

PSYCHOSOCIAL IMPACTS OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF
BROADER DEBATES ON POST-CONFLICT RECONCILIATION

By

EVANGELINA LOPEZ

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Approved by:

Dr. Elizabeth Oglesby
Department of Geography

Abstract:

This literature review will consider the literature on political violence, specifically genocide. Human rights and psychology will come together to examine psychological impacts of political violence and potential effective accompaniments for victims of political violence. Forms of reconciliation post-political violence will be addressed regarding the Guatemalan Genocide and comparatively. A case study on the Guatemalan Genocide will also be provided addressing the human rights violations that occurred, the psychosocial impacts of the genocide and forms of reconciliation that have been implemented. The case study on Guatemala brings to light an accurate example of transitional justice, and exposes the difficulty of attaining justice for victims.

Introduction:

A vital component of any type of war is violence; however, violence does not have one sole definition since it could be perpetuated in many forms. Political violence is defined as violence outside of national control that is politically motivated. Types of political violence may include revolutions, civil war, riots and strikes, but also more peaceful protest movements. According to Muller (1985), political violence represents “violence directed against the regime (the structure of political authority) and/or against particular authorities occupying positions in the regime.” Muller conducted a sociological study on the causes of political violence, specifically income inequality and regime repressiveness. Results demonstrated that high levels of inequality and a regime structure that is neither democratic nor totalitarian are key factors that could lead to political instability (Muller, 1985). Muller’s research implicates that countries following a development strategy without taking into account the macroeconomic issue of distributional equality are more at risk to experiencing high levels of mass political violence. In addition, countries with an intermediate level of regime repressiveness are particularly likely to experience high levels of mass political violence. These descriptions of societies are most applicable to developing countries, where wealth inequality exists due to corruption and repression of the poor.

This literature review will primarily focus on one form of political violence: genocide. Genocide occurs when a large population is deliberately killed with the purpose of exterminating the specific group. Although inherently inhumane, genocide has occurred throughout all areas of the world, leaving behind various adverse psychosocial impacts in the respective country’s environment. In many circumstances, genocide is not given the attention needed to halt it before it expands. For example, in Rwanda, the genocide that occurred in the 1990s was heavily ignored

by the international community, even when the country reached out for international aid. *Worse than War* successfully depicts the nature of genocide by interviewing killers, victims and even political leaders. The film provides a glimpse of almost every genocide that has occurred in history and captures the perspectives of various individuals involved. Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's paramount argument throughout the film is that genocide is caused by terror, and it never occurs as a surprise because it is planned by a political leader or a small group of political leaders.

Genocide as a form of political violence is an area of interest because as Goldhagen coins it, genocide is worse than war. This literature review will primarily focus on the genocide that occurred in Guatemala against the indigenous (Maya) communities. The nation experienced a period of genocide during the guerilla war, which scarred the nation with adverse psychological and psychosocial wounds. This literature review will focus on the psychological and psychosocial impacts of political violence in Guatemala and comparatively to be able to evaluate the potential interventions and accompaniments available for victims, thus allowing transitional justice to occur. In addition, forms of reconciliation will be addressed to provide possible ways victims of political violence are able to overcome the atrocities that occurred against them. A case study will be presented on Guatemala to answer questions regarding the psychosocial effects of political violence that may occur within a country. Guatemala's case is interesting in that many have claimed that genocide did not occur since the state's intention was to get rid of "enemies of the state," and members of the guerilla group were mainly indigenous. However, it was the military's perception of Maya communities as natural allies of the guerillas that encouraged the military to intensify the human rights violations committed against the Maya people, thus allowing for an aggressive racist component of intense cruelty that led to the mass

extermination of defenseless Maya communities allegedly associated with the guerrillas (CEH, 1999).

The case study presented will provide a testimony by Psychologist, Marco Antonio Garavito, who brings anecdotal evidence to light, proving that genocide in fact occurred against Maya communities. He also explains the ways a society like Guatemala's could overcome such horrific events through his experience of working with victims. It is essential to evaluate the psychological and psychosocial impacts of political violence because violence occurs throughout the world at all levels of society at the cost of human rights violations. Victims of violence should be provided with accompaniments and interventions to allow them to recover, and forms of reconciliation should be available for countries to assist in the mending of wounds for their citizens. Guatemala's case study is pertinent to provide a valid assessment of the impacts of political violence as well as forms of accompaniments organizations have provided for the victims of the Guatemalan Genocide.

Guatemala's Background:

Guatemala is often referred to as "a beauty that hurts" due to its beautiful scenery and culture, but painful history and human rights violations / corruption. Guatemala is one of the seven countries in Central America; it is located between El Salvador and Mexico, and bordering the Gulf of Honduras. During the first millennium A.D., the Maya civilization thrived in Guatemala as well as in the surrounding regions. However, it became colonized by Spanish rule, and it took three centuries before the country gained its independence in 1821. Colonialism left behind a dark legacy of exploitation that instigated military and civilian governance during the

2nd half of the 20th century. Until the liberal reformation of 1871, political and economic power in Guatemala remained in the hands of families, who were descendants of conquerors or Spanish colonial administrators (REMHI, 1999). Since 1955, Guatemala was continuously governed by dictatorships, which eventually led to a 36-year guerilla war that plagued the nation from 1960 to 1996 when the government signed a peace treaty.

Guatemala's anti-democratic nature stems from its economic structure; only a minority of its population has owned the country's productive wealth, which established a system of multiple exclusions, including racism (CEH, 1999). Racism is recognized as one of the most violent and dehumanizing social systems because it incorporates the idea that one group is better than another on the basis of race. This is typically manifested with the idea that lighter skin is superior to darker; in Guatemala, this has meant that Ladinos (mestizos) are viewed as superior, while the indigenous people are perceived as inferior. Moreover, apart from the decade during 1944-1954, the lack of an effective state policy perpetuated a historical dynamic of exclusion, and in more recent cases, State policy has created inequality, or widespread institutional weaknesses have perpetuated it at the least. This was demonstrated during the first twenty years of the armed conflict (1960-1980) when state social spending and taxation were lowest in Central America (CEH, 1999). The Guatemalan government was incapable of attaining social consensus around a national project to bring the whole population together, which led it to abandoning its role as mediator between opposing social and economic interests. Consecutive constitutions of the Republic, and the human and civil rights outlined in them, became official tools violated by the several structures of the State itself (CEH, 1999). The legislative branch also became responsible for augmenting polarization and exclusion by establishing legal norms allowing the suppression of civil and political rights as well as obstructing any process of change. Eventually, a vicious

cycle of social injustice leading to protest and political instability was generated. The only responses available for political instability became repression or military coups (CEH, 1999).

Movements arose striving to propose economic, political, social or cultural change; however, this led to the State having to resort to violence and terror to maintain social control. Political violence became a direct expression of structural violence (CEH, 1999).

The Historical Clarification Commission (CEH) has found that during the armed conflict, the Guatemalan State failed to provide answers to valid social demands and claims, leading to a replacement of the judicial action of the courts. An unlawful and subversive punitive system was established, managed and directed by military intelligence as a form of social control for the State during the armed confrontation. This system functioned with the direct or indirect contributions from principal, economic and political sectors (CEH, 1999). Through induced or deliberate ineffectiveness, Guatemala's judicial system failed to apply the law by tolerating or even facilitating violence. The judicial branch allowed the social conflicts to worsen various times throughout the nation's history, and the constructed impunity contributed to the protection of the repressive acts of the State as well as those acts committed by individuals who shared similar objectives. Impunity also allowed the application of methods utilized to repress and eliminate political and social opponents (CEH, 1999).

Upon the overthrow of the government of Colonel Jacobo Arbenz in 1954, the opportunity for political expression rapidly terminated. New legislation outlawed the widespread and diverse social movement and brought together the restrictive and exclusionary nature of the political system. The limitations on political participation were established by the country's real powers and implemented by the civil and political forces at the time. This clearly exposed that the military, the economic powers and the political parties worked in accordance with each other.

Additionally, limited political options in Guatemala was not only caused by the legal restrictions from 1963 onwards, but also the rising state repression against its real or alleged opponents.

According to the CEH (1999), the overall determinants of the outbreak of the armed conflict included “structural injustice, the closing of political spaces, racism, the increasing exclusionary and anti-democratic nature of institutions and the reluctance to promote substantive reforms that could have reduced structural conflicts.”

During the armed conflict, human disappearances were utilized as a form of terror against the civilian population. A list of targets was created, and by the 1970s, the State expanded its list of suitable targets for death or displacement to include people who had never defied the law but in some way endangered the interests of the military government or its upper-class sponsors (Ball, Kobrak, & Spirir, 1999). Then, by the early 1980s, victims were primarily unarmed Indian peasants living in the guerrilla zones of operation (Ball, Kobrak, & Spirir, 1999). The 36-year guerilla war has come to also be known as the Guatemalan Genocide because the repugnant war left over 200,000 people dead and perhaps about 1 million refugees, and victims mainly consisted of Mayans between the year 1981 - 1983 (CIA, 2017). Soldiers killed, burned and raped villagers and classified the indigenous people as enemies of the state. As described by Elizabeth Oglesby and Diane Nelson, “The army slaughtered people and animals, laid waste to cornfields and smashed household and religious objects. Massacre survivors fled and hid in the mountains; over one million people were displaced throughout the country” (Oglesby & Nelson, 2016). Torture was used for purposes of intimidation or coercion. In addition to physical or psychological abuse, even causing death to several people, torture intended to impose a message of terror in the population. Executions were made, and cadavers were thrown on the streets or squares, for all to see what happened to the “guerrilleros” (Team of Community Studies and

Psychosocial Action - ECAP, 2012). At points, women were forced to serve as slaves for the military, and the military would sexually abuse the women as and when the pleased.

The military implemented scorched earth operations to get rid of, or in this case, exterminate individuals who would disrupt their plans. For the military, this meant indigenous communities because they were automatically linked to the guerrillas. However, much of the Guatemala population has and continues to be primarily Maya, therefore, it made sense that most guerrillas would be indigenous. Nonetheless, the majority of Maya communities were innocent with absolute no involvement nor knowledge of the armed conflict. The scorched earth operations led to a complete extermination of several Maya communities, along with their homes, cattle, crops and other essential elements for survival (CEH, 1999). The CEH recorded a total of 626 massacres connected to the armed forces. Consequently, the CEH concluded in their report that agents of the State of Guatemala committed acts of genocide against Maya communities in counterinsurgency operations between 1981 – 1983.

The extent to which torture reached the people of Guatemala is unheard of. According to the Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH) Report, 42,275 individuals (men, women and children) were registered as victims of human rights violations and acts of violence linked to the armed confrontation. Of these individuals, 23,671 were classified as victims of random execution and 6,159 were victims of forced disappearance. Eighty-three percent of the registered victims were Mayan and the remaining were Ladino. There have been trials to hold the dictator and others involved in disappearing people accountable, but the country continues to have human rights violations, such as the indigenous peoples not having complete control of their land property. The legacies that colonialism and the 36-year guerrilla war left behind has shaped the

country into what it is today: underdeveloped and people fearing to be ripped of their human rights once again.

Literature on Psychological Impacts of Political Violence:

Aftermath of Political Violence in Guatemala:

The atrocities that occurred against the Mayan population during the guerilla war are unpardonable. Soldiers would arrive to villages where they killed, burned and raped human beings. As described by Elizabeth Oglesby and Diane Nelson, “The army slaughtered people and animals, laid waste to cornfields and smashed household and religious objects. Massacre survivors fled and hid in the mountains; over one million people were displaced throughout the country” (Oglesby & Nelson, 2016). Torture was used for purposes of intimidation or coercion. In addition to physical or psychological abuse, even causing death to several people, torture intended to impose a message of terror in the population. Executions were made, and cadavers were thrown on the streets or squares, for all to see what happened to the “guerrilleros” (Team of Community Studies and Psychosocial Action - ECAP, 2012). The extent to which torture reached the people of Guatemala is unheard of.

After much suffering through these atrocities, adverse psychological outcomes may arise, including depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among the victims. According to Prince et al. (2007), mental health issues establish a crucial public health problem that contribute to fourteen percent of the global burden disease. For instance, unipolar depression is the leading contributor to years lived in less than full health (Patel, 2007). However, despite the importance of mental health, infrastructure, human resources and policy are lacking in low-

and middle-income countries (LAMIC) (Tol et al., 2010). Political violence is mainly perpetuated in LAMIC, which exposes an astronomical burden of psychosocial and mental health difficulties as these countries lack in mental health care. Since the second half of the 20th century, there has been a change in the nature of warfare in which there are primarily interstate and intrastate conflicts in civilian-populated areas. This has brought up concerns for the civilian populations due to increased vulnerabilities of human rights violations, such as disappearances, torture and sexual violence (Pedersen, 2002).

While PTSD is a potential psychological effect of political violence, it's psychiatric approach has been criticized due to its "lacking attention to the socio-cultural aspect in symptom expression and help-seeking, the medicalization of normal distress reactions, and an under-appreciation of existing ways of dealing with distress" (Tol et al., 2010). Nonetheless, practice and research has demonstrated a shift to a multidisciplinary focus. According to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (2007), both social strategies and providing care to those with severe mental disorders are vital. In Nepal, a low and middle income country, political violence occurred post-Cold War. Nepal's recent Maoist armed revolution was an intrastate conflict, primarily fought in civilian-populated areas impacted by chronic poverty. As in other political violence-affected low- and middle-income countries, Nepal's political violence stemmed from deep structural causes. Since mental health services provided by the government are uncommon, non-governmental organizations have been key actors in the delivery of mental health and psychosocial support for specific target groups. Tol et al. (2010) conducted a multi-disciplinary review on political violence, mental health and psychosocial wellbeing in Nepal. They highlighted three crucial issues in their review: "the importance of socio-cultural factors in mediating the impact of political violence, the diversity of mental health and psychosocial

consequences, the value of existing resources, and the interaction between political violence and context.” The researchers found very limited research in Nepal on these main topics. However, Tol et al. (2010) exposed that former child soldiers, torture survivors and the general population demonstrated a high affliction of common mental disorders, including anxiety, depression and somatic symptoms, rather than simply increased levels of PTSD symptoms. According to most of the studies they reviewed, the prevalence of common mental disorders was almost equal or greater than the prevalence of PTSD. Nonetheless, research with torture survivors in Nepal still demonstrated PTSD symptoms causing disability in daily life, thus supporting the cultural legitimacy of PTSD symptoms in the particular target group. Additionally, prior research has demonstrated that PTSD is a valid mental health issue with its severity congruent to the level of violence endured; more exposure to political violence causes more PTSD symptoms. Tol et al. (2010) argue that it is essential to prioritize the treatment for mental disorders based on its relation to disability.

Nepal and Guatemala are both developing countries who experienced political violence in the second half of the twentieth century. While Nepal did not experience genocide, the target group was similar to that of Guatemala’s. The individuals impacted had lower socioeconomic statuses, and they were psychologically affected by the political violence. Victims in Guatemala were personally affected when the violence ended with living a threatening reality, having sentiments of impotency, constantly being in a state of alert, and experiencing a disorganization of behavior (e.g., panic attacks) as well as health issues (REMHI, 1999).

Furthermore, communities also endure psychosocial impacts post-political violence. The Recovery of Historical Memory Project (REMHI) concentrates on three principle aspects from the Guatemalan civil war: the suffering of the population, the functioning of repression and the

consequences and demands for the future. Repression from the war produced a vital threat, a gloomy social environment, hunger, sentiments of injustice and health issues. REMHI also addresses *susto*, a loss of the soul due to a traumatic event, as a health issue victims faced. *Susto* is best defined as an “impact of fright, trauma, or a disturbing event on the human body spirit, as well as a living universe that can be offended or that is so powerful that it takes over a human being” (Gonzales 202-203). In the Maya culture, *susto* is identified as a disease that manifests after a violent incident or vulnerable conditions of an individual, and curative measures must be taken to cure *susto*. In other cultures, it may be also be referred to “mal de ojo” caused by an evil stare. *Susto* is typically manifested through depression and anxiety, which is sensible since many victims experienced these symptoms.

According to the REMHI, social impacts of fear included communication censorship, detachment from organizations, social isolation, questioning of values and community distrust. The psychosocial impacts described by the REMHI is parallel to the description Psychologist, Marco Antonio Garavito, speaks about in the case study that will be presented later in this literature review.

Accompaniments Post-Political Violence:

After horrific acts of war and inhumane actions within a country, as what transpired in Guatemala, there are various psychosocial impacts that political violence (such as genocide) has on victims. In memory of the tragedies, two major public projects in Guatemala documented the long-lasting psychological trauma among victims of the genocide: the Catholic Church's Recovery of Memory Project in 1998, and the Commission for Historical Clarification in 1999. Yet recognition within Guatemala's medical establishment of the myriad health effects of the

violence, particularly within Maya indigenous communities, has been slow. The Team of Community Studies and Psychosocial Action (ECAP) and the League for Mental Hygiene (Liga Guatemalteca de Higiene Mental), have strived to provide accompaniments to the victims of the war in Guatemala. For instance, victims were provided with support when they testified before the court. This was often necessary for women, who would often take longer to be able to open up about their harsh experiences due to the stigma attached to sexual abuse. This was especially prominent in Guatemala with the majority of its population practicing a form of Christianity.

Other forms of accompaniments have been practiced in other countries as well. For instance, psychotherapy could be provided as it is for veterans and refugees who have suffered from trauma in the United States (McKinney, 2007). Nonetheless, these forms of interventions are difficult to attain in developing countries like Guatemala.

Literature on Reconciliation:

Haynar (2001) defines national reconciliation as “rebuilding relationships today that are not haunted by the conflicts and hatreds of yesterday.” Reconciliation is indubitably harsh for victims of war and their families to face. However, some tools that have the potential to pave the way to reconciliation are collective remembrance, accountability and using the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Reconciliation tools that have been utilized as interventions include, collective remembrance, justice in terms of accountability and working with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Collective remembrance is a recollection of memories gathered by the public in regards to what they could recall. This is effective when people demand the truth post-political violence. For instance, in Guatemala, the Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH) to find

the answers behind the genocide that occurred in Guatemala. Mersky depicts the idea of collective remembrance in her article, *Does Collective Remembrance of a Troubled Past Impede Reconciliation?*, and recognizes that in post-war or post-conflict societies, people don't have the full facts of occurrences to truly be right when telling their stories. However, collective remembrance is essential to keep an account of the past and learn how to resolve future issues of political violence. Nonetheless, collective remembrance could also not be effective at the end of armed violence or systematic repression because, as Mersky's article states, talking about the past and insisting on acknowledgement of crimes and harms could potentially increase the chances for the violence to return. This is similar to what ensued in Argentina after the dirty war, in which acts of genocide were also manifested. Robben (2012) exposes Argentina as an example in which collective remembrance and continuous narration of past violence was not effective in the country post-political violence. This type of reconciliation did not advance the coexistence of oppositional groups; instead, it intensified their hostility and invigorated certain repressive practices (Robben, 2012). However, it wasn't collective remembrance itself that halted the process of reconciliation; it was the way the country implemented it. Remembrance, justice and reconciliation establish an intertwined complex, therefore, "the extent to which reconciliation achieves justice and justice achieves reconciliation will inevitably depend on how it is done and how it is interpreted by supporters and skeptics alike" (Daly & Sarkin, 2007). The Argentine government did not necessarily work towards reconciliation appropriately for the citizens to accept it. For instance, Argentina's military was unwilling to clarify the disappearances of the 1970s, they had impunity in the late-1980s and systematic baby thefts in the late-1990s was brought to light in the process of collective remembrance. All of these factors caused citizens to distrust the government even further and motivated the human rights

movement into pursuing persistent memorialization as well as searching for alternative modes of legal amends, leading the Argentine people to completely turn against the government's reconciliation efforts. Additionally, the citizens sought the persecution of more than one thousand perpetrators (Robben, 2012). Reconciliation has been indubitably difficult in Argentina due to the lack of complete cooperation by the military, and the genocide discourse has impeded collective remembrance; collectivized guilt and accountability has extended from the military to civil society. Citizens live in suspicion of other citizen's complicity with acts of genocide, thus reinforcing antagonistic positions, recollections and actions (Robben, 2012). Although collective remembrance has not been effective in Argentina, it is a way for victims and citizens within a country that has experienced political violence to be able to begin mending wounds through the knowledge of truth. In Guatemala, collective remembrance has occurred through non-governmental organizations, such as CEH and REMHI, documenting the occurrences of the political violence and recording testimonies of the victims. This has contributed to the evidence provided to the court in prosecuting those responsible, especially Efraín Ríos Montt.

Besides collective remembrance, reconciliation could possibly occur through people being held accountable for their actions after a time of war or conflict. Accountability allows victims to move on while knowing the justice system has not failed them entirely. Post-war and post-conflict, the community often says "never again", but this statement is said in vain when no actions are taken to condemn those who are guilty. For example, after the Guerilla War in Guatemala, Ríos Montt was not condemned or held responsible for the genocide of the Mayan people, which increased distrust of government by the indigenous people. Accountability, however, may not work if victims aren't satisfied with how their perpetrators are condemned or if the process of condemnation is prolonged. In the case of the Rwandan Genocide, justice was

sought for the victims by the Rwandan government. The government developed a new system for trying genocide cases called *gacaca* (Human Rights Watch, 2014). This system was developed from a community-based dispute resolution mechanism typically utilized to solve minor disputes. However, *gacaca* differed in that it concentrated more on a model of punitive justice. *Gacaca* strived to deliver justice and reinforce efforts for reconciliation as well as expose the truth regarding the genocide (Human Rights Watch, 2014). Judges, who did not have prior legal training, were elected by the population to try cases in front of local communities, and these communities were encouraged to expose the knowledge they about the defendants' actions during the genocide. The pilot phase commenced in 2002; however, it wasn't until 2005 when *gacaca* courts began fully functioning throughout Rwanda. *Gacaca* courts astoundingly processed nearly two million cases until their cessation in June of 2012 (Human Rights Watch, 2014).

Lastly, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission could be utilized as a tool towards reconciliation. This mechanism goes hand in hand with collective remembrance and accountability, but it offers a more secure process of learning the truth. Those who may argue against this particular tool would say that narratives of victimhood can turn into or be manipulated into calls for revenge. Nevertheless, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission promotes collective remembrance and could work with the victims to find peace without seeking radical vengeance. According to Hayner, a truth commission has five basic aims: "to discover, clarify, and formally acknowledge past abuses; to respond to specific needs of victims; to contribute to justice and accountability; to outline institutional responsibility and recommend reforms; and to promote reconciliation and reduce conflict over the past."

These three mechanisms of reconciliation incorporate memory and the knowledge of truth for the victims and citizens in the country. Although negative arguments about remembrance in a post-war/conflict society exist, it is better to acknowledge the experiences of the victims rather than bury them in history. By choosing to forget, atrocities against victims aren't able to be prosecuted, and it becomes difficult to go through the process of reconciliation. Memory could come to be excessive only if it promotes more wrongdoings; however, if remembrance brings accountability and unison, it should be encouraged and not hidden. When memory is controlled, people's human rights are violated because essentially, they continue to endure oppression through silence. Consequently, memory should not remain in the past; the wrongdoings should remain within society as a way to advance the future of human rights.

Guatemala Case Study:

After horrific acts of war and inhumane actions within a country, as what transpired in Guatemala, there are various psychosocial impacts that political violence (such as genocide) has on victims. Through an interview conducted with renowned Psychologist, Marco Antonio Garavito Fernandez from The Guatemalan League for Mental Hygiene (Liga Guatemalteca de Higiene Mental), these psychosocial impacts were discussed. Marco Garavito is the director of the Guatemalan League for Mental Hygiene, and he is a professor in the College of Psychological Sciences at the University of San Carlos in Guatemala. For years, he has coordinated the program Todos por el Reencuentro (All for the Reunion), which strives to find the missing children who disappeared during the armed conflict in Guatemala. He has also overseen the program Mi Territorio sin Violencia (My Territory without Violence), which develops a model of violence prevention in various municipals of the country. Garavito has

received several awards for his work in promoting mental health as a necessary factor of human development in Guatemala, and he has become the public voice of psychology in Guatemala, particularly in the social realm.

The Guatemalan League for Mental Hygiene (Liga Guatemalteca de Higiene Mental) was founded in 1952 during the revolutionary and democratic period, and it is one of the oldest organizations in Guatemala. Since its commencement, the organization's projects have been mainly marked by a revolutionary philosophy in the sense that its main priority has always been to serve the most vulnerable and impoverished sectors of the nation. The Guatemalan League for Mental Hygiene's paramount goal has been to combat or prevent mental illnesses rather than treat them because mental health is a complex that is built and destroyed by social interactions. Due to Guatemala's violent history, mental health is a delicate topic to discuss.

During late 1990s, the Guatemalan League for Mental Hygiene restructured the organization to include six areas of focus, one of them being mental health and violence with the perception that violence is a construction of reality. During his interview, Marco Garavito explains that violence in Guatemala was long existent in the country (since colonialism), and the war was simply another form of violence. He additionally adds that people in lower social classes have always faced violence; violence and suffering is embedded in their culture. For example, during his time in a village near the mountains where genocide occurred, Garavito spoke to a 92-year-old man from Ixcán who described the guerilla war as a small war because nothing could be compared to the grand war — 300 years of colonialism. In order to survive the genocide, people fled to the mountains and remained up there for up to fourteen years (Marco Antonio Garavito Fernandez, personal communication, July 5, 2016).

Garavito moved on to explain that psychosocial effects don't only arise during the war or conflict; they are also reflected in how people react post-conflict. The war may have created a stadium of violence, but the suffering of the indigenous population in Guatemala was long present before the war. Therefore, the Guatemalan League for Mental Hygiene decided to work in the realm of mental health and violence, understanding that violence is a disarticulator of healthy social interactions, both constructive and productive. In the area of mental health and violence, the organization implements a surge of programs, one of them being "Todos por el Reencuentro" (All for the Reunion). This particular program has aimed to psychosocially accompany families who lost their children during the war, but never actually saw them die due to being captured by the military and sent to different areas. The organization strived to accompany these families because no one else was necessarily making an effort. When the 1996 Peace Accords were signed, a political space was created to begin talking about the war, such as the massacres that occurred, the people who disappeared and the economic damages; however, the topic of the disappeared children was never touched on. Therefore, the Guatemalan League for Mental Hygiene dove into the issue to investigate whether there were disappeared children and if they were alive. During this time, fear continued to persist because people were unsure whether it was safe to begin looking for their lost children and seeking answers. Systematic work and assistance from the families allowed the Guatemalan League for Mental Hygiene to complete their goal of finding those who disappeared. Through its seventeen years of existence, the organization has executed 433 reunions with family members who had been separated between 28 – 30 years. Most of those who were disappeared have been found in Guatemala, and the few that have been found abroad — in the United States, Canada, or Europe — were given

up for adoption via Evangelical churches. Garavito emphasized in his interview that when these reunions occur, the organization ensures the individuals are emotionally prepared.

The organization continues to accompany victims and their families psychosocially because the impacts these atrocities had on them are terrible; families who lost their children, also lost their homes, their animals, and even other family members who were killed. Despite all the harm, the *pueblo* has remained resistant; the percentage of pathological mental problems in rural Guatemala is precarious, and the people didn't lose a touch with reality. Surprisingly, Guatemala has a low suicide rate even with all the grotesque occurrences during the war. In the past 500 years, the country has been conditioned to be resilient and handle all types of atrocities due to previous tragedies. It is common for these victims of war to be victimized and scrutinized for the damages caused to them; however, it's not common to conduct research that highlights the people's resiliency and the strength they must have had to endure the tragedies of the war. For example, people who lived during the massacres continue to dream and have high hopes for the future.

Pedro's story, from Puente Alto, evidently depicts this idea. Garavito highlights that the military executed a grand massacre in Puente Alto through an operation that included other massacres in the region, and a total of 366 people were killed. The day of the massacre, women in Puente Alto wore beautiful typical clothing because they were informed an important event would take place. When the military arrived, they asked children and women to enter a church constructed with palm roofs, aluminum sheeted walls and sticks. The military also requested the men to go into a school that was constructed with the same materials as the church. After everyone was in their respective building, a soldier walked into where Pedro and his mother were and instructed everyone to "look at the light because you will all die." Pedro clenched to his mother as the

soldiers began to shoot into the church; his mom was hit with a bullet while Pedro remained safe. When they finished shooting at the church and school, they began to set fire on the two buildings with the people inside. Pedro was standing right next to the aluminum walls, and as the sole survivor, he escaped to the mountains and was lost for a couple days before he found a path that would lead him back to Puente Alto. Upon his return, he found bodies thrown in areas where people defecated with dogs and animals eating away at their bodies. Pedro was frightened and ran to the mountains once again, this time he was lost in the mountains for a week. He eventually found a community called Nuca, and a family who was aware of the massacres adopted him (Marco Antonio Garavito Fernandez, personal communication, July 5, 2016).

Garavito had interviewed Pedro in Puente Alto because Pedro returned to his village as an adult, and at the time of his interview, only twelve people were living there. Pedro was living peacefully with his wife and two children. Astonishingly, Pedro calmly provided testimony while the woman filming his interview was completely disheartened and drenched in tears. Pedro explained his resiliency to Garavito, "I was the only one who survived, and if I survived, it was because it is my responsibility to revive la Aldea, my village. That is why I returned." Pedro's story demonstrates that psychosocial effects do exist, but these indigenous people's behavior need to be analyzed as well because despite the tragedies they endured, there are others like Pedro who continue to fight for a future. It is awestraking that with 500 years of racism, the indigenous populations continue to push through.

According to Garavito, the Guatemalan Genocide may not be well-known, but there is no other Latin American country that could compare to what Guatemala suffered through. Garavito elucidates that violence from the war brought about disarticulation of the communities because before the war commenced, Guatemala was more united. People now shelter and isolate

themselves more to protect themselves from violence; however, people exiling themselves from the community is just another psychosocial outcome of the war. Violence from the war has created isolation within the Guatemalan society and has encouraged the younger people to participate in consumerism while pushing college students away from becoming civically engaged.

Furthermore, Garavito discusses the role the Evangelical churches have played both during and after the war. He claims that the Evangelical churches in Guatemala divide populations and had perverse intentions during the war. The Catholic church is distinct in that it functions vertically while every church works together without a hierarchy; Evangelical churches function horizontally and fend for themselves. These Evangelical churches grow exponentially, and the United States Orthodox church has played an integral role in increasing the amount of churches in Guatemala, which has adversely affected the nation. The Catholic church played a dominant role in Guatemalan communities during the war because the country was enduring a period of theological liberation. The Catholic church assisted impoverished communities; however, during the war, Catholics were murdered by soldiers with the purpose of spreading Evangelism. As this was occurring, people sought refuge in the Evangelical churches. During the interview, Garavito states, “it was all a strategy to create social division. Before the war, there were very few Evangelical churches, and as the war progressed, these churches advanced as well.” Thus, dividing the nation even more and producing a permanent psychosocial effect of dehumanization. Corruption became more common because less care was expressed for others, and corruption has made reconstructing Guatemala extremely complicated. While the Ladinos and mestizos were struggling, the indigenous populations were united and had much resiliency; their culture, religion and social link has allowed them to remain united. Indigenous communities

unite to solve their education, health and environmental problems, and their capacity to connect is very much a cultural factor. They have high respect for nature because during the war, the only reason they survived was thanks to the mountains. On the other hand, there's no link between the Ladinos and the mestizos who live in the cities. The only factor that could link them is the fact that they are all humans; however, Guatemala has lost this value through dehumanization — Guatemalans now have a lack of solidarity, lack of respect, lack of community (Marco Antonio Garavito Fernandez, personal communication, July 5, 2016).

Garavito then discusses the aspect of how the war affected racism. Before the war, Guatemala was purely seen as a country populated by Ladinos, and the indigenous communities were forced to assimilate to the Ladino lifestyle. Nonetheless, after the war, the 1996 Peace Accords provided an identity to the indigenous population and recognized the indigenous communities. There was also an emergency to protect the rights of the indigenous communities, which has obligated certain aspects of racism to be less evident in the country. This does not mean that these aspects of racism have been completely obliterated. Garavito adds that there is now a law that condemns those who perpetuate racism against others because Guatemala is now perceived as a multicultural nation. For example, one of Efraim Rios Montt's grandsons has a dominate Guatemala; however, the difference after the war is that indigenous peoples have spoken out and have sought their civil and human rights. Nevertheless, even with their efforts to combat racism, systematic racism persists; it is rare to see an indigenous person in a governmental role. Ladinos have internalized racism and do not wish to recognize the profound aspect of Guatemala, "el mundo profundo de Guatemala", as Garavito describes it. Indigenous peoples continue to live in the shadows—the most impoverished areas of the country, areas hidden from the touristic path. One paramount psychosocial effect of the war is that Ladinos

have come to fear the power indigenous communities may have because they fear indigenous communities would seek revenge. Indigenous peoples, however, have a distinct Cosmo vision; they prefer peace over war and wish for equality and respect for their lands over anything else. Although indigenous communities continue to be exploited and hidden from touristic view, they are now realizing they could do something to protect their human rights; therefore, a positive psychosocial effect of the war is the emergence of the indigenous world. Indigenous peoples are now seen in social gatherings where they wouldn't have congregated before the war.

Additionally, a law now exists that permits them to wear their typical *trajes* (clothing) to school, whereas before the war, they purposefully hid their *trajes* and dressed modernly as a way to steer away from attention. According to Garavito, without the war, there would have been no advancement in the rights of the indigenous peoples because before and during the war, people couldn't even speak or think differently. Post-war, the government was required to work for the needs of indigenous communities.

As the interview with Marco Garavito culminated, therapeutic accompaniments for victims of the war and their families were discussed. Garavito emphasizes that therapeutic accompaniments are most helpful for victims and their families. Therapeutic accompaniments encourage reconstruction of families' confidence in themselves and in organizations. Following the war, a lot of money entered Guatemala to assist victims and their families; for instance, international organizations withered into the country providing aid to families and serving as their "savior". These international organizations victimized these victims even more, leading them to expect more help and lose faith in their own strengths. However, organizations shouldn't have the mission to solve people's problems and act as their savior; they should instead provide them support and encourage them to recuperate their own strength and capacities. In some cases,

organizations lied to victims because they portrayed the message of, “we will resolve all your problems.” Victims and their families were already in a vulnerable state, and these international organizations took away the little hope that remained by speaking on their behalf and not completely following through with their promises to these victims. Conversely, the Guatemalan League for Mental Hygiene has sought to create a new citizen, despite if they find their lost family member or not. The organizations strive to teach them that they have a voice to ask and demand for their needs and the needs of their communities, such as health care and potable water. As evaluated by Marco Garavito, the Guatemalan genocide had various positive and negative psychosocial effects, and despite what occurred during the war, it has allowed Guatemala to advance in its protection and recognition of indigenous communities. Guatemala is not currently standing where it is fully on board with the protection of human rights; however, it is progressing much more than before the war (Marco Antonio Garavito Fernandez, personal communication, July 5, 2016).

Conclusion:

Political violence could occur in a plethora of processes, and ethnic cleansing, or genocide, is the most inhumane form of violence. In Guatemala, violence and torture were perpetuated by the international community — specifically by the United States — as to protect their capitalistic interests. In the end, political violence brings forth trauma and psychological issues difficult for communities to overcome. Although accompaniments and interventions are provided for victims, the wounds left by the violence take time to heal. Through this healing process, it is necessary to provide the knowledge of truth to victims, and especially justice through the prosecution of perpetrators. Moreover, it is essential to cater to the needs of the

targeted population. In Guatemala, the targeted victims were Maya indigenous communities. However, the Guatemalan government has not fully committed to assisting the indigenous communities, which constitute sixty-five percent of the population. With such a large number of indigenous people living in Guatemala, it is necessary for the nation to serve these people with an equitable education and reduce the disparities between them and the Ladinos as a way to move towards transitional justice. However, history has proven that indigenous people have been stripped of their human rights and have been exploited for the past five centuries. They've endured castellinazacion in school, which is not an equitable education because this process does not provide them with the necessary resources to thrive in school since they may not know Spanish when commencing their educational career. Although there have been programs rooted in helping indigenous people receive a proper education, such as Castellinizacion Bilingue, these types of programs have ultimately worked for transitioning them into the Spanish language, thus working towards negating their native tongues. Indigenous people continue to be perceived as second class citizens, suffering from systemic racism and limited in educational careers.

Moreover, primarily non-governmental organizations are those who have documented the atrocities of the Guatemalan Genocide, which has only provided a slow process of collective remembrance. Controversy also exists on the idea of whether genocide occurred in Guatemala, and the simple fact of even questioning this delegitimizes the traumatic events indigenous people and those threatening the regime endured. However, the present case study on Guatemala is an example of documenting the atrocities of the war, and legitimizing the experiences of victims.

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