

What's in the past is in the past?

Communication about Guatemala's civil war with the next generation



Romy Nieuwenhuizen

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Romy Nieuwenhuizen

romynieuwenhuizen@live.nl

3360334

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A word of gratitude

On Thursday morning of my first week in Uspantán I walked for fifteen minutes up a hill towards a small school. I could hear children's voices from far which was a good sign; the school was closed the day before, according to the distant noises, it was open today! I noticed that I started walking slower and slower as I approached the school. It was the first time for to approach possible informants, and I was terribly nervous! When I stood in front of the school I took a deep breath and entered a classroom of which the door was open. The teacher that was in there looked up at me and I could see the surprise in his eyes. I asked him whether I could speak to the director of the school and he immediately stood up and walked me to the director's office. The director saw me coming and stepped out of his office which was as small as a broom closet. Before I could say anything or introduce myself he gave me a big warm hug. 'Welcome at my little school!' he said happily!

This is only one example of the kindness of the people I met during my investigation. Everywhere I went people wanted to help me. They let me observe wherever I wanted, I was allowed to talk to whomever I wanted and allowed to ask whatever I wanted. The teachers of the different schools I went to guided me through classrooms and pointed me in the right directions. Even though I was nervous before every single conversation I had, the people I talked to proved that to be unnecessary. I couldn't have done this investigation without them!

I would like to especially thank Sonia and David, two of the kindest people I have ever met. They let me into their house, helped me with my Spanish and with my investigation. I have learned a lot from them, not the least important of which was drinking tequila.

I would also especially like to thank the people from La Escuelita. I could not have imagined a better start of my investigation. I will never forget the people and the children there, they have provided me with some of the most valuable experiences of my life!

Introduction

"It is a shame that there remains no evidence to give knowledge to the youth and the children."

"Because many have forgotten what happened in these years."

These are several comments given on a photo exposition that was held in Uspantán, Guatemala, 2011. The exposition consisted out of photographs that were taken during the civil war in Guatemala, and one of the main goals of the exposition was to increase awareness about the war amongst the youth. There are innumerable people in Guatemala that suffered terribly during the conflict that lasted until 1996. Many of them are still suffering now, and one of the reasons for that is that they feel like they don't get acknowledgement for what happened to them. There is a next generation growing up, seemingly ignorant of Guatemala's violent past. This is also a worry for many people, because they fear that history will be repeated if children don't know the full story about the war; for example they are afraid that children when they grow up will vote for parties with people that were perpetrators during the war. For some people it is very important that the next generation is aware of the civil war.

On the other hand, awareness can also be transformed into grievances. The issue of raising and educating children becomes very important in case of a post-conflict situation. These children have not experienced the violence, but their parents, grandparents and their teachers have. Whether deliberately or not, the traumatic experiences of the generation that witnessed the war can have an effect on the identities of the next generation. Those children could for example grow up with feelings of hatred and biases, or with fear, or maybe with a strong sense of reconciliation. Both fear and hatred can be very dangerous; victims have endured experiences that grieve them. Those grievances can be a cause for future conflict.

Reconciliation is necessary to sustain social cohesion. It is especially difficult to reach reconciliation when conflict has escalated into excessive violence and when people endured intensive trauma. In the immediate aftermath of violence, reconciliation seems to be a long way gone, but in order to create a peaceful society efforts towards reconciliation have to be made; trust between people has to be restored (Ramsbotham et. al., 2005).

Reconciliation is also very important for children. Children can become secondary victims of war because their role models are directly traumatized; *'They are the victim's victims'* (Daly and Sarkin, 2007; 66). Besides the psychological and health care which adults get to deal with trauma, there are programs aimed specifically at children. These programs use art or music or games to get children to deal with their trauma, which is necessary for reconciliation (Daly and Sankin, 2007, www.warchild.nl).

A way to promote reconciliation amongst children is through education (Smith, 2005). It is a possibility that instead of being raised with feeling of hate, fear or victimization, children in a postwar area are raised with a strong sense of reconciliation.

These several issues that are concerned with the raising of children in a post war society have led me to the following central research question;

1. How do the parents and the teachers of the next generation influence the process of children learning and feeling about the civil war and the peace process?

As mentioned before, the concept of reconciliation is very important in this question. Besides that there are many possibilities that can occur in a post conflict situation. Communities can become separated, which creates biases between groups. Fear can influence parents and teachers towards not speaking about the past at all. It is also possible that in the light of the current peace, the paradigm of people shifts towards a focus on current problems. All of these concepts will be discussed in the following chapters.

I used several methods to find out how the situation is in Uspantán, a small city in Guatemala that suffered a lot during the civil war. I was therefor a period of 8 weeks; from the 26th of February 2011, until the 22nd of April 2011. In that time I interviewed different target groups. The starting point of my investigation was a small school with young children. I had in depth interviews with the teachers there, and a lot of informal chats with the children. I also got a lot of information from observing the lessons. I did the same at a different school, with somewhat older children. Especially the teachers were able to give me a lot of information. Through the children I got in touch with some of their parents. Not all parents were willing to be interviewed, but some were. I had long depth interviews with several parents, of both young and old children. The last group I studied were students between 17 and 24 years old, that followed education which prepared them to become teachers. I had many interviews with these students, and also with their teachers.

This variation of different people I interviewed allowed me to gain a complete picture of the process of children learning about the war. I saw what children know when they are very young, and when they are older. I now know what a lesson about the civil war looks like and why. I also know how students that want become teachers will treat the topic in their future lessons. This information completes the cycle of a process of gaining knowledge, and passing this knowledge on to a next generation.

The first and next chapter describes the Guatemalan civil war and the post conflict situation in Guatemala with the help of some general concepts concerning conflict and post conflict. Many

people in Guatemala don't know the full story of the war, because it is a very complicated one. After having read chapter 1 the story will become clearer. Chapter 2 is introduced with an example of a typical school day in Guatemala. In this chapter I will first explain my findings in the literature and then compare these to my actual findings in the field. Children learn very little about the conflict, but why? Chapter 3 starts with some examples of post conflict situations in other countries and the importance of parents in postwar societies. After that the chapter contains a typology of different sorts of parents to clarify the ways of communication about the war, and the effect this has on children. In chapter 4 the feelings of the children themselves will be discussed, this chapter is mostly based on my interviews with the students from the Immbi school.

1. Conflict and education in Guatemala

Since the end of the cold war, there has been a decline in violent conflict overall. Even more dramatic than the decline in number of conflicts is the decrease in the number of people killed in wars. The decline in victims can be ascribed to the shift in types of conflict; there are almost no interstate conflicts nowadays. Most conflicts are intrastate, and low-intensity. They occur most often in poor, developing countries; countries where neither the government nor rebel groups can afford high tech weapons or weapons of mass destruction which explains the drop in battle-related deaths.

Another characteristic of the many intrastate wars is that they are asymmetric; between a majority and a minority, or between government and rebels (Human security report, 2006; Ramsbotham et. al., 2005). According to Ramsbotham et. al. (2005; 72), by the end of the twentieth century eighty to ninety percent of the victims of conflict were civilians, the majority of them women and children. The Human security report (2006; 2) disagrees with this and states that there is no reliable proof for this statement. However, it is a fact that the targeting of civilians in conflict happens more often these days than it did in World War I and II, and (not taking in to account the victims of genocide) the amount of battle-related deaths of civilians nowadays is much higher than it was back then (Human security report, 2006; Hultman & Eck, 2007); Ramsbotham et. al., 2005). Hultman and Eck (2007) use the term 'one-sided violence' to describe 'fatalities that are caused by the intentional and direct use of violence against civilians'. This one-sided violence is used both by the government and by rebel groups.

1.1 Guatemala

During the civil conflict in Guatemala, many civilians were targeted. In 1954, Carlos Castillo Armas became the president of Guatemala through a coup d'état sponsored by the CIA in America. This is the beginning of a military regime in Guatemala. There were rebel groups that fought this regime. The rebels were located in the East, especially in urban areas. They were unsuccessful, and in 1970 the Guatemalan government launched an operation to catch and fight these rebels. In this operation there were already many civilian casualties. In 1975 there came a new rebel movement that tried to gain support from the Indians, they visited Mayan villages and tried to convince the Maya's to support them. In some cases they forced the Maya's to listen to them. The armed forces of the Guatemalan government saw this as support to the guerrilla's and they targeted the Mayan villages (Bizarro Upján, 2001).

The government troops burned down entire villages, and massacred everybody, including women and children (Gilbert, 2002). 83% Of the identified victims of the war were Mayan. The

military violence was constituted as a genocide (CEH report in Bizarro Upján, 2001 en Oglesby in Cole, 2007). However, the guerrilla's weren't innocent either, they took over villages and used violence as well (Stoll, 1993).

The Maya's seemed to be in 'between two armies' (Stoll, 1993). On the one side there were the rebels that took over their villages (sometimes using violence) and tried to gain their support. On the other side there was the government with its military regime that targeted them, especially when they had had contact with the rebels. The situation however is more complicated than that. There were quite a few rebels that came from Indian descent, and there were many Indians that supported the rebels, mainly because the government had been discriminating them for years. There were also Mayas that supported the army, for example by organizing or participating in civil patrols. This support however was often motivated by fear of the army (Stoll, 1993; 94). Many people were forced to participate in the civil patrols. Supporting the army became a way (in some cases the only way) to survive. That meant that people that were supposed to be victims were forced to act as perpetrators and participate in the violence. *'As an officer told the first patrollers in Nebaj, "Now we're all going to get our hands dirty" ' (Stoll, 1993; 115).*

From 1986 on, the rebels became open to negotiations with the government, realizing that people were sick of war and that violence wasn't going to get them anywhere (Jonas, 2000). The president of Guatemala at that time (Cerezo) refused to meet with them (Delli Sante, 1996) but finally, in 1991 became open for dialogue (Jonas, 2000). The international community pressured Guatemala, and the United Nations played a key role in the signing of the peace accords, which finally happened on the 28th of December 1996 (Delli Sante, 1996). The peace accords did not only end the war officially, but most importantly agreements were made to improve living conditions in Guatemala. Of these agreements the most important are;

- Global agreement on human rights.
- Agreement on the resettlement of former refugees.
- Agreement on the establishment of a truth commission (CEH).
- Agreement on the identity and rights of indigenous people.
- Agreement on socio-economical and agricultural aspects.
- Agreement on the strengthening of civil power in a democratic society.

(Morales et. al., 2004).

1.2 Post conflict

Besides the people that become a victim of direct violence in conflict, there are also always many victims because of indirect causes. Because of civil war diseases occur more often, there is famine, displacement, the health and other services often break down, and the economic development of a

country stagnates, which can lead to less production and falling exports. *'The indirect deaths usually outweigh the direct effects of war'* (Ramsbotham et. al., 2005; 72). These 'side effects' of conflict make it very hard for the country to get back on the right track once there is peace. The country has to cope with material destruction and a traumatized society which ensure a difficult post-conflict situation. On the macro-level society has to deal with lost opportunities in terms of human and economic development and international relations. On the micro-level, conflict has a huge impact on lives and households; people have to deal with the loss or disappearance of relatives, and with the memory of the violence they themselves have experienced. This affects their daily lives (Brück et. al., 2009). In some cases people are too traumatized to talk about what they have endured. In other cases they are still afraid of repercussions if they express themselves negatively about their enemies. Even though the war is over, the fear remains for many people (Robben, 2007).

In Guatemala there were many people that had to leave their land. When they got back after the war they didn't have anything left. There was, and still is, a lot of poverty. There is also a lot of criminality, especially in the bigger cities. Because of the war 200.000 children became orphans. Some of these children ended up on the streets, others in orphanages. When children are 18, they have to leave the orphanages. They have to stay alive but don't have any skills and don't get any opportunities. A lot of them end up in the criminal circuit. Many people in Guatemala feel as though the peace accords have not been fulfilled yet, not when there is still so much crime. The peace accords brought many improvements, but there is still a lot of work left to be done. When you ask Guatemalans what has changed since the signing of the peace accords, many will reply that too much has remained the same. In the postwar period there still was no real freedom of opinion (people were brutally killed when expressing the 'wrong' opinions). Even when the war 'ended' many people kept fleeing across the border, looking for a safe place to live which they weren't able to find within the borders of Guatemala (Gilbert, 2002). Human rights continued to be violated after 1996 (Molina Mejia, 2003). I witnessed some of these problems in the city Uspantán, located in the department of Quiché. This entire area suffered heavily during the war, and the people that live in Uspantán literally and figuratively still bear the scars off their pasts.

1.3 Education in Guatemala

The peace accords also brought a change to the education system in Guatemala: Education was (and still is) divided into different parts. Children first go to *'pre-primaria'*, most are about 5 or 6 years old when they go there. After this children go to *'primaria'* (primary school). Primary school consists out of six grades. The school I visited, which I will from now on refer to as 'La Escuelita', is an indigenous school with children that mostly come from poor families. At home these children speak K'iche', and the first thing they start to learn in the first grade of primary school is Spanish. The ages of the

children in the different classes vary; children go to a higher class based on their educational level. There are many children that have to repeat several classes. This is mostly due to their many absences, about which I will explain more in chapter 2. An example: In 'sexto grado' (sixth grade), where I spent most of my time at La Escuelita, the youngest in the class was 10 years old, while the oldest was 14 years old.

La Escuelita is a public school. There are also private primaria schools in Guatemala. In the private schools the education is often better. The most important reason for this is that there are less absences there, and there are less lessons cancelled. However, to send children to a private school costs a lot more than a public school.

After primary school most children (not all) go to 'basico' education (secondary school). The average age of children going there is 12, however, again, there is a lot of age difference in the classes. Secondary school consists of six years. I studied the 'Instituto Basico' in Uspantán. The children there get 7 lessons of 35 minutes each day. They get taught mathematics, Spanish, social sciences, music, theatre, dance, physical education, English and K'iche'.

In Uspantán there are a lot of children that quit school after secondary school (or sometimes even after primary school) to start working, in most cases for their parents. However, there are more and more children that keep on studying. There are some that go to the universities in the bigger cities, and there are many that follow education which teaches them a specific profession. In Uspantán there is a school which educates students to become teachers; the 'Immbi' school. I have done a part of my research at this school as well.

1.4 Learning about the war

The Guatemalan government (<http://www.mineduc.gob.gt/portal/index.asp>) has made curricula's for the schools, however, these are very general. A school like la escuelita cannot complete its curricula because the teachers have to spend much more time on teaching Spanish than is in the curricula. A teacher at the Immbi school told me; *"The government wants teachers to use many methods which they copied from other countries, however, these don't always work in Guatemala"*. Besides writing curricula's and developing some schoolbooks the Guatemalan government pays little attention to its schools; Mario, a social science teacher at the instituto basico says: *'The government doesn't care about the schools. They don't get involved in any way, and they especially don't pay any attention to the topic of the war, because they don't want to be associated with that.'* Going to school is obligated for Guatemalan children, however there are no authorized people to check this really happens; parents can keep their children at home as often as they want without there being any consequences.

Children get their knowledge about the civil war in Guatemala in phases, and these phases

can be linked to their education. In the final grade of primary school most children hear about the conflict for the first time. Most children are generally around the age of twelve by then, although this differs. They don't learn a lot about it, because the topic is very difficult for them. They learn more about the war in the third grade of secondary school. These children are about 15 and 16 years old. The information they get there is about the same as they got in their primary schools, however by then the children are older and they understand what they learn more.

After secondary school most children don't learn a lot more about the war. Some children learn more from their parents when they get older. Some children that go to universities in big cities find out more about the war, but only when they take classes concerning the war or investigate about the war through books and internet. Most children (by then they are actually not children anymore) go to work after secondary school or follow education that prepares them for a specific subject, such as to become a teacher. I talked with a lot of students that want to become teachers, and they don't learn any more about the war at the Immbi school than they did in secondary school.

The next chapter contains a more detailed description of what exactly children learn at the different school levels. There are several factors that influence what the children learn about the war at school and how much, for example school absences. I will elaborate on these factors and also explain the way of teaching in the different school and the effect this has on the knowledge of the children. School is an important element in the process of children learning about the war, in most cases school initiates this process. Chapter 2 will clarify and explain this.

2. A useful lesson? Education about the war

It is 7.30 and the children of the third and fourth grade enter their classroom. The classroom looks old and a bit shabby, with cracks in the walls and a roof that is made out of golf plates. Despite that, it is adjusted to look welcoming; the walls are painted light blue and are decorated with drawings and informative pictures. The students sit down at their tables, which are old but look firm. The teacher, a large man in his forty's, asks the children to hand in their homework which they were supposed to have made over the weekend. Not everyone is able to hand something in, but the teacher doesn't get angry with them.

The children talk Spanish to each other, but it is mixed with some K'iche'. All the girls wear *trajes*, varying from beautiful ones with bright colours and glitters, to *trajes* that are not adorned with colours or glitters, but with holes. Some boys too wear shabby clothes with holes in them. Many children have dirt on their faces, which might be due to the long walk they have to make through the mountains each morning to get to school, according to the teacher.

The teacher tells the children to get a book from the large pile of schoolbooks that rests against one of the walls, due to the lack of bookshelves. Most children have to share a book because there aren't enough. They have to read a story that is about two pages long. The children start reading, but the classroom is full of soft noises. Instead of looking at their books most children are looking at me very curiously. The noises get louder and louder as the children forget about the story and start chatting to each other. After about ten minutes the teacher tells them to continue reading and the children do so, for about five minutes. Then the teacher's phone rings. He answers and takes his time to chat with whoever is on the other side. After he hangs up he tells the children to copy the story into their notebooks. While the children start doing that the teacher sits down next to me. He starts chatting with me and doesn't seem to notice that the children get distracted. A few of them are walking around, and two girls throw confetti on each other's heads. 'Back to work!' the teacher shouts, and the children return to their notebooks.

About ten minutes later, which the teacher spent informing me about the school, he leaves the classroom. Immediately the children start talking loudly. A lot of them come up to me, they want to see what I have been writing down. I ask them some questions, but they mostly just keep looking at me and giggling with each other. It takes about twenty minutes before the teacher gets back and the children go back to

work. Still, most children are not really working, but looking around and making eye contact with each other and with me. The teacher doesn't seem to notice and continues telling me his story, until his phone rings, again.

At 10.00 the bell for the break rings, and the children get up to go outside. Most of them have not finished copying the less than two pages long story into their notebooks.

This arguably typical morning in La Escuelita illustrates how easily the children of the third and fourth grade get distracted during their lessons. Their teacher is not that strict, and the children hardly get any work done. The children's educational level is not high, due to the frequent absence of most children, and also due to the fact that Spanish is not their first language and they have to spent a lot of school time learning it. Lessons like this don't seem to improve their situation much. This is one of the causes for the lack of knowledge about the civil war. There is not much time to teach children about it, because the first objective in school is to teach the children sufficient Spanish. Besides that, the educational level of the children is that low that they wouldn't understand a difficult subject such as the civil war. They also would probably get distracted quickly if the teacher would try to explain it to them.

The school doesn't have access to advanced materials, and some of the children come from very poor families, which is probably why they are not going to school as often as they should be; they have to help out at home, and some parents do not understand the importance of education.

2.1 The CEH and a culture of peace

Education is a big part of the raising of children. Teachers transmit moral values to children by complimenting them when they do good, and punishing them when they do wrong. They also transmit ideas, simply through the lessons they give. History lessons can for example be really important (Cole, 2007). They effect social memory, and also the identities of children.

Efforts are and have been made in Guatemala to reveal the truth about the civil war, most important of all by Guatemala's Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH), which came to exist as an agreement of the peace accords. Both the government as the URNG (the rebels) preferred the CEH's report to stay superficial and the commission was given a timeframe of only six months to draw it up. Because of this and other circumstances (Oglesby in Cole, 2007) expectations of the report were very low, and so it was very shocking when the report constituted the military violence as a genocide; genocide was not part of the amnesty agreement that had been made. The CEH report was politicized and polarizing (Isaacs, 2010).

The Guatemalan peace accords were supposed to improve education by raising government

spending on education and mandate curricular reform to treat issues of ethnic diversity and multiculturalism. An attempt was made for a textbook and curriculum based on the CEH's report, but a sector of congress reacted negatively and so this didn't happen. The current history textbooks especially discuss themes such as human rights, children's rights, peace accords, culture of peace (more in a social studies kind of way), but the actual happenings are only discussed shortly, and only brief references are made to the CEH (Oglesby, 2007). In some cases teachers used their agency to teach children about the war in creative ways; by performing plays or visiting exhumations for example. They have the capability to act as agents and make their own choices (Giddens, 1984, cited in Long, 1990). Many children were very interested in the subject of the war because they knew so little about it (Oglesby, 2007). But in most cases school curricula focuses only on the peace process and on reconciliation instead of on what actually happened. This could be considered a good thing, however *'acknowledgement is crucial for reconciliation'* (Biruski and Ajdukovic, 2008; 340).

There is now a 'culture of peace' in Guatemala, by which we mean that society is focused on peace instead of on the violent past. A 'culture of violence' is portrayed as the cause of the war. Because of this the real causes and motivations remain hidden. People can talk about the war now, but they don't talk about the conditions that caused the war. Everything is discussed very broad, but details and specifics are left out and ignored; the discussion is very limited. The people are divided into two groups, victims and perpetrators, and people modify their memories in order to belong to one of the two groups. Categories more fluid than 'victim' are necessary, for example for the civilians that took part in the civil patrols (Oglesby, 2007). It is positive that with the 'culture of peace' clear efforts towards reconciliation are made, but how can real reconciliation be achieved if there is no possibility for people to come to terms with their past?

2.2 La Escuelita

The lessons about the war in primary school are pretty shallow. The children get a general image of the war, they learn about what happened, where it happened and they get a lot of facts and figures like for example the number of people that got killed. They also learn a lot about the peace process. In the school book the teachers use for lessons about the conflict, the theme is discussed in two pages, of which one page discusses the peace agreements. What the children don't seem to learn is the long history that preceded the war, and the relations between the government, the indigenous people, and the guerrilla. The difficult matters, in which some people might end up looking bad, and the matters which are complicated to understand aren't treated in the lessons. Oglesby (2007) had already written about this, however according to her one of the main reasons for this general teaching about the war was fear of the government; teachers could be afraid of punishment if they wouldn't follow government instructions. My findings do not confirm this. The government doesn't

show any sign of interest into the schools. Teachers have changed other parts of the curricula, without any fear of the government even noticing. Erick, a teacher of primary school completely abandoned his curricula; the children he teaches have no time for things like social sciences (which is in the official curricula) because they have to learn proper Spanish first. The government also doesn't notice anything about the high level of absences in the school.

The most probable cause for the shallow treatment of the subject to me seems to be the educational level at the school. All the children are indigenous, and at home they speak K'iche'. When they enter school, they still have to learn Spanish. Almost all the school time is used for this, and there is not much time left for other subjects like social sciences (history and geography). Because of this children know very little about the world; this one time, the teacher of sixth grade showed his students a large map of Guatemala. After explaining the kids that the map showed them their own country, they came up to me and asked me to point out Holland for them at that same map. As one can tell by this example, the children's general knowledge is very shallow. This is a reason why the teachers keep the subject of the war very simple, because the children simply wouldn't understand the complicated elements of the war. I have seen in the classes that when children don't understand something, they lose their interest really quickly. If a teacher would teach the children of La Escuelita all sorts of complicated elements of the civil conflict, the children would stop paying attention which means that they wouldn't learn anything anyway.

Another reason for the low educational level in the school are the many absences. A lot of children only come to school every now and then. Some have to stay at home and work, or some live very far away from the school and therefore only go occasionally. Most parents don't find education that important, because most children are going to work at home, with their parents, later on anyway. Erick once told me; *'On parent asked to keep her kid at home for a week. So the girl missed a week of school. When she came back afterwards she had forgotten everything.'* Because of the high absence rate it is very difficult for teachers to teach. When children have been gone for a while, they are behind compared to the rest of the class. In order to get them at the same level as the rest of the class, the teacher would have to give that student more attention and the other students less. If the teacher would just continue the lessons like he/she planned, the children that would already be behind wouldn't understand everything and they would lose their attention. They would start doing other things and that would distract the other students. As one can see from this information teaching at La Escuelita is very difficult and chaotic.

Besides the above named reasons for the low educational level, which is a reason for the shallow treatment of the war, the motivation of the teacher also adds to the level of the children. Most teachers leave the classrooms frequently and it is unclear for what reason. They leave, and the children stop doing their assignments and start chatting and messing around. Once, the teachers of

third and fourth and of sixth and fifth grade left the school at 9.30 to play soccer with their friends. The children had the rest of the morning off. The children don't get much done during a day of school, and that brings their educational level down even further. Oglesby (2007) wrote about passionate teachers that taught children about the war in very creative ways. I have noticed nothing like that in Uspantán. Teachers here do what they have to do, and nothing more. They have the capability (Giddens 1984, cited in Long 1990) to teach more, to pay more attention to certain subjects, but it seems as though they don't want to put the effort in to it. For example, they mostly don't plan their lessons at home but just create them while they are at La Escuelita, during the lessons. However, I cannot blame them; the teachers don't earn a lot of money, and almost all work at two schools, which means that they work around ten hours a day. These are no conditions to motivate someone to go an extra way to teach better.

In the private primary school in Uspantán the war is not treated at all. It is not a part of the program in the school. They don't find the topic that important, especially because the children will learn about it again at the Instituto Basico; all the children at the private school are going to the secondary school afterwards. Dari, the teacher of the sixth grade of the private primary school said to me: *'We don't teach about the war. It is not in this school's program, and it is a very difficult subject. Children will learn about the war later'*.

2.3 Higher education

In the secondary school the teachers teach about the war in the same way the teachers at La Escuelita do. They teach a very general image of the war, mostly consisting out of facts and figures. They focus on what happened, but not on whose fault that was. The schoolbook they use supports this. Subjects are covered in only two pages. The book uses the Cold war as a trigger to discuss the Guatemalan war. After stating that during the Cold war the United States brought military governments to many Latin American countries (including Guatemala) the book describes the war as following:

'During the sixties guerrilla groups came to exist in Guatemala, like the organization Revolutionary Organization of Armed People (ORPA) and the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP). At the beginning of the eighties, the guerrilla organizations formed the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit (URNG).

From the sixties to the nineties in Guatemala:

Situations: -Political violence
 -Military governments
 -Peace agreements

Social movements: -Workers
 -Peasants
 -Students

Foreign interferences: -Military training
 -Help with weapons and technology
 -Sending of military advice
 -Financial and logistical help

The collected information permits us to draw conclusions like

- The cold war directly affected the social and political situation in the country between the fifties and the nineties.
- The governments of the United States and the USSR indirectly helped in parts of the conflict.
- The Guatemalan guerrilla movements didn't operate just as a result of the cold war, there already existed internal causes that pushed them to their birth and consolidation.'

(Morales et. al., 2004).

This is all that the book says about the war (the peace agreements are discussed in a different chapter). It names a lot of difficult concepts without explaining them. Since the amount of time in the lessons is very limited, teachers don't have time to explain them elaborately either. This leaves the children with an image of a lot of difficult elements, but without the complete story. Without knowledge about the interactions between those elements.

Children are left with many questions . At this age (15-16 years old) children start to ask more questions about the conflict. I asked the teachers which questions they got most often. Many children ask about the causes of the war; apparently explaining the causes of the war is not part of the general lesson about the war, otherwise the children wouldn't have to ask about it. The causes of the civil conflict are of course very diverse and complicated, so therefore I can understand that teachers rather avoid to explain this. When they get a question about it though, they answer it. So I asked the teachershow exactly they answered such a question. Marco, director of la escuelita told me: *'People with different ideologies than the government'*. Erick, teacher of third and fourth grade at the primary school answered a little more elaborate, but still very general:

'I tell them that the war had many causes; Capitalism, land reformations, discrimination, marginalization. The war came from two sides, both from the government and from the guerrilla. Some parents of children here were part of the civil patrols, other aided the guerrilla.'

Mario, who teaches children at the Instituto Basico, teaches children that are older and can understand more. Still, his answer as well is very general: *'A division within the army, and between the people.'* These answers are not wrong, but not very elaborate either. Another example of an answer: *;'people that didn't agree with the government'*. Mostly the teachers say nothing about what they didn't agree about, and when they do, it is very general like *'poverty'* and *'discrimination'*. They don't explain any more than that. I think it is interesting that all these answers show a very neutral point of view; no specific group or actor is blamed. A reason for this is that the teachers do not want to make things too complicated for the children.

Another reason for this could be lack of time. A lesson at secondary school takes only 35 minutes. The actual lesson takes even less time, because it takes a long time before the class gets started. At the beginning of a lesson children ask the teacher questions, and they say prayer together. This mostly results in having about 25 minutes left for the actual lesson. This is very little to go into a subject very deeply and thoroughly. Mario, a social science teacher, told me that he spends about 4 lessons on the war. This is more compared to other themes in social science classes, which mostly take 2 or 3 lessons. However it is still very little time; this forces the teachers to keep the subject general.

The teachers at the Instituto Basico are not being checked by anyone; for example by the government or by the director of the school. They have the capability to use their agency and spend more time on the Guatemalan civil war. They don't however. They see the civil conflict in Guatemala as just another part of world history. It has happened, and it is just as important as any other theme in social sciences. Mario told me; *'It happened a long time ago, for them (the children) it is very far away. It's a part of history and nothing more.'* Many people have a *'what's in the past, is in the past'* mentality, and children copy this mentality when they grow older. Current day problems are much more on the minds of people than the war. In almost all interviews I had people started talking about the poverty, violence and criminality of nowadays, without me asking about it. People live in the present, and not in the past. Especially the children, most of them said things to me like; *'I wasn't alive during the war'*, indicating that they have nothing to do with it. According to the teacher at the Instituto Basico, the children show just as much interest in the civil war of Guatemala as in the second world war or the Cuban revolution.

Both the teachers of primary and secondary school told me that they use their own experiences and the experiences of others in their lessons about the war. However, they don't tell about experiences in much detail; they mostly stick to *'Everyone suffered a lot'*, *'it was a very difficult time'*. They see that as talking about experiences.

The methods which the teachers at la escuelita and at the instituto basico use are in some ways the same; in both schools they talk about 'experiences', in both schools they use schoolbooks

and photographs. The way of teaching in the schools is very different though. At la escuelita teaching exists mostly out of writing things down on the whiteboard, and making the children copy that. At the instituto basico the teachers teach very interactively; they do quizzes, ask the children questions and really make the children think about what they learn. This makes the children at the instituto basico remember what they are taught better than the children at la escuelita. Mario ended his classes with a quiz; The children have to pass around an object while he turns around and claps his hands. When he stops clapping, the kid that is holding the object has to answer a question about the theme of the lesson. The children seemed to love this; they were all participating and laughing. And, this is especially important, every single one of the children answered their question correct. This proves to me that the interactive way of teaching is a very good way.

However, the children at the instituto basico are also older, and on a higher intellectual level than the children at la escuelita, which also adds to them remembering their classes better.

At the Immbi school the students get a class about history of education. After the signing of the peace accords the educational system in Guatemala was changed, and therefore the subject of the war is treated in that class as well. Again, the students get taught a very general image about the war, however, because they learn about the war again, and at a later age, they do remember what they are taught even better than they did at the instituto basico.

2.4 Peace education

Every society wants peace, and a good way to promote peace is through the education system (Bar-Tal 2001). Peace education is focussed on different elements in different countries. For example; in Australia peace education is focussed on challenging ethnocentrism, cultural chauvinism and violence (Burns 1985, cited in Bar-Tal 2001). In Japan, peace education treats nuclear disarmament, militarism and responsibility for past violence (Murakami 1992, cited in Bar-Tal 2001). In Guatemala the government's ministry of education has drawn up certain rules to promote peace through education (<http://www.mineduc.gob.gt/portal/index.asp>). These include (amongst others) a 'Day of non-violence', intergenerational talks between children and their parents and grandparents and the making of drawings to express thoughts (for the full agreement on peace education, see appendix). The Guatemalan children also get taught about the peace accords. They learn that after negotiations between the government and the guerrilla, peace accords were signed. At primary school the children do not learn specific details about this. At the secondary school however, they learn about the exact changes the peace accords were supposed to bring, of which the most important were (according to the schoolbooks) equal rights for indigenous people and changes in agriculture. In fact, children learn more about the peace (accords) than about the actual conflict. As

is illustrated with an extract from the schoolbook in chapter 2.3, the book discusses the war very, very shortly, however it does give a lot of details. More than I had imagined after talking to the children. I think though, that this is just a bit too difficult for most children to understand. The words that are used are difficult and since everything is named only shortly, there is not much room for explanations. This complicated way of discussing the theme will get children to lose their attention and interest in the theme. The book has a very neutral vision of the war, it doesn't blame anyone. It names military governments as a cause, but also the social problems in Guatemala, and the cold war. It doesn't name an enemy. This is consistent with the information I got from my interviews. What strikes me is that there is no mention of the extreme violence that was used. In this case, teachers act independently. They do speak of the violence, they don't avoid it. However, they also don't really name any reasons for the violence; for example they don't tell that the government killed people that aided the guerrilla's. By not doing this they avoid the creation of an enemy.

The teachers I spoke to know about the REMHI report, and they say that they use the information of the report in their lessons. However, I don't think that they mention the report in their classes, because none of the children or students knew anything about it. The name didn't ring a bell. The CEH report is a lot less known. The teachers at the Immbi school knew about it, the other teachers knew that it was a part of the peace accords, but they didn't know what was in it. The CEH report is mentioned in the schoolbook of the instituto basico as its creation being part of the agreements in the peace accords. However the information from the CEH report is not specifically used; the book for example never mentions the word genocide, even though the CEH report constituted the violence in Guatemala as a genocide.

The children don't learn anything about the post conflict situation. They know that there is still a lot of violence but don't link this to the war in any way. When I asked students about it, most said that the peace accords stopped the war, indicating that first there was war, and after that no more. They see this in a very simple way. However, almost everyone I spoke to said that the peace accords weren't completely fulfilled yet, there is still a lot of work to be done. They know that the situation in Guatemala isn't good, but they don't see this as a post-conflict situation.

Lessons about the civil conflict in Guatemala are very shallow, short, and they avoid the difficult elements such as who was responsible, and who did what and why. Oglesby (2007) already wrote that in the Guatemalan education about the war more attention is paid to the peace than to the actual war. Peace is promoted, through schoolbooks that promote multiculturalism, through inter-ethnic schools and through the avoidance of blaming someone and creating an enemy. Oglesby (2007) was right when she described a culture of peace in Guatemala; the details of Guatemala's violent past become forgotten while the people focus on the current situation. The focus in

Guatemalan schools when teaching about the war is almost entirely on peace. A next generation is growing up without adequate knowledge about the causes of the war. This worries many people; they are afraid for a repetition of past errors in the future.

There are many parents that are concerned with this. Besides school parents are a very important factor in the process of children gaining knowledge about the civil war. Parents determine the level of interest of their children in the topic of the conflict. There are different ways in which parents deal with the war in their houses, with their children. There are also different types of parents, with different experiences, which influence the way that they deal with the war. The next chapter will start with some theory about intergeneration transmission. After that different postwar situations in different countries are discussed with the help of examples. I have then compared these examples with the situation in Uspantán.

3. Within closed doors: Communication about the war with parents

3.1 Transmission

Intergenerational transmission is 'meant' (often not deliberately intended) to maintain knowledge, tradition, language and other cultural aspects throughout generations. With the transmission of culture also comes the transmission of social memory. This social memory surfaces in two ways; (1) as a subject of public debate (deliberate transmission of social memory), and (2) through sentiments and relations in life, as something that is naturally accepted within society (not deliberately transmitted social memory) (Mannheim, 1970 citation in de Bolt, 2000). Social memory often is selectively transmitted; experiences in former times are adjusted to new situations; certain aspects are emphasized, others are 'forgotten'.

The issue of raising children becomes very important in case of a post-conflict situation. When a country is under (social) reconstruction, recovering from violence, the question is how to deal with the past. Memories of death, suffering and destruction are widespread and still affecting the daily lives of people. There is also the next generation; one that hasn't experienced the violence, but knows about it never the less. As said above, parents transmit their own opinions, values, attitudes and ideas on to their children. In a postwar society, the parents have to cope with trauma, feelings of hatred, fear and victimization. These feelings can, whether deliberately or not, be transmitted to the next generation; their children. Another aspect of a post-conflict situation is reconciliation, a phenomenon important to pass on to children in order for them to live in a peaceful society.

In Kulen Vakof, a small town in north-western Bosnia, a culture of silence emerged amongst the Muslim population that experienced but survived the mass killings in that town (Bergholz, 2010). Nearly everyone knew what had happened, and everyone remembered it because the events were too traumatic to be forgotten. However, the inhabitants of Kulen Vakof chose not to speak about it. There were several reasons for this (Bergholz, 2010), but the reason I would like to focus on here is fear. People suffered a tremendous trauma, and there was a widespread sense of fear that the massacres one day might be repeated. Survivors didn't feel comfortable talking about what had happened, and many resolved to never speak about it. In some cases people superstitiously believed that talking about the massacres would somehow lead to repetition of them (Bergholz, 2010). They thought that by remaining silent they were protecting their children. Others deliberately didn't speak about the massacres with their children because they did not want to pass on their trauma to them, they didn't want to burden them with such terrible stories, and most important of all; some didn't want their children to grow up hating others. There was also fear for retribution from the Serbs when

they would speak about the massacres; many Serb perpetrators were now in high positions of authority in their society (Bergholz, 2010). In this case, many children grew up almost ignorant of what had happened. Most children probably heard rumours or vague stories about it, but not the whole story. Parents thought they were protecting their children by remaining silent, but one can only question whether vague rumours might only do more harm than the real story.

Another reaction in a post-conflict situation can be assuming the role of the victim. This victimization phenomenon is discussed by Biruski and Ajdukovic (2008). Most of the people that victimize themselves were indeed victims, but this identity of being a victim can be passed on to children. The feeling of being a victim can lead to a desire for revenge. Violence can become justified, and conflict can rise again.

Both fear and victimization can be transmitted to children, as described in the above examples (the example of Kulen Vakof actually described how parents deliberately tried to prevent themselves from transmitting a sense of fear to their children, but this example does tell us that transmitting fear to children is an option; something that is able to happen). Besides that, the inability of parents to speak about what happened to them (because they are afraid) can also have an effect on children. This effect can be positive when children grow up 'forgetting' what happened, or when they remain ignorant of the past. The effect can also be negative when children hear vague rumours and give meaning to that themselves (de Bolt, 2000).

Pascoe (2009) discusses the attitude of parents towards their children in postwar Australia; Victoria in the 1950's. Many children there grew up in immense freedom. They were encouraged by their parents to play outside and '*roam the streets happily and safely until nightfall*' (Pascoe, 2009; 1). It was as if parents wanted their children to make the very most of the freedom and the safe environment that they themselves never had. However, Pascoe (2009) also found evidence of the opposite; with the absence of war dangers, other dangers (traffic, kidnappings, etc.) were emphasized in for example *Education Gazette* (Pascoe, 2009; 220). These are two other, very different reactions to a postwar situation in relation to the raising of children; 1. Letting them enjoy the freedom the parents never had, and 2. Looking for new reasons to be worried about children. These two reactions occurred after each other; the looking for and being worried because of new dangers happened a few years after the children had so much freedom. However, because of the nostalgia of the memory many people seem to forget this, and focus is laid on the years of immense freedom (Pascoe 2009).

3.2 The parents

Most parents in Uspantán prefer not to talk about the war with their children. All the children in the fifth and sixth grade of La Escuelita that don't have older siblings have never talked about the war with their parents. They don't know anything about the war.

Once children start learning about the war in school, which is when they are a bit older, they also start talking about it at home. This explains the contradictory answers I got from the children and the parents at La Escuelita; the children told me that they didn't talk about the war. The parents told me that they did. The parents I interviewed also have older children; children that have heard of the war at school. After having been taught about the war at school children come home with questions about it. Parents by then can't avoid the topic of the war any longer.

During my interviews with the parents I noticed that the parents referred a lot to the current problems in Guatemala. They don't link this to the war; they talk about poverty, but they don't associate this as being a result of the conflict. Parents talk a lot about criminality, and about corruption. The current situation in Guatemala seems to be a much bigger issue to them than the past war. This is similar to the situation in postwar Australia which I discussed in chapter 3.1.2 (Pascoe, 2009). People have new things to worry about now and therefore don't think that much about the past. There are new dangers now. This is another reason for parents not to talk about the war that much with their children; they have other things on their minds. The issue of the kidnapping of children in Guatemala is much more recent than the war, and about this the parents do talk. Children know about this. Once a little boy from la escuelita asked me; *'are you going to kidnap us?'*.

According to Brinkgeve and Van Stolk (1997, citation in de Bolt, 2000) parents deliberately make choices on the way in which they raise their children. They want to transmit to their children only the values which they think are important. On the other hand, a lot of transmitting is done unintended. In Uspantán it doesn't seem like parents think about the way in which they transmit the war to their children. They tell their children what they know, and if they don't like talking about it they just tell everything in very general terms. They don't influence their children in favour of or against a group or actor (for example the government) but that is probably because they themselves don't have biases against any current day groups that are based on the war. I asked all the parents (and teachers) that I interviewed whether they deliberately tried to pass on a message about the war to their children. All the parents answered that they did, however their messages were different than I had expected. The messages they tried to transmit did not directly concern the civil war, but the parents saw the conflict as a cause to teach their children values like respect, to be good people, to study hard, to love their families and to not use violence. They want their children to grow up as good persons, different from the people that were perpetrators during the civil war. This is a

very positive thing. Maybe not all parents will be successful in teaching their children these values, but I had expected that they might be passing on messages of hatred against the government, or messages of revenge. I noticed no signs of this in any of my interviews or chats.

There is another way in which parents influence their children's knowledge about the war. There are parents that care a lot about the education of their children. They encourage their children to read and study hard. When children for example go to universities they come across literature about the conflict and they find out more about it. However there are also a lot of parents that don't care about school; their children will eventually start working for them anyway. They don't want their children to waste their time on reading while they can be working and earning money as well. At a cultural centre and language institute in Uspantán I talked to Mara, a woman that taught at the university of Guatemala city. She told me that because many parents discourage their children to study and read, children often remain ignorant of many important things, like the civil war.

What I especially found is that the communication about the war differs a lot per house hold. This is dependent on different factors, of which one is, like I have written above, the age of the children. Parents with older children talk more about the war than parents with younger children. Another factor is the experiences of the parents and their families. Most of the parents that do talk about the war with their children have had family members killed or arrested, or they had their houses destroyed, or they had to hide in the mountains. In these cases, the subject of the war comes up when parents talk about their lost relatives or their previous lives. In most cases the parents talk to each other, or to other adults about this, and then the children hear those conversations. After hearing those conversations, the children ask about it and the parents answer. I have not a heard of a single case in which parents refused to answer questions of their children. They always answer. The initiative of the war being discussed at home almost always comes from the children, from when they start asking questions about what they have heard. When the parents don't want to tell something they keep their answers short, general and simple.

The best way to describe the differences amongst parents is through a typology. Below I have described three types in which all the parents that I have spoken to or spoken about fit; the unaffected, the passionate and the traumatized.

3.3 The unaffected

Not all the parents that live in Uspantán have experienced the war or have suffered during it. Some only moved to Uspantán after the war was over, others were too young to have really experienced it. For those parents the war is in the past. They don't think about it that much themselves, and don't really talk about it with their children. When their children ask, they answer, but they don't know that much to answer elaborately. They give general, vague answers, but they have to because they

don't know any more about it. Also, because they don't have many experiences to talk about, their stories make less of an impression on children, and therefore these children are not that interested in the topic. I noticed this especially when I talked to students from the Immbi school. Some of them hardly knew anything about the war, even though they had gotten the same education as the students that did know a lot. Apparently they were not that interested in the topic, they didn't remember much from their classes and they didn't talk about the war with their parents. An example of this is Maria, an 18 year old student of the Immbi school. She didn't have much of an opinion about the war, and when I asked her how she felt about it, she told me she didn't really have any feelings about it. She also didn't talk about the war with her parents, but she didn't know why not. When I asked her about the age of her parents I found out that they were very young, which means that they hadn't experienced the heavy years of war (around 1980) in Guatemala.

3.4 The passionate

Some parents suffered a lot during the war, they lost family members for example and want to talk about that to their children. The children of these parents know the most about the war, and talk about it very passionately. I met a lot of these parents when I went to the opening of the photo exposition in Uspantán, which I already mentioned in the introduction (Simon, 1980-1988). This exposition contained photographs that were taken during the war by Jean-Marie Simon. The exposition was called; '*Guatemala: Eterna primavera, eternal tiranía*' (Guatemala: eternal spring, eternal tyranny); '*Un relato de los oscuros años del Conflicto Armado Interno de Guatemala en 40 fotografías entre 1980 y 1988*'. One of the main goals of the exposition was to increase awareness about the war amongst youth. The people that went here were mostly older people that had experienced the war, most had suffered a lot. These people were all very passionate about getting acknowledgement for their suffering during the war and therefore shared their experiences. These people wanted the youth of Guatemala to know what had happened. I got access to the guestbook of the exposition in which people left their comments. These are some of them:

'This project is very important, hopefully the youth will get to know the violence that happened in the country, committed by the Guatemalan army.'

'It gives me a lot of sadness to see, but it is true, in my community many people were massacred as well. It's important to continue giving knowledge.'

'I am a survivor and victim of the internal armed conflict. All that is seen in the pictures happened in our village as well. Knowledge has to be given.'

'It's an activity that promotes the knowledge of the true political and social history of the country, because it permits children and youth to have a different vision. They are the protagonists of reality, to not let history repeat itself.'

'More work has to be done to accomplish that in the schools more knowledge is given about the history of Guatemala and about the internal armed conflict.'

I met this attitude of wanting youth to become aware in some of my interviews as well. One woman was especially very passionate about this: Flor de Maria is a 60 year old teacher at the Immbi school. I interviewed her because she is a teacher, but I also asked her questions about her own children. Flor de Maria told me a lot about her experience in the war. She suffered a lot, but no physical harm was done to her and her family. Her suffering consisted out of living in constant fear and seeing people around her get hurt and killed. She told me all of that very detailed:

'Once, when I went to another village, to the safer village, I passed a checkpoint. I had to walk because there weren't many cars back then. I ran into a checkpoint with civil patrollers. They asked me where I was going and what I was going to do. They thought I was with the guerrilla! I said no, I am a teacher, I am going to teach. But they didn't believe me. They wanted to violate and molest me, then kill me in the mountains. At that moment a car came up. The lights of the car shone into the eyes of the patrollers and they were distracted. I was with my brother and he hit the patrollers. The patrollers were drunk. We ran and got away.'

Flor de Maria tells her own sons all of this as well, and the girlfriends of her sons too. She wants them to know, and to understand what happened. In the past many people were ignorant. Flor de Maria doesn't want her children to be ignorant, she doesn't want them to accept bad things.

In this type of parents there are also the ones that still feel victimized. They want justice for what happened to them, and most of all they want acknowledgement for their terrible experiences during the war. They want children to know what happened because if children don't know, past perpetrators will just get away with what they have done. As Biruski and Ajdukovic (2008) describe this identity of a victim can be passed on to children. However, in Uspantán this was not the case. Even though there are many passionate parents that try to pass on this feeling, children are also influenced by school and peers. Children of the passionate parents are more interested in the conflict, they know more about it and they talk more passionately about it. But they themselves don't feel like a victim, and they don't desire revenge. Just the truth.

3.5 The traumatized

Unlike in Kulen Vakof (Bergholz, 2010), the reason for some parents to remain silent in Uspantán is not fear. They do not fear the current government; When I ask who the enemy was during the conflict they say that it was the government, however they don't associate the war with the current government. They are not enthusiastic about the current government, but that is because of the present day problems in Guatemala, like criminality and poverty. The war has not influenced them against the government in general. The children are also not biased against the government. For them it is the same as for their parents; they associate the government with current problems, but not with the war. They do not fear the government.

Parents might not want to talk about their own experiences with their children in order to spare them such horrific stories. However it seems as if they don't deliberately avoid topics like violence; children here know a lot about violence and cruelty. Young children talk about the gangs and murderers in Guatemala city for example.

During my interview with Flor de Maria we were interrupted by another teacher at the Immbi school. Flor de Maria told me that that teacher was taken from her house, violated and molested. *'She suffered a lot. She suffered too much'*. Flor de Maria also told me that I couldn't interview that teacher: *'Because her memories are too strong, too traumatic'*. Some parents suffered so much that they have memories that are too traumatic to talk about and therefore they don't talk about the war, because it brings back their pain. If children ask about the war they answer in very general terms. They say for example; *'It was very difficult'*, or *'many people died'*, but they don't mention their own suffering, and they only talk about the war when asked about it. This is a big difference between the traumatized and the passionate parents; the passionate parents want to tell children about the war, while the traumatized parents rather avoid the subject. However, I think the children of these parents unconsciously know that their parents suffered, and therefore they are interested in the conflict. I have not spoken to parents that are so traumatized that they don't talk about the war anymore. The reason for this is very obvious; those parents simply don't want to talk about it. However I found out about this 'category' through other people. Marco, the director of la escuela told me that many parents don't talk about the war because it is too difficult for them. *'They have to cry when they talk about it'*.

The category to which parents belong has an impact on the level of interest of their children in the conflict. Children that have talked a lot about the conflict with their parents (children of the passionate parents) show more interest in the topic. These children have heard more details about the violence, and they have heard about the experiences of their family. This leaves a much stronger impression on the children than the lessons at school do. I noticed this especially when I talked to the

students from the Immbi school. I asked them how they wanted to treat the war in their classes when they would become teachers. The students that had earlier in the interview told me about the experiences of their parents and other family members were much more passionate. They wanted to make children understand the war, and tell them everything about the war. This is what one student of the Immbi school, Cirilo, told me: *'I want to orientate the children. I want to teach them respect. I want them to be friends with other people and to not cause any problems. I want to teach them values, especially for when they get older. It is very important that children learn about the civil war.'* I noticed this as well because they also talked to me very passionately, like they wanted to make me understand as well. Cirilo, said to me: *'It is terrible that so many people died. Those people needed to be defended. People have to be able to defend their rights!'* Especially the tone in which he said this, and the way in which he looked me straight in to my eyes made it clear to me that he cared a lot.

Students that got most of their knowledge about the war at school, and did not talk about it much with their parents answered all of my questions very shortly. They didn't have that much to say about the war, they didn't seem that interested in the topic. When I asked those students how they were planning to teach about the war when they would become teachers, they would give me a short and simple answer; *'The same way I was taught'*.

The parents have a lot of influence on the children, but how do the children themselves really feel? What image do they eventually develop of the war, and what views do they have on the war and on the peace? Do they grow up with biases, feelings of hatred, stereotypes? Or with reconciliation? The next chapter will give the answer to these questions.

4. The children speak: How do they feel?

'I heard my parents talk about it, about people being murdered.', Brenda, 17 years old.

I have discussed the way in which schools and parents deal with the civil war in relation to their children, but what sort of effect does this have on their children? This chapter will be about how the children feel. About their thoughts about the war, the government, the guerrilla and the peace. About their ideas for the future, and about reconciliation.

4.1 Hatred or reconciliation?

It is a possibility that children in a postwar society grow up with biases or even feelings of hatred about the 'other'; the group that was in their eyes responsible for the harm that was done to their parents and grandparents.

An example of this can be found in Vukovar (Croatia), a town that transformed from an integrated multi-ethnic society into an area with many ethnic tensions which eventually led to horrible atrocities committed by the Serb military and paramilitaries (Biruski and Ajdukovic, 2008). When the war was over, the town remained 'separated'. Serb and Croat children went to different schools and grew up in a divided community. These children didn't know any better than that, they had never known a socially and ethnically integrated community. This lack of opportunity to meet and socialize with the other group affected the children's perceptions of the people in that other group; they developed a negative attitude towards them (Biruski and Ajdukovic, 2008). This negative attitude is a result of the current group relations, history of conflict between groups, social status, distribution of power, social norms, etc. These aspects are transmitted to children by their parents (and other members of the family), but Biruski and Ajdukovic (2008) also mention that the divided environment plays a big part in spreading the negative feelings toward the other group.

In this case, especially the Croats showed discriminatory attitudes towards the Serbs. They felt victimized and entitled to openly express themselves negatively about the other. This attitude felt legitimate, justified by the harm that was done to them in the past. However, this can become very dangerous, because it could spark a *'new circle of injustice and violence – by discriminating against individuals on the basis of their out-group membership, a victim is at risk of becoming a perpetrator'* (Biruski and Ajdukovic, 2008; 345). Not only a negative attitude feels legitimate, retribution can be justified as well. Although revenge can't undo what has happened in the past, every culture has norms and beliefs that can *'govern and justify retributive behavior'* (Sommers, 2009; 3). The key point here is the justification. As said in chapter 1, when violence feels legitimate it is more likely to occur; moral restraints against violence become less or disappear. Therefore it is

extremely important to prevent negative attitudes towards the other group, in order to prevent future conflict. This means that it is important to encourage reconciliation.

'Reconciliation – restoring broken relationships and learning to live non-violently with radical differences'(Ramsbotham et. al., 2005). Like I mentioned in the introduction, in order to get people to trust each other again after such a violent conflict, reconciliation has to be promoted. This can for example be done through education; in many countries the government has developed a program for peace education and besides that teachers have a lot of influence on the children they teach. They can promote reconciliation in a very effective way. Other people with a huge influence on children are their parents. Many children copy attitudes from their parents when they grow older, and if parents would transmit sentiments of reconciliation to their children, the children would copy those feelings too. Children are influenced from many different sides and there are different possibilities for the outcome of that.

4.2 Fear and anger

When children in Uspantán first find out about the war they feel fear. They have by then never heard of the war before, and it comes as a shock to them that so many people were killed. Most children hear about the war before they have heard about other wars and therefore they feel scared; they didn't know that something as terrible as that could happen. However, those feelings of fear quickly diminish. The teachers of La Escuelita told me that children showed signs of fear when they told them about the conflict. However, the teachers of the Instituto Basico did not confirm this. By that time the children are older and they are familiar with concepts like war.

The war happened a long time ago, and for most children it is just another theme in their history classes. It is very far away for them. Besides that, in school the Guatemalan civil war is discussed just as broadly as other wars in the history of the world. This does not give children the idea that it is more important than the other wars. Brenda, a 17 year old student at the Immbi school told me; *'I don't really have many feelings about the war, because I wasn't alive when it happened. I have just heard about it. But nobody would want to live during a war.'*

I asked the students of the Immbi school about their feelings; their feelings when they first found out about the war, and their feelings about the war right now. Most answered that they felt scared when they first heard about the conflict, but that they are not scared now. They also did not seem scared at all when they were talking about the war. Some students seemed bored, others a bit nervous at first, for talking to me, a foreigner, but none of them felt reluctant in speaking about the war.

Not one of the children I talked to said that they were angry. Some even looked at me like I was crazy for asking that question. The war was in the past, and the only things they are angry about

are the problems of today in Guatemala. I also asked them who was the enemy during the conflict. Some didn't know who the enemy was. Francisco, a 19 year old student told me; *'The president was the enemy, because he ordered all the killings'*. Juan Alberto is a 20 year old student who knows more about the war than his fellow students. He answers; *'The guerrilla and the army. People were forced to help them. The people were in between the army and the guerrilla and therefore they were in danger'*. Magdalena, 19 years old is not sure but says: *'Probably the government'*. Hilda, 24 years old is very clear when she answers my question with: *'All the people that did bad things'*. The rest of the students I talked to named the government as the enemy. However, none of the students showed any signs of anger at any point during the interviews, and also the teachers and parents I interviewed said that the children were not angry when they discussed the war.

4.3 Biases

Roberto, 17 years old: *'The government should do more about the violence in the streets'*. Maria, 18 years old, says: *'There is a lot of violence. The government doesn't help all the people that need help'*. These are not very positive attitudes towards the government. The students at the Immbi school don't applaud the current government. There are a lot of things wrong in Guatemala, most important of which is the on-going violence. However, they are also not enthusiastic about other parties that want to be elected in the upcoming elections. It's like Juan Alberto, 20 years old, says when we talk about the current violence: *'But no government can put a stop to that'*. All these failures of the government are only linked to the current situation in Guatemala, the children don't associate the current government with the war. When the students talk about the current government they use the same calm tone which they use when they talk about the war. It's like they want to say: *'It's just the way it is'*. They don't show a trace of remorse or anger against the government; their negative attitude towards the government is not caused by the past conflict.

Actually, the children are not biased against any group or actor during the conflict; they also do not show any signs of hatred against the guerrilla. I did notice that most of them are more positive about the guerrilla than about the government; there was almost no one that named the guerrilla as the enemy during the conflict. The most important result though was that even if the students recognised an enemy during the conflict (the government, the army, or *'people that did bad things'*) they do not carry a grudge against anyone.

The example of Vukovar (Biruski and Ajdukovic, 2008) shows a town in which people grow up with such strong biases that they eventually lead to a justification of violence. In Vukovar the Serb and the Croats lived separate from each other. This is not the case in Uspantán. There are many neighbourhoods (aldeas) inhabited by indigenous people only, but this is more of a coincidence based on difference in income, than a deliberate plan. Indigenous people and Ladino's interact every

day. The Instituto Basico is a nice example of this, because both indigenous and ladino children go there. The children all wear school uniforms, but the indigenous girls wear their school sweater over their 'traje' (traditional clothing), while the ladino girls wear shorter, more western skirts. The walls of the classrooms of the Instituto Basico are decorated with educative posters; both in Spanish and K'iche'. The children are able to learn K'iche' at the school and there are two different classes in Spanish; Spanish for those that have Spanish as a first and for those that have Spanish as a second language. A lot of effort goes into the adjusting of the school to both groups, and the efforts are very successful. The children play and talk with each other without taking any notice of the differences between them.

During one social science lesson the professor, Luis, of that class asked the children some questions. The classroom is packed with little desks; there are about 40 and they are all full. The children are busy chatting, walking around the classroom and looking outside the window. The teacher doesn't pay any attention to them while he writes three words on the whiteboard. Multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and bilingual. When he finishes he turns around and raises his voice. The children immediately return to their seats and look up to him quietly. *'Today we are going to talk about Guatemala'*, he says. Luis is a very big man, with a deep voice. The children pay close attention. *'Guatemala is...'*, Luis starts, and then he points to the three words. *'Multi-cultural!'* the children shout enthusiastically when Luis' finger points at the first one. *'Multi-ethnic!'*, the second one. *'And?'*, Luis asks when he points at the third and final word. *'Bilingual!'*. After this Luis gives the children an assignment: They have to copy all three words on an empty sheet of paper and that afternoon when they're at home they have to look up and copy the definition of the word. They also have to look up or draw a picture that matches each word. From my experience at the Instituto Basico I know that these sort of assignments are not that useful; the children often look up the definitions without actually reading it. Once when I observed a class the teacher remembered to ask the children about their homework and he asked them whether or not they had read the information they were supposed to look up. None of them had actually read it. However, the mere fact that attention is paid to these difficult, sensitive themes is a good start.

This special attention that is paid to the fact that Guatemala is multi-cultural is a very good thing. This, besides the integrated schools, prevents children from developing stereotypes about 'the other'. The children know that there are different cultures and ethnic groups in their country, but they also know that they don't have to fear those other groups.

4.4 Peace

The children's opinions about the peace accords are all the same; the signing of the peace accords made Guatemala more calm, it improved the situation. However, more needs to be done. The peace

accords are not a 100% fulfilled because there is still violence, and there are still people being killed. I found it striking that everyone I talked to stated this without showing any sign of fear or anger. Again there was this calm and resigned attitude. Though children realise that the situation in Guatemala is still very troublesome, they are not afraid that there will be another conflict in the future. Why not? *'It is different now'*. Again a simple, general answer.

Children in Uspantán are not deliberately raised with a strong sense of reconciliation. There aren't any programs designed to restore trust between people (Ramsbotham et. al., 2005). However, there seems to be no need for this. Trust between the ladino's and the indigenous people is present already; this can be clearly seen at the Instituto Basico, where ladino and indigenous kids are each other's best friends. There is not a lot of trust in the government of Guatemala, but that has to do with the current problems. It is not a matter of broken trust or a broken relationship between the government and the people. It is more like a new relationship between the government and the people that has nothing to do with the past. There is not a lot of trust, but there never was and the lacking of trust is not based on the past civil war. An important part of reconciliation is to live non-violently with radical differences (Ramsbotham et. al., 2005). Life in Guatemala is not non-violent, there are gangs, robberies, kidnappings etc. But the violence has nothing to do with the ethnic or cultural differences between people. Even though reconciliation was not specifically promoted and there still is a lot of violence, people seem to have reconciled.

5. Conclusion

There are many cases in which conflicts arise based on past grievances; people have been hurt in the past, and they want justice and revenge. They feel like they are entitled to justice and revenge and therefore the violence that they use to achieve that feels legitimate. An example of a grievance can be a conflict in the past. Guatemala suffered from a terrible war which was eventually constituted as a genocide against the indigenous people. Those people have suffered a tremendous trauma. They are terribly grieved, and if that feeling of being grieved is passed on to the next generation it could become a cause for future conflict.

Children in Guatemala find out about their country's terrible history on a late age. They receive knowledge about the civil war both from their teachers and their parents. Both these sources are very important, and have a lot of influence. School is important because the process of children learning about the war begins there; most children hear about the conflict for the first time at school. The information children get at school is very general; they don't learn about the dynamics/relationships within the war, about the history that preceded the war or about who exactly was responsible. Most children learn about the war for the first time in the final grade of primary school. After that they get taught about the conflict again in the third grade of secondary school, by this time they understand more. Some children follow higher education and learn more about the civil war there. School is very important because it initiates the process. However, the parents have the most influence on how exactly children deal with the knowledge they get at school, and on their level of interest in the topic. The children of passionate parents that talk about the war a lot are very interested in the conflict. They want to learn more about it, ask more questions about it, and in case of the Immbi students; when they become teachers they want to make the next generation really understand what happened. The children of unaffected parents lose their attention more quickly when discussing the war. When they become teachers, they'll just stick to teaching in the same way they were taught.

A big similarity between teachers and parents is that both raise children without transmitting biases against 'the other'. They also don't transmit any feelings of fear or anger to the children. The children don't grow up with a strong sense of an enemy; they grow up in a neutral, unbiased way. Amongst the parents there is some victimization; parents that want acknowledgement for the harm that has been done to them. However this feeling is in most cases not transmitted to their children. The elements of reconciliation all seem to be present in society without deliberate work having been done to achieve that. Having said that, I do have to acknowledge that the integrated schooling system has definitely helped in achieving the current state of reconciliation.

The current generation of children is growing up without feeling any grievances based on

Guatemala's violent past. Since grievances can be a base for conflict in the future, this is a very good thing. Children don't grow up with a grudge against the government. Even though they are not content with the current government, the past has nothing to do with that.

Children do not feel grievances, however in some cases their parents do. They are grieved by the unawareness of the next generation. They feel that they don't get acknowledgement for their suffering. This causes anger and especially pain amongst many people. It is exactly the shallow treatment of the war at school and at home which is a problem to some people. They want children to learn the exact truth. This grievance does not make people want to take up their weapons and start a new war thankfully. And even better; children don't copy these feelings. The feelings of hurt about the unawareness of the youth mostly remain with the older generation that has experienced the conflict. The most visible outcome of this feeling of grieve can be seen in initiatives like the photo exposition I mentioned earlier.

Another worry for many people, besides not getting acknowledgement, is fear for a repetition of the past. As said in the introduction, people are afraid that the next generation will in the future vote for parties in which there are people that were perpetrators during the past. However, because the communities in Guatemala are now much more integrated than before the war this seems very unlikely.

Parents and teachers determine the process of children learning about the civil war. They decide the knowledge that the children get, although this is often done without deliberate intentions of spreading certain feelings. Children do not grow up with a strong sense of an enemy, with biases or with feelings of hatred. They grow up in a society that has reconciled. This reconciliation is achieved through education which is integrated and does not teach children strong negative feelings, and it is achieved through the parents who do not discriminate or spread hatred in any sort of way. The new generation is growing up without much knowledge about the terrible years of war which terrorised their country. They are growing up in a different country. Today's Guatemala suffers from poverty and violence, but both the older and the younger generation agree that today's Guatemala is much better than the Guatemala of the past, and they are keen on keeping it that way.

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7. Appendix

7.1 Reflection

I have experienced my first time in the field as one of the most valuable experiences ever. It was new, it was scary, but it was also challenging and amazing.

The first steps of my research; getting contact with a local school and permission to observe in classes went well. I didn't encounter any problems and started of my research exactly the way I had planned. I got to talk to the children and interview the teachers and besides that I got a lot of information just by observing the classes. However I quickly realised that I wasn't going to be able to follow through with all the ambitious plans I had described in my research plan, like for example the group discussion with the children; the children wouldn't be able to concentrate.

A second problem I encountered was that it was very difficult to reach the parents. Not all parents were willing to talk to me, and the director of La Escuelita didn't really want me to talk with the parents. Besides that I needed to expand my research area; I had to look further than La Escuelita because the children there knew nothing about the war.

At this point, which came after about three weeks, I started to get worried for the first time. This didn't take long though, because I quickly found some new inspiration. I changed my research question to studying the process of children learning about the war, instead of studying children of one age group. This way I could still use my information from the first weeks at La Escuelita. I moved on to a different school with older children, and also contacted a school for upcoming teachers. This also helped me because I could now also interview students, who could give me some information about their parents. I realised that doing research is not about following your research plan, it is just about getting the information you need to answer your research question.

Doing research is about improvising. There were days on which I didn't get any useful information. There were also days on which I spontaneously got to do an interview. Some informal chats turned out to be very important, especially on moments when I least expected it. Every time after that realisation when I had a setback (and there were many), I just thought of a new way to get my information. When a parent wouldn't answer a certain question, I would ask a student or a teacher why. This way I got all the results I needed.

A thing I found very difficult was asking people about sensitive subjects. My research was about the civil war, and there are many people who find it difficult to talk about that. At first I asked people about their experiences. Most people gave me very general answers like 'it was very difficult' without telling me much details, and I was very reluctant to ask more because I noticed that they rather didn't talk about it. I thought that it wasn't really necessary to know about their exact

experiences for my research, so I left it at that. People that did want to tell me about their experiences told me about them anyway, and I didn't want to bother the others.

It is a pity that our research only lasted eight weeks. If I would have had more time I would have been able to get to know my informants better. I could then have gotten more personal information from them. Especially because I wanted to investigate in three different schools, I only got to know most of my informants on a shallow base. This is something I would do differently next time; I would make sure that I have more time in the field. If I would have had more time I might would have been able to talk to traumatized parents as well, instead of only talking about them.

While in the field I felt like I was crossing my own boundaries every day. I was scared to go up to people and talk to them; I didn't know them, I had to speak Spanish and I was going to bother them with all sorts of questions about sensitive topics without giving them anything in return! However, the people in Guatemala were extremely nice and willing to help me every time. Even though I was nervous in anticipation of a conversation or interview; every single time it turned out not to be scary at all. The feeling of doing something you don't really want to do, but just do it and afterwards see the good results you got; that is a great feeling!

Guatemala is very different from Holland. Especially when you look at poverty and prosperity. Sometimes teachers would ask me about education in Holland and I felt guilt while telling them how good we have it here. Talking to the children was really confronting as well at times. The looks on their faces when they hear that I have travelled in an airplane for example. This is a difficult thing, but unavoidable.

One of the things I will remember with the most warmth is my time at La Escuelita. Every morning when I walked up to the school I got hear the children shout 'Romy! Romy!' from the moment they saw me until I had reached the school. The children and the teachers were amazingly kind to me; they treated me as if I was doing them a favour, even though it was actually the other way around. This is something I will never forget.

I have learned a lot from doing fieldwork. Not only things concerning anthropology and doing research, but also things concerning gratefulness and appreciation. Being part of a different world makes you realise how good your own world is.

This is me with the director of La Escuelita, a great man who has helped me a lot, and who I am still in touch with through facebook!



7.2 Summary in Spanish

Conflictos siempre son muy difícil, pero cuando hay paz, todavía hay una situación difícil. Hay una nueva generación, que no tiene lo mismo experiencia de sus padres. Si de propósito o no, las experiencias de los padres y de los abuelos tienen un efecto en las identidades de los niños de ahora. Es posible que los niños crecen con prejuicios, sentimientos de odio o posiblemente sentimientos de reconciliación.

Durante los años sesenta a los años noventa, Guatemala fue en una guerra terrible entre la guerrilla y el gobierno. Especialmente muchas indígenas fueron víctimas de la violencia extrema. En 1996 los acuerdos de paz fueron firmados. Ahora hay paz, pero mucha gente todavía está sufriendo de los recuerdos de la violencia. Es importante saber que efecto esta situación tiene en los niños, porque si los niños crecen con por ejemplo sentimientos de odio, es posible que otro conflicto viene en el futuro.

Yo viví en una pequeña ciudad, Uspantán, por ocho semanas. Uspantán fue muy afectado durante el conflicto armado. Allí he investigado esta pregunta:

- Como está la influencia de los padres y de los maestros de la nueva generación en el proceso de los niños están aprendiendo sobre el conflicto armado y la paz?

He entrevistado a padres y maestros, niños y estudiantes de escuelas diferentes. También he observado en las clases en las escuelas.

Los niños no aprenden mucho sobre el conflicto armado en las escuelas. La primera vez que ellos descubren sobre la guerra es la mayoría de veces en sexto grado de primaria educación. Los niños aprenden solamente información de poca profundidad. Ellos aprenden quien lucharon a quien, y quantas personas se murieron. No aprenden información complicada, y no aprenden la historia totalmente. En la educación básica los niños aprenden un poco más, pero no mucho.

La mayoría de padres no se gusta hablar sobre el conflicto, pero cuando sus hijos tienen preguntas, los padres responden. Hay padres que quieren dar información a sus hijos. Ellos quieren que los niños saben la verdad. Pero también hay padres que sufrieron demasiado, y para ellos, hablar sobre el conflicto es demasiado difícil. Hay un tercer grupo de padres que no tienen muchas experiencias en la guerra; ellos no hablan mucho sobre el conflicto con sus hijos, porque ellos no saben mucho.

Los padres tienen mucha influencia en sus hijos; los hijos de padres que hablan mucho sobre el conflicto son más interesados en el tema que los hijos de padres que no hablan sobre la guerra.

Un resultado muy importante es que los niños no crecen con sentimientos de odio, o con un imagen de un enemigo. La información que la nueva generación recibe no tiene muchos detalles,

pero también no tiene prejuicios.

Después de los conflictos es muy importante que viene la reconciliación. En Uspantán hay reconciliación. En las escuelas las indígenas y los ladinos tienen todas las clases juntos, sin problemas. La gente no está contenta con el gobierno, pero no tiene prejuicios contra el gobierno que son basados en el conflicto armado.

La nueva generación está creciendo sin prejuicios o sentimientos de odio, y este es muy positivo. Pero hay mucha gente en Uspantán que quieren que los niños sepan más sobre su pasado. Para ellos, es muy doloroso que su pasado terrible sea olvidado.

Fortunadamente hay iniciativas buenas para dar más conocimiento sobre la guerra a los niños. Un buen ejemplo es una exposición de fotografías, con fotografías tomadas durante el conflicto armado. Esta exposición está abierta para jóvenes también. Los jóvenes que han visitado la exposición fueron muy afectados e impresionados.

Uspantán fue un lugar fantástico para vivir y para investigar. La gente que me ayudó es muy amable, y muy especial. Muchas gracias para todos!

