

“Nosotros sufrimos mucho”

***Coping with trauma and bereavement
after La Violencia, Guatemala***



Sophia Murrís

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Sophia Murrís

3233111

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Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Kees Koonings University Utrecht

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INTRODUCTION

The twentieth century was a century of massive killings. The holocaust, the Armenian genocide, Rwanda, Srebrenica, Afghanistan are only some examples of the impunity of the former century. The period of massive human rights violations has not stopped however. In this time and day newspapers, television programs and the internet are filled with contemporary violent conflicts. Libia, Sudan, Jemen, Afghanistan, and Tunesia among others are widely followed by the general public. What strikes me in the stories about these conflict is that attention is mostly paid to the number of deaths and economical costs of the conflict. Maybe more worrisome is that it is only important when a lot of attention is paid to it. Attention is barely paid to the aftermath of the conflict and how the people affected by the conflict cope with its consequences. Solely giving numbers, gives people the chance to distance themselves from the people living in conditions of war and their stories of suffering. As Sanford (2003:14): *“When people become numbers , their stories can be lost”*

This thesis is about the conflict and genocide in Guatemala during the 1980s. In this period, also known as *La Violencia*, more than 440 villages were burned by the army of Guatemala, 150,000 people fled into refugee, one and an half million people were displaced, and 150,000 people were either killed or disappeared (Sanford 2003:14). Like said, these numbers show the immense scope of the conflict, but do not tell anything about the people that have lived and are still living through the consequences of la Violencia. In my thesis I will look deeper into the stories of the war and how the war still affects people. More specifically, into how people cope and have coped with the trauma and loss of loved ones from that period. As the title indicates, *“Nosotros sufrimos mucho”*, it is about the sufferings of the victims of the war. Now and in the past. I chose this title because many informants started their stories with this sentence. Even though they were telling their individual story about the war. They started their story in a collective sense, which is indicative to the context. When the scope of violence is this immense, people do not suffer alone.

“All over the world, societies are dealing with the legacies of massive violence, human rights violations, and terror orchestrated by the state” (van Drunen 2010:22). In both public and academic world discourses efforts have been made to understand the forces of violence and terror, its effects and how to deal with them in order to create a better society. In my thesis I hope to complement the existing knowledge and discourse, by looking at how victims of La Violencia cope with trauma and bereavement, caused in that period, on both an individual and collective level. As an anthropological study, I believe it is important to let the stories of struggle and survival of these people be heard.

They are not just victims, but above all humans that learn to adopt and survive in the most dire conditions. This has led me to the following central research question:

How do people cope with the trauma and bereavement of the genocide of 1978-1983 in Guatemala?

My research was conducted in the period of February to April 2011 in San Miguel Uspantán, one of the greater municipalities of Quiché, Guatemala. During La Violencia around 340 massacres had been committed in Quiché, making the department the most affected of Guatemala. My research is focused on people affected by the war through violence committed against them or against their loved ones, specifically on people that had lost loved ones during the war. To get into contact with informants and also to understand the collective side of coping, I worked with several organizations working with victims of the war and their needs.

I used participant observation on various occasions such as in reunions of victim-organizations, an exhumation and inhumation, and also in masses of the Catholic church. I took interviews with my informants and key-informants and collected testimonies of victim-survivors. Daily conversations with people and visiting my informants at home have supplemented my interviews and participant observations. Finally, I reconstructed life-histories of my key-informants, whom I had the most connection with. In order to get in contact with informants, I used the snow-ball technique and also made use of my informants and organizations to attend collective meetings and memorials.

The thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter explains what the effects of conflict and violence are on a social level. In the Guatemalan conflict, the government used direct violence against civilians as a war tactic which culminated into genocide. Terror and violence on such a scope causes individual and collective trauma and bereavement. This chapter looks deeper into the context of the Guatemalan conflict and to the stories of the victim-survivors of the war and after and how trauma and bereavement are constituted in these stories.

The second chapter will look into the theory of coping with trauma and bereavement on an individual and collective level. I will show that theories on mourning stages are not applicable on extreme cases of trauma and bereavement such as is the case in Guatemala. The chapter will also look further into the stories of the victim-survivors and the way they dealt and deal with their trauma and bereavement on an individual and collective level.

The Third chapter will show that the individual and collective level not just overlap but are intertwined. I will show this through the concept of memory. Through the testimonies of victim-survivors a collective memory is created in which people can relate and reconstruct their own

stories of the war. Constructing collective memory is especially conflictive in the context of extreme violence, which will be shown through the example of the truth commission of Guatemala.

Finally, the conclusion will summarize my findings given in the three chapters and will give an answer to the central research question.

Photograph of former massacre near Desengaño, San Miguel Uspantán



CHAPTER ONE

CONSEQUENCES OF WAR AND VIOLENCE: TRAUMA AND BEREAVEMENT

The first chapter of this thesis is about the conflict of Guatemala and specifically the events of La Violencia between 1980 and 1986 and its aftermath. In order to understand the trauma of the victims of the war, attention needs to be paid to their stories but also the greater events of the period. To understand the events better, attention will be paid to irregular civil wars, the use of violence and genocide. Trauma and bereavement are, among others, social effects of conflict which still trouble victims of the conflict in this time and day. The final part of this chapter is about the stories of my informants about their life in the war. It is important to hear their stories in order to understand the damage done to both the community as well as the individual. Theory will be applied where most necessary, but all is important for the reconstruction of La Violencia and the context of Guatemala and Uspantán.

1.1 Before La Violencia

“Life before the war was tranquilo. We grew milpa, frijoles and papas. We raised chickens, cows, pigs and horses. We had our houses, a church and we did not suffer from hunger”. This is what one of my informants told me when I visited him in his house in Caracol. Most people gave me this answer when I asked about their lives before the war. Even though the war officially started in the 1960s, it started in the 1980 for most people, during the period now that is now called La Violencia. Life before the war was peaceful yet difficult. Most of the aldeas did not have access to healthcare and education, there was no electricity nor did a good road exist to their aldea. Where there was a school, most children also had their obligations of working on the lands.

According to informants active in organizations, civil organizations fought for equal rights for indigena's, an end to the exploitations and for higher wages on the plantations in the 1970s. These organizations were different from the guerilla as they were not violent and lead by, among others, students from the capital with family in the aldeas. *“We were not guerilla's, we fought for our civil rights on a peaceful, non-combat way.”* During the 1970s and before, indigena's were forced to work on the highways and roads for very little wages. The forced labor on the infrastructure of Guatemala prevented people from working on their lands or earning wages on the plantations near the coast. The plantations were another problem as people were barely paid for their hard work.

People did not notice much of the war between the government and the guerillas before the 1980s. Many people did not notice the guerillas living in their area. *“I barely saw the guerilla's, they would only pass through our village or to buy provisions. We had nothing to do with them”.* Others

claim that the guerilla sometimes visited their aldeas. During their visits the guerillas talked about their ideology, give food and educate children. *“The guerillas thought the children and villagers how to read and write. They also talked about the injustices of the people and how to prepare for war.”* The answers about the guerillas differ a lot. This might be because different villages had different experiences with guerilla’s. The contacts with guerillas differed per family as well. What was clear to all was that the army arrived soon after the guerilla’s.

1.2 Conflict, Violence and Genocide

“When domestical political conflict takes the form of military confrontation or armed combat, we speak of civil war.” (Khalyvas 2008:1) Civil war can be defined as *“Armed combat taking place within boundaries of a recognized sovereign entity between parties subject to a common authority at the outset of hostilities”*(Khalyvas2008:1). Civil wars are, like conflict in general, very hard to analyze and compare, because there is no easy one-size-fits all. According to MacGinty en Williams every conflict has its own ‘conflict DNA’(2006: 26). They differ in scope, length, intensity, kinds of actors, causes, consequences and motives. Actors defer from national to the local level, they can be the government, individuals, rebel groups, communities, villages and so on. Causes of war can be on the economic level, cultural, political, structural, historical or social level. Depending on the theoretical approach to conflict, focus is put on causes like greed or grievance, socio-structural factors and history. Because civil wars are so hard to analyze, many authors have tried to distinguish between different kinds of civil wars with above called characteristics as classifiers.

Khalyvas (2008) gives three classifications for civil war in their use of warfare. Civil wars are mostly identified as irregular wars, where the power between the opposing groups is unequal, such as between a government and a rebel movement. The weaker group, mostly the rebel group, makes use of guerrilla tactics and low capacity warfare in order drain the enemy. They refuse to fight their stronger opponent face-to-face. The opposite of irregular wars are conventional wars, where opposing groups are of the same level and fight each other in decisive battles across clear fronts. Symmetric non-conventional wars belong to the third classification. These are wars in which mostly multiple groups are fighting each other of equal strength. This kind of warfare is mostly used after state implosion, so that several groups struggle for power. It defers from conventional wars, because the groups defer in strength and it defers from irregular wars because it has clear frontlines (road blocks, parts of cities, travel routes).

The armed conflict of Guatemala can be classified as an irregular civil war. It started as an dispute over land and civil rights between the leftist opposition and the government. In 1954 the first military regime was installed with the help of the CIA. At the start of the 1960’s rebel groups

emerged who fought against the military government. From the start, the guerillas were weaker than the military due to lack of weapons and personnel. Up until the mid 1970's the war was mostly between the guerilla groups and the government. This changed when the guerilla movements gained more and more support from the peasants in the areas where they resided. At the end of the 1970s the government started to target the Mayan villages in order to capture the guerilla. *"In order to get the fish we have to drain the water"*, was a common used sentence to refer to the burning of entire villages and the massacre of its inhabitants in order to destroy any support or potential support for the guerrillas.

When I asked people about the war, they mostly replied very general: *"The war lasted for 36 years, many people were killed, we had nothing but hunger and thirst, and everything was taken or destroyed by the army. We suffered a lot."* However, when I asked my informants about their experiences with the war their stories started in the years 1979 or 1980, depending on where they lived, and ended in 1986 when the violence by the army mostly stopped. The period of 1979 to 1986 is referred to as *La Violencia* by the victim-survivors and backed up by, among others, Victoria Sanford (2003). The period refers to the violence perpetrated under the regimes of General Lucas García (1987-82) and General Ríos Montt (March 1982-August 1983). During these regimes selective state terror struck both rural and urban Guatemala and this culminated into the genocide of the "scorched earth" campaign.

Extreme violence, especially against civilians, is one of the main characteristics of conflict and specifically to civil wars. *"Violence is an intentional use of force or power with a predetermined end by which one or more persons produce physical, mental or sexual injury, injure the freedom of movement, or cause the death of another person or persons (including him or herself)"* (Concha-Eastman in Spree 2004: 11). Rebel groups use violence in order to undermine state authority, but also to recruit new people. Governments might also use violence in order to stop people from supporting rebel groups. Violence is also used to claim power, land and resources. According to Khalyvas (2005:97) irregular wars, where the combating groups are unequal of power, are characterized by violence primarily used to *"terrorize the population and to shape it's behavior"*. *"Violence is a key-resource in irregular wars: it displays a strategic logic"* (2005:97). At least one of the actors is willing to use violence in a discriminating way. Meaning that they will try to separate those within the population who might support their rival from those who do not. In this way they shape the population's incentives in order to gain support and break resistance.

During the period of *La Violencia* the army changed its tactics from a fight against the guerrilla and the leftist opposition to a counter-insurgency against the Mayan population of the mountainous areas of North Huehuetenango, El Quiche and Baja Verapaz. The counter-insurgency

strategy resulted in the death or disappearance of approximately 200,000 people, 600 Massacres, 440 destroyed villages, one and a half million people displaced and 150,000 refugees. (Sanford 2003:14 and Viaene 2010:290). According to the CEH (Commission for Historical Clarification) 93 percent of the human rights violations were committed by the army and about three percent was committed by the guerrilla's. A staggering 83 percent of the victims was Mayan and 17 percent was ladino.

Under the Genocide Convention adopted by the United Nations in 1948, "*genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, as such (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about the destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group*" (Brownlie 1992: 31-34). The final CEH-report stated that the government of Guatemala committed acts of genocide. This is different from committing genocide, as genocide tactics were used but genocide was not the end goal. Sanford makes a good stance for the fact that genocide was committed by looking at the ideology and narratives the government used at the time. An example for ideology and narrative is the fact that they identified Ixil Mayas instantly as subversives that needed to be destroyed. (Sanford 2003: 157) It was not the use of singular massacres but the combination of several massacres that constitutes the genocide. According to Sanford the government committed three genocides. The first being the 'Scorched Earth' campaign wherein villages were destroyed and its villagers massacred. The second genocide consists of the relentless hunting down and bombing of the refugees residing in the mountains in combination with the structural destruction of the food and water resources of villagers and refugees, resulting in the death of many through hunger and disease. The third genocide is the forcing of refugees into 'model villages' and the hunt on the refugees of the CPR (Comunidades Población en Resistencia) (2003:147-179).

1.3 Social effects of war: Trauma and Bereavement

The use of numbers, such as the ones in the CEH-report of Guatemala, can give a good description of the damage done during a conflict. War also has a great influence on the economy, ecology and governmental institutions. These numbers, however, do not show the stories behind these numbers. Conflict and violence have consequences for both individuals as well as societies. People that die or disappear leave behind people that cared for them. They will have to deal with these deaths and losses. These deaths also have an great effect on the communal and societal levels. Conflict also

produces survivors, living in the midst of war and the experience of war has a great impact on the personal and the collective level. In order to get more insight in the consequences of La Violencia on the civilians and specifically the consequence of the bereavement of persons, it is important to look into the concepts of trauma and bereavement.

Green (2003:8) defines trauma as *“Harm, injury, and encounters with death, either by having one’s own life threatened, or by experiencing the death of others”*. It is not the event in itself that is traumatic, it is the emotions and reactions that people have on the event, and the meaning they give to the event that makes it a trauma. It does not matter if the trauma is objective reality or not, as long as people define the situation as real, it is real in its consequences (Daly and Sarkin 2010). In this way some people may find an event traumatic while others do not. Trauma also does not happen in a vacuum. Meaning is always given through existing structures of meaning which are created through history, a shared culture and the collectivity.

When Sztompka (2000) refers to cultural trauma he describes five characteristics which make an event traumatizing. First, the event should be marked by a particular temporal quality, so that it is sudden or rapid. Second, it must be on such a scope that it is felt as radical, deep and touching the core. Third, it is perceived as outside of the self or group. It is exogenous and imposed upon. Easier said people suffer or encounter trauma, they cannot do anything about it. This also is important for a trait that Kleber (1993) gives to trauma: the sense of helplessness. Finally it needs to be experienced as unexpected, surprising, shocking and repulsive.

Many authors (Sztompka 2000, Kleber 1993, Spree 2003) refer to trauma as an uncommon state of affairs which disrupt the taken-for-grantedness of the world. Spree describes how people have internal structures which help them see and understand the world. Trauma causes a disruption in these structures. To give an example, the death of a loved one creates a gap in this structure where deceased person used to be. Future, present and past are altered because of this. The world no longer coincides with the internal structures and the individual, group, or community will have to learn to deal with this and change their internal structures so that it corresponds with the outside world again.

When people are killed, die or disappear they leave people behind. Loss through death can be painful, because the lives of those left behind are impacted and altered in many ways. People that have lost someone are mostly referred to as bereaved. Bereavement refers to *“the state of being bereaved or deprived of something. In other words, bereavement identifies the objective situation of individuals who have experienced a loss of some person or thing they valued”* (Corr et al. 1997: 480). Grief is the reaction to loss and refers to both internal and external reactions of loss. Thus when you lose someone or something you are bereaved and grief is the reaction to this loss.

Trauma and bereavement have a lot in common. In some theoretical cases bereavement is the trauma or part of the trauma. In a sense, trauma can be seen as the bereavement of the life before the trauma, whether the death of a loved one is involved or not. But not all bereavement is traumatic and not all traumas are associated with the death and bereavement of others. This is why I want to keep the two concepts separated. Like trauma bereavement causes a disruption in the taken-for-grantedness of the world. When someone dies it leaves a hole in the heart and the minds of the ones left behind. Memories of a person are seen in a different light after death. Responsibilities and activities of the person that died, have to be done and taken over by others. A future with that person does not longer exist. Like with trauma, life is described as a time before and after the death of the person. Bereavement can be experienced as sudden, but also slow and that you see it coming like with disease. Whether slow or a sudden death, the feelings of grief touch the same essences emotions. These two concepts can be divided in the personal and collective levels. Both concepts do not happen in isolation, so it is important to look at the individual as well as the social or collective level. Collective and individual trauma may enhance or weaken each other's strengths. In my research it is therefore important to look at both kinds of trauma and how people deal with them.

1.3.1 Individual trauma and bereavement

Individual trauma is mostly related to the psychological science of trauma. PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) is the most common used concept when looking at trauma on an individual level. Although it is the most common used concept, I do not want to look at PTSD, mainly because not all people get serious psychological disorders after experiencing a traumatic event. Like stated above, some events are not even experienced as traumatic even though they can become traumatic for others. This does not mean that I deny the problems people may experience after a traumatic experience.

Everyone reacts on traumatic experience and also copes with trauma differently. Although this makes analyzing trauma and bereavement very case specific, something can be said about the general stages someone goes through when being bereaved. Corr (1997) and Spree (2003) describe these stages in their research. The first stage is *shock and numbness*. People feel like they are being knocked off the familiar balance of life. They feel detached from the world and cannot absorb any information other than the death of their loved ones. The second stage is *yearning and searching*, as an effort to return things to the way they are. People might search for their loved ones, or hope that they will return to them alive. In this stage one is unable to accept. Their aim to get everything back to normal is doomed to fail, because things cannot go back to normal. Fase three is *disorganization*, in which the bereaved start to understand the scope and meaning of the loss. This is their first step

to reorganize their worlds. The fourth stage is the slow process of getting on with life and to give the deceased a new place in the life of the bereaved.

During my research I came to notice that the loss of loved ones and the trauma highly intertwined. Victim-survivors did not only lose someone dear to them, during the same event their lives were irreversibly changed. They were not just bereaved of a lost one, but also of their lives before the violence. This is seen in how victim-survivors look back at their life before the war. *“Life was so tranquil before the war. We had our land, our work and our community. Though there were problems, life was good. We did not suffer from hunger.”* Many people were forced to leave their lands during the conflict and were not able to return to their lands after the conflict. *“All of our houses were destroyed, they killed all of our animals, burned our milpa (young corn) and frijoles (beans). Not only that they also destroyed our church, the municipalidad and the school for our children. We watched as they burned our houses. We had nothing left.”* Widowed women had a lot of problems during and right after the war. Because their husband was killed or disappeared they had to earn an income on their own, while also raising the children. During the war, widows were targeted more because of the death of their husband. The death of their husbands meant that they were supporting guerillas.

1.3.2 Collective trauma and bereavement

Collective trauma has, in my opinion, two meanings. First, it can be seen as many traumatized people that live in the same group, community or society. People are traumatized individually, but live together and have to deal with each other. After violent conflict, people may be traumatized together. In Guatemala, the execution of many people affected the communities greatly, because of the many empty spaces left by the dead that could not be filled easily. In this case I would like to speak of collective bereavement.

The second meaning of collective trauma is very different. It is not about the sum of traumatized individuals, but about the social fabric of society that has been damaged. According to Robben, who refers to it as massive trauma, collective trauma is different because it *“ruptures social bonds, destroys group identities, undermines peoples sense of a community, and entails cultural disorientation because taken for granted meanings become obsolete”* (2005:346). Collective trauma in this sense is a wound to the social body and its cultural frame.

Alexander refers to collective trauma when *“members of a collectivity feel that they have been subjugated to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their groups consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable*

ways” (2004:1). In order to understand the scope of the trauma of the victim-survivors on an individual and collective level, the memories of the war need to be reconstructed.

1.4 Stories of the war

The stories of my informants started when the army came to their village. They would ask people questions about their work, family, religion, political affinity and relations. To most people, violence started in a neighbouring village. *“Rumours came from Macalajau, where they killed 43 people in one night. We were very afraid. The next day the army showed up in our (Caracol) village.”* How people reacted on the violence depends on the village and how the violence started. One of my informants of Desengaño told me about his first experience with violence:

“The war started in my village when the soldiers came and killed off a few families at the outskirts of the aldea. We (his family and other villagers) would flee into the mountains for the night and to return in the morning. People that did not flee were killed or taken away by the soldiers. This happened a few times until my father was killed. We then fled permanently.” (Enrique, 14/03/2011)

Another victim-survivor, Juan, had to leave his house when his parents were killed, he saw how his house was burned and lived in the forest for awhile before he and his brothers went to live with his sister in Uspantán. In el Membrillal II, Chiché the villagers fled into the forest because the army had killed a few of their community members on the second day they were in the area. In other aldeas, like Caracol and Laj Chimed, the army came by truck in the early morning:

“I remember it so well. They came very early in the morning, unexpected, in big vehicles. They drove by the houses and threw gasoline over them. Then they set them to fire. The people that wanted to flee their houses were shot. My brother’s wife and children were locked up in their house and burned alive. My brother was killed in front of his house.”

(Lucas, 08-04-2011)

The villagers had to flee into the mountains without time to take their belongings with them. *“We had to flee so fast that we were not able to take any belongings. Some people fled in their underwear, because they did not have time to put on their clothes. We had nothing, they destroyed everything we had when we fled.”* In these cases the violence was more rapid and people were not able to return, because there was nothing left. In most villages, whether it was immediately or a few weeks or

months later, the army burned all the houses, their fields, churches and schools. In order to prevent people from getting food the army destroyed all the fields and killed or took all of the animals.

1.4.1 Life in flight

What people did during the years 1979-1986 differs greatly. Many people lived in the mountains for different periods of time, some only for a month others lived in the mountains for years. *"In the mountains we had nothing. Nothing! (Nada!) No food, no water, no clothes, and no medicines"*, told one of my informants during one of our interviews. *"We sometimes tried to cultivate in the mountains, but only for the army to find it and destroy again. We ate roots, leaves and plants."* Many people died in the forests and mountains due to illness and hunger. The weakest people would die first, like children and elder people. This was the case with the children of the exhumation in El Membrillal II. Others were killed during the hunting sessions of the army. According to Sanford (2003) one of the hunting techniques of the army was to have two platoons. One platoon would encircle an area and start to shoot except on one side. The refugees would flee, thinking they were safe only to run right into the wave of bullets of the other platoon lay in hiding there. The army burned down big parts of the forests in order to smoke people out, but the army also bombed villages and the forests. *"We hid under the trees, as the helicopters tried to bomb us. We hid many, many times."* During these hunts they had to be very quiet, many mothers were forced to keep a hand over the mouth of their small children. In some cases the children died of suffocation Rosa told me about one of her experiences with the hunts.

"We had to be very quiet because the soldiers were very near. My little daughter, who was on my back, cried a little. A soldier heard it and threw a grenade in our direction. It went BOOOM! And then they threw another BAMMM! After this it became dark. I could not see nor hear for a long time and my daughter was hit in the face. My son born early because of this and died after four hours, because I could not feed him."

(Rosa 15/03/11)

Others were more lucky. *"My wife had our daughter on her back as we ran for the shootings. My daughter (3 years old then) was shot, but only in her foot. She survived."* A brother and a sister of Enrique and the three year old daughter of died because they were captured during one of the hunts. Enrique and now nothing of the whereabouts of their loved ones, only that they died. They were not there when they were killed, because their families got separated during the war.

Other groups of villagers decided to go to Mexico. The travel to Mexico was rough. People walked for days on end without sleep and food. Many children and adults did not make it due to illness or because they were found by the army. Little children sometimes died because their mothers smothered them. Mothers were forced to keep their children silent when the army was nearby. They had to put hands over the mouths of the children, which sometimes did not end well. Other people decided to join the CPR (Comunidades de Población en Resistencia) deep in the mountains. These were organizations of villagers who sometimes cooperated with the guerrilla, but were not violent. From the 1990s onward the CPR would fight for human rights and peace in Guatemala by letting the world know about the war and genocide in Guatemala.

1.4.2 Living under repression

Some people decided to live in Uspantán or in another village for a few months or years. Here they would have to live under the repression of the army. Juan, who lived in Uspantán with his sister and brothers, told me about the fear when living in the village. Nobody would be on the streets and there was a curfew after six o'clock at evening. The streets belonged to the army and people only went into the streets when it was necessary. Uspantán was not hit as hard as the surrounding aldeas in the sense that houses were not burned and property not destroyed. Less people were also killed. Uspantán was the centre from which the army cooperated. The army lived in the quarters of the Catholic Church and occupied some of the surrounding houses where they tortured people.

Even though they lived in the village, people still did not have food, water or medicines. Everything was in the hands of the army. Most reports about the wars say that men from 16 to 65 years old had to work in the civil patrols of PAC. But Juan was 14 years old when he had to fight in the PAC. Every eight days he and his patrol had to secure the borders of Uspantán for 24 hours. He told me he had to fight a lot of guerrilla during his time in the PAC, but I wonder how much people were really guerrilla. Some authors (Sanford 2003, Lykes 2007,) describe how a lot of the massacres were committed by neighboring civilians working in the PAC. Most people did not want to work in the PAC but were forced anyway. To Juan working in the PAC was very troubling because his parents had been killed by the army. Now he had to kill people as well.

Living under the army did not prevent people from being hurt. Villagers suspected of working with the guerrilla were tortured. Juan was suspected of being a commander of the guerrilla because he was very active in civil rights groups. He and his father were tortured for sixty days because of this. Other men were abused for not cooperating with the army and many women were raped (Sanford 2003). Hales (2003) tells how widows were target of rape, because their husbands were killed for not cooperating with the army or due to suspicion of being a guerrilla. Analiza and her widowed mother

lived in Las Esperanzas during La Violencia. Here she was at the mercy of the soldiers who sometimes came to her house and attacked them. Manuel lived in Chimac, near Caracol, with his little brothers. He was fourteen years old when his father was killed at the market. His mother died of *tristeza*, which caused him to take care of four little brothers. He also had to fight in the PAC when he became fifteen.

1.4.3 Stories of the dead

Most people do not know what happened to their relatives or where they lay buried. Some hear what happened through others, other bereaved never see their loved ones again nor know what happened to them. The husband of Rosa was shot down from a car when he was going to work. Other family members were killed when they were stopped by the army at road blocks. Analiza's brothers also disappeared and she found her father in her house. His tongue, nose and ears were cut off. His wrists and neck were slit through. The same happened to Rosa's father, but this was told to her. She still does not know the whereabouts of her father. Other people were killed in massacres, like the father of Enrique and the parents of Juan . Other family members lay buried in clandestine cemeteries in the forests. They were killed in massacres unknown to most people. *"I only know that they took my brother and sister away. I have never seen them again nor know where they lay buried."* Some people such as the mothers of Analiza, Javier and Manuel died of *tristeza*. This means that they could not live without their loved ones and died due to illness or weakness. Other people died of hunger, like the father and cousin of Lucas. *"We lived in Wacamayas for a little while. The village was surrounded by the army and we did not have access to food or water. At one day, my father said that I should flee with my family. That we were young and had to survive. He told me that he was too old to flee and said farewell to us at that moment. So we fled, my father and cousin stayed and died there of hunger."*

These are only a few of the many stories during La Violence. Many stories are not heard, because the people were killed in massacres, during hunts of the army, died due to illness or because they disappeared. Some are heard through victim testimony and exhumations, others will not because people do not know what happened.

1.4.4 After la Violencia

Many people decided to return to their villages after 1986. When I asked why they decided to return, they answered with: *"Because it was tranquilo"*. This was true, because the army ceased to murder people and burn houses. They began a new program in which they offered people sweets and food in order for them to return. On return many people were tortured by the army, because they thought

people cooperated with the guerrillas (Sanford 2003). In cases like Desengaño and Caracol only a few families returned to their lands in the beginning. Slowly other people came to live in the villages as well. Not necessarily people that lived there before the war. Of the 85 families of Caracol, only fifteen lived there before the war as well. As such, many people found their lands either occupied by the army or by other displaced people. After the war many people came to live in Uspantán, because they had lost their lands. Many widows came to live in the colonia of Uspantán that was build for them by the government. Other people started new lives in other villages in the same region or another. Others lived in Mexico or in the Capital for a while.

During La Violencia civil organizations did not get the chance to protest or even exists. Most of the civil leaders and many students were killed during the war. Any sort of opposition was crushed by the army and the government. After 1986 people dared to speak out again. Organizations such as CONAVIGUA, Defensoría Maya, Mojomayas and other organizations have their origins in the early years after 1986. The organizations fought for abolishment of the forced Civil Patrols, but also for more rights for the victims and for the search of truth and reconciliation. People wanted to know what happened to their disappeared or killed relatives and also what happened to the country in total. Other organizations fought for the land rights of displaced people and for the people returning to their lands. The Catholic Church was also able to rise again. During the war, many catholic churches had to close and many church leaders were killed. The Catholic Church was targeted, because it spoke out against the atrocities of the government.

Although many joined in on the manifestations, some also did not. People were busy rebuilding their lives after the war. Children had to be taken care of, food had to be grown. After the war there was not much work accept in the aldeas where they needed to take care of the land. Many men traveled from the Uspantán to the aldeas in order to find a job. Men also were able to work on the roads and build churches and schools, though it was for a small wage. Because they had lost their husbands, widows had to work the lands as well as well as taking care for their children. Women, like Rosa, also lost their lands. She lived with family for a while and washed the clothes of clients. Other women made clothing or sold food. Life was though and people did not have much. Food was scarce and people did not have the money to send their children to school.

1.4.5 After the Peace Accords of 1996 until now

After the Peace Accords people felt a lot safer. The war was officially over and with this men were not forced into the PAC anymore. Still a lot had to be done. Organizations such as CONAVIGUA still fought for truth and human rights. Since 1992, FAFG (Foundation of Forensic Anthropologists Guatemala) started with the exhumations of clandestine graves. In 1997 two reports of the CEH and

the REHMI report of the Catholic Church came out. They both gave clear reports of the war and were a collection of testimonies of victims of the war. Still the government would not denounce that the period of La Violencia was genocide.

After 1996, people just went on with their lives. Many people were not able to return to or get their lands back, so they started with nothing. They helped people on their lands for money or started little businesses. Most people believe life is better after the peace accords, but not much has changed for the victims of war. They are still poor and many of the promises of the governments after the war did not and do not come true. People had problems with trusting each other, because of all that happened. At times families of the deceased knew who was the killer, but could not do much about it. In this time many of the volunteer PACs still lived near their original villages. There were government programs for the resettlement of the PAC-members, but not many for the survivors of the war. Many victims of the war fought and are still fighting for the recognition of their sufferings.

1.5 Impact on San Miguel Uspantán

San Miguel Uspantán is one of the larger municipalities in the north of el Quiché. The capital, Uspantán, was not hit as hard as its surrounding *aldeas*. The army committed many massacres in the surrounding aldeas, where they killed men, women and children indiscriminately. In this time and day memorials are still held in the aldeas of Caracol, Las Mayas and Peñaflores. But these are only a few of the massacres that happened in this department. Many of the aldeas were burned to the ground. Villagers that did not get the chance to escape were either killed or taken to Uspantán. In Uspantán the captured were tortured brutally in one of the torture centers near the parque central.

All people I spoke to accept one believe their community has changed after the war. Right after the war the change was felt most, because the effects of war were felt the hardest. Families were fractured greatly, not only because many people were killed but also because families got separated during the war and lived in different regions. Spouses separated during the war thought their loved ones had died and married another. This caused many divorces during and after the war. Many families had to go on without fathers or men in the household. In other cases families were forced to move to Mexico during the war. In other cases people got confronted with missing family, which they would not meet again because they disappeared. Another problem was that many people were not able to return to their homes. Their houses and lands were destroyed and other people lived on their lands. In many villages land was redistributed, crossing over the original borders.

In the first years after the war people did not dare to speak out. They were afraid of repatriation and people that would betray them. This is why people barely spoke to others, not even in the

household. Children were also not allowed to play outside nor talk to people. Many people had seen or suffered from violence, sexual violence or torture and were not able to trust people anymore. Another effect of this is that violence rose within the household and men started drinking more. This is also an effect of the increased poverty, but this was also caused by the war. The unemployment raids were high.

At this time and day people believe the community has become more normal. They still do not have their property and believe life was easier before the war, but people are able to communicate again. One of my informants said it changed for the better in the sense that after the war his village got a school, electricity, running water and a road connecting to the other villages. This is of course not the case in all of the villages in the region of Uspantán, especially for the aldeas in the far north which are the least reachable.

CHAPTER TWO

COPING WITH TRAUMA AND BEREAVEMENT

Traumatic experiences have tremendous effects for people on a personal, group and collective level. Like explained earlier, a trauma disrupts the inner taken-for-granted world of persons so that it no longer coincides with the outside world. This is very problematic and to get on with their lives, people have to deal with this one way or the other. Dealing with something traumatic is also called coping. This chapter will explain coping-strategies on both an individual and an collective level and how victim-survivors of La Violencia have coped and are coping with their trauma and bereavement during La Violencia. As will be shown through examples of exhumations and inhumations, collective and individual coping are intertwined. At the same event collective and individual coping may occur, but with other effects and purposes.

2.1 Coping Theory

In his research on natural hazards, vulnerability and disasters Blaikie (1997:62) defines coping as *“the manner in which people act within existing resources and range of expectations of a situation to achieve various end”*. Blaikie emphasis that it is more than just managing resources, as it is usually done in abnormal and unusual circumstances. *“Coping can include defense mechanisms, active ways of solving problems, and methods for handling stress”* (Murphy and Moriarty 1976 in Blaikie 1997:62). Blaikie makes a strong point for coping strategies focused on coping with disasters in a material sense, such as gaining more access to food, shelter and income, but does not look at coping with emotions and trauma caused by disasters. For this I would look at the coping theory of Charles Corr.

Charles Corr (1997:135) defines coping as *“constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person.”* What is good about this definition is that it describes coping as a process. Trauma and coping are not connected to an outcome, because they are not ending. People constantly need to learn how to cope with the world and processes and changes surrounding them. The concept also emphasizes the efforts of people dealing with trauma, whether it is successful or not. *“A coping person may try to master a particular situation but is often content to accept, endure, minimize, or avoid stressful demands”* (Corr 1997:137). What I miss in this definition is the collective part of coping. People do not only cope with trauma on their own. They are always situated in the collective realm and in this way people also cope together. This is different from individual coping. And there is of course collective or cultural trauma that people cope with collectively.

Corr makes a distinction between emotional and problem-solving coping strategies. Emotional strategies are the ways in which people try to overcome emotional reactions of a problem or a trauma. Someone that has experienced torture or abuse for example, might consciously or unconsciously forget about its experiences in order to survive. On a collective level, trauma may lead to *selective forgetting*. Problem-solving strategies are ways in which people cope with problems or trauma in a more practical sense. The problem-solving strategies match the coping-strategies named by Blaikie, focussed on overcoming the basic needs to survive. A widow, for example, needs to find a job because her husband died. Coping strategies are highly influenced by the possibilities and resources of the coping persons. People can choose which resources they want to use and which not depending on the amount of resources they have. The resources people have are influenced by their position in society. Poor people are more vulnerable to disasters as their access to resources such as labour, land and food are lower. Women tend to have less opportunities than men, as their opportunities for employment and access to land are limited.

Some problems or situations may need to be resolved before others, because some needs are more important or urgent than others. Human needs can be identified in “*distinct levels of needs, with each level incorporating and depending on the satisfaction of needs below them in the hierarchy*” (Maslow 1970 in Blaikie 1997:63). At the top of the hierarchy stands self-realization or the giving and receiving of love and respect, after that comes a good standard of living, adequate shelter and food and at the bottom are conditions such as minimum security from violence and starvation. In this sense during a violent conflict people may want to first look out for their safety, before even thinking about overcoming their traumatic experiences. The importance of certain needs depend on the cultural and social structures wherein these needs are positioned. So at times people may want to claim dignity over better living conditions.

As trauma can be experienced on different levels of society such as the personal and collective level, so do these different levels have their own coping-strategies. This is not to say that these strategies do not intertwine. On the contrary, in my opinion individual and collective coping with trauma highly influence each other. Because the death of loved ones during *La Violencia* is only one part of the trauma, the coping-strategies of victim survivors are directed on coping with trauma as well as with bereavement, though differentiations can be made.

2.2 Individual Coping

Most people I talked to describe their loss as “*Mucho dolor, nosotros sufrimos mucho*”. When they do so they point at their heart and also to their head. When they refer to the deaths of their loved ones many of my informants also referred to the war and how they suffered because of that. In

my opinion this is because the trauma of the death of the loved one is part of the trauma of the war. At the moment they still believe they suffer a lot because of their bereavement. Not just their loss of loved ones, but also the loss of their lives before the war. Someone told me that many Guatemalans do not like to talk about their feelings and losses of the war, because it is part of their culture. I asked about this to others, and like I thought, it depends on the person whether they want to talk about it or not. This is the same with how people cope with their losses and how they show their mourning.

Individual coping is in many studies (Putter 2003 and Corr 2000) divided in four stages. The first three stages have been explained in chapter on. These stages are shock and numbness, yearning and searching, and disorganization. The fourth stage is the slow process of getting on with life and give meaning to the events so that they may fulfil a new place in the lives of the survivors. These stages may happen simultaneously and at times people may fall back in previous stages.

During my research in Uspantán, I came to notice that these stages are difficult to apply, by myself and by themselves, to victim-survivors. My informants were not able to describe their process in this way. They just realized they were better able to get on with life at a given moment and some people still feel as if their loved ones died yesterday. In my conversation with Nora she said *“Sometimes I am still shocked about what happened, I tremble and all I can do is cry”*. The yearning for her loved ones is daily, though less than before. In my opinion the first three stages Corr refers to are more symptoms than stages. At times people can only feel the sadness of their loved ones, at others people realize what impact the death has on their lives. The only thing certain is that time slowly heals their wounds, but never completely. As Corr says ‘a never ending process’.

2.2.1 Mourning

One of the ways in which people cope is through mourning. Mourning is the outward expression of grief, which is the emotional inner reaction to bereavement (Corr 1997). Mourning is based on cultural, religious and personal beliefs. People go to grave sites, have memorial days on special dates such as date of birth and death, and express grief through external expressions such as clothing (wearing black in the western world). In the process of coping people may, deliberately or not, choose to forget about the events. People deny that events ever happened in order to keep their emotions under control. This is closely related to previous stages of coping. People may also desperately try to keep their loved ones alive by clinging on to their memories. Unfortunately this may get painful because time makes people forget.

Talking about their process of mourning was difficult. During the war people were not able to mourn at all. It was dangerous, because dead family meant possible accusations of being guerrillas. The dead were not dead for nothing. Moreover Catholicism and Maya ceremonies were illicit. Any

sign of a ritual or ceremony was proof of being a guerrilla. In other cases smoking incense for the dead would give away their location in the forest. So this was not possible as well. People got the chance to mourn after La Violencia, when it was not dangerous to mourn and people had the opportunity because they did not have to worry about their and their family's life. Referring back to Maslow's hierarchy of human needs, during the war people were not able to cope with their losses because it was too dangerous. Other needs such as safety and food were more important, so people were not able to cope well with their feelings.

For victim-survivors the loss of their loved ones was painful and still is at this time and day. At the moment people are not able to think about their loved ones as much as before because they have other worries to think about, such as the care for their children and earning money. Some say they still think about their loved ones every day, others say less. It is still very painful, but people have learned to cope with their feelings and deep sadness better. It is difficult to describe the process of change; at first people are not able to cope with it and after a few years people realize it has gotten better. All people I talked to have days that they are confronted more with their sadness than on others, such as holidays, birthdays and memorial days. Also special occasions in the news or when someone of the same age of their child or someone looks like their husbands. Rosa told me about how she does not like Semana Santa,

"Semana Santa is such a sad time. During the festivities my table and house are empty. My children and I are the only ones at the table. My father is not there, nor my husband, nor my brothers. Every year I am confronted with this emptiness. There is no one left."
[Rosa starts crying, because she still cannot deal with the fact that her father is dead and she still does not know what happened to him] (14/04/2011)

There is a big difference in the coping and the feelings of people who know what happened to their loved ones and people whose loved ones have disappeared. Mourning has not really started or is unfinished for people with disappeared loved ones. They still hope for them to return and, in many cases, still search for them. Like the people with loved ones without a grave, they keep hoping to find their loved ones.

"Every exhumation, me and my parents hope to find him (his brother). Every time the wounds are torn open, but we cannot proclaim him dead. It is as if we kill him ourselves. He might still be out there. There was an exhumation in Chajul, a few kilometres from here. We still hope that we find him." (Esteban 30/03/2011)

Emotional reactions during my interviews were the strongest when talking about disappeared people. During one of the reunions of victim-survivors, I was collecting testimonies of three cousins. A woman, Analiza, came to listen to their stories and asked what we were doing. When she heard that I was collecting testimonies, she immediately started talking about her family. Analiza started crying heavily when talking about her disappeared brothers. She was able to talk about her father, whom she found in her house, but cried deeply because she did not know what happened to her brothers. Rosa also cried over her disappeared father. I think this is because they have not been able to find closure, because they do not know what happened to them and do not have a body.

Another difference between murdered and disappeared is that people that have the body of their deceased are able to give their loss a place. They can visit their loved ones during festivities and celebrations on the cemetery. During the inhumation I talked to an old father who was able to reclaim the body of his son after thirty years. When I asked him how he felt about the inhumation he said: "I am happy and sad at the same time. I am very sad because of the massacre of my son. I am very happy, because I now have a place to bury him. I can finally drink beers with him again during Semana Santa."

Though there are great differences between disappeared and murdered, and also between burial and no burial there are some things many people do in general. Many people go to memorial days to remember and honour their loved ones and others that have died during the war. They also burn candles in the church and in their house often. Some people have a little altar in their house for the deceased, but for others this is troublesome. Many people do not have an altar, because they have nothing of their loved one. The children of the people of the exhumation and Isaia were too young to take pictures of and all they had of them was lost in the war. This is for them the reason for not having an altar for their children. Like said, people who have buried their loved ones are able to visit them weekly and also during special occasions like Semana Santa, Dia de los Martires and birthdays. They put flowers and gifts next to the graves and say their prayers. Others may visit monuments or the church to do the same.

2.2.2 Use of Religion

People will need to give meaning to the traumatic events, and most people will use religion or other believe systems to give this meaning. Religion for example may give meaning to death and life and reveal hopes for a better future and an peaceful afterlife. This may soothe the harsh reality of trauma and bereavement. Others may also lose their religion, this has to do with the disruption of the inner structures of people. How people use their religion differs per person. Before the war most people

were catholic, many people changed their religion in Evangelicalism during or after the war. One reason for this is that being a catholic was at times a sign of being a guerrilla; people were hunted down for it. The Catholic Church barely existed in Guatemala during the war, almost all churches were closed. Another reason is that people did not feel the same after the war and wanted to change their religion, this in combination with evangelical missionaries after the war, caused many people to walk over. According to a pastor and a padre the ceremonies of Catholicism and Evangelicalism differ greatly. Catholicism looks back a lot to history and is a little more conservative, while evangelicalism is more of the problems and celebrations of the now. Evangelicalism barely talks about the pains of war.

Whether catholic, protestant, evangelical or another, many people used their religion to keep on going during and after the war. Faith made them believe that God was with them during the war and that he would protect them and help them get through the war. Faith in God also soothed their hearts, because their loved ones were in a better place and the culprits would eventually be punished by God. To people with faith, all is in the hands of God and He sees and knows everything that has happened.

Being in a religious community or church also gives people the opportunity to talk about their past, their pains and their sadness. People can speak with the pastor or the father about things they cannot tell to their loved ones. In this sense it helps them cope with their trauma and bereavement, because the pastor, father or sister listen to them and understands. One of the sisters of the Catholic Church told me how she visited bereaved families after the war and just listen to them. People had the opportunity to talk and afterwards they would pray together. Sometimes they would also sing and pray before the altar of the deceased. The church also had programs to support the bereaved families, such as with food and land working tools . They also accompanied families during festivities or during exhumations and help them with their struggles. At this time and day programs have changed from helping victims to helping the poor in a more general sense.

Since the year 2000, less and less people ask the church to visit them in order to talk about the past. This is because people do not feel the need for it anymore and have other problems as well. There also used to be a Comité de los Martires, which organized memorial days in the villages. Since a few years the comité has fallen apart and the church now organizes the three memorial days in this area. According to the comity-members interest in general in the memorial days became less and as they became older so did their interest in organizing. At the moment most of the ex-comity members are over seventy and do not have the time nor the energy to organize the memorials. In my opinion, both are signs that most people have learned to accept the deaths of their loved ones and know how to deal with their feelings.

2.2.3 Use of Social Institutions

Some victim survivors have had the opportunity to get support from social institutions of the government. The program of repayment/resarcimiento (PNR) has been active since the peace accords. The PNR has five fundamentals in its program: restitution of material, economical support, psycho-social help and rehabilitation, dignification of victims and cultural recuperation. Human rights violations that the PNR pays attention to are: forced disappearances, extrajudicial executions, physical and psychological torture, forced displacement, child soldiers, sexual violence, violations against children and massacres. In my opinion their ideology is very theoretical, because what the programs of the PNR are depends on the government at power. The government now in place is the first government to accept that the period of La Violencia is genocide, before all government denied the genocide. The PNR is now more active than ever, but this may change after the coming elections in September.

From what I have seen and heard the PNR is not just a program for money. Though it gives small funds to widows and orphans and also gives temporal donations and materials to other victims of the war that have lost a lot. I have seen people from the PNR at almost every community gathering about the war: at the reunions of victims and CONAVIGUA, at the inhumation and exhumation and also at the opening of the photo exposition. This is all part of the recuperation of culture, but the PNR also gives legal and emotional support during the inhumations and exhumations. Communities have to ask for an exhumation and the legal process and research of the exhumation can begin. This is part of the program of PNR for the dignity of the martyrs and the bereaved, human rights and the search for truth and reconciliation.

2.3 Collective Coping

Collective coping, like collective trauma, has two sides. A natural disaster or a war affects many people in a society or community. People are bereaved of belongings and loved ones and may be traumatized. Because many people have experienced the disaster, people cope together in their personal losses. Talking about losses and grievances becomes easier, because it happened to everyone. Personal losses may become easier when compared to other more severe losses. This is also called relative deprivation (Putter 2003: 75). In 1986, after the violence had stopped, people did not dare to speak to each other, let alone talk about their losses and trauma. People were afraid of being prosecuted and trust between people was simply not there because of all that happened.

“I forbade my children to talk to other people when outside. They had to get home immediately after school and church. I did not dare to talk to my neighbors, except to some friends within the house. Where people could not hear us. But even then I was careful”. Now, through testimony and sharing

experiences, people are able to talk about what happened to them and are able to place their stories into the greater history of their community.

The other meaning is about healing the social fabric of the community or society. Due to collective trauma, a new cultural reality has to be created which incorporates the life before and after the trauma (Daly and Sarkin 2010). In social sciences more attention is paid to the theory of reconciliation than to the theory of collective coping. In my opinion, collective coping strategies coincide with reconciliation strategies. Communities and societies have certain strategies to cope with all that has happened. Reconciliation, the restoration of bonds between the conflicting groups, is only one of the many outcomes. In peace-making policies and with the construction of democracy reconciliation is the most desired outcome, but also very idealistic. Reconciliation after violent conflict is very hard to realize. After peace accords conflict may rise a new and division between groups might grow stronger. Strategies for community healing and reconciliation are coping strategies after trauma, just as starting a new conflict out of revenge and grievances is as well.

Gloppen in 'Roads to Reconciliation' (2005) calls upon five categories of reconciliation. The first strategy is focused on the need for *justice*. The underlying assumption is that in order to gain reconciliation perpetrators need to be held accountable and punished for their crimes. The second strategy is centered upon *truth* and is based upon the assumption that knowledge about what happened and who were responsible for the planning and execution of the crimes is necessary for reconciliation. The third is *restitution* in which the damage done to victims, in psychological, physical and emotional sense, needs to be acknowledged and repaired in order to create reconciliation. The Fourth is *reform*, in which focus is put on preventing future human rights abuses through the creation of strong social institutions. The fifth is *oblivion*, in which amnesty legislation and public amnesia is believed to help reconciliation. *Time* heals all wounds and people need to forget what happened in order to go on in the future. Final is transitional justice in which new policies are created in order to prevent history from repeating itself. (2005:18) As will be seen in the case of Guatemala, the categories truth, justice, restitution and transitional justice were most pursued by the victim organizations. These categories were needed in order to cope with their communal trauma and to heal the social fabric of the community. Others strategies are community healing through religion and ceremony, and remembrance a tactic which is closely related to the search for truth.

2.3.1 Civil Organizations and the search for truth and justice

"Most people, of course, belong to many communities at once. They belong to a church, a trade union, ethnic group, and a political affiliation" (Daly and Sarkin 2010: 81). How people are organized regarding trauma and bereavement during war is very influenced by how people organized in the

past, because the organizations of the past are still active at this moment but differently. Before the war Guatemala's civil society was very active and growing in power. There were several civil organizations who fought for their rights over lands and for higher wages for people working at the plantations. One of my informants, then living in Laj Chimel, worked in the organization CUC (Comité de Unidad Campesino) along with many of the other men of his family. He was also a *catequista* of the Catholic Church who informed people of their possibilities to claim their rights as civilians. This happened in the whole region of San Miguel Uspantán. The Catholic Church in Guatemala was before and during La Violencia known for speaking out against the injustices of the government. The people working for the Catholic Church were the first to be targeted when La Violencia started, because they were seen as opposition and guerrillas. In the years of 1980 to 1984 organizations did not have the chance to fight for the people. Many of the civil leaders were captured, tortured and in many cases they disappeared or were killed. My informant working for CUC told me how he was captured along with his father. They were tortured for sixty days in Uspantán, before being saved by a friend of his father. After their release he lived in the capital for a while because it was dangerous.

In the period of democratization right after La Violencia more and more people dared to speak out. One of the first organizations was CONAVIGUA in 1987. They fought for the abolishment of the PAC and for the truth about what happened to their husbands, fathers and children that had disappeared. They also fought for women's and widow rights, because many women had problems on the economical and security level. Many women lost the lands of their husbands and did not have an income, because their husband was killed. In the same time the Comité de los Martires came into being. 1987 was the first year that they held memorial days in the aldeas of Caracol, Peña Flor and Macalajau. Next to these two, there was also a civil organization for the forced PAC members and a first organization for victims of the war fighting for human rights and the protection of their cultural heritage. In 1992 the first exhumations began under the lead of FAFG and with the help of CONAVIGUA (Sanford 2003). During the transition period to peace two investigations were set up. One was of the UN called the CEH for historical clarification. The other was set up by the bishop of the Catholic Church and was called REHMI. The sister of the Catholic Church told me about how she, the father and other sisters would visit people at their homes to collect their testimonies. This was not just important for the clarification of the truth, but also for the victims themselves to tell their story and to give them hope for justice. After the Peace Accords many organizations would come and go, as they changed names or ideals or when interest for their goals would fade away. Their goals were for the search for truth, human rights, reclamation of culture, protection of orphans, widows and ex-PAC.

Most organizations regarding victims of the war in the area of Uspantán have both a local and a national level. The biggest local organization in Uspantán that represents victims of the war is the Comité de Sobreviviente de Víctimas de la Violencia en Uspantán. It is part of the national organization of victims and it presents the region of San Miguel de Uspantán. The comité is present in most aldeas and villages, for example Zona Reigna, Cunén, Sacapulas, Chajul and Chicaman. I am not sure when it was constituted, but the representatives and coordinators have been active in different organizations for human rights and victims during and after the war. The victim organization of Uspantán has committed itself to informing victim-survivors about the restitution program (PNR) of the government. In their two-weekly reunions they inform the delegates of the surrounding aldeas about the progress of the PNR. During my stay in Uspantán there were two national reunions of the victim organizations in the capital in order to claim more repayments from the government. They also want the government to promote awareness amongst the youths and non-victims about the sufferings of the victim survivors. The national reunions are also meant to strengthen cohesion amongst the victim-survivors and their organizations. Whenever there is an exhumation or inhumation in the area, the victim organization is there to support the victim-survivors whose loved ones might or are buried there.

Other organizations in Uspantán are Mojomaya and CONAVIGUA. As has been seen CONAVIGUA has had its history in manifestations and fights for truth, justice and memory. Mojomayas is part of CONAVIGUA and focuses its attention to bringing awareness of civil rights and the history of the victim-survivors to Maya youth. Mojomaya and CONAVIGUA stimulate and support the creation of young civil leaders and to inform youngsters about the history of the war. According to Joanna and her mother, both active in CONAVIGUA and Mojomayas since the beginning, CONAVIGUA stimulates young civil society so that the struggle of victim-survivors is not in vain and so that history does not repeat itself. It is also an initiative to restore civil society to what it used to be. CONAVIGUA still supports the widows and orphans of the war in programs for justice, reconciliation, emancipation and in their livelihood. Like the victim organization, CONAVIGUA also organized a national reunion in the capital for orphans and widows.

An organization that makes itself strong for the dignity of survivors and their murdered loved ones is CONCODIG. The organization supports victim-survivors legally and emotionally during exhumations and inhumations. Many victim-survivors do not speak proper Spanish, so CONCODIG serves as translator and contact person between survivors and the government program of the PNR.

2.3.2 The use of social suffering and victimization

In this time and day, the search for truth, human rights and the dignity of the martyrs is still an important part in the organizations, but their attention has shifted. During reunions of both CONAVIGUA and the Comity of Victims attention was paid to problems of the present. The problems they treated were about the fight between the army and drugs cartels in Coban, the exploitation of the mines, problems with Resarcimiento (PNR) and the hydroelectric company situated in the area of Zona Reina. In my opinion they are connected to social suffering and modern victimhood that is situated in the past of violence and exploitation. Social suffering is about the little sufferings in everyday life. According to Putter (2003) social suffering is caused by large forces such as the government, globalization, poverty and post-war effects. Emphasis is put on the small sufferings, such as poverty, vulnerability and discrimination.

In the case of the mine exploitation and the hydroelectric company, there was a consultancy of the communities in the area who voted no against the build of the hydroelectric company. Both the mining and the hydroelectric company cause ecological pollution and the local population does not gain anything from it. The communities believe it is their *Madre Tierra* and want to protect it as part of their culture. Unfortunately the government ignores the outcome of the consultancy and the communities do not like this. The government has, in their opinion, done enough during the war and needs to respect their decision. In the case of Coban, the army has taken control of the area and city and is fighting against the drugtraffickers. During both reunions the spokespersons saw this as another reason to kill innocent indiginas and campesinos.

Though it is a lot better than during the war, many people believe that the situation has not changed much since the peace accords. Many children are not able to attend school, many people do not have good access to health care and many people live under the poverty line, especially in the north western area of Guatemala where more than 50% of the population is indigena. People feel victim of the discrimination and of the corrupted government. All three organizations, CONAVIGUA, the victim organization and CONCODIG believe their fight is not over until the Mayan people no longer suffer from these injustices.

Another reason for the shifted attention is that many problems surrounding truth and victims have been solved, though there is still much to be done. The government in power at this moment is the first to accept that La Violencia is genocide. This has great consequences for the victims as the government finally has made a beginning in acknowledging their sufferings. Since this government the PNR is able to do a lot more than under previous governments. Victims receive more money and the PNR has more programs to create awareness amongst the population. Examples of these programs for awareness are the photo exposition about the war and also many books about victims

of the war have been published. Such as a book about Desengaño, but also books with stories about what happened to killed persons and about the consequences of war. That the PNR is able to be this active is because, according to a few organizations, the government is more social and less military focused. Attention has also shifted because most people have learned to live with the deaths of their loved ones and do not need more attention to it anymore. Other programs such as those for pobre indignas and women in general are more important at the moment. This is also apparent in the programs of the church. The programs for development have taken the place of programs for victimas.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CONSTRUCTION OF MEMORY AND CREATION OF A COLLECTIVE FUTURE

Chapter one and two have looked at the concepts of trauma and bereavement and how to cope with them on a collective and an individual level. Some efforts have already been made to show that the collective and the individual are inseparable and dependant of each other. This chapter will look deeper into the relationship between individual and collectivity through the concept of memory. Though stands can be made for other concepts, I believe that memory serves as an good example to show the connection between the two. The construction of a collective memory is important to build up an collective future for the community. How victims of the conflict fight for their future constructed through past and present will also be described.

3.1 Memory and Testimony

Memory *'Is the meaning we attach to experience, not simply recall of the events and emotions of that experience'* (Stern 2004 in van Drunen 2010:33). According to van Drunen individual memory is always socially constructed and inter-subjectively structured. *'The relational setting in which actors are located affects the depth, tone and the very facts of their memories'* (Auyero 2002 in van Drunen 2010:33). What individuals remember is partially determined by the group he or she is part of and what the group believes is memorable. In this sense people never remember alone. During the exhumations in El Membrillal II, people relived their experiences of the war. Not only the memories attached to that place, the burying of their young children, but also to the conditions of that time: the constant flight for the army, the hunger and the people that had been killed. The context and location of the exhumations made them remember. By sharing their memories with the other survivors they were also able to reconstruct their memories through those of others.

Through sharing past experiences it is possible to create a collective memory. According to Osiel (1997 cited in van Drunen 2010:33) collective memory consists of *'past reminiscences that link given groups of people for whom the remembered events are important, that is the events remain significant to them later on'*. It is not a sum of personal memories of its various members. Collective memory is created through the sharing of the individual memories, but only the stories common to all are remembered collectively. Collective memory cannot exist without its members and is like all social constructs susceptible to change. *'Collective memory always results from a selection process that involves remembering some things and forgetting others'* (van Drunen 2010:34).

According to Sanford giving of testimony can be *'an effective method for survivors to process and come to terms with the extreme traumas they have suffered'* (2003:239). Testimony is important

on both individual and collective level, because it may reflect their individual and community experience as part of a larger national history (2003:241), as part of the collective national memory. It is important that the testimonies of the survivors are accepted as lived-experience. The suffering of the victim must be heard and acknowledged as such. The acknowledgement of testimony may later be used in the search for justice. In cases such as Guatemala, where the CEH and the catholic church collected the testimonies of survivors in order to create a national narrative of the war, victims are also able to place their own story in that of the national discourse. The search for truth may give people answers about why and how things happened to them and their loved ones. It gives them a better view of how their lives are now.

3.2 Spaces of Memory: Exhumations and Inhumations

The inner plaza of the municipality is very crowded today. Seventeen unusually small coffins have been placed in the centre of the plaza. To catch a glimpse of the coffins, people press together in a tight circle around the coffins. Children squeeze themselves through the legs of the grown-ups to get to the front. Overall it is a big gathering of colors, voices, and curious faces. The small coffins contain the remains of four women and thirteen men who have been killed by the army during La Violencia. It is an inhumation ceremony where family members, after thirty years, are finally able to reclaim the body's of their loved ones who have been murdered or have disappeared. During the ceremony, several victim-survivors give their testimony and a spokesperson of FAFG explains what has happened during the war in general and to the deceased specifically. It occurred to me that most people present at the ceremony did not know the victims. When I asked why they were there they answered: "Because it is *costumbre*. We want to know what has happened and want our children to know what has happened. It is part of us."

The above case of an inhumation is, in my opinion, an great example in which individual and collective coping come together through memory. Inhumations together with exhumations are great examples in which individual and collective coping come together through memory. I would like to call them spaces of memory as they connect and enhance collective and individual memory. An exhumation of a clandestine grave is the first step in literally uncovering the truth and the recovery of the dignity of the deceased. On an individual level, the processes of exhumations and inhumations are important for the mourning process. At the start of the exhumation people do not feel relieved

that they can finally bury their loved ones on an honourable way. The bereaved victim-survivors are glad they are finally able to recover their loved ones. Severe feelings of pain and sadness dominate nonetheless, because they are confronted with the fact that their loved ones are dead. One of the women told me how much she misses her son: *“He was so gordito (chubby)! He was so beautiful. By this time, he would have been married, have a job and many, many babies. I miss the life that I never had”*. Many of the people at the exhumation relived moments of the war. One of the men told me of their life in flight. *“When the army went that way, we would go that way”* [pointing from east to west] *“Then when the army came after us again we would go that way or run the other way again if we met other patrols. Many, many people died. Friends, neighbours, family. Too many.”*

The reclamation and reburial during an inhumation are next steps in the recovery of loved ones. Due to the research of the FAFG (Forensic Anthropologist Foundation of Guatemala) the victim-survivors and also the community knows what has happened with their loved ones or members. Moreover they are able to reclaim the bodies of the deceased and give them the proper burial they deserve and may give the first steps to find closure. After the inhumation I visited some of the bereaved victim-survivors at their homes. One of them was a sister of two brothers who had been killed. *“I am so happy”*, she told us, *“I finally have my brothers back. And we are going to celebrate it the whole night”*.

Inhumations and exhumations give bereaved the chance to mourn for their loved ones. Clandestine graves are seen as dishonourable, as the deceased were not given a proper burial. *“They just lay there. On that unreachable place, so far away from us”*. Exhumations and inhumations were not just for the dignity of the deceased, but also for the dignity of the community and culture. One of the community members explained: *“By burying them here without a proper burial, they (military) denied our traditions, our culture.”* The inhumations and exhumations also enhance the cohesion of the community as a whole. Victim-survivors are remembered to the fact that they all suffered together during the war, while being confronted with their own memories of the war. What was interesting is that during the exhumation and inhumation many people did not know the deceased. Like said they came there to understand what has happened. To show their children what has happened. But also to be there for other victim-survivors and for themselves, as many still have disappeared loved ones. During the inhumation the sense of cohesiveness is enhanced by the several organizations talking about the genocide and the sufferings of the victim-survivors as a whole. They also explain what happened with the community and to the deceased in specific. On the inhumation ceremony and the reburial, several survivors gave testimony. By giving testimonies their sufferings were acknowledged and placed in the greater narrative of their collective memory.

3.3 Guatemala's struggle over memory

The creation of a collective memory, especially on the national level, is often very conflictive. Different actors, such as the government, media, religious or political parties and leaders, individual and collective actors, academics, and civil actors and parties, try to institutionalize their narrative of the past. In this sense, their narratives must have a meaning in the present and coincide with the interests of the respective actors. Zerubavel (in van Drunen 2010:34) names conflicts over the contents of collective memory *mnemonic battles*. Gender, class and power relations are all of influence to the specific *memory-actors* and their influence on the discourse of collective memory. In the creation of the collective memory, many stories will be ignored or not even heard through their place in the hegemony.

The struggles in Guatemala over its recent violent past is also a mnemonic battle. After the war the government and the army tried to cover the atrocities of La Violencia by silencing the victims through threats and violence. The government sought to put the past into oblivion. In 1994, during the negotiations of peace, the Commission for Truth (CEH) was installed. The commission got full permission to uncover the atrocities of the war, however amnesty was granted for all political crimes, except genocide, torture and forced disappearances (Isaacs 2010: 258). For human rights, indigenous and victim organizations who sought justice the negotiations were a disappointment. During the research period of the Commission, the civil organizations and the catholic church motivated their members to give testimony to the CEH. *'The more people testified, and the more they spoke in unison about having witnessed indiscriminate killings of women and children, the harder it would be for either the CEH or Guatemalan society to deny genocide'* (Isaacs 2010: 261). Where the civil organizations did everything they could to uncover the truth, the government and the military did the opposite. Afraid of legal persecutions, tarnished reputations and also revenge, the military kept silent and denied any responsibility. In order to prevent exhumations and the giving of testimonies, the military threatened victim-survivors and the organizations.

"The exhumations were very dangerous. People, including me, were threatened many times. They were told that they had to stop what they were doing. During the exhumations, they (ex-patrollers) would keep an constant eye on us." (Isaia, civil leader)

"People were afraid to give testimony. Doors and windows had to be closed. People were afraid that someone might hear them telling the truth."

(Maria, sister of the catholic church).

The results of the final CEH report were staggering: 626 villages were massacred, 1.5 million people were displaced, 150,000 refugees, and more than 200,000 people were killed or disappeared. The majority of violence against civilians, 93 percent, was committed by the government and only three percent was committed by the guerrillas. Furthermore, 83 percent of the victims were Maya and 17 percent of the victims were ladino (Sanford 2003:149). A great victory for the victim-survivors was that, like the REHMI-report, the CEH acknowledged that genocidal acts had been committed by the government. Unfortunately, the conflict over memory did not end there, because the report has not generated a consensus in Guatemala. Up until now the government resisted responsibility and claimed that most of the victims were combatants. Victim organizations and victim survivors and their descendants on the other hand acknowledge the findings of the report and still pursue further uncovering of the truth, such as in exhumations, justice and also for their history to be included in public education (Isaacs 2010, Sanford 2003). *'The most important things we fight for at the moment are justice, repayment, dignification for the dead and the survivors and that our children know our history. So that the struggling and the suffering of our people may not be forgotten'* (Isaacs 23/03/2011).

Though the CEH-report did not succeed in creating a national collective memory, it has strengthened the collective memory of the victim-survivors. I have not been in a collective meeting of victims, whether it was an exhumation, reunion or the opening of a photo gallery, where they did not cite the outcomes of the CEH report. All victims I have spoken to know the statistics as well and know about the injustices that were done, not just on a regional or village level. During one of my conversations with , he told me that *"Our experience of the war is both an negotiation as well as an negation. A negotiation of what happened between victims, communities and the international community. A negation by the government"*.

3.4 Struggles of the past, directed to the future

According to van Drunen struggles over the past require a particular intensity when they concern a great historical trauma that has national dimensions, *'because they raise expectations about the possibility to implement a new moral and political order'* (2010:36). The different actors construct their narratives about the past, in order to express their expectations of the future. When the victim-survivors fought and fight for truth, memory and justice, they also fight for a better future for themselves and for their children, so that what happened in the past may never repeat itself. *"The conflicts that arise in this context, then, are as much about how to remember the recent past as about the state model or project that these different groups want to promote"* (Jelin 2002 in van Drunen 2010:36).

To victim-survivors it is important that their collective memory of the past is acknowledged by society and incorporated in the national collective memory of the war. If people understand what has happened, how it happened and why, history will not repeat itself. They also see it as a moral-obligation to remember and make others remember what has happened, so that their and their loved ones struggles may not be forgotten. To the victim-organization of Uspantán and CONAVIGUA it is important that their children know what has happened. So that they continue the struggle for human rights, as their parents did before them. In this way their sufferings will not be in vain. At the moment children are barely informed about the history of the genocide in school. Where the children of survivors are able to listen to the stories of their parents, other children do not. At the moment society forgets what has happened during the war, while the stories are still so lively within the victim-survivors.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have tried to answer the question of how people cope with trauma and bereavement after La Violencia, Guatemala. The thesis was constructed in three parts, the first was about the reconstruction of La Violencia and the social consequences it had on the victims. The second part was about how people cope with their trauma on an individual and collective level. The final part tried to connect the individual to the collective and vice versa on how they reconstruct the trauma and how they cope together. To describe this I made use of the construction of memory and the creation of a collective future.

The thesis is relevant as it looks behind the statistical numbers of conflict, through telling the stories of the people on the ground. By telling their stories people are no longer able to distance themselves completely from them. The thesis is also relevant because it complements the discourses on how to deal with gross human rights violations on an individual, collective and national level. It shows how collective and individual levels of trauma and coping are highly intertwined as well as dimensions standing on their own.

The conflict of Guatemala lasted from 1960 until 1996, but had its peak during the period of La Violencia from 1980 to 1986. During La Violencia the military changed its tactics from a fight against the guerilla and the leftist opposition to counter-insurgency against the population, which culminated in the genocide of the “scorched earth” campaign. The campaign resulted in 400 Maya villages burned to the ground, 600 massacres, 150,000 murdered or disappeared, 1.5 million people displaced and 150,000 people in refugee. The insurgency stopped around 1986, leaving heavy destruction in its wake. On an individual level, people became traumatized due to the experiences with and witnessing of many forms of violence, rape and torture. Many of the survivors of massacres fled into the mountains where they lived under dire conditions with no food, water, medicines or clothes, and with the army constantly hunting them down. Many people were not only bereaved of loved ones, either by death or disappearances, but also of their lives before the war. On a collective level the trauma was best felt after the violence was over. Families had fallen apart because of the many people that had died during the war, but also because families got separated during the war. The heavy repression by the army, the silencing of the population through fear, and the brute violence committed against the population had destroyed the social fabrics of the communities. People did not trust each other anymore nor did they have trust in the social institutions as the government was the enemy. The trauma of the victims became worse, as the government denied all responsibility for the violence, even denied that it ever happened.

Trauma has tremendous effects on people on the individual, collective and national level. Trauma disrupts the inner taken-for-granted world of people and communities so that it no longer coincides with the outside world. Past, present and future are altered and people have to find a way to cope with their trauma in order to go on. The most natural way of coping with trauma and bereavement on an individual level is through mourning. Mourning is very individual and as this thesis shows also very context dependant. During the war people were not able to mourn because their lives were in danger. After the war the victim-survivors who knew what happened to their loved ones were better able to cope with their losses than people whose loved ones disappeared. Not only because the bereaved knew what happened but also because they were able to bury their dead. On an individual level people may use religion in order to cope better with their traumas. Religion gives meaning to what has happened, but also hope through faith. People are able to accept their lives better because everything is in the hands of God, and he holds final judgment. Social Institutions such as the PNR are able to help cope in a more practical sense by giving money, and legal and emotional support during exhumations and inhumations.

In my opinion Corr's (1997) four stages of mourning do not apply to the victims of La Violencia. These stages are (1) shock and numbness, (2) yearning and searching, (3) disorganization and (4) the process of getting on with life. Victim-survivors were not able to describe their process through the stages given by Corr. At the moment people have learned to live with their trauma better due to the passage of time. They were only able to conclude that they were able to cope with it better than before. Because the stages can happen simultaneously or may return over time I would like to suggest that stages one to three are symptoms of mourning instead of stages. Stage four is the outcome through time although it can never be fully achieved. As it is an never-ending process.

Theory on an collective level have much in common with theory on reconciliation. In my opinion the strategies are the same, but should be seen as reconciliation is an outcome of coping with collective trauma. Gløppen gives five categories of reconciliation which are in a way all applicable to the case of Guatemala. These categories are truth, justice, restitution, reform and oblivion. All except oblivion, which was used by the state, were pursued by victim organizations and communities up till now. Right after La Violencia several victim organizations demanded the truth about what happened during the war ,their loved ones and who were the perpetrators. Justice was important as well as people felt that the perpetrators had to be punished in order for the victims to move on with their lives. They were however ignored by the government as the government denied accountability and wanted to forget the past. With the peace accords amnesty was given to many almost all perpetrators of violence and justice became harder to demand. With justice barely achievable after amnesty, civil rights organizations focused fully on the search for truth and acknowledgement of

genocide by the government. At the moment the government has acknowledged the genocide and with the program of the PNR restitution is given to victims on economical, social and cultural bases. Many organizations still fight for more truth, more restitution, and still hope for justice. Reform is not completely achieved as victim-survivors and the Mayan population are amongst the poorest of the population. Many but not all communities have access to water and electricity. But access to education and health care is also difficult.

During my stay in Uspantán it became clear that the organizations for victims and also the church are paying more and more attention to the problems of the now. People feel victims of a situation created by the government. Due to the civil war, violence, exploitation and corruption the situation of victim-survivors and indigenous people have not change much since the peace accords. New forms of violence and exploitation of the government are linked to the abuses committed against the victim-survivors. Attention for present problems is asked because people are able to cope better with their losses of the war and problems regarding truth and justice are almost solved.

Collective and individual coping with trauma and bereavement are highly connected in the sense that they overlap and also influence each other highly. I have tried to show the connection through the concept of memory. By giving testimony, victim-survivors let their stories be heard and search for acknowledgement of their sufferings. By sharing their experiences with other victims they are able to create a collective memory. Collective memory in return gives people the ability to place their story into the greater whole. Exhumations and inhumations are good examples of the connection between collective and individual coping. As collectives and individuals people are able to reclaim the bodies of their loved ones and are able to find out the truths behind the deaths of their loved ones. By sharing their experiences and hearing the truth about the past, people are able to relate to each other and create a common identity of suffering and survival. During exhumations and inhumations their sense of collectivity is enhanced as well as the their collective memory.

The struggles over the past between the victim-survivors and the government and the rest of society are struggles for the future as well. Victim-survivors want that their collective memory to be incorporated in the national collective memory and history so that the stories about the struggles of them and their loved ones are not forgotten. They want their stories to be told their children and future generations, so that La Violencia never happens again.

The brutal violence of the government directed at the mostly indigenous population of Guatemala has had tremendous effects on an individual and collective level. The violence and impunity caused bereavement and trauma on both individual and collective level. In order to get on with life the individuals and communities had to cope and are still coping with their trauma of the genocide. On

an individual level victim-survivors cope with their trauma and bereavement through mourning. In order to get on with their lives it is important that victim survivors know what happened with their loved ones and that they have a place where they can visit their dead. Victim-survivors also cope through religion, which can give them answers and hope. They also make use of social institutions such as the PNR to get support in a more practical sense. Coping on a collective level is seen in organizations who pursue the truth, demand justice and restitution from the government in order to get justice in times of impunity. Collective and individual trauma and coping are connected through the creation of memory. By sharing their experiences with other survivors collective memory is created. Through collective memory, people are able to relate to each other and feel connected. They are able to place their story into the greater narrative of their people. Spaces of memory are inhumations and exhumations in which individual and collective coping and trauma come together.

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APPENDIX I REFLECTION

My study in Guatemala about coping and bereavement after La Violencia does not stand on itself. For me this research is the final outcome of my life during my four years of studying anthropology. Two weeks before I started studying anthropology my mother died of cancer. The death of my mother has been an great influence during my years of study and I cannot say it has not influenced my subject for the bachelor project. When we had to opportunity to choose a subject for the bachelor project, all I could think of was that I wanted to do something with bereavement and death. The other great influence for my subject is my minor Conflict Studies. These two influences combined made the decision that I wanted to research the conflict of Guatemala during the 1980s. Little did I know at that moment about the scope of the conflict and the effects on the survivors.

When I chose my subject I knew it was going to be difficult for me to do the research. I would be confronted with the losses and emotions of other people and I knew this would eventually confront me with my own bereavement. As the person that I am, I also wanted to confront myself with my feelings and those of others. I was curious about them and how other people dealt with them. The other difficulty was asking people about these subjects. Almost everyone I talked about warned me about the difficulty of letting people talk about such deep and even horrific emotions. I thought I could handle it more than others, because I in a way experienced the same feelings of bereavement. During my fieldwork I came back on my words. These people had been through so much, how could I as a 22-year old student living in a rich, peaceful country be able to understand that? After a lot of thinking and talking with friends and family, I realized I could never completely understand how they felt. But I could respect their feelings and show interest in the experiences of my informants. I still might be better to understand their feelings of bereavement better than people that have not experienced bereavement of a loved one, but not the same level as my informants.

In my opinion, my research was very opportunistic. I did not have an organization or institution I could go to on a daily basis. Uspantán did not have as much organizations for victims of the war as I wanted to. Where I hoped for daily reunions of more than one organization, I only found two organizations that had a reunion every three weeks. Through some of my informants I was able to go an exhumation and inhumation, but this also was very opportunistic. In the case of the inhumation, my informant just said to me that I should “just go” to Huehuetenango, a four-hour drive from Uspantán, and call a man I did not know and “everything would be alright, *no problema*”. I had my doubts, but I in the end I was glad I did go. During my research I had to take the things as they went and go with the flow. Which was at times difficult, because I was dependant of others for my activities.

One of the greatest road-blocks in my research was that I did not dare, as my teacher Geert Mommersteeg would say, “To go out and experience.” Especially at the beginning of my research I did not dare to ask people about my research. Especially the heavy subjects. I noticed that my informants also did not dare to introduce me to others, because of my difficult subject. The problem of “not-daring-to-ask”, culminated in the fact that during the inhumation I did not really dare to speak to people about their feelings about the inhumation. My teacher Gerdien Steenbeek really pushed me to “pluck up courage”, because if I did not do that I would not be able to finish my research properly. And so I did and I noticed that most people did not really mind talking about their feelings and their testimonies. Where it was difficult I knew when to stop. I also learned that I should not directly ask people about difficult subjects, but start with something lighter. One of my informants made clear from the start that she did not want to talk about her experiences of the war. When I asked for an interview with her I asked about her organization at first. She eventually started talking about her experiences of the war freely and without me even asking about it. This is only one example of this approach.

My last three weeks were the best for my research. People got used to me and I got used to the people. I dared to knock on doors of people I did not know, because my informants said I should speak to them. Strangely enough, people immediately let me in their houses and were very open and helpful in answering my questions. In the last few weeks I noticed my Spanish had improved as well. I was better able to communicate in Spanish and was finally able to understand stories people told me completely. This worked through in my interviews, as the best interviews I had with my informants were in the last two weeks. Though the character and ability of my informants to explain things clearly might have been a factor as well.

In my final few weeks I began experiencing problems not necessarily with my informants, but with my own moral standards. By now, I visited some of my informants daily. Keeping them from their work without giving something really in return. Because people helped me so much without expecting much or anything back, I was starting to feel guilty. To solve this problem, I tried to tell more about myself and give them knowledge I knew or might be able to get. Such as with questions about forensic research by one of my informants. I also promised my informants that I would send an summary of my research in Spanish to them.

APPENDIX II LIFE-HISTORY OF ISAIA

Isaia was born on 14 November 1959 in Uspantán. His father is Kiché Maya. His mother is an Uspanteca. He has four brothers and four sisters and lived in Uspantán up to the age of twelve. During these years his father owned a Tabatéria in which Isaia still works at this moment. It is a family business. There his father built up a lot of connections with the people in Uspantán, something that Isaia does as well at this moment. Daily many people visit him to have a talk with him or to repair their shoes, or both. His father taught him the artisans work of the shoe making, again how he does now with his son as well.

In 1971, when Isaia was 12 or 13 years old, his family went to live in Laj Chimele. The brother of his father fought for the rights of the campesinos and worked for the development of the villages in the area. (According to his son, he also helped people with medicines and get injections). Life at this moment was very tranquilo. They owned their own piece of land where they cultivated milpa, frijol, mais and papas. They also raised a lot of animals such as chickens, horses, pigs and cows.

When he was 13 and 14 years old he directed and informed youngsters about the LEO campesinos. He was also part of funders of CUC. At 15 years old he became a catequista of the catholic church. The community asked him to become one. Up until he was about 19 years old, he helped the community, informed the people about human rights and spread the word of God. He married in 1979 with his first wife and had a child with her very soon after.

The war started in 1979 in Laj Chimele. The army came into the village to ask questions about the people and do investigation about the area. For example about their religion, political choice, age, family and so forth. In 1980 the violence started when in España, a village north of Laj Chimele, 37 students of the university of Guatemala were executed. His uncle was part of the group that was killed in España. The students fought for the rights of the campesinos. Isaia told me that there were not many guerillas in the area. Only civil organizations. During this period many people were killed by the army and many villages were massacred and burned to the ground. There were also a lot of bombings on the villages. The same happened in Laj Chimele. From the beginning of 1981 Isaia fled into the mountains with his family. He got separated from his wife, his child and her family. His daughter died in the mountains when she was 1.5 years old. He still does not know what happened to her, because he does not talk to his ex-wife. They divorced during the war, simply because they do not live together anymore. She lives in a village far away, he said to me. He also does not talk to her anymore because she is evangelical now. During the war, she remarried with another man.

Life in the mountains was very hard. He told me how they did not have any clothes, no water, no food and no medicines. They also had to flee a lot of times because the army hunted them down

or bombed the mountains where the refugees lived. He told me how he hid between the trees or had to run for the bombings of the helicopters. People were exposed to the harsh climate. He told me it was very cold in the mountains and that many people got very sick, including himself. They also could not return to their village, because the army burned and killed everything. All of their houses, land and crops were burned. All of their chickens, horses, cows, pigs and even pets were killed by the ejército. People were killed if they returned to their villages. During his flight he and his family got separated at times. Some of his family members were together, got separated and found others again in other villages. He lived for little times in some of the communities of refugees in the mountains. He has also lived with the CPR, Communities of People/Pueblos in Resistance, for a few months as well. He was captured by the army together with just his father in October 1983. His mother was captured the year before. He told me how there was an ambush on the road they walked on. They were pushed to the floor and their hands were bound on their backs. The army brought them to a village for a while before taking them to Uspantán 6 months afterwards in 1984. He must have been 24 years old at this time. In Uspantán, very close to his store, they were tortured for 60 days. His mother and siblings were also brought here earlier and tortured. They thought he was a comandante of the guerrilleros, but during his torture he could only reply with that they were a civil rights movement.

During these sixty days, he was severely tortured. He explained to me in the first weeks of my stay in Uspantán, how they cut in his eyebrows and put hooks in them. They also tortured him with the help of electricity. They bound his feet and hands and hang him by his neck halfway in the water. They put a spoon in his mouth and would give him electric shocks through the spoon. He was eventually saved by a friend/contact of his father who worked for the army. His father had many contacts in the village because of his work. His whole family received a paper stating that they were not guerrillas. This was in 1984 as well. After they were released, Isaia went to live in Guatemala for a few weeks. His family was very separated during this time. Some lived in villages others in Uspantán. He had to return to Uspantán soon after, because he had to help his father with his work. This was in 1985. Returning was not a problem because of the paper of his father's friend. He did not have to work in the PAC as well, because of this paper. The army also did not trust him on that, because he was still suspected of being a commander.

In 1985 Isaia restarted his work in the civil movements. He started in Maja Huil Kich, which means something like human rights in Quiche. There he fought for human rights and to abolish the forced military service in the PAC. He also helped a lot of PAC-members with their problems and the human rights abuses. He did this for about three day in the week. The other days he helped his father in his tabateria. His next organization he joined was the Defensoria Maya, who fought for their right

of culture but also for their land rights and human rights. In 1987 he got together with his next wife. I think he is not able to be married to her, because he is still sort of married to his ex-wife. With his new esposa he is “unido”, which is almost the same as being married. He already knew his wife before and during the war. They did not just meet. His children were born in 1988 (daughter), 1990 (daughter) and 2003 (son). His life did not change much up until now. He worked a lot in the organizations for victims of the war and also in the tabateria of his father. His father died 15 days after the peace-accords due to decease. His mother is still alive and is 97 years old. At the moment he has a little bit less work in the organizations but still a lot. Before 1992, organizations demanded the truth and the exhumations of their loved ones. These started in 1992, even though the government and many people were against it.

At this time, the first government has been elected which recognizes the genocide. There are a lot of programs of the PNR at this moment, and Isaia hopes they will last for a long time. His organization now not only fights for the rights of the victimas, but also for the improvement of the lives of the pobre indiginas. Because their impoverty is an effect of the war and the discrimination and corruption of the government. At the moment his organization still fights for the acknowledgement of their victimhood and their history of violence. But also for their future identity. They believe that their fight will stop if their children do not know about their sufferings. If they know, they will keep fight for their rights and for the acknowledgement of their victimhood.

APPENDIX III LIFE-HISTORY OF ROSA

When I first met Rosa, I thought she was a very nice women. Rosa buys and sells traje to the women of the pueblos, aldeas and the region. She does this out of her house and also repairs and makes clothes/skirts for women. She lives with her daughter in the colonia, that was built for the widows of the war. The road to the colonia is unpaved and a lot of trees and plants grow around the colonia. Houses are built of concrete blocks and have a chipboard roof. Most have an open space in the center, and some women have animals if they have space for it. The colonia has the feeling of being a small aldea, grown onto Uspantán.

Women daily come to her house to buy new clothes. She and her daughter work together well to sell their ropes. vendors are very enthusiastic about their clothes, and the women are not sure if they should buy them because they are very expansive (and yet so pretty!). They always pet the cloth if they do not know what to do. Eventually they always leave with the prettiest and most expansive cloths. Now I know her better I still thinks she is a very sweet, nice person. But she is also very traumatized. When someone outside walked by or when something happened. She would hide a little and walk away from the door. Then she would curiously look outside to see what was happening or who it was. She really suffers a lot at this time and day as well. During the interview, her face would sometimes look very painful. She also has a lot of sicknesses, which she connects to the trauma of the war.

Rosa is now 51 years old. Before the war she lived in San Pedro de Esperanza. She was 21 years old when the war started, married and had a little baby daughter. Right before the war, her mother died of a decease. The army entered the village in the beginning of the eighties. They killed many men, women, children and elders during their stay. She does not really remember a date or a year of when the war started. To her everything was in the same long period where she did not even know what date it was. The first one to die in her family was her own husband. He was killed when he was walking on the road, the army shot him from a car. In the period of 81-83 (she really does not know the dates), the army threw gasoline over the houses and set them to fire. People, including Rosa and her family, had to flee into the forests because the army used machine guns to shoot people down. Some people even ran with only their underwear on. The army destroyed everything the people left behind in the villages. The people had nothing. No food, no water, no house, no animals and also no clothes. They also could not get anything out of the mountains or from their lands, because the army cut everything that could possible give food. They cut everything: milpa, mais, orange and banana trees. She told me how hungry she was and how sick she felt. How she had little wounds and big

lumps everywhere and that the insects stung her a lot. She had rashes everywhere on her arms, belly and face.

In 1981 (she must have known it was this year because she was pregnant of her husband, and he died in this year) she and her daughter were hit by an grenade. She tells me how she was hiding in the forests and that they threw a grenade right next to her. She makes a “BAMMM”-explosion sound and grabs the left side of her face. She points at a scar right behind her ear. She tells me that she still cannot hear from her left ear and that her face was very wounded in that time. Her daughter she carried with her still has a big burning scar on her face. At the time of the grenade she was eight months pregnant. Because of the wounds or the stress, she gave birth to her son too early. Her son was born in the mountains at one o'clock in the night, but died at around 5 o'clock the same night. He died because she did not have any food and it was very cold. She has a lot of tristeza, because of the death of her husband and her son soon after. During the time she was wounded by grenades she told me later how she was raped as well. She does not remember her rape, just that it happened. Her head was very wounded and she could not see who it was. It could have been a patrol member, army soldier, or guerilla but also another refugee because she was not killed nor taken captive.

During her life in the forest she was very afraid, so many people were killed by the army. When the army was close, she had to close the mouth of her daughter with her hands to silence her. She would shush her child so that she would become calm. At times, like the time she was hit by an grenade, her child or someone else's child would cry or a dog bark and the army would throw an grenade in that direction. The helicopters would also shoot or bomb the area from the air. She told me about how hungry they were. Constantly feeling the hunger and the thirst and feeling very weak.

Her father was taken away by the army in 1983. She told me how the ground was completely colored with his blood. She does not know where his body is, she does know that they tortured him a lot. They cut his ears, tongue, wrists and throat. They also bound his hands very tight. Even at this day she does not know where he is. They might have buried him in a mass grave, thrown him in a river or in the barancas (a small ravine). Her brother was also killed in 1983 but she did not really explain how he was killed. Maybe the same way as her father. She also has another brother who died, but she does not know what happened to him at all. She does not know when, where or even if or how he died.

After her father and brother died, in 1983 her health got worse. Due to the hunger, no sleeping out of fear and because of her bereavement, she got very sick. There were no medicines to help her, so it took a long time to heal. At one time she got so sick that she felt she was going to

die. I do not know how she survived but she did. In the same year the civil patrols killed many people. They would ambush people on the roads and question them. Many people were tortured and afterwards killed. The women were also raped, (sexually) tortured and then killed. She told me about a case of a mother and her daughter who were both pregnant and had eight of their children with them. I do not know if this was in '81 or in '83 but these stories happened during La Violencia. They first tortured the women severely and killed their children. They also cut open their bellies and killed the babies in their wombs. The husband of the mother told her how they also cut open their legs and that there was so much blood. Rosa was also caught by the patrols, but they did not kill her nor (as she said or not said) raped her. They bound her hands tightly behind her back and a rope around her waist and brought her to the Finca of San Francisco. There they questioned her about the guerrillas and about her family. They accused her of being a guerrilla, but she could only reply with anything, because she did not know anything. She was able to meet up with her aunt and lived with her for a few months in 1984. But she decided to leave because she burdened her aunt a lot. The son of her aunt had been killed and she suffered a lot from *tristeza*. She also had a lot of little children to take care of and very little space to live. So Rosa went to live on her own and worked hard to survive. She and her daughter were the only ones left of her direct family. She worked very hard by washing clothes and cleaning people's houses. I do not know how but she got a son with a baron in 1987 and in 1990 her daughter Joana was born.

Rosa is one of the founders of CONAVIGUA with the other widows. She told me how they fought a lot against the government. For the truth about their husbands and for the protection of their children. They did not want them to become orphans and they wanted their children to be able to go to school because they had no money to pay school costs. They also supported many other organizations and manifestations. Such as the exhumations. And she now lives in her house in the colonia with her daughter. She does not have much time to work in the organizations, because she needs to work and pay for their food and house. Her daughter has taken over her task in the organizations. She works in an organization for youngsters (MOJOMAYAS), but also in CONAVIGUA and in CONCODIG.

APPENDIX IV PHOTOGRAPHS OF MY RESEARCH

Villagers at the Ixtahuacan Inhumation, 2011



Mother reclaiming the bodies of her two sons at the inhumation Ixtahuacan, 2011



Digging site for clandestine grave, exhumation El Membrillal II, Chiche, 2011



Victim-survivors looking at photographs of the war at opening of exposition, Uspantán

