

AND WHEN THE BODY ECHOES :
NEGOTIATING MEMORY THROUGH THE PERFORMANCE OF NEGATIVE AFFECT
IN GALINDO'S 'LAS ESCUCHARON GRITAR Y NO ABRIERON LA PUERTA'

Margot De Grave Loyson

4424344

Thesis submitted for the degree of Master in Gender Studies

Utrecht University, August 2022

Supervisor: dr. Milica Trakilović

Second reader: dr. Jamila Mascot

— To my mom,
for encouraging me to develop a critical voice
and for always listening.

“When the happiness seal is broken, when violence has intruded into scenes of bliss, we begin to hear the ghosts of feminists past. The feminist ghosts clamor around; they surround; we listen.”¹

— Sara Ahmed

¹ Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017), 63.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	3
Acknowledgements	4
1. Introduction	5
1.1. Choice of topic	5
1.2. Introduction	6
2. Theoretical framework	14
2.1. Cultural memory and national identity	14
2.2. Cultural memory as a structure of feeling	18
2.3. Negative affect: grief as a negotiation over the meaning of loss	20
2.4. Trauma: unfinished histories and ghostly matters	23
2.5. Feminist epistemology and the bodily performance of meaning	26
3. Methodological framework	29
3.1. The semiotics of screaming	29
3.2. Note on positionality	32
4. Analysis	34
4.1. Las Escucharon Gritar y No Abrieron la Puerta	34
4.2. Listening closely	35
4.3. Conclusion	46
5. Conclusion	47
6. Bibliography	51

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the potential of bodily performances of memory in the creation of critical counter-memories. Taking a closer listen at Regina José Galindo's sound performance 'Las Escucharon Gritar y No Abrieron la Puerta' (2017), this thesis explores how the performance of negative affect can counter cultural silences surrounding femicide in the context of Guatemala and, in doing so, challenge its dominant cultural memory. Departing from the problematic position of memory in post-war Guatemala and the inadequacies of the traditional testimonial form demonstrated in the stark contrast between the civil war's ongoing legacy of gender-based violence and the strategic amnesia enabled by the nationally-endorsed discourse on progress, this thesis addresses the need for alternative forms of memory-making in attending to traumatic hi/stories. Observing how the embodied reality of traumatic memory often resists narration, this thesis explores the potential of artistic practices in attending to the affective registers of (traumatic) memory. Through a semiotic reading of the scream as an auditory signifier of grief, this thesis demonstrates the disruptive potential of the bodily performance of negative affect, describing how the scream, in making audible the negative affect of grief, opens up a space for the ongoing negotiation over the meaning of loss and, in doing so, counters the silence surrounding femicide in Guatemala. Additionally, this thesis finds that, in its affective re-call of the past, the scream reevaluates hi/stories of gender-based violence as 'unfinished', disrupting the teleology of the nationally-endorsed narrative and, subsequently, produces a counter-memory that fractures the carefully constructed cultural memory of Guatemala, sculpted in favour of a unidirectional move toward a 'promising' future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Even though writing often feels like a rather lonely process, this thesis would not have been here without the contributions of the wonderful people surrounding me.

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest appreciation for my supervisor, dr. Milica Trakilović, without whom this thesis would not have been possible. Milica, I am profoundly grateful for your kindness and support, for your encouraging words and the inspiring conversations. For always making time — for being much more than a supervisor. As an endless perfectionist, the writing of a thesis seemed like an insurmountable task, but your trust in the process gave me the confidence to trust it too. A very sincere thank you. Let's go for that celebratory drink sometime soon!

I would like to extend a big thank you in advance to my second reader, dr. Jamila Mascat, for taking the time to engage with my work, and a special thank you to Jake, for the meticulous editing of my messy documents and the critical feedback, I very much appreciate it.

Furthermore, I would like to express my love and deep appreciation for my lovely friends and roommates here in Utrecht, for being there and for making me feel truly at home in the Netherlands. A heartfelt thank you to Kaja, for reminding me that every small step is, indeed, a step. To Solenne, for her amazing ability of putting things into perspective. To Maarten, for always being there, the long walks and the critical input along the way. To my sisters, for being my biggest inspiration. And to Hanna, for reminding me of the revolutions that dwell in the body.

And, of course, none of this would be possible without my parents, to whom I am eternally grateful for their endless love, interest and support. Thank you for always encouraging me, in whatever direction I choose to take.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Choice of topic

When, during the final years of my Bachelor's programme, the Black Lives Matter protests came to a head in Belgium, opening up a public debate on its colonial history, it moved me to reflect on the very recent colonial past of my own family, mirrored by the large map of Congo on our living room wall. Although the map was there for a long time already, I had never really questioned it — it had become invisible. As a child, the stories I heard about it, being rather exciting, spoke to the imagination: I always pictured the exotic sounding 'Congo' as a happy, sunny, peaceful place. Gradually, that image changed. The stories I had heard growing up were very different from the discourse of the BLM movement, which was often dismissed for being 'too emotional' and unnecessarily holding on to a past that 'we have nothing to do with anymore.' It showed me how, even at our own kitchen table, some stories are continuously obscured while others are collectively amplified — how the past is, indeed, present in the ways we choose to remember and forget. It also showed me how sometimes screams of resistance are necessary to perceive hi/stories in a new light, to really examine them. Pursuing a degree in visual storytelling, I have always believed in the disruptive potential of art. Precisely because of the different (affective) registers it employs, it can be a particularly potent instrument to shine a different light on what might have become invisible.

During my Master's in Cultural Studies, I encountered the concept of cultural memory, which allowed me to further examine how the stories we choose to tell and remember, and the ones we strategically forget, are very much intertwined with structures of power. Drawing from my background in Fine Arts in my master's dissertation, I explored the potential of visual storytelling in the creation of counter-memories of traumatic hi/stories of gender-based violence, focusing on the graphic novel as a memory medium. In doing so, I built on Gardner's conception of 'graphiation,' which examines the embodied nature of drawing and asserts the drawn line as a signifier of the physicality of the maker, referring to "the fact that the hand and the body — as well as the whole personality of the artist — is visible in the way he or she gives a visual representation of a certain object, character, setting or event."² Developing an understanding of (traumatic) memory as embodied inspired me to further explore alternative forms of storytelling that take into account the embodied character of traumatic

² Jan Baetens and Hugo Frey, *The Graphic Novel: An Introduction*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 137.

memories. Studying feminist epistemologies and deepening my understanding of affect theory during the Gender Studies programme, very much informed my interest in examining the potential of negative affect in processes of remembering. In the early stages of delineating my thesis topic, I already knew I wanted to write about the potential of feminist artistic practices in the creation of critical counter-memories. It was a guest lecture by my thesis supervisor, Milica Trakilović, that made me consider looking into the genre of performance, a medium I was not that familiar with but its clear connection to the conception of memory as bodily and affective matter, very much spoke to me.

In one of my late night internet searches, I stumbled across the work of the Guatemalan performance artist Regina José Galindo. I was instantly intrigued by her oeuvre. After a few hours of browsing through her extensive archive, I encountered a work titled ‘Las Escucharon Gritar y No Abrieron la Puerta’ (They Heard Them Scream and Did Not Open the Door),³ a sound performance in which forty-one women scream for nine consecutive minutes. I was immediately touched by it. However, I was quite hesitant in writing about the performance, as I knew very little about the Guatemalan context and I was not sure if I, considering my positionality, could do the work justice. I initially decided against it, but the piece kept haunting me — it had already gotten under my skin.

1.2. Introduction

Guatemala, 2017. Forty-one women gather in a small room. Pressed tightly together, eyes closed, they scream. Galindo’s poignant piece is an installation in remembrance of the forty-one young women who lost their lives after being locked up in a small room and left to burn alive when a fire broke out in the government-run Virgen de la Asunción Safe Home in San José Pinula, Guatemala. The incident was the result of a riot, in which the residents of the home protested against the abuse, rape and overcrowding in the orphanage, which already had a history of allegations against it.⁴ In the

³ “Las Escucharon Gritar y No Abrieron la Puerta,” accessed May 1, 2022, <https://www.reginajosegalindo.com/en/las-escucharon-gritar-y-no-abrieron-la-puerta-2/>.

⁴ Multiple reports outlining the overcrowding and overall inhumane conditions in the safe home were filed by a number of civil society organisations as well as UN bodies. Several residents, too, had made formal complaints with the Public Ministry concerning physical, psychological and sexual abuse, reporting torture, detention, sexual exploitation and trafficking. In addition, there were several missing person reports. The safe home had already received a court order for its restructuring, however, at the time of the fire, the secretariat for social welfare (the overarching organisation responsible for the Safe Home) was in the process of appealing the ruling. — Aisling Walsh, “41 crosses, 56 lives: The struggle for truth and justice two years on from the Hogar Seguro Virgen de la Asunción fire,” *Women’s Media Center*, March 5, 2019, <https://womensmediacenter.com/women-under-siege/41-crosses-56-lives-the-struggle-for-truth-and-justice-two-years-on-from-the-hogar-seguro-virgen-de-la-asuncion-fire>

midst of the uproar, a group of young women ran away from the home, fleeing into the surrounding mountains. They were eventually rounded up by the National Civil Police and forcefully escorted back to the home. There, they were locked in a small room with barred windows and without water, the door secured from the outside. After spending the night there, one of the girls started a fire, hoping that the police would let them out. They did not. The young women started screaming for help. The officers, ignoring the women's calls, waited nine minutes before opening the door. Forty-one women died.⁵ In the aftermath of the fire, numerous protests broke out, accusing the state of negligence and murder.⁶ However, the judicial process that followed was marked by delays and obstructions, with the individuals that were set to face trial (a number of police officers, the staff of the home and the officials of the Ministry of Social Welfare) getting off on minor charges.⁷

Born in 1974, Galindo gained recognition in the Guatemalan art scene in the late 1990s, working amongst a group of female artists whose work responded to the cultural amnesia that marked the aftermath of the civil war period.⁸ Galindo's socially and politically motivated practice, situated in the context of post-war Guatemala, examines the silenced histories of Guatemala while speaking to its contemporary urgencies. In one of her most widely discussed works, '¿Quién puede borrar las huellas?' (2003), she walks from the Guatemalan Constitutional Court to the National Palace of Guatemala, bathing her feet in a basin of human blood every few steps, leaving a bloody trace. The work was created in memory of the victims of the civil war and in response to the presidential candidacy of general Rios Montt, who played a significant role in the bloodiest years of the civil war.⁹ Employing artistic performance as her main medium, Galindo puts the body (both the individual and the social one) at the centre of her practice, performing extreme bodily metaphors in addressing systemic injustices and ongoing histories of violence. In her extensive oeuvre, Galindo primarily investigates the violence against women during the war, as well as the ongoing gender-based

⁵ Aisling Walsh, "41 crosses, 56 lives."

⁶ La Nación, "The number of girls killed by fire in Guatemala rises to 39," March 11, 2017, <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/el-mundo/sube-a-39-numero-de-ninas-fallecidas-por-incendio-en-guatemala-nid1992314/>.

⁷ Cathy McIlwaine, Jelke Boesten, Rebecca Wilson, *London School of Economics and Political Science*, "Women in sisterhood resisting violence in Guatemala," November 25, 2021, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/latamcaribbean/2021/11/25/women-sisterhood-violence-guatemala/> – Havana Times, "Three years after the Fire that Killed 41 Girls in Guatemala," March 16, 2020, <https://havanatimes.org/features/three-years-after-the-fire-that-killed-41-girls-in-guatemala/>.

⁸ Candice Amich, "The Limits of Witness: Regina José Galindo and Neoliberalism's Gendered Economies of Violence" in *Performance, Feminism and Affect in Neoliberal Times*, ed. Elin Diamond, Denise Varney and Candice Amich. (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), 91.

⁹ In 2005, Galindo received the 'Lion Award for Best Young Artist' at the 51st Venice Biennale for the performance.

violence in its aftermath and the rising number of femicide cases in the country, most of which remain unpunished.¹⁰ In doing so, she reveals how the neoliberal democracy installed in the aftermath of the war has brought new forms of injustice and violence with it, recognising how “the brutal deaths of the women (...) reveal the perverse logic of neoliberalism’s gendered economies of violence.”¹¹ In her sound performance ‘(279) golpes’ (2005),¹² for example, she is hidden from view inside a closed cubicle, hitting herself once for every murdered woman between the first of January and the ninth of June 2005. The sound is amplified, so it can be heard outside of the cubicle. In another work of hers, titled ‘La Verdad’ (2013), Galindo reads testimonies by survivors of the massacres of indigenous Ixiles during the civil war, while a dentist repeatedly anaesthetises her mouth, trying to silence her.

Her work, as I will further elaborate in this thesis, can be understood as a clear reference to the ongoing struggle over meaning in the aftermath of the war and can be read as an active form of memory-making. Galindo herself refers to the necessity of such interventions in the public sphere and, subsequently, in the collective Guatemalan memory, stating that “Guatemala is a country without memory.”¹³ In examining processes of memory-making in the context of post-war Guatemala, it is thus essential to address its difficult relation to memory as a result of its long history of violence, injustice and strategic forgetting.

While the Virgen de la Asunción Safe Home fire is not (directly) related to the civil war, the memory work following the incident, such as Galindo’s ‘las escucharon gritar y no abrieron la puerta,’ is very much coloured by the post-war struggle over memory which, as I will further elaborate below, entails the obstruction of narratives that might challenge the particular national identity constructed in the aftermath of the war. Recognising how, in the context of post-war Guatemala, the concept of memory is a charged one, it is thus crucial to understand Galindo’s memory work in the wider context of structural amnesia in the aftermath of the Guatemalan civil war and to link it to the ongoing struggles over memory in the country.

¹⁰ Emilia Barbosa, “Regina José Galindo’s Body Talk: Performing Femicide and Violence against Women in “279 Golpes,”” in *Latin American Perspectives*, 41 (2014): 59-71, accessed April 28, 2022, DOI:10.1177/0094582X13492131.

¹¹ Candice Amich, “The Limits of Witness,” 99.

¹² As the work is an ongoing project, the number continuously changes in each performance.

¹³ Regina José Galindo, “Regina José Galindo by Francisco Goldman,” interview by Francisco Goldman, *BOMB Magazine*, January 1, 2006. <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/regina-jos%C3%A9-galindo/>.

The thirty-six year civil war (1960-1996) between the Guatemalan government and several leftist rebel groups grew out of a longer history of anti-communist counterinsurgent state formation, building on long-evolving patterns of colonial violence,¹⁴ forced labour of indigenous groups, foreign intervention,¹⁵ rural repression and the consequent ongoing struggles for land-reform.¹⁶ It resulted in the deaths of over 200,000 Guatemalans and the disappearance of more than 50,000.¹⁷ The vast majority of victims were indigenous Maya (making up about 85% of the casualties) as the dictatorial regime believed them to be “the seedbeds of guerrilla support.”¹⁸ Under the rule of president Efraín Ríos Montt, who came to power through a coup in 1982, the war experienced some of its bloodiest years, due to his scorched-earth tactics and the targeted massacres of the indigenous populations as part of his counterinsurgency strategies in which gender-based violence and femicide played a central role.¹⁹ In March 1996, the URNG²⁰ and the government negotiated a cease-fire which was followed by the signing of a peace treaty in December of the same year, officially ending the civil war.²¹ In the aftermath of the war, however, an ongoing struggle persisted, regarding the memory and the meaning of the conflict.

Even before the war officially ended, various human rights organisations, grassroots movements and civilian protests engaged in a struggle against impunity and imposed forgetting, demanding the establishment of truth commissions in the investigation of numerous deaths and disappearances, inspired by prior truth commissions in other Latin American countries.²² In 1994, the accord mandating the formation of the ‘Commission for the Historical Clarification of Human Rights Violations and Other Acts of Violence that Have Caused the Suffering of the Guatemalan People’ was

¹⁴ Guatemala was a Spanish colony from 1524 until it achieved independence in 1821, following a series of indigenous uprisings.

¹⁵ The UN-sponsored truth commission’s report argued that the neocolonial export-oriented plantation economy, in particular the discrimination against the Mayan majority and the ‘deep economic inequality’ played a key role in enabling the violence. Situating the conflict in the broader context of the cold war, the report insisted that foreign interventions by the U.S. were an aggravating factor in the Guatemalan civil war (McAllister and Nelson 2013).

¹⁶ Greg Grandin, “Chapter 1. Five Hundred Years” In *War by Other Means: Aftermath in Post-Genocide Guatemala* edited by Carlota McAllister and Diane M. Nelson, (New York, USA: Duke University Press, 2013), 64-66. — Carlota McAllister and Diane M. Nelson, “Aftermath: Harvests of Violence and Histories of the future,” in *War by Other Means: Aftermath in Post-Genocide Guatemala* edited by Carlota McAllister and Diane M. Nelson, (New York, USA: Duke University Press, 2013), 12-13.

¹⁷ Greg Grandin, “Five Hundred Years,” 60.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

²⁰ The ‘Unidad Revolucionario Nacional Guatemalteco,’ or the union of the Marxist guerilla groups.

²¹ “Moving toward Peace,” Britannica, accessed, July 28, 2022,

<https://www-britannica-com.kuleuven.e-bronnen.be/place/Guatemala/Moving-toward-peace> — Carlota McAllister and Diane M. Nelson, “Aftermath: Harvests of Violence and Histories of the future,” 17.

²² “Negotiating rights: The Guatemalan Peace Process” in *Accord: An International Review of Peace Initiatives* (London: Conciliation Resources, 1997), 18-19. — Amy Ross, “The Creation and Conduct of the Guatemalan Commission for Historical Clarification,” *Geoforum* 37 (2006), 75.

signed.²³ Between 1997 and 1999 the UN-sponsored commission conducted a thorough investigation into the atrocities committed during the country's civil war, becoming a “site of struggle in which battles concerning impunity versus accountability occurred.”²⁴ The question of whether the violence enacted during the war should be considered a genocide was a central one.²⁵ In 1999, the commission published its report, ‘Memory of Silence,’ finding the state responsible for more than 93% of the crimes committed during the war. Most importantly, the report referred to the massacres of indigenous people as an act of genocide.²⁶ However, McAllister and Nelson state, “attempts to bring to justice the perpetrators of genocide and war crimes have been wearily slow and difficult, hampered by official obstructionism, fearmongering, and outright violence.”²⁷ In 2013, former head of state Rios Montt was brought to trial, charged with acts of genocide during the civil war. Montt was found guilty of overseeing the massacre of the Ixil population and sentenced to eighty years in prison for “committing acts of genocide and crimes against humanity.”²⁸ However, eleven days later, the Constitutional Court overturned the verdict due to a procedural technicality, once again suspending justice for the many victims of the war.²⁹ The ongoing struggle for justice, then, proves a difficult (and often dangerous) endeavour, “especially under a government in which many officials are directly implicated in wartime crimes and use their power to insist “no hubo genocidio” (there was no genocide).”³⁰ The Guatemalan struggle over memory, then, persists in the neoliberal economy installed in the aftermath of the war: establishing a culture of structurally imposed amnesia, the ‘new’ Guatemala continuously silences stories that challenge the national narrative, carefully constructing its collective memory in favour of an ideal image of the nation-state.³¹ Oglesby underlines how this systemic forgetting has to be understood as “[serving] the purpose of neoliberal governance.”³² McAllister and Nelson, too, note how the coincidence of the Guatemalan shift to democracy with the implementation of neoliberal policies “is not in fact coincidental,”³³ pointing to how “the “end of war” has been inflected by a complex, subtle, and omnipresent violence that makes it impossible to

²³ Amy Ross, “The Creation and Conduct of the Guatemalan Commission”, 74.

²⁴ Ibid., 70.

²⁵ Ibid., 78

²⁶ Ibid., 79.

²⁷ Carlota McAllister and Diane M. Nelson, “Aftermath: Harvests of Violence and Histories of the Future,” 17.

²⁸ Candice Amich, “The Limits of Witness,” 97.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Carlota McAllister and Diane M. Nelson, “Aftermath: Harvests of Violence and Histories of the Future,” 24.

³¹ Rebecca Clouser, “Development and denial: Guatemalan post-genocide development narratives,” *Geoforum* 117 (2020): 93.

³² Candice Amich, “The Limits of Witness,” 94.

³³ Carlota McAllister and Diane M. Nelson, “Aftermath: Harvests of Violence and Histories of the Future,” 24.

simply lay the war to rest.”³⁴ Below, I will further examine how the denial of genocide plays a role in the process of memory making, as it is understood to hinder national reconciliation and economic development. Forgetting, then, has to be understood as an essential mechanism of national identity formation in the aftermath of the Guatemalan civil war.

Speaking to the context in which it is produced, Galindo’s work has to be understood in relation to the crisis of memory following the civil war and the precarity of memories — of long ago as well as more recent hi/stories — that challenge the narratives of the nation-state. In countering the strategic amnesiac characteristics of the post-war period, Galindo shines a light on obscured hi/stories that are forgotten in favour of the image of the nation state, demonstrating how “the genocidal crimes of the civil war era (...) blur into images of ongoing violence against women in Guatemala, suggesting continuity, rather than a radical break, between the eras of dictatorship and neoliberal democracy.”³⁵ As the trials following the truth commissions have left many Guatemalans disillusioned about the potential of traditional testimony and the pursuit of justice through the human rights model, Galindo’s work can be read as a proposal of an alternative process of meaning-making, in her employment of the artistic practice of performance. Reading her work as a form of active memory-making, I approach Galindo’s performance as a grievance against the long-standing culture of injustice and forgetting in Guatemala.

With this thesis, my aim is to explore the potential of alternative forms of knowledge-production in challenging dominant cultural memory: male, heroic, teleological and based on the conception of an objective and natural ‘truth’. Grounding my research in the field of cultural memory studies, I examine the realities of *living with* traumatic memories and the ongoing struggles over meaning in the Guatemalan context through the framework of affect theory. Turning to affect, as the “capacity to move and be moved,”³⁶ allows me to examine the embodied nature of (traumatic) memory expressed in the medium of performance. Through listening closely to Galindo’s ‘Las Escucharon Gritar y No Abrieron la Puerta,’ I explore the potential of the negative affect of grief in the creation of critical countermemories. The research question this thesis will explore is thus twofold: how does Galindo’s piece make use of negative affect in addressing and denouncing the cultural silence surrounding

³⁴ Carlota McAllister and Diane M. Nelson, “Aftermath: Harvests of Violence and Histories of the Future,” 24.

³⁵ Candice Amich, “The Limits of Witness,” 91.

³⁶ Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling*, (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2012), 4.

hi/stories of femicide and injustice in Guatemala and, subsequently, how does the employment of negative affect in Galindo's work perform an intervention into its dominant cultural memory?

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Cultural memory and national identity

In the aftermath of histories of violence and injustice, a crisis of memory inevitably follows.³⁷ How does a society make sense of what happened? How does it remember and when does it forget? Looking into collective ways of remembering and forgetting in post-war Guatemala, I turn to the concept of cultural memory.

With its broad scope, the notion of cultural memory is difficult to delineate. As Erll underlines, the concept of ‘cultural’ memory is inherently multifarious and functions as an umbrella term entailing “media, practices, and structures as diverse as myth, monuments, historiography, ritual, conversational remembering, configurations of cultural knowledge, and neuronal networks.”³⁸ Jan and Aleida Assmann, too, address the complexity of identifying what precisely makes a memory ‘cultural’ in their seminal writings on collective forms of memory. In doing so, they make the distinction between ‘cultural memory’ and ‘communicative memory,’ in which the latter refers to the oral passing on of lived experiences while ‘cultural memory’ implies how, after death has put an end to oral forms of transmission, memory requires symbolic mediation.³⁹ “without eyewitnesses to history,” Erll underlines, “societies are dependent on media-supported forms of remembrance.”⁴⁰ For something to be remembered on a collective level, then, it needs to be culturally cultivated. Therefore, the process of memory-making requires a continuous mediation through artefacts, narratives and (social) performances. Sturken emphasises how those objects and practices should be regarded as “technologies of memory,” producing and sharing meaning rather than “vessels of memory in which memory passively resides.”⁴¹ Halbwachs — whose writings on what he defined as ‘*mémoire collective*’ have been fundamental to the development of the field of cultural memory studies — consequently argues that memory has to be understood as inherently social. It is impossible, he claims, for the individual to remember outside of their wider sociocultural context

³⁷ Gilad Hirschberger, “Collective Trauma and the Social Construction of Meaning,” *Front. Psychol.* 9 (2018): 1441, accessed April 15, 2022, DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01441.

³⁸ Astrid Erll, “Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction,” in *Media and Cultural Memory/ Medien und kulturelle Erinnerung*, ed. Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning. (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 1.

³⁹ Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture*, trans. Sara B. Young (Hampshire, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 4.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Kaitlin M. Murphy, *Mapping Memory: Visuality, Affect, and Embodied Politics in the Americas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), 18.

(re)producing those memories.⁴² Halbwachs goes on to underline how, through carefully selecting what is remembered as well as what is forgotten, collective identities are constructed — most often in the interests of the dominant social group, thus resulting in hegemonic cultural memory.⁴³ In line with this, various scholars have highlighted the interconnectedness of the construction of national identities and processes of remembering and forgetting (particularly the latter) in emphasising how memory is central to the (re)production of political authorities.⁴⁴ Clouser, too, underlines the manipulation of cultural memory in shaping national identity and emphasises how “such a “rhetorically fixed” national identity can then be used to legitimise inequality and administrative control.”⁴⁵ As I will further elaborate, this pertains to the government-sustained strategic amnesia in post-genocide Guatemala, in which calls for justice compete with denial campaigns and governmental rhetoric of national progress and development.⁴⁶

In the process of cultural meaning-making, then, “identity, whether individual or cultural, becomes a story that stretches from the past to the present and the future,”⁴⁷ Hirsch and Smith state. Erll, too, stresses that “Individual and collective memories are never a mirror image of the past, but rather an expressive indication of the needs and interests of the person or group doing the remembering in the present.”⁴⁸ Subscribing to the postmodern notion of the “past as a human construct,”⁴⁹ she goes on to underline how cultural memory has to be understood as “the interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts.”⁵⁰ Memory-making, then, is a complex process of meaning-making, steeped in a tangle of power relations. The process of cultural memory-making is thus to be firmly situated in the present. Memories, Murphy concludes, are “essentially *of* the present and concerned with the ongoing impact of the past *in* the present.”⁵¹ In this sense, cultural memory-making can be understood as a political act of meaning-making about the past in the present in which memories have to be recognised as fluid, precarious, constructed, and situated.

⁴² Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture*, 13-15.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Rebecca Clouser, “Development and denial: Guatemalan post-genocide development narratives,” *Geoforum* 117 (2020): 97.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 93.

⁴⁷ Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith, “Feminism and Cultural Memory: An Introduction” in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28 (2002), 8.

⁴⁸ Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture*, 8.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 5.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 2.

⁵¹ Kaitlin M. Murphy, *Mapping Memory*, 48.

Locating memory-making in the present, then, gives rise to concerns about actual political interests in the manipulation of cultural memory. Grounding this research in the context of Guatemala, still grappling with its history of genocide and the crisis of memory following the civil war, I will take a closer look at how processes of selective forgetting play an important role in the narrative put forth by the Guatemalan nation state.

As outlined above, cultural memory-making can be understood as “a field of cultural negotiation through which different stories vie for a place in history.”⁵² This negotiation is clearly reflected in the Guatemalan truth commissions in the late 90s, following the civil war, in which minority memories are put forward in an attempt to resist structural amnesia. Clouser notes how, in those truth commissions, testimonies of victims compete with “mainstream development narratives,” which, she argues, “focus on a nation-state’s linear progression from ‘under-developed’ to ‘developed’, smoothing over ruptures, violence, and contradictions in the timeline.”⁵³ This tendency is mirrored by the protests following the Guatemalan truth commissions in 1999: after the UN-sponsored commission found the Guatemalan state guilty of acts of genocide against indigenous Maya populations, campaigns claiming “no hubo genocidio” (there was no genocide) arose.⁵⁴ Responding to the findings of the commission, the Guatemalan government rejected the report, as it did “not fulfil its duty to contribute to the reconciliation of the Guatemalan family.”⁵⁵ In 2014, the Guatemalan congress approved a resolution officially denying the occurrence of genocide during the country’s civil war, in which they frame “social conflicts as impediments to the “full development” of Guatemala “as a nation.”⁵⁶ Congressman Luis Fernando Perez, who proposed the resolution, insisted that “Guatemala must look to the future and not to a past which offends us, divides us and does not help us build the nation of peace and development that we are longing for.”⁵⁷

In a critical reading of neoliberalist narratives in the post-genocide Guatemalan context, Amich underlines the harm this future-oriented narrative inflicts, describing how, “while the testimonies of victims were framed within an international discourse of human rights, perpetrators were rarely, if ever, held accountable for acts of violence,”⁵⁸ because of the national focus on political consensus

⁵² Kaitlin M. Murphy, *Mapping Memory*, 18.

⁵³ Rebecca Clouser “Development and denial”, 94.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁵⁸ Candice Amich, “The Limits of Witness,” 93.

and reconciliation, which “primarily facilitated a transition ‘into an era of market-driven economic progress,’”⁵⁹ rather than accounting for its painful pasts. Further emphasising the political impact of these denials, Clouser describes how those statements are grounded in the fear that official recognition of genocide would threaten the national image, hindering it in ‘moving forward’⁶⁰ — with only one ‘right track’ to get there. The idea of solidarity and national harmony thus strategically obscures ‘unwelcome stories’ that might threaten the carefully constructed promise of the future in revealing how this attitude toward the future mainly serves the neoliberal nation state. This trend is clearly demonstrated in the Guatemalan development plan ‘Mejoremos Guate’, which states that “...We strongly believe that Guatemala can improve if we build a comprehensive, consistent and viable proposal to advance towards the country we all wish for (...) to reach the nation we desire (...) It is crucial that every Guatemalan takes the same road towards the development we all desire.”⁶¹ As Clouser notes, this discourse “works to reinforce and reconstruct an ideal, yet false, linear and beneficial progress for all.”⁶² She goes on to describe how this “seemingly commonsensical orientation towards the future in a society built on destruction, enables regimes of violence to continue their work while claiming the moral ground of making a better future.”⁶³ Proposing “solidarity as a moral attitude,”⁶⁴ the state appears to suggest that any other direction taken by an individual would therefore be construed as ‘immoral’ and an obstruction to the happiness this future promises to hold. This carefully constructed image of the ‘happy future’, then, becomes a means to *affectively* orient the Guatemalan population toward it — moving away from painful pasts that might breach the national narrative.

⁵⁹ Candice Amich, “The Limits of Witness,” 92-93.

⁶⁰ Rebecca Clouser “Development and denial,” 94.

⁶¹ Ibid., 98-99

⁶² Ibid., 99

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 96.

2.2. Cultural memory as a structure of feeling

Murphy points to the interconnectedness of memory and affect, describing how affect takes a central place in the ongoing act of “*living with memory*.”⁶⁵ “If memories are the stories of past events and experiences that shape who we are, giving meaning to our identities, affect is what gives colour and texture to memories, and what keeps memories alive, circulating in the present.”⁶⁶ As I will further elaborate upon, affect not only ‘keeps memories alive’, but also plays a central role in deciding which memories are strategically forgotten in favour of the dominant cultural memory.

Hemmings underlines how the recent attention to affect,⁶⁷ a term broadly referring to sensory experiences and states of being, led to “an exploration of the complex interrelations of discursive practices, the human body, social and cultural forces, and individually experienced but historically situated affect and emotions.”⁶⁸ The so-called ‘affective turn,’⁶⁹ then, allows for a non-essentialist way of ‘thinking through the body,’ taking into account a wide range of modes and levels of bodily experiences, simultaneously expanding the category of *experience*.⁷⁰ Firmly locating affect in the context of social narratives and power relations, Cvetkovich asserts an understanding of affect “as critical object and perspective through which to understand the social world and our place within it,”⁷¹ rejecting earlier notions of affect as autonomous and outside of social meaning.⁷² Departing from a broad understanding of affect as “our qualitative experience of the social world, [our] embodied experience that has the capacity to transform as well as exceed social subjection,”⁷³ I build on the understanding of affect as situated in the interplay between the feeling embodied, subject and the broader ‘structures of feeling’ in which it is situated, drawing from Raymond

⁶⁵ Kaitlin M. Murphy, *Mapping Memory*, 37.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ In line with Cvetkovich, stating that “terms such as *affect*, *emotion*, and *feeling* are more like keywords, points of departure for discussion rather than definition,” (Cvetkovich: 2012) I consciously move away from rigid definitions. Approaching affect in a broader sense, I use the terms (negative) affect and (bad) feelings – as conceptualised by Ahmed – interchangeably.

⁶⁸ Clare Hemmings, “Invoking Affect: Cultural Theory and the Ontological Turn,” *Cultural Studies* 19 (2005): 553. DOI: 10.1080/09502380500365473.

⁶⁹ Early conceptions of affect led to the so-called ‘affective turn’ in the 1990s, signifying a body of research inspired by Deleuzian theories of affect as well as the seminal work of psychologist Silvan Tomkins.

⁷⁰ Clare Hemmings, “Invoking Affect”, 553.

⁷¹ Ibid., 548.

⁷² In defining affect, different scholars make the distinction between ‘affect’ and ‘emotion’, in which ‘affect’ often implies a (precognitive) sensory experience, a state of being, rather than its manifestation or translation into ‘emotion’, which, in turn, refers to the sociocultural and -linguistic constructs and conscious processes emerging from those affect — how we are *making* sense of the affective event, as it were. In a critical reading of Massumi and Sedgwick, however, Cvetkovich rejects the notion of affect as autonomous and outside of social meaning, which is the perspective I take up in this thesis.

⁷³ Clare Hemmings, “Invoking Affect”, 549.

William's conceptualisation of the term. In line with Williams, who elucidates how his focus on 'feeling' aims to emphasise its difference from more formal concepts of 'world-view' or ideology,⁷⁴ I approach structures of feeling as "meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt."⁷⁵ Following Williams, Flatley, too, underlines the manner in which certain events give rise to certain affect in certain contexts, claiming that "If the function of an ideology is to narrate our relation to a social order so as to make our daily experience of that order meaningful and manageable, then *structure of feeling* would be the term to describe the mediating structure — one just as socially produced as ideology—that facilitates and shapes our affective attachment to different objects in the social order."⁷⁶ Turning to the notion of affect then, allows for a better understanding of how "history is narrated with and through bodies."⁷⁷

Ahmed also emphasises the central role of affect in the processes of meaning-making, putting forward an understanding of "emotion as a form of cultural politics of world making."⁷⁸ She goes on to underline the affective forces in the creation of a shared direction, stressing that "this is why the social bond is rather sensational. Groups cohere around a shared orientation towards some things as being good, treating some things and not others as the cause of delight."⁷⁹ Below, I will examine this tendency further, looking into how the nation employs affect in creating and sustaining a national identity and, following this, what the potential of negative affect can be in countering this unilateral narrative as well as creating space for critical countermemories. In doing so, I turn to the politics of grief in examining the role of affect in responding to histories of injustice and loss.⁸⁰ Building on Butler's writings on 'precarious life' and Ahmed's conception of 'queer grief',⁸¹ in which she reconsiders the complexity of grief in approaching it as "a psycho-social process of coming to terms with loss,"⁸² I touch upon how grief can be a form of meaning-making as well as a way of challenging dominant cultural memories.

⁷⁴ Raymond Williams, "Structures of feeling" in *Structures of Feeling: Affectivity and the Study of Culture*, ed. Devika Sharma and Frederik Tygstrup (Berlin, Munich, Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2015), 23

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Kaitlin M. Murphy, *Mapping Memory*, 36.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 37.

⁷⁸ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 12.

⁷⁹ Sara Ahmed, "The Politics of Good Feeling," *ACRAWSA e-journal*, 4 (2008) accessed May 24 via <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58ad660603596e00ce71a3/t/58becb77893fc0f72747d4e8/1488898936274/The+Politics+of+Good+Feeling.pdf>

⁸⁰ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 191.

⁸¹ Ibid, 155.

⁸² Ibid., 159.

2.3. Negative affect: grief as a negotiation over the meaning of loss

Through a postcolonial reading of affective attachments, Ahmed proclaims that we cannot separate the history of empire from 'histories of happiness,'⁸³ underlining how positive affect toward the nation and, subsequently, negative affect toward those who threaten this national ideal, are cultivated as a way of sustaining national narratives. She further explains how, in this process, a national identity is created through the process of 'othering' as "the narrative invites the reader to adopt the 'you' through working on emotions: becoming this 'you' would mean developing a certain rage against these illegitimate others (...) Indeed, to feel love for the nation, whereby love is an investment that should be returned (you are the taxpayer), is also to feel injured by these others, who are 'taking' what is yours."⁸⁴ Happiness, then, is promised in return for loyalty to the national ideal which might thus be read as functioning as a 'cruel attachment'.⁸⁵ In this discourse, "those who are 'not us', and who in not being us, endanger what is ours,"⁸⁶ are perceived as a threat to the imagined 'common good'. Certain bodies, then, come to be considered the origin of 'bad feelings', as obstructing the promises of happiness the national narrative entails.⁸⁷ Negative affect, then, is regarded as "oriented toward the past, as a kind of stubbornness that 'stops' the subject from embracing the future."⁸⁸ In her 'Killjoy Manifesto,'⁸⁹ Ahmed critically engages with this stance, stating that she is, indeed, "not willing to get over histories that aren't over,"⁹⁰ thereby firmly situating ongoing histories of injustice in the present. She observes how, when assuming this position, "you are judged as the one who has yet to do what others have done: get over it; get over yourself; let it go."⁹¹ She goes on to emphasise

⁸³ Sara Ahmed, "The Politics of Good Feeling," 12.

⁸⁴ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 1.

⁸⁵ This observation closely relates to Berlant's notion of 'cruel optimism' (Berlant: 2011) which refers to "when the object/scene that ignites a sense of possibility actually makes it impossible to attain the expansive transformation for which a person or a people risks striving; and, doubly, it is cruel insofar as the very pleasures of being inside a relation have become sustaining regardless of the content of the relation, such that a person or a world finds itself bound to a situation of profound threat that is, at the same time, profoundly confirming." (Berlant: 2011) The relation to the ideal nation state, then, could be seen as what Berlant calls a 'cruel attachment' (Berlant: 2011), in which one's object of desire actually obstructs one's flourishing.

⁸⁶ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 1.

⁸⁷ Sara Ahmed, "The Politics of Good Feeling," 1.

⁸⁸ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 216-217.

⁸⁹ Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, 251-268.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 262

⁹¹ Ibid., 262-263

that 'letting go' has come to be understood as the 'healthy' response to loss.⁹² Refusing to simply move past painful hi/stories steeped with loss, therefore, comes to be equated with a "theft of optimism, a killing of joy, a failure to move on or to put certain histories behind us."⁹³

What if one refuses to 'let go' of what is lost, to 'get over it' and 'move on'? Underneath, I turn to the affect of grief, as a way of negotiating the meaning of loss continuously — keeping histories of injustice alive in the present — and how, consequently, mourning should be regarded as a concern of memory-making.⁹⁴

As outlined above, dominant cultural memory obscures stories that might threaten the reality it continuously constructs. The regulation of what can appear in the public sphere, then, "is also a way of establishing whose lives can be marked as lives and whose deaths will count as deaths,"⁹⁵ Butler writes. Following this, Ahmed points out how, in examining the disruptive potential of grief, it is essential to question "what losses are counted as grievable?"⁹⁶ Underlining the idea that who we mourn is inextricably bound up with the process of nation-building, Butler goes on to describe how "certain forms of grief become nationally recognized and amplified, whereas other losses become unthinkable and ungrievable."⁹⁷ She points out how negative affect toward certain memories of loss is dismissed in a nationalist discourse which suppresses "any internal dissent that would expose the concrete, human effects of its violence."⁹⁸ Butler emphasises how this process relies on the dehumanisation of certain bodies: "the differential allocation of grievability that decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved and which kind of subject must not, operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human: what counts as a livable life and a grievable death?"⁹⁹ What, then, does it mean to mourn lives that aren't perceived as grievable, losses that aren't recognised as loss in the first place?

⁹² Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 159. — In a critical reading of Freud, Ahmed challenges the idea that "the purpose of grief is to sever the bonds with the deceased in order to free the survivor to make new attachments" (Ahmed: 2014) She goes into Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia in which mourning, entailing "the 'letting go' of the lost subject," (Ahmed: 2014) is construed as the healthy response to loss, as opposed to Freud's reading of melancholia in which "the ego refuses to let go of the object, and preserves the object 'inside itself,'" (Ahmed: 2014) which leads to it being identified as pathological.

⁹³ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, 162.

⁹⁴ In line with Butler's observation of a "hierarchy of grief" (Butler: 2020), Ahmed goes into what she calls 'queer grief' and notes how, often, "queer lives are not recognised as lives 'to be lost.'" (Ahmed: 2014).

⁹⁵ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London, New York: Verso, 2004), XX-XXI.

⁹⁶ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 156.

⁹⁷ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life*, XIV.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 37-38.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, XIV. ; This notion needs to be situated in relation to colonial practices of othering and dehumanisation and to be acknowledged as a fundamentally racialised practice.

In conceptualising grief through a queer lens, Ahmed explores the extent to which grieving for the ungrieved can address injustice, asking “what happens when those who have been designated as ungrievable are grieved, and when their loss is not only felt as a loss, but becomes a symbol of the injustice of loss?”¹⁰⁰ In other words, when does mourning become political? In doing so, she proposes another way of looking at grief by redefining the refusal to ‘let go’ as “an ethical response to loss,”¹⁰¹ arguing that “the desire to maintain attachments with the lost other is enabling, rather than blocking new forms of attachment.”¹⁰² Similarly, Cvetkovich stresses how “the goal is to depathologize negative feelings so that they can be seen as a possible resource for political action rather than as its antithesis.”¹⁰³ Opposing the notion of affect as outside of social meaning, she emphasises how understanding particular feelings as political and socially situated is essential for “rethinking activism in ways that attend to its emotional registers.”¹⁰⁴ Ahmed, too, stresses the potential of negative affect in challenging histories of injustice and losses for which we are not yet finished grieving. “Bad feelings”, she states, “are not simply reactive; they are creative responses to histories that are unfinished,”¹⁰⁵ a notion I will take up in the analysis of the case study below. Ahmed thus concludes that:

We need to find ways of gathering that do not allow us to cover over bad feelings and the pasts they keep alive. To gather in this way is to offer (...) the potential of a beginning, the commencement of an exchange. To gather in this way is not to turn over a page in history; it is not even to start a new page. To gather in this way is to attend to history, to what does not simply go away, in the moment of recognition of the unhappiness of that history. A concern with histories that hurt is not a backward orientation: to move on, you must make this return.¹⁰⁶

Recognising a history as ‘unfinished’, then, entails acknowledging that you cannot simply ‘move past’ it. In that sense, the purpose of grief, then, is not to let go, but lies in “negotiating and renegotiating the meaning of the loss over time.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁰ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 192.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 159.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: a Public Feeling*, (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2012), 2.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 7.

¹⁰⁵ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, 217.

¹⁰⁶ Sara Ahmed, “The Politics of Good Feeling,” 13.

¹⁰⁷ Phyllis R. Silverman; Dennis Klass, “Another Paradigm” in *Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief*, ed. Dennis Klass, Phyllis R. Silverman, and Steven L. Nickman (New York, London: Routledge, 1996), 19.

2.4. Trauma: unfinished histories and ghostly matters

This cultural negotiation over the meaning of loss is demonstrated in the struggle that comes with the cultivation of so-called ‘cultural trauma.’¹⁰⁸ As outlined above, defining a memory as ‘cultural’ is “to enter into a debate about what that memory means.”¹⁰⁹ Understanding an event as a ‘cultural’ trauma, then, requires its traumatic nature to be acknowledged on a collective level through what Alexander calls the ‘trauma process,’¹¹⁰ which implies that “collective identities and cultural memories connected to these identities are brought up for debate and reformulated.”¹¹¹ Hirschberger similarly describes this process as a crisis of meaning in which social groups “redefine who they are and where they are going.”¹¹² The traumatic event and the processes of meaning-making that follow it thus play an essential role in the construction of social identities.¹¹³ For members of the perpetrator group, allocating the status of trauma to (the memory of) an event poses an identity threat, as it jeopardises the positive self-image of the group.¹¹⁴ This tension between uncomfortable pasts, threatening group structures of meaning, and the identity of the group in the present, creates a certain discontinuity, Hirschberger writes. It creates a rupture in the carefully constructed linear narrative toward the future, which often leads to the denial or distortion of the past in a way that serves the dominant group’s identity.¹¹⁵ However, where the past poses a threat to meaning for one side, for victimised identities “the very essence of meaning stems from the same traumatic past.”¹¹⁶ The trauma process, then, is above all a struggle over meaning.¹¹⁷ Observing how social groups create symbolic representations which “can be seen as ‘claims’ about the shape of social reality, its causes, and the responsibilities for action such causes imply,”¹¹⁸ Alexander goes on to describe how the cultural construction of trauma can be seen as such a claim: “It is a claim to some fundamental

¹⁰⁸ In theorising trauma, it has been generally situated in the realm of the personal by means of psychological and psychoanalytic discourse. Various scholars, however, have sought to expand the notion of trauma to the collective level, introducing the concept of cultural trauma. Cultural trauma, then, distinguishes itself from the individual experience in its discursive character: its ‘traumatic’ status needs to be established and generally accepted in its wider sociocultural context.

¹⁰⁹ Kaitlin M. Murphy, *Mapping Memory*, 18.

¹¹⁰ Jeffrey Alexander in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, ed. Alexander et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) quoted in Ron Eyerman, *Memory, Trauma and Identity*, (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 23.

¹¹¹ Ron Eyerman, *Memory, Trauma and Identity*, (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019) 5-6.

¹¹² Gilad Hirschberger, “Collective Trauma and the Social Construction of Meaning,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 9 (2018): 1441, accessed April 15, 2022, DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01441.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* — Jeffrey Alexander, “Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma”, in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, ed. Alexander et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 10.

¹¹⁸ Jeffrey Alexander, “Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma”, 11.

injury, an exclamation of the terrifying profanation of some sacred value, a narrative about a horribly destructive social process, and a demand for emotional, institutional, and symbolic reparation and reconstitution.”¹¹⁹ The claim to trauma, then, has to be understood as an active process of meaning-making that puts forward a hi/story as ‘unfinished’.

As outlined above, the Guatemalan government disregards the claim to trauma brought up in the truth commissions, denying the occurrence of genocide and, in doing so, excusing itself from attending to the traumatic memories attached to it. As Amich notes, “this focus on consensus and the subsequent erasure of counter-memories is only possible through “the continued repression of trauma.”¹²⁰

This is problematic precisely because of the ungraspable nature of trauma, which inherently “disrupts the ability of the subject to synthesize, categorize, and attach meaning to events.”¹²¹ Preventing the event from being commemorated and assimilated into public memory, then, causes the victimised group to be haunted by the traumatic past, continuously struggling to render it meaningful. As Erikson puts it: “Our memory repeats to us what we haven’t yet come to terms with, what still haunts us.”¹²² Traumatic memories can thus be understood as what Gordon names ‘ghostly matters:’ “that special instance of the merging of the visible and the invisible, the dead and the living, the past and the present — into the making of worldly relations and into the making of our accounts of the world.”¹²³ She stresses the importance of turning to that which has been rendered ghostly in the process of memory-making, in line with Weinstock, who remarks that “We value our ghosts, particularly during periods of cultural transition, because the alternative to their presence is even more frightening: If ghosts do not return to correct history, then privileged narratives of history are not open to contestation.”¹²⁴ Gordon goes on to underline the importance of admitting the ghosts (of traumatic memories) in the present to address injustices that are still haunting us: “It is about putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look. It is sometimes about writing ghost stories, stories that not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place,

¹¹⁹ Jeffrey Alexander, “Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma,” 11.

¹²⁰ Candice Amich, “The Limits of Witness,” 93.

¹²¹ MaryCatherine McDonald, “Trauma, Embodiment and Narrative”, in *Idealistic Studies* 42 (2013) 247. DOI: 10.5840/idealisticstudies2012422&315.

¹²² Kai Erikson, “Notes on Trauma and Community,” in Caruth (ed.) *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 184.

¹²³ Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 23.

¹²⁴ Kaitlin M. Murphy, *Mapping Memory*, 38.

toward a countermemory, for the future.”¹²⁵ Ghost stories, then, are about making the return Ahmed speaks of, about attending to what refuses to be gone and doing it justice in the present.

Trauma thus requires this return, as it needs “an ongoing reconstruction of the trauma in an attempt to make sense of it.”¹²⁶ This closely relates to what Shay calls ‘communalization of the trauma,’¹²⁷ which entails “the active narration of the traumatic event to a sympathetic and understanding community.”¹²⁸ Shay and Laub conclude that “when victims do not have the opportunity to tell their story, (...) healing is near impossible.”¹²⁹

Studying the struggle implicit in testimonies of trauma, Laub and Felman describe how, while its telling is essential in the process of healing, traumatic memory, because of its elusive nature, inherently resists narration.¹³⁰ LaCapra similarly describes how “one of the manifestations of a catastrophic age is taken to be the insufficiency of word and narrative to capture the affect of traumatic experience.”¹³¹ Writing about the understanding of trauma as ‘unrepresentable’, McDonald adds to this, stating that “what we mean when we say that an event is unspeakable is *not* that we cannot speak it — it means that we cannot *render it meaningful* through speech.”¹³² Similarly, Murphy concludes how “to live in the exact physical spaces where that violence occurred, is something that is all but impossible to render fully legible through traditional testimony.”¹³³ She thus argues for a “more holistic understanding of the relationship between memory and affect” taking into account how “trauma lives in and is transmitted affectively through bodies.”¹³⁴ Due to its elusive nature, then, the reconstruction of trauma requires an approach that takes into account the embodied, affective experience of trauma.

¹²⁵ Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 22.

¹²⁶ Hirschberger, *Collective Trauma and the Social Construction of Meaning*, 1.

¹²⁷ Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam* (New York: Touchstone Publishing, 1994), quoted in MaryCatherine McDonald, “Trauma, Embodiment and Narrative”, in *Idealistic Studies* 42, 2 (2013), 247. DOI: 10.5840/idstudies2012422&315.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Mary Catherine McDonald, “Trauma, Embodiment and Narrative,” 248 — The dismissal of this claim can be read as a form of epistemic violence: these testimonies are prevented from being rendered meaningful on a political level, by denying the speech act of the testimony the status of knowledge. This tendency can be recognised as a form of testimonial oppression, a phenomenon that has long been examined in the work of women of colour, who, as Patricia Hill Collins states, are continuously undervalued as a ‘knower’. (Collins: 2000)

¹³⁰ Dori Laub, “An Event Without A Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival,” in *Testimony: Crises of Witness in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* edited by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (New York, London: 1992), 75-92.

¹³¹ Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), quoted in Ron Eyerman, *Memory, Trauma and Identity*, (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 90-91.

¹³² MaryCatherine McDonald, “Trauma, Embodiment and Narrative”, 259.

¹³³ Kaitlin M. Murphy, *Mapping Memory*, 47.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

Underlining the embodied nature of trauma, McDonald suggests that traumatic memory defies any understanding of subjectivity that relies on a strict body/mind dualism,¹³⁵ describing how trauma “reveals the subject to be foundationally embodied, one whose mind and body coexist in a dynamic and interconnected relationship.”¹³⁶ Therefore, it is crucial that the embodied reality of the traumatic experience is acknowledged in the narration of the story: “trauma must be situated in an account that links the stories we tell with the bodies in which we live,”¹³⁷ McDonald states. Similarly criticising a Cartesian mind-body dualism, Tota analyses the embodied nature of (traumatic) memory, describing how, in this context, “the past can be viewed as bodily present, as incorporated in the present state of the body: a sort of tacit knowledge or passive modus that affect what we feel, what we think, how we react to events, what we remember and what we forget.”¹³⁸ The traumatic past, then, can be understood as sedimented in the traumatised embodied subject and, in this way, still present. Narvaez underlines how, in this context, turning our focus to the body “can help us see how we can ‘naturally’ carry, in our bodies, the strong presence of the past”¹³⁹ Attending to traumatic memories, then, to what is rendered ghostly, calls for an affective approach.¹⁴⁰

2.5. Feminist epistemology and the bodily performance of meaning

This perspective closely relates to the feminist revaluation of knowledge as embodied and situated, rejecting a Cartesian mind-body dualism.¹⁴¹ Introducing the notion of ‘situated knowledges,’¹⁴² Haraway not only emphasises how the knowledge we produce is inevitably distorted by our situatedness, but, in doing so, she firmly locates the process of meaning-making in the *embodied* subject. Countering the idea of a disembodied knower, she argues for “the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring and structured body, versus the view from above, from

¹³⁵ MaryCatherine McDonald, “Trauma, Embodiment and Narrative”, 250.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Anna Lisa Tota, “Dancing the Present: Body Memory and Quantum Field Theory,” in *Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies* edited by Anna Lisa Tota and Trevor Hagen, (London, New York: Routledge, 2016), 467.

¹³⁹ Rafael F. Narvaez, “Embodiment, Collective Memory and Time,” *Body and Society*, 12 (2006), 59. DOI: 10.1177/1357034X06067156

¹⁴⁰ Diana Taylor underlines how “The writing = memory/knowledge equation is central to Western epistemology,” describing how the persisting hegemonic status of the written word in Western cultures and their processes of memory-making, “continues to bring about the disappearance of embodied knowledge.” (Diana Taylor: 2007)

¹⁴¹ Louis van den Hengel, “The Arena of Affect: Marina Abramović and the Politics of Emotion.” In Rosemarie Buikema, Liedeke Plate and Kathrin Thiele (eds), *Doing Gender in Media, Art and Culture: A Comprehensive Guide to Gender Studies*, (London, New York: Routledge, 2018), 127.

¹⁴² Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective”, *Feminist Studies* no.3 (Autumn, 1988): 575-595.

nowhere, from simplicity.”¹⁴³ The knowing, remembering subject, then, is to be understood as inherently interconnected with the body, which is shaped by social and discursive practices. “This notion of the body as a kind of shifting membrane between the self and the social world positions the human being as an essentially sensorial and relational entity — that is, as an affective subject,”¹⁴⁴ Van den Hengel concludes. The meaning-making subject, then, has to be understood in terms of affectivity and relationality. Therefore, it is essential to take into account affective attachments when examining processes of memory-making — not least in the context of Guatemala, where, as outlined above, affect plays a particularly important role in manipulating collective memories: “If official histories, by definition, sublimate and attempt to make transgressive memories disappear, then it is essential to investigate the ways in which memory persists in bodies and lived experience,”¹⁴⁵ Murphy rightly argues.

Examining different kinds of knowledge-production and meaning-making that account for the embodied nature of memory leads me to turn to the artistic practice of performance, which I understand as “an embodied praxis and episteme,”¹⁴⁶ in which bodily expression functions as a mnemonic reserve,¹⁴⁷ in line with Murphy who notes how in the context of performance, the “body serves as the medium through which memory may emerge.”¹⁴⁸ In that sense, she states, “reenactments loosen the ties that separate the past and present, aiming to give body and voice to a past that no longer physically exists, except in memory and through representation,”¹⁴⁹ highlighting the distinctive potential of performance in transmitting forms of knowledge that dwell in the body. Through performance, then, the degree to which the past expresses itself through the *present* body becomes salient.

Referring to feminist epistemologies that move beyond a dualistic mind/body understanding, Van den Hengel emphasises the epistemological revaluation inherent to the genre of performance art, which — in considering the body as central in processes of meaning-making — “takes the emotions, which are traditionally associated with the irrational, the physical and the feminine seriously as a

¹⁴³ Louis van den Hengel, “The Arena of Affect,” 127.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Kaitlin M. Murphy, *Mapping Memory*, 24.

¹⁴⁶ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 17.

¹⁴⁷ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 4.

¹⁴⁸ Kaitlin M. Murphy, *Mapping Memory*, 71.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

source of knowledge.”¹⁵⁰ The genre of performance, then, seems to offer a unique mode of transmitting the *affective* nature of memory: performance can be understood as a form of memory-making that “*resonates* with the physicality of the body.”¹⁵¹ Employing the body as a medium for communicating meaning, a way of storytelling that *moves* beyond Western logocentrism, the embodied practice of performance allows for a way of transferring what resides in the body but resists linguistic narration: communicating meaning with and *through* the body. Firmly situating the genre of performance in feminist histories,¹⁵² Van den Hengel describes how the it mobilises “the materiality of the human body both as a visual medium and as an instrument of political critique,”¹⁵³ demonstrating its potential to bring about “new forms of female subjectivity, agency and creativity,”¹⁵⁴ a claim I will further examine in my analysis of Galindo’s work.

¹⁵⁰ Louis van den Hengel, “The Arena of Affect,” 127.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 125, (my emphasis)

¹⁵² Van den Hengel describes how, from its outset in historical avant-garde, Western performance art was “overtly political.” (Van den Hengel: 2018) He goes on to note that, therefore, “it is not a coincidence that the heyday of the genre coincided with the rise of second-wave feminism, the American Black Power movement, Vietnam War protests and the revolutionary events of May 1968 in Europe.” (Van den Hengel: 2018).

¹⁵³ Louis van den Hengel, “The Arena of Affect,” 125.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

3. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. The semiotics of screaming

The ontological point of departure of this thesis is grounded in a social constructivist understanding of reality, closely related to the basic premise of the field of cultural memory studies, which recognises how our relationship to and conception of present realities is very much constructed by our understanding of the past — which is, in turn, shaped by a variety of intersecting power structures at play in the present. Looking at memory from a deconstructionist perspective, I understand the past as a human construct, in which the symbolic processes of cultural memory-making play a central role. In doing so, I consciously move away from grand narratives and positivist notions of a natural universal truth, instead recognising memory as fluid, always already mediated, contextual, embodied and precarious.

The complex tension between knowledge, power, and memory, as outlined above, gives rise to various epistemological questions: can studying what is remembered, as well as forgotten, lead to knowledge about the present condition if the present is constructed through processes of selective forgetting? And, if so, how do memories produce knowledge in and about a culture?

Employing the notion of ‘culture’, requires a brief note, as culture is a complex term, resisting a single definition. Hall points out that (defining what counts as) culture is “always a site of struggle,”¹⁵⁵ inherently related to a system of intersecting power structures — a conception grounded in the broader framework of postcolonial thinking, which recognises how “the construction of ‘Western culture’ always entails stigmatising and oppressing other cultures. The defining of a certain culture is based on the devalorization and exclusion of ‘the other’ of that culture, often the people who lived under colonial rule.”¹⁵⁶ As Hall notes, this strand of thinking is rooted in a binary understanding of culture in opposition to nature, coinciding with colonial discourses in passing judgement on who ‘has’ culture. Culture, then, has to be understood as “never simply present, neutral or homogenous; far from being an a-historical given, it’s always a sphere of contestation, disagreement and struggle.”¹⁵⁷ Looking at systems of meaning-making in the process of remembering, I adopt Erll’s

¹⁵⁵ Joost de Bloois, Stijn De Cauwer, Anneleen Masschelein, *50 Key Terms in Contemporary Cultural Theory*, (Kalmthout: Pelckmans Pro, 2017), 8.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 12

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

understanding of culture as “a shared sign system with a social, a material and a mental dimension”¹⁵⁸ in the context of this thesis. Consequently, my interpretative work in the analysis of the case study is grounded in the field of semiotics, defined by de Saussure as a “science which studies the life of signs as part of social life.”¹⁵⁹ In his conceptualisation of the diacritical nature of the semiotic sign, entailing the “union of a form which signifies (signifier) and an idea signified (signified),”¹⁶⁰ de Saussure asserts that there is no natural relation between the two. “The main point”, Hall elucidates, “is that meaning does not inhere *in* things, in the world. It is constructed, produced. It is the result of a signifying practice – a practice that *produces* meaning, that *makes things mean*.”¹⁶¹ The sign, then, gets its meaning through a complex process of signification, rather than a reading of a meaning it intrinsically carries. In my analysis of Galindo’s work, then, I approach the scream as a cultural sign, understanding the performance as a process of signification in which the meaning of the scream is ascribed to it via the performance itself. Hall goes on to state that “if meaning is the result, not of something fixed out there, in nature, but of our social, cultural and linguistic conventions, then meaning can never be *finally* fixed.”¹⁶² When examining technologies of meaning-making in the context of this thesis, I thus take up a deconstructionist approach, in which meaning is never anchored and always the result of an ongoing negotiation. In doing so, I understand the meaning of the sign as determined by its difference from other signs, in line with Derrida’s notion of ‘différance’ central to his theorization of deconstruction, which implies that “the play of differences supposes, in effect, syntheses and referrals which forbid at any moment, or in any sense, that a simple element be *present* in and of itself, referring only to itself.”¹⁶³ A sign, then, inevitably refers beyond itself as a result of its embeddedness in a larger network of meaning, making visible the simultaneous presence and absence of the signs from which it differs. In that sense, there is no absolute transcendent truth: “If all things (...) are produced as identities by their differences from other things, then a complete determination of identity (a statement of what something “is” fully and completely “in itself”) would require an endless inventory of relations to other terms in a potentially

¹⁵⁸ Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture*, trans. Sara B. Young (Hampshire, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 11.

¹⁵⁹ Alexandros Lagopoulos, and Karin Boklund-Lagopoulou, “Chapter 1 Introduction: What is semiotics?” In *Theory and Methodology of Semiotics: The Tradition of Ferdinand de Saussure* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 2020)

¹⁶⁰ Stuart Hall, “The Work of Representation,” in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* edited by Stuart Hall (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 1997), 16.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁶³ Jacques Derrida, “Semiology and Grammatology,” in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Maiden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), 337.

infinite network of differences. Truth, as a result, will always be incomplete.”¹⁶⁴ In the context of this thesis, then, I conceive of meaning as constructed, contextual, relational and, because of its precarious nature, always fluid.¹⁶⁵ Following this, Hall points out how signifying practices have to be situated in their sociopolitical context, describing how “it is social actors who use the conceptual systems of their culture and the linguistic and other representational systems to construct meaning, to make the world meaningful and to communicate about that world meaningfully to others.”¹⁶⁶ The ‘meaning’ of the sign, then, has to be understood as the product of social and cultural construction and therefore, always subject to its locatedness. If ‘meaning’ is socially and politically situated, it follows that “‘taking the meaning’ must involve an active process of interpretation,”¹⁶⁷ an exercise I take up in my reading of the sign of the scream.

The semiotic approach enables me to examine the performance of the scream in the Guatemalan context where, as outlined above, unwelcome stories are systematically silenced, allowing me to interpret the sign of the scream as a form of resistance against the silencing of hi/stories of gender-based violence in the Guatemalan cultural memory. What follows is thus not an analysis of what it means to scream, but a semiotic reading of the sign of the scream when it is performed for nine consecutive minutes by forty-one women in a small room in Guatemala as part of Galindo’s artistic practice.

My main object of analysis, then, will be the recording of the nine minutes of screaming performed in Galindo’s work. Apart from the screaming itself, I will also pay attention to the women’s breathing before and after the screaming. Additionally, the small number of images captured during the performance inform my interpretation of the sound, particularly the sweat that is visible on the women’s bodies. Rather than analysing it based on its purely aesthetic qualities, I will approach the scream as a cultural ‘sign’ conveying meaning in and about the Guatemalan context, understanding the performance of the scream as a process of signification and memory-making.

As the piece, which Galindo describes as a ‘sound performance,’¹⁶⁸ is only accessible to me in the

¹⁶⁴ Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, “Introduction: Introductory Deconstruction,” in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Maiden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), 258.

¹⁶⁵ This, however, does not mean that the semiotic sign cannot convey something ‘true’ or rather ‘meaningful’ to the one doing the meaning-making, but rather that, in its reading, the meaning should always be interpreted in its specific context.

¹⁶⁶ Stuart Hall, “The Work of Representation,” 11.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁶⁸ “Las Escucharon Gritar y No Abrieron la Puerta,” accessed May 1, 2022, <https://www.reginajosegalindo.com/en/las-escucharon-gritar-y-no-abrieron-la-puerta-2/>.

form of a low-quality recording with a lot of excessive noise and in the 6 images documenting the event, my interpretation is therefore also subject to an imperfect and mediated representation of the performance, rather than a first-hand experience: I am analysing documentation of a performance, rather than the performance itself – or rather, a memory of a memory. Grounding my research in the field of memory studies thus requires me to acknowledge that the way something is mediated and archived inevitably influences the way it is interpreted in the present – which is no different in the context of my analysis of the case study.

3.2. Note on positionality

My very limited knowledge on the Guatemalan situation made it hard to navigate the contextualisation of the performance: I was doubtful whether I would be able to produce a critical reading of the sign of the scream as taking up a semiotic approach requires the interpretation of its meaning to be situated in its particular context — a context very different from my own. The large geographical distance between my context and the Guatemalan one expresses itself in a major gap in knowledge, one that cannot simply be bridged: I can never ‘know’ the lived experience of what it means to be a woman in post-war Guatemala, let alone understand the precarious position of the women living in the Virgen de la Asunción institution. As translation is always interpretative work and, unavoidably, things get lost in translation, my reading of their screams, or rather the echoes of their screams, is therefore inevitably limited and partial.

As a woman, I have often been told to lower my voice, and I have experienced the intense urge to scream against the *felt* injustice. However, as a white, highly educated woman living in Western Europe, I know that I do not have to raise my voice as much as a lot of other people to be heard.¹⁶⁹ Even when my lived experiences are often not reflected in the highly gendered Western historiography, as a cisgender white woman born in Belgium, I still benefit to a large extent from the narratives it cultivates. As stated earlier, it was only when others screamed that I started to actively investigate my privileges, which Ahmed aptly describes as “the experiences that you are protected from having; the thoughts you do not have to think.”¹⁷⁰ it is easier to forget painful hi/stories, when you are not continually living them.

¹⁶⁹ In this context, it is also important to note that not all forms of resistance are audible, not everyone can afford their screams to be heard.

¹⁷⁰ Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, 181.

While I can never know the particular nature of the violence in post-war Guatemala, the lived experience of navigating the social sphere as a woman has made the topic of gender-based violence a ‘sensitive’ subject to me: it is impossible for me to engage with it without involving the senses — it raises anger and sadness, indignation, despair and grief. Although there are a great number of reasons why Galindo’s piece is so far removed from me, across this distance, however, the work still *resonated* with me: even though I did not know anything about the Guatemalan context, the work *touched* me, in the only way it could considering my major gap in knowledge: affectively. Although I cannot understand the lived experience of the mourning women, the work manages to convey an *impression* of their grief, *moving* me to engage with it. Underlining the value of affectively engaging with a topic, Ahmed emphasises the potential of approaching a subject through the senses: “a gut feeling has its own intelligence. A feminist gut might sense something is amiss. You have to get closer to the feeling,”¹⁷¹ simultaneously acknowledging affect as a form of knowledge-production.

Given my background in visual arts, the analysis of sound proved to be quite a challenge for me, as it seemed rather ungraspable, intangible. Without a visual referent, I felt slightly lost. Accounting for the affective nature of the work, then, opened up a way for me to engage with the sign of the scream, as it allowed me to study its *intensity* and attend to embodied forms of knowledge-production and transference. Affect thus became a central element in my approach.

Finally, recognising how my ‘impression’ of the work is very much coloured by my affective experience of it, requires me to stress how my own situatedness, as an embodied and affective subject, strongly influences the knowledge produced in this thesis — how my situated body has to be understood as a mediating structure between the performance and my interpretation of its meaning as presented in this thesis. In line with Haraway’s conception of ‘situated knowledges,’ implementing a feminist perspective requires me to acknowledge that, in the process of meaning-making, one is never speaking from a “disembodied, omniscient position.”¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, 27.

¹⁷² Laurel Richardson, “Writing: A Method of Inquiry.” In *Handbook of Qualitative Research* edited by Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2000), 928.

4. ANALYSIS

4.1. Las Escucharon Gritar y No Abrieron la Puerta

Below, I take a closer listen to Galindo's 'Las Escucharon Gritar y No Abrieron la Puerta', examining how her piece makes use of negative affect in addressing and denouncing the silence surrounding hi/stories of femicide and injustice in Guatemala and, subsequently, how the performance of negative affect in Galindo's work challenges dominant cultural memory and traditional ways of memory-making.

The work starts with the women taking a few deep breaths. Then, a short, sharp breath. They all start screaming at the exact same moment. The screaming is shrill, the women's voices roughly at the same pitch, as if coming from a single body. It is loud. And disturbing. After about a minute and a half, the sound seems to develop dimension, blending into a polyphonic soundscape. Following a collective decrescendo, the voices become more distinctive, taking on different dynamics, intonations and colour. As it goes on, the sound becomes more layered, complex and textured. Every now and again, the weaving of voices is pierced by a single high-pitched scream, as if to make sure it keeps the listener's attention. It is not a monotonous sound, then, it moves — it is moving.

Towards the end, the sound swells again — before ending abruptly. The silence that follows is filled with heavy breathing.

In the images¹⁷³ accompanying the recording, the women — Galindo amongst them — are pictured in a small and plain room, their bodies close to each other, sweating. Their faces seem serious — determined. Some women's eyes are closed, some women cover their ears — allowing me to imagine the impact of their screams. They all face in the same direction. The women are surrounded by microphones and cameras, as if to ensure nothing goes unnoticed.

¹⁷³ Fig. 1; Fig. 2 ; Fig. 3— Regina José Galindo, <https://www.reginajosegalindo.com/en/las-escucharon-gritar-y-no-abrieron-la-puerta-2/>

4.2. Listening closely

As outlined earlier, approaching the scream as a cultural sign involves an active process of interpretation: if meaning is the result of a sociocultural process of signification, the sign is not 'natural', which requires its reading to be consciously situated. Below, I propose a reading of the scream as an expression of grief which, as previously elaborated, has to be understood as a signifying practice — a way to negotiate the meaning of loss. This interpretation can only be the result of a reading that firmly situates the sign of the scream in the specific context of Galindo's performance which is, in turn, to be situated in the wider context of the post-genocide Guatemalan inclination to obscure narratives that might challenge the neoliberal orientation toward happy futures. Galindo herself refers to how her practice is rendered meaningful in and through its locatedness, stating that "as Guatemalans we know how to decipher any image of pain, because we have all seen it up close."¹⁷⁴ She thus consciously employs symbols of grief and pain throughout her work, recognising how, performed on Guatemalan soil, it speaks to histories that are lived and felt.

Below, I examine the scream as a form of memory-making and affective knowledge-production, exploring the hypothesis that, in the context of Galindo's piece, the scream can be read as an auditory signifier of refusal which, through attending to the affective registers of (traumatic) memory, constructs a critical countertermemory and, in doing so, creates a rupture in dominant cultural memory.

As outlined earlier, the embeddedness of the sign in a larger network of meaning makes visible the simultaneous absence and presence of the signs from which it differs. Taking up the notion of 'différence', then, leads me to examine how the scream in Galindo's work derives its meaning through its difference from the ubiquitous silence surrounding Guatemala's ongoing history of gender-based violence. Galindo herself notes how "there are many theories for why so many women are killed in Guatemala. Not all deaths originate from the same direct causes, but all murders are committed under the same premise: that it is done, it is cleaned up, and nothing happens, nothing occurs, nobody says a thing. A dead woman *means nothing*, a hundred dead women mean nothing, three hundred dead women mean nothing."¹⁷⁵ In doing so, she illustrates how silence can be understood to pose a threat to processes of meaning-making, not least of all those that might breach

¹⁷⁴ Regina José Galindo, "Regina José Galindo by Francisco Goldman," interview by Francisco Goldman, *BOMB Magazine*, January 1, 2006. <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/regina-jos%C3%A9-galindo/>.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., (own emphasis).

the clearly demarcated boundaries of national memory. As stated previously, painful hi/stories challenging the national Guatemalan narrative of development and progress are structurally silenced in favour of a 'promising' future. Foregrounding unwelcome stories of loss and grief in its reappropriation of the scream, then, Galindo's work seems to expose and, subsequently, counter the silence that surrounds the memory of the women's deaths, as well as the structural silencing of women's voices — when one is continuously silenced, the scream is indeed full of meaning.

Although it is rather tempting to fall into a binary conception of screaming versus silence (life versus death, as it were) in which the latter is understood as void of meaning, it is essential to note the *significance* of the silence, too. While, as outlined above, silence does indeed block certain meanings from appearing in the public sphere, it shouldn't be read as the opposite of *meaning*: not only does the screaming get its meaning through its difference from silence, but in countering the silence with screaming, the silence, too, is rendered meaningful, as the screaming problematizes the seemingly 'natural' presence of silence, revealing its constructed nature and its subsequent relation to structures of power. The screaming, quite literally, *breaks* the silence, exposing its fragile construction: the scream is forceful. Galindo's use of the scream, then, not only serves to amplify the women's voices, but makes clear her objective of drawing attention to the silence, too: the use of the voice in its highest intensity contrasts sharply with the deafening silence, making it all the more apparent and, in doing so, denaturalising it.

In employing the tension that comes from juxtaposing the silence with the scream, presence with absence, life with death, Galindo's work refutes the idea of death, and the silence that follows it, as the end of meaning. She does so through rendering the women's deaths meaningful in the process of grieving them: by performing the negotiation of the meaning of that loss, she establishes the grievability of the women. The lost lives are posited as 'grievable deaths', made *significant* through their grieving. Putting forward this 'fundamental injury,' the work could thus be read as performing what is described above as a 'claim to trauma'. In Galindo's performance, then, grieving becomes an act of meaning making, a process of signification. Consequently, the women's screaming can be read as a refusal to accept the silencing of the grief that lingers right below the surface of seemingly happy histories: the scream, as an expression of grief, is a refusal to mourn in silence as well as a refusal to let go of 'what does not simply go away'. In moving beyond a binary understanding of the 'lively' scream and the 'deathly' silence, then, the scream performs a 'life-in-death and

death-in-life:¹⁷⁶ evoking the presence of the absent women, Galindo creates a liminal space in which the (memories of) the dead can come to life and those who ‘live on’ in the presence of death can grieve — keeping the past alive in the present.

Moving away from a dualistic approach leads me to note how the voice can be used in myriad ways — from laughing to whispering, to crying, talking, humming, singing, even gargling or growling, a sigh, maybe. Consequently, the scream does not only become meaningful through its contrast with silence, but also acquires meaning through its difference from other speech acts. In Galindo’s performance, the women’s voices are not uttering silent whispers, soothing songs or soft sighs, rather they are incredibly loud, high and raw, pushed to their limits. You can hear them catching their breaths, their voices cracking. The women’s heavy breathing that follows the performance, as well as the glistening sweat on their bodies, accentuates the corporeality of the act of screaming. Screaming, much more than other speech acts, reveals how the voice is inherently tied to the human body. What distinguishes the scream from other usages of the voice, then, seems to be a matter of *intensity*: screaming *strains* the voice, it wears you out, leaving you with a hoarse voice, a sore throat. The scream is demanding. In that sense, countertermemories can be read as what Ahmed refers to as a ‘sweaty concept’: “sweat is bodily; we might sweat more during more strenuous and muscular activity. A sweaty concept might come out of a bodily experience that is trying,”¹⁷⁷ she states, pointing to how sweat might be interpreted as revealing a *bodily* resistance, “sweaty concepts are also generated by the practical experience of coming up against a world, or the practical experience of trying to transform a world.”¹⁷⁸ The corporeal nature of the voice and the extreme intensity of the scream, then, make salient how memory work is bodily work and how, when you have to scream to be heard, memory work is strenuous.

In perceiving of the scream as “a response to intense moments of lived experience,”¹⁷⁹ Moore and Hare, too, draw attention to the material body producing the scream, simultaneously pointing out its

¹⁷⁶ Stefanie Fishel and Lauren Wilcox, “Politics of the Living Dead: Race and Exceptionalism in the Apocalypse”, *Millenium: Journal of International Studies* 45 (2017): 342, accessed January 5th, 2022, DOI: 10.1177/0305829817712819 — Steven Pokornowski, “Vulnerable Life: Zombies, Global Biopolitics, and the Reproduction of Structural Violence”, *Humanities* 71 (2016): 6, accessed January 8th 2022 <https://doi.org/10.3390/h5030071>.

¹⁷⁷ Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, 13.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Amber Moore & Kathleen (Kaye) Hare, “Come Scream with Me: On feminist stories and screaming into the void,” *Journal for Cultural Research*, 25:3 (2021):313. DOI: 10.1080/14797585.2021.1978747

affective nature. They go on to describe how the scream can thus be interpreted as an expression of “experiencing precariousness that feels imminent.”¹⁸⁰ As outlined above, the screams in Galindo’s performance can be read as an act of memory-making, a performance of grief negotiating the meaning of loss, a refusal to simply forget. In a context where memories of the dead are buried in nameless graves, where meaning-making is actively blocked, the remembering subject might feel the need to raise its voice: screaming might feel like the last resort, the necessary condition to be heard — “what goes unsaid, that which is implied and omitted and censured and suggested, acquires the importance of a scream.”¹⁸¹ In the performance, then, the silence is breached by the women’s screaming, immediately at its full capacity, as if it was there already, demanding to be expressed — anxiously dwelling in the body, restless, pressing against the skin that has become too tight. The scream is pressing. The urgency the women’s voices seem to communicate through their intensity, their volume and profundity, might thus be read as demonstrating a certain anxiety around the precariousness of the memories they refuse to forget, at the same time revealing their persistence in the body and their inevitable resurfacing.

Inherently tied to the body, the women’s screams in Galindo’s work can be read as an expression of the lived and *felt* experience of loss, a way to *give voice* to their grief while staying with the body in which their traumatic memories of loss reside. In the context of Galindo’s work, then, the scream can be read as a signifier of the affect of grief.

In line with trauma theory, Galindo recognises the ‘past as a bodily present’, demonstrating through her performance how “memory lives on in the body— latent but ready to emerge if given the opportunity.”¹⁸² The scream, then, is a clear instance of ‘ghostly matter,’ a reminder that “the past is never dead. It’s not even past”¹⁸³— revealing how the bodies of the living are continuously haunted by the traumatic memories of loss, how the dead live on in the bodies of the living, always present, impatiently waiting to emerge. Through performing the emotionally charged scream, Galindo shows how we cannot ‘close the door’ on the past — how the ghosts refuse to be locked up. Attending to this affective attachment to the dead, refusing simply to ‘let go’, she welcomes the ghosts, recognising that they bring with them the possibility of “that special instance of the merging of the

¹⁸⁰ Amber Moore & Kathleen (Kaye) Hare, “Come Scream with Me,” 314.

¹⁸¹ Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 83.

¹⁸² Kaitlin M. Murphy, *Mapping Memory*, 73.

¹⁸³ William Faulkner, *Requiem for a nun*. (New York: Random House, 1951).

visible and the invisible, the dead and the living, the past and the present—into the making of worldly relations and into the making of our accounts of the world.”¹⁸⁴ Performing this ‘life-in death and death-in-life,’ then, Galindo makes clear that the lost other is *present* in the body of the remembering subject, putting forward the body of the grieving subject “as a kind of shifting membrane between the self and the social world (...) as an essentially sensorial and relational entity — that is, as an affective subject.”¹⁸⁵ In doing so, she recognises how the remembering subject is formed in and by ‘structures of feeling’, its relationality and its affective attachments to others: in being shaped by others, we carry with us the “‘impressions’ of those others.”¹⁸⁶ To preserve those affective attachments, to remember, “is not to make an external other internal, but to keep one’s impressions alive, as aspects of one’s self that are both oneself and more than oneself.”¹⁸⁷ Ahmed concludes that “to grieve for others is to keep their impressions alive in the midst of their death.”¹⁸⁸ The scream, then, can be read as an ‘ethical response to loss’ in its maintenance of the attachment to (through its active re-call of) the lost other — which, as noted previously, is “enabling, rather than blocking new forms of attachment.”¹⁸⁹

Performing the impression of and, in doing so, the *presence* of the lost other through echoing their screams in the present, Galindo’s work invokes a rupture in the carefully woven narrative of the happy nation — spilling negative affect in a cleaned-up history. In doing so, Galindo thereby refutes the idea of a linear narrative: by *listening* to the body, recognising it as a memory medium, she shows how the past is very much present.

This rupture, then, can be read as the result of what Ahmed calls a ‘feminist snap’, a sudden break: “to snap can mean to make a brisk, sharp cracking sound; to break suddenly (...) let’s treat the word snap as verb, as doing something: to snap.”¹⁹⁰ The sharp breath, right before the screaming starts, can thus be read as a ‘snap,’ a sudden breaking of the silence, of the bodies carrying a heavy hi/story: “we hear the sound of its breaking. We can hear the suddenness of a break.”¹⁹¹ And out of

¹⁸⁴ Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 24.

¹⁸⁵ Louis van den Hengel, “The Arena of Affect: Marina Abramović and the Politics of Emotion.” In Rosemarie Buikema, Liedeke Plate and Kathrin Thiele (eds), *Doing Gender in Media, Art and Culture: A Comprehensive Guide to Gender Studies*, (London, New York: Routledge, 2018), 127.

¹⁸⁶ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 46.

¹⁸⁷ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 160.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 159.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ Sara Ahmed, *Living A Feminist Life*, 188.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

that breakage, the possibility of the scream is born: “we might assume, on the basis of what we hear, that the snap is a starting point (...) the unbecoming of something.”¹⁹² The suddenness of the ‘snap’, however, is misleading: as stated earlier, the scream was *already there*, residing in the body, the traumatic memories living right under the surface of the skin, ready to emerge — “if a snap seems sharp or sudden, it might be because we do not experience the slower time of bearing or of holding up; the time in which we can bear the pressure, the time it has taken for things not to break.”¹⁹³ The sharp breath can thus be construed as a refusal to keep bending, being pressured into a shape, a direction. As Ahmed notes, “a break is not only a break of something,”¹⁹⁴ but also the breaking off of a route, a refusal of the destination.¹⁹⁵ In that sense, the scream can be read as the result of the breaking off of a cruel attachment, a shared direction, to the ‘promising’ future. I thus propose a reading of the scream as (the creation of) a possibility, born out of a feminist snap, the creation of a break, an opening — opening up other ways of attending to the past, to render it meaningful in the present. The scream, then, is a refusal of a linear direction toward a promising future, a refusal of the *continuation* of hi/stories of violence. The scream can then also be read as a form of resistance, a form of agency, a ‘turning away’ from the mapped out route: “A present snap can be an accumulated history; a history can be confronted in an act of snap. (...) To snap is to say no to that history,”¹⁹⁶ and how it is narrated. In this way, the scream becomes a reminder of unwanted stories, breaking the construction of the happy future: through the bodily expression of hi/stories that *go against* the teleological narration of history, the performance of counter-memories actively *deconstructs* that narrative.

In recognising the embodied nature of (traumatic) memories of loss, then, Galindo underlines how memory-making involves “stories of both live and absent bodies,”¹⁹⁷ demonstrating how the dead ‘live on’ in the bodies of the living and how their deaths can acquire meaning in the present through their re-emerging. Attending to the embodied nature of traumatic memory, Galindo’s work gives voice to the lived experience of loss, the negative affect of grief, putting forward the women’s body as a living archive. Drawing from the body, employing the voice in its intensity, the work creates a rupture in the linear construction of the national narrative by performing the negative affect already

¹⁹² Sara Ahmed, *Living A Feminist Life*, 188.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 189.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 168.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 202.

¹⁹⁷ Kaitlin M. Murphy, *Mapping Memory*, 43.

present in the body. In this way, Galindo shows how the women's screams can be re-appropriated in the struggle over meaning and the right to remember.

In its *collective* performance of the scream and its audible multivocality, Galindo's work provides a pluralistic understanding of the meaning of loss in which the single cry is not erased by the collectivity, but rather amplified. As Galindo emphasises in a later interview: "A single voice is a thunderclap; collective voices are the storm, able to devastate everything."¹⁹⁸ Through the performance, then, Galindo underlines the potential of uniting the voices that are not heard otherwise. In moving away from the traditional first-person testimony and, in doing so, refusing to represent the neoliberal individual, she seems to point out the risk that the individualisation of stories of gender-based violence entails: by individualising these events, the structural frameworks that lie at the roots of the violence, as well as the shared lived experiences of violence go unnoticed. The rich tapestry of voices, then, does not deny the individuals but weaves together their audible affect into a complex texture, connecting the loose threads, the stories that are too easily forgotten. In moving beyond the single story, the lonely cry, Galindo's 'soundscape' addresses the structural nature of selective forgetting in challenging the strategic individualisation and pathologising of negative affect toward the nation through its collectivisation of grief. As Hirsch and Smith conclude: "to remember, then, is precisely not to recall events as isolated"¹⁹⁹ but to form meaningful connections. In doing so, Galindo's performance calls for the right "to grieve, and to make grief itself into a resource for politics."²⁰⁰ In its employment of the voice, intrinsically tied to the body, Galindo's work is, indeed, undeniably political: "due to its connection with the body, the voice turns into politics: the politics of the particular body that produces it, a social, cultural, political and gendered body."²⁰¹ The scream, then, channels meaning through its connection to the body, located in the wider structures of feeling — the social body, as it were — in which the voice resonates.

The bodies of the screaming women, then, not only serve as a proxy for the lost women, but also as a 'technology of memory,' producing meaning about the past in the present. The performance is thus

¹⁹⁸ Regina José Galindo in "Plurality devices. Regina José Galindo and the use of the voice for a politics of bodies," interview by Arnold Braho, *Juliet Art Magazine*, July 29, 2021.

<https://www.juliet-artmagazine.com/en/plurality-devices-regina-jose-galindo-and-the-use-of-the-voice-for-a-politics-of-bodies>

¹⁹⁹ Hirsch and Smith, "Feminism and Cultural Memory: An Introduction" in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28 (2002), 7.

²⁰⁰ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life*, 30.

²⁰¹ Arnold Braho in "Plurality devices. Regina José Galindo and the use of the voice for a politics of bodies," interview by Arnold Braho, *Juliet Art Magazine*, July 29, 2021.

<https://www.juliet-artmagazine.com/en/plurality-devices-regina-jose-galindo-and-the-use-of-the-voice-for-a-politics-of-bodies>

not only an instance of memorialisation but, in voicing precarious memories, it can simultaneously be read as a political demand to remember, a recognition of the need for redress and re-construction of traumatic memories in the struggle over meaning. In their reenactment of the scream, translated into the present, the women take agency over the narration of hi/story: they are now screaming *on their terms*.

In their echoing of the screams, then, the women underline the ongoing need to “reckon with what modern history has rendered ghostly.”²⁰² Attending to histories that haunt, then, they put “life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look.”²⁰³ Tracking the traces of the ghostly presence of the past, and the negative affect attached to it, Galindo shows that it is very much *present*. The reenactment of the scream, then, is clearly “intended to have contemporary effects — to create something new *through* the deliberate bodily invocation of the past.”²⁰⁴ Turning to the body, Galindo’s work performs an intervention in the present by reviving the past. The re-presentation of the past is taken quite literally in the formal choices of Galindo’s work: the number of women and the minutes they scream are certainly not an arbitrary choice, but clearly reference the hi/story Galindo attempts to inscribe into the Guatemalan cultural memory. However, as articulated above, the work inherently differs from the historical episode it re-creates. Consequently, in the context of memory-making, ‘différence’ also has to be understood in terms of temporality: in Galindo’s performance the sign of the scream not only derives meaning from its contrast to silence or its difference from other speech acts, but also through its difference from the historical event it actively re-calls: where the scream was first a call for help, out of despair, it is now a call for justice, a refusal to forget. Through her reenactment of the scream, and the negative affect it entails, Galindo creates a *temporal* rupture, disrupting the linearity of the narrative and, in doing so, exposing the messiness of history — how past and present instances of violence bleed into each other. “Reenactments”, Murphy elucidates, “occur in and with bodies, and the connections they draw, through bodily presence and practice, between places, temporalities, and events.”²⁰⁵ Expressing memory through the *living* bodies of the women in the present and, in doing so, demonstrating their proximity to the dead, the women’s bodies seem to converge with the lost ones — underlining how the living and dead bodies exist in a continuum, rather than independently of each other, Galindo’s

²⁰² Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 18.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁰⁴ Kaitlin M. Murphy, *Mapping Memory*, 71.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

work could therefore be read as a way of inscribing more recent hi/stories of gender-based violence into a longer narrative of women's pain. The scream, then, is a refusal of a teleological understanding of history or a linear narrative of progress.

As Murphy states, reenactment is "the deliberate repetition of a set of precise movements that derives meaning from its earlier iteration."²⁰⁶ The scream, then, is also rendered meaningful through its repetition in the present – symbolising the continuous need for redress in the process of meaning-making. Conveying the potential of performance as a memory medium, Murphy describes how, "engaged in specific sets of movements in precise locations, the reenacting body serves as the medium through which memory may emerge."²⁰⁷ In that sense "reenactments loosen the ties that separate the past and present."²⁰⁸ Galindo thus ingeniously deploys the medium specificity of performance: mobilising the materiality of the body allows her to assert the affective texture of (traumatic) memory, carried in and through bodies, and attend to painful histories that stick to the body and are often not acknowledged beyond it. In 'performing the past in the present', then, she creates a temporal rupture by interrupting happy hi/stories with the performance of negative affect. Taking up the practice of performance thus allows Galindo to put forward ways of 'thinking through the body' in the process of meaning-making about the past. In understanding the body as a memory medium and recognising how traumatic memories defy a strict body/mind dualism, Galindo recognises bodily performances of affect as a form of knowledge-production. In doing so, Galindo's performance "not only rebels against the modernist ideal of 'objective' reflection, but also constitutes a new perspective on the materiality of the body as an acting, thinking and essentially creative substance."²⁰⁹ The scream, then, can be read as 'a creative response to histories that are unfinished.'²¹⁰

As emphasised earlier: "trauma must be situated in an account that links the stories we tell with the bodies in which we live."²¹¹ Similarly, Gordon notes how "the ghost is alive, so to speak. We are in relation to it and it has designs on us such that we must reckon with it graciously."²¹² As Galindo

²⁰⁶ Kaitlin M. Murphy, *Mapping Memory*, 71.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Louis van den Hengel, "The Arena of Affect, 127.

²¹⁰ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, 217.

²¹¹ MaryCatherine McDonald, "Trauma, Embodiment and Narrative", in *Idealistic Studies* 42, 2 (2013), 250. DOI: 10.5840/idstudies2012422&315.

²¹² Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 64.

makes salient in her performance, in the creation of critical counter-memories of traumatic histories, it is essential to attend to the haunted body in providing “a hospitable memory for ghosts *out of a concern for justice*.”²¹³ In doing so, her work addresses the inadequacies of the traditional testimonial form, putting forward “haunting as a prerequisite for sensuous knowledge.”²¹⁴

As stated earlier, the traditional testimony form, as it is deployed in the Guatemalan truth commissions, is inevitably limited and often “fails to coherently and comprehensively represent the traumatic events that it references”²¹⁵ in its disregard of the affective registers of (traumatic) memories. Turning to the corporeal nature of memory, then, Galindo represents the body as prime witness, providing a testimony that centres affectivity: amplifying the negative affect through the performance of the scream, she draws from the embodied archive in an attempt to provide a critical counternarrative. In doing so, her work demonstrates the disruptive potential of “bodies that get in the way”²¹⁶ of the nation and its “desire to be judged by history as an ideal nation.”²¹⁷ Galindo’s performance thus rejects the structural forgetting that comes with happy narratives by proposing instead a form of cultural memory-making grounded in embodied (and therefore precarious) knowledge. Acknowledging the role of negative affect in the creation of counter-memories, Galindo performs a space into being for memories that cannot be incorporated in happy histories – traumatic memories that keep on lingering in bodies without being culturally acknowledged. Recognising the embodied subject as central in the process of meaning-making when addressing the ongoing and un(der)represented histories of gender-based violence and injustice in Guatemala, Galindo thus proposes another way of attending to the past.

Moving away from the first-person testimony as the dominant form of memory-making, turning instead to embodied forms of meaning-making that cannot be co-opted by the neoliberal narratives of the nation-state due to their deep roots in the remembering body, Galindo’s work allows for different ways of knowledge-production about the past to emerge, which carry “the potential to speak outside of and in a different register to governmental narratives—and to render visible the ongoing impact of past violence and unreconciled injustices”²¹⁸

²¹³ Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 64.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

²¹⁵ Dori Laub, “An Event Without A Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival”, in Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*. (New York: Routledge, 1992), 78.

²¹⁶ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 67.

²¹⁷ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, ed. 2014), 111-112.

²¹⁸ Kaitlin M. Murphy, *Mapping Memory*, 5.

The performance of the scream, then, is a form of affective knowledge-production about a painful past, an active process of embodied meaning-making, remembering the lives that have been lost “without reproducing the epistemic violence that enabled their loss from the start,”²¹⁹ in which Galindo recasts the hysterical, screaming woman — most often excluded from “the register of legitimate speech”²²⁰ in its “failing to live up to the standards of truth in their emotionality”²²¹ — as a knowing subject. In doing so, she goes against the notion of emotion as “failing the very standards of reason and impartiality that are assumed to form the basis of ‘good judgement.’”²²² in which the “already pathological ‘emotionality’ of femininity, exercises the [gendered] hierarchy between thought/emotion.”²²³ The scream can thus be read as a refusal to ‘speak’ inside normative technologies of knowledge and memory, in its collective performance of the affect of grief through “a postlinguistic practice that is placed outside the male prescription of the word.”²²⁴

In this sense, the scream can be interpreted as a refusal to be silent and, simultaneously, a refusal to translate the grief into a *productive* narrative that does not account for negative affect and the embodied nature of memory. In Galindo’s performance, then, “testimony’s value is not dependent on its acceptance into official historical archives”²²⁵ but on its recognition of how “these stories are the roots from which contemporary structures of feeling grow.”²²⁶ Not only does she provide a critical countermemory, she also questions the wider structures and ways in which we remember.

²¹⁹ Nicole Gervasio, “Siting Absence: Feminist Photography, State Violence and the Limits of Representation,” in Ayşe Gül et. al. (eds.) *Women Mobilizing Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 260.

²²⁰ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 169.

²²¹ Ibid., 170.

²²² Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 170.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Arnold Braho in “Plurality devices. Regina José Galindo and the use of the voice for a politics of bodies,” interview by Arnold Braho, *Juliet Art Magazine*, July 29, 2021.

<https://www.juliet-artmagazine.com/en/plurality-devices-regina-jose-galindo-and-the-use-of-the-voice-for-a-politics-of-bodies>

²²⁵ Kaitlin M. Murphy, *Mapping Memory*, 45.

²²⁶ Ibid.

4.3. Conclusion

‘Las Escucharon Gritar y No Abrieron la Puerta’ thus counters the silence surrounding hi/stories of femicide and injustice in Guatemala through making *audible* the negative affect that reside right under the skin, contrasting the happy narrative the nation upholds. In doing so, Galindo’s performance reveals the strategic amnesia and structural forgetting that perpetuate this narrative. Regarding the body in its performance of the sign of the scream, Galindo’s work demonstrates how the lost other is *present* in the bodies of the living, defying the linear narration of hi/story in her refusal to simply ‘let go’ of this attachment. In recognising the embodied nature of (traumatic) memories, Galindo thus suggests an alternative form of knowledge-production and meaning-making about the past, providing a testimony that accounts for the affective nature of memory. Grieving the dead women in the present, the performance of the scream opens up a space for the negotiation over the meaning of that loss, countering the systemic forgetting of hi/stories of gender-based violence. The piece thus challenges the dominant cultural memory of Guatemala by demonstrating how the past is very much present in the remembering, affective, subject. In doing so, it performs a counter-memory that challenges the narratives in which the Guatemalan nation identity is formed. Additionally, In asserting memory work as bodily work, Galindo’s performance exposes the failings of traditional forms of memory-making: her ingenious use of the medium specificity of performance demonstrates how “knowledge cannot be separated from the bodily world of feeling and sensation; knowledge is bound up with what makes us sweat, shudder, tremble, all those feelings that are crucially felt on the bodily surface, the skin surface where we touch and are touched by the world.”²²⁷ — how we can never ‘know’ the past, but how we can ‘feel’ its *presence*. In staying with the body, then, Galindo renders meaningful forgotten hi/stories through affectively evoking them in the present: by making sense through making *sense*.

²²⁷ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 171.

5. CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have examined the potential of the bodily performance of memory in the creation of critical countertermemories. Taking a closer listen at Regina José Galindo's performance 'Las Escucharon Gritar y No Abrieron la Puerta,' I have explored how the performance of negative affect can counter cultural silences surrounding femicide in the context of Guatemala and, in doing so, challenge its dominant cultural memory.

Departing from the problematic position of memory in the Guatemalan context and the inadequacy of the traditional testimonial form demonstrated in the stark contrast between the civil war's ongoing legacy of gender-based violence and impunity and the nationally-endorsed discourses on progress, I have proposed to look at alternative forms of memory-making. Acknowledging how trauma often resists narration, I have explored the potential of artistic practices in attending to the affective registers of (traumatic) memory. Examining Galindo's performance piece, I have found the medium of performance to be particularly potent in addressing hi/stories of trauma that dwell in the body which are often not acknowledged beyond it. Through a semiotic reading of the scream as a signifier of grief, I have demonstrated the disruptive potential of the bodily performance of negative affect, describing how the scream, in making audible the negative affect of grief, opens up a space for the ongoing negotiation over the meaning of loss and, in doing so, counters the silence surrounding femicide in Guatemala. Additionally, In its embodied re-call of the past, the scream asserts hi/stories of gender-based violence as 'unfinished', disrupting the teleology of the nationally-endorsed narrative. In doing so, the women's screams produce a countertermemory that fractures the carefully constructed cultural memory of Guatemala, sculpted in favour of a unidirectional move toward the 'promising' future.

Finally I have shown the potential of artistic practices in providing critical countertermemories, precisely because of their employment of the affective registers that are generally disregarded in the traditional testimonial form. In doing so, I have demonstrated how Galindo's work not only provides a countertermemory, disrupting the Guatemalan cultural memory, but also moves us to rethink the ways in which we attend to the past.

Understanding the performance of grief as a form of resistance, as demonstrated in this thesis, meaningful future research could be conducted on the emancipatory potential of performing grief and how the performance of traumatic memories of loss might allow for different (self)conceptions of

victimhood and agency. Additionally, further inquiries on the topic could explore how artistic practices of memory-making can be re-employed in the communities they emerged from, examining how different forms of knowledge-production can be incorporated into the fight for justice and the right to memory.

In chapter one, I have situated Galindo's work in the wider context of post-war Guatemala, sketching the country's problematic relation to memory and its ongoing struggle over the meaning of its violent past. Subsequently, I have put forward the ongoing need for redress as well as the failings of the truth commission form in addressing traumatic memories. In this context, I have described how the denial of genocide and the unidirectional move to the future establish a culture of forgetting in favour of the ideal image of the nation state. In doing so, I have underlined the importance of understanding Galindo's work in the broader context of the Guatemalan struggle over meaning, emphasising how the work suggests a "continuity, rather than a radical break between the eras of dictatorship and neoliberal democracy."²²⁸

In chapter two, I turned to the notion of cultural memory, defining it as a technology of knowledge-production and meaning-making in and about a certain culture. This allowed me to examine the interconnectedness of meaning-making and power. In doing so, I looked into how technologies of remembering are intertwined with structures of power and processes of identity-formation, outlining how dominant cultural memory serves the dominant social group and has to be understood as a political act of meaning-making, firmly situated in the present. Situating my research in the context of post-war Guatemala, I have underlined how governmental narratives of reconciliation serve the shift to the neoliberal nation state, rather than attending to its painful past, describing how the future becomes a 'promise of happiness'.

Following this, I have examined the affective nature of memory, observing how the meaning-making subject has to be situated in the broader 'structures of feeling' that shape our affective attachments and how, therefore, emotion has to be understood as "a form of cultural politics of world making."²²⁹ In this context, I described how the nation suppresses negative affect in its endorsement of the

²²⁸ Candice Amich, "The Limits of Witness," 93.

²²⁹ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 12.

narrative of the 'promising' future. Subsequently, I have suggested the negative affect of grief as a form of meaning-making that goes against instances of forgetting through its continuous negotiation of the meaning of loss, asserting mourning as a concern of memory-making. Building on Ahmed's conception of 'queer grief,' I have examined the disruptive potential of grief in its refusal to 'let go' of hi/stories of pain and loss, in accordance with Ahmed's argument for a reading of grief that does not pathologise the ongoing attachment to the lost subject but rather recognises it as enabling. In line with Butler, I accentuated how certain forms of grief are silenced and others amplified, understanding grief as a political act of meaning-making in which negative affects "are not simply reactive; they are creative responses to histories that are unfinished."²³⁰ This allowed me to understand how, through grieving, a history is posited as 'unfinished,' opening up the negotiation of its meaning. Drawing on trauma theory, I have reflected upon how this process can be regarded as a claim to cultural trauma and how the nationally-endorsed narrative is only possible because of the systematic repression of trauma. Recognising the spectral nature of trauma, I have emphasised its need for reconstruction and redress in order to make sense of it. This has led me to explore how the embodied nature of trauma and its inherent resistance against narration calls for alternative forms of meaning-making that take into account the affective nature of (traumatic) memory. Drawing on feminist epistemologies, then, I put forward the genre of performance as a unique way of expressing bodily knowledge about the past in the present.

In chapter three, I have explained how, taking up a semiotic approach, in the context of my analysis, allowed me to further examine meaning as the result of a cultural negotiation, an ongoing process of signification. In doing so, I have used the framework of semiotics to examine the scream as a semiotic sign that produces meaning in and through its specific context.

In chapter four, I have analysed Galindo's performance, examined the sign of the scream as an auditory signifier of refusal against the structural silencing of hi/stories of gender based violence in Guatemala. From a deconstructionist perspective, I explained how the scream can be interpreted as a deconstruction of the silence surrounding hi/stories of femicide, proposing a reading of the scream as a sign of grief, refusing the idea of death as the end of meaning. Describing how the women's collective cries of grief establish the grievability of the lost subject, I have put forward Galindo's performance as a claim to trauma, a refusal to simply 'let go'. Turning to the corporeality of the scream, I have examined its performance as a bodily and affective reaction to the lived and felt

²³⁰ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, 217.

experience of loss. In staying with the body, I have explored how the lost subject 'lives on' in and through the bodies of the grieving women. In doing so, I have described how, through the performance of the negative affect of grief, histories of loss are asserted as 'unfinished,' opening up a space for the ongoing negotiation over the meaning of that loss.

Following this, I have suggested that the scream, as a signifier of grief, can be re-appropriated as a form of resistance, challenging the individualisation and subsequent pathologising of negative affect through its collective performance. In doing so, I have emphasised the political potential of the scream which, as I have elucidated, can be understood as a form of remembrance as well as the political demand for the right to remember. Describing how the scream creates a rupture by performing negative affect in happy hi/stories of progress, I have shown how Galindo's performance interrupts the teleology of the nationally-endorsed narrative, underlining the presence of the past.

In doing so, I have demonstrated how Galindo's employment of the medium specificity of performance, as a way of 'thinking through the body,' reveals the limits of traditional forms of testimony: in accounting for the affective nature of memory through her performance, Galindo's work performs a valuable critique on a culturally endorsed system of forgetting in which traumatic memories are strategically obscured. Finally, in underlining the potential of artistic practices to attend to the affective registers of traumatic memory, most often disregarded in the traditional testimonial form, I have demonstrated how Galindo's work not only performs a countermemory but also proposes a different way of attending to the past.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ahmed, S., *Living a Feminist Life*. London and Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.

Ahmed, S. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014.

Ahmed, S. *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010.

Ahmed, S. "The Politics of Good Feeling," *ACRAWSA e-journal*, 4 (2008): 1-18.

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58ad660603596eec00ce71a3/t/58becb77893fc0f72747d4e8/1488898936274/The+Politics+of+Good+Feeling.pdf>

Alexander, J. "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma", in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, edited by Alexander et al. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

Amich, C. "The Limits of Witness: Regina José Galindo and Neoliberalism's Gendered Economies of Violence" in *Performance, Feminism and Affect in Neoliberal Times*, edited by Elin Diamond, Denise Varney and Candice Amich, 91-104. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017.

Baetens, J. and Frey, H., *The Graphic Novel: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Barbosa, E., "Regina José Galindo's Body Talk: Performing Femicide and Violence against Women in "279 Golpes,"" in *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 41, no. 1 (2014): 59-71, accessed April 28, 2022, DOI:10.1177/0094582X13492131.

Berlant, L., *Cruel Optimism*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011.

Britannica, "Moving toward Peace." Accessed, July 28, 2022.

<https://www-britannica-com.kuleuven.e-bronnen.be/place/Guatemala/Moving-toward-peace>

Butler, J. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London, New York: Verso, 2004.

Clouser, R., "Development and denial: Guatemalan post-genocide development narratives," *Geoforum* 117 (2020): 93-102.

Cvetkovich, A. *Depression: A Public Feeling*. Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2012.

De Bloois, J., De Cauwer, S., Masschelein, A., *50 Key Terms in Contemporary Cultural Theory*. Kalmthout: Pelckmans Pro, 2017.

Derrida, J., "Semiology and Grammatology," in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, edited by Rivkin, J. and Ryan, M. 332-339. Maiden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004.

Erikson, K. "Notes on Trauma and Community," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* edited by Caruth, C. 183-199. Baltimore, London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.

Erl, A., *Memory in Culture*, trans. Sara B. Young. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Erl, A. "Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction," in *Media and Cultural Memory/ Medien und kulturelle Erinnerung*, edited by Erl, A., Nünning, A. 1-18. Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008.

Eyerman, R., *Memory, Trauma and Identity*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

Faulkner, W. *Requiem for a nun*. New York: Random House, 1951.

Fishel, S. and Wilcox, L. "Politics of the Living Dead: Race and Exceptionalism in the Apocalypse," *Millenium: Journal of International Studies* 45 (2017): 335-355. DOI: 10.1177/0305829817712819

Galindo, R., in "Plurality devices. Regina José Galindo and the use of the voice for a politics of bodies," interview by Arnold Braho, *Juliet Art Magazine*, July 29, 2021. <https://www.juliet-artmagazine.com/en/plurality-devices-regina-jose-galindo-and-the-use-of-the-voice-for-a-politics-of-bodies>

Galindo, R. J., "Las Escucharon Gritar y No Abrieron la Puerta." Accessed May 1, 2022. <https://www.reginajosegalindo.com/en/las-escucharon-gritar-y-no-abrieron-la-puerta-2/>.

Galindo, R.J. "Regina José Galindo by Francisco Goldman," interview by Francisco Goldman, *BOMB Magazine*, January 1, 2006. <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/regina-jos%C3%A9-galindo/>.

Gervasio, N., "Siting Absence: Feminist Photography, State Violence and the Limits of Representation," in *Women Mobilizing Memory*. edited by Ayşe Gül et. al. 258-276. New York: Columbia University Press, 2019.

Gordon, A., *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

Grandin, G. "Chapter 1. Five Hundred Years" In *War by Other Means: Aftermath in Post-Genocide Guatemala* edited by McAllister C. and Nelson, D. 49-70. New York, USA: Duke University Press, 2013.

Hall, S. "The Work of Representation," in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* edited by Stuart Hall. London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 1997.

Haraway, D. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective", *Feminist Studies* no.3 (Autumn, 1988): 575-595.

Havana Times, "Three years after the Fire that Killed 41 Girls in Guatemala," March 16, 2020, <https://havanatimes.org/features/three-years-after-the-fire-that-killed-41-girls-in-guatemala/>.

Hemmings, C. "Invoking Affect: Cultural Theory and the Ontological Turn," *Cultural Studies* 19 (2005): 548-567. DOI: 10.1080/09502380500365473.

Hill Collins, P., *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. London: Taylor & Francis: 2008.

Hirsch, M. and Smith, V. "Feminism and Cultural Memory: An Introduction" in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28 (2002): 1-19. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/340890>

Hirschberger, G., "Collective Trauma and the Social Construction of Meaning". *Frontiers in Psychology* 9 (2018):1441, accessed May 5th 2021, DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01441

LaCapra, D. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001. Quoted in Ron Eyerman, *Memory, Trauma and Identity*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

Lagopoulos, A., Boklund-Lagopoulou, K. "Chapter 1 Introduction: What is semiotics?" In *Theory and Methodology of Semiotics: The Tradition of Ferdinand de Saussure*. 3-7. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 2020.

Laub, D. "An Event Without A Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival," in *Testimony: Crises of Witness in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* edited by Felman, S. and Laub, D. 75-92. New York, London: 1992.

McAllister, C. and Nelson, D. "Aftermath: Harvests of Violence and Histories of the future," in *War by Other Means: Aftermath in Post-Genocide Guatemala* edited by McAllister, C. and Nelson, D. 1-45. New York, USA: Duke University Press, 2013.

McDonald, M. "Trauma, Embodiment and Narrative", in *Idealistic Studies* 42, 2 (2013), 247. DOI: 10.5840/idstudies2012422&315.

McIlwaine, C., Boesten, J., Rebecca Wilson, "Women in sisterhood resisting violence in Guatemala." *London School of Economics and Political Science*, November 25, 2021, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/latamcaribbean/2021/11/25/women-sisterhood-violence-guatemala/>

Moore, A. and Hare, K. "Come Scream with Me: On feminist stories and screaming into the void," *Journal for Cultural Research*, 25:3 (2021): 313-326. DOI: 10.1080/14797585.2021.1978747.

Murphy, K., *Mapping Memory: Visuality, Affect, and Embodied Politics in the Americas*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2019.

Narvaez, R. "Embodiment, Collective Memory and Time," *Body and Society*, 12 (2006): 51-73. DOI: 10.1177/1357034X06067156

Pokornowski, S. "Vulnerable Life: Zombies, Global Biopolitics, and the Reproduction of Structural Violence," *Humanities* 71 (2016): 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h5030071>.

Richardson, L. "Writing: A Method of Inquiry." In *Handbook of Qualitative Research* edited by Denzin N. and Lincoln, Y. 923-948. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2000.

Rivkin and Michael Ryan, "Introduction: Introductory Deconstruction," in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, edited by Rivkin, J. and Ryan, M. 257-261. Maiden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004.

Ross, A. "The Creation and Conduct of the Guatemalan Commission for Historical Clarification," *Geoforum* 37 (2006) 69-81. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2005.02.005>

Shay, J. *Achilles in Vietnam*. New York: Touchstone Publishing, 1994. Quoted in McDonald, M. "Trauma, Embodiment and Narrative", in *Idealistic Studies* Vol.42 no. 2 (2013): 247-263 DOI: 10.5840/idstudies2012422&315.

Silverman, P., Klass, D. "Another Paradigm" in *Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief*, edited by Silverman, P., Klass, D., Nickman S., 16-20. New York, London: Routledge, 1996.

Taylor, D. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003.

Tota, A. "Dancing the Present: Body Memory and Quantum Field Theory," in *Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies* edited by Tota, A. and Hagen, T., 458-472. London, New York: Routledge, 2016.

van den Hengel, L. "The Arena of Affect: Marina Abramović and the Politics of Emotion." in *Doing Gender in Media, Art and Culture: A Comprehensive Guide to Gender Studies* edited by Buikema, R., Plate, L., Thiele, K. 123-135. London, New York: Routledge, 2018.

Walsh, A., "41 crosses, 56 lives: The struggle for truth and justice two years on from the Hogar Seguro Virgen de la Asunción fire," *Women's Media Center*, March 5, 2019. <https://womensmediacenter.com/women-under-siege/41-crosses-56-lives-the-struggle-for-truth-and-justice-two-years-on-from-the-hogar-seguro-virgen-de-la-asuncion-fire>

Williams, R. "Structures of feeling" in *Structures of Feeling: Affectivity and the Study of Culture* edited by Sharma, D. and Tygstrup, F. 20-28. Berlin, Munich, Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2015.

La Nacion, "The number of girls killed by fire in Guatemala rises to 39," March 11, 2017, <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/el-mundo/sube-a-39-numero-de-ninas-fallecidas-por-incendio-en-guatemala-nid1992314/>.



(Fig.1)



(Fig. 2)



(Fig. 3)

Fig. 1; 2; 3 — Regina José Galindo, Casa de la Memoria, 'Kaji Tulam,' Ciudad de Guatemala, 2017.
<https://www.reginajosegalindo.com/en/las-escucharon-gritar-y-no-abrieron-la-puerta-2/>