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**They didn't win the war.**

**Aesthetics and infrastructure in post-counterinsurgency Guatemala.**

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**They didn't win the war.**  
**Aesthetics and infrastructure in post-counterinsurgency Guatemala.**

**by**

**Alejandro M Flores Aguilar, Dipl. –Soz.**

**Dissertation**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of  
The University of Texas at Austin  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**The University of Texas at Austin**

**May, 2017**

Para Mariel & Mariel

## Acknowledgements

I want to thank my beloved partner Lizeth Castañeda for her love and support, as well as her intellectual and artistic influence during these past five years in which we have been away from each other during long periods of time. I also want to thank Mariel Aguilar Sánchez who pushed me to ask critical questions about Guatemala's reality since I was a little boy.

For their inextinguishable interest and patience reading multiple drafts of this dissertation, and for providing me with feedback, I am grateful to my sister Mariel Aguilar-Støen, and colleagues Karen Ponciano, Juan Carlos Mazariegos, Christian Kroll-Bryce and Daniel Perera. I am enormously thankful to my academic mentors Clara Arenas, Gustavo Palma and Rodolfo Kepfer (R.I.P), who have continuously supported me for twenty years. I am extremely grateful to my supervisor Charles R. Hale for giving me the opportunity to work and learn from him during these five years. To my professors and friends who inspired me to experiment with alternative new horizons of engaging visual anthropology and photography, Kathleen Stewart, Craig Campbell, Donna DeCesare and Daniel Chauche. I also want to thank Irma Alicia Velásquez Nimatuj and Diane Nelson for their insightful advice towards completing this project.

I want to thank my friends and fellow researchers at the Ixil University whose support and engagement made this dissertation possible. They include, Tixh Viyo'm (Baltazar de la Cruz Rodríguez), Concepción Santay Gomez, Pablo Ceto, Pedro Raymundo, Magdalena Terraza Brito, María Terraza Brito, Martina Terraza Brito, Feliciano Herrera Ceto, Cristina Solis Brito, Juan Carlos Terraza, Elena Brito Herrera, Santa Roselia De León Calel, Be'n Ijom, Kaxh (Gaspar Cobo), Juan Luis de la Cruz

Rodriguez. I also want to thank my dear friend and colleague Giovanni Batz for his selfless support and contribution during my time working at the Ixil University. Finally, I want to thank all Ixil University students, for whom I have the greatest respect and admiration.

I am also very grateful with my other companion researchers, Daniel Chauche and Yasmin Hage, who embraced me and taught me new ways of thinking and understanding the complexities of Guatemala's aesthetics and reality. I am grateful to my artist friends, Juan Pensamiento Velasco and Alejandro Paz as well as my journalist friend Andres Zepeda who generously provided me with feedback during long and remarkable conversations. This dissertation would not have been possible without the contributions of the *Visualidad/Seguridad* Project and its participants: Monica Mazariegos, Juan Pensamiento Velasco, Vicente Chaperó, Dinora Salguero, Heini Villela, Marisol Alonso, and Lizeth Castañeda.

Special thanks to the Asociación para el Avance de las Ciencias Sociales, my academic home for more than twenty years, and my dear colleagues and friends who make it a great place to be: Clara Arenas, Gustavo Palma, Eugenio Incer, Juan Vandevaire, Camilo Salvadó, Juan Carlos Mazariegos, Rodolfo Kepfer, Matilde González, Karen Ponciano, Ligia Pelaez, Ana López Molina, Alejandra Roche, Andrea Tock, Fernando Jerez, Marco Chib'alam Carrillo and Danilo Rivera. I also want to thank the archive team at CIRMA, especially Thelma Porres, who made a major documental contribution to this project. I would like to thank the Vicerectoría de Investigación y Proyección, the Philosophy Department and Plaza Pública at Landívar University, especially Carlos Cabarrus, Juan Blanco, Amilcar Dávila, Marlon Urizar, Eduardo Blandon, Enrique Naveda, Alejandra Gutierrez Valdizan and Marta Mendez who have contributed in discussing this project with me.

I thank my beloved and eternal friends Isabel Fernandez and Joseph Russo, who made this academic journey lighter, in which we met every Friday to eat and drink, and share our dreams, challenges and frustrations. I also want to thank my dear friends Nóra Tyeklár, José Villagran, Elizabeth Velazquez, Sarah Ihmoud, Alvaro Torres, Juan Pablo González, Anthony Dest, Giovanni Batz, Edwin Román-Ramirez, Arno Argueta and Greg Goeken. In Guatemala, I want to thank my dear friends Rodrigo Salvadó, Oscar Pineda, Fernando Posadas, Columba Sagastume, and Marcela Gereda, who have always supported my research and myself. I also want to extend my gratitude to those others that have shown interest and supported this project in any capacity.

I would like to thank the funding institutions that made my work possible. These include the Fulbright-Laspau for providing me with a two-year grant to pay tuition and life expenses; the Wenner-Gren Foundation for a two-year dissertation field research grant; the Teresa Lozano Long Institute for Latin American Studies that funded the pre-dissertation portion of my research; and the Anthropology Department at the University of Texas at Austin for the Rhonda L. Andrews Memorial Fellowship Award in recognition for academic excellence that was provided to me in order to support the writing of my dissertation.

**They didn't win the war.**  
**Aesthetics and infrastructure in post-counterinsurgency Guatemala.**

Alejandro M Flores Aguilar, Ph.D.  
The University of Texas at Austin, 2017

Supervisor: Charles R. Hale

By studying, producing, and executing ethnographic visual-arts projects, my dissertation analyzes the sociocultural infrastructures intrinsic to sensorial forms of counterinsurgency that spread to the aesthetic regime in contemporary Guatemala. I focus on the historical moment in which counterinsurgency becomes common sense(s) within significant numbers of Guatemalans, for whom the lack of empathy towards the suffering of State-violence is normalized. In the aftermath of Rios Montt's genocide trial, this lack of empathy is basically triggered by the emergence of a field of expressivity in which the history of State-violence becomes tangible and transmutes in the production of processes of politicization. This dissertation is an attempt to understand the sociocultural sensorial framework in which, on the one hand, it becomes almost impossible to empathize with the victims of genocide and massive extermination; while on the other hand, the spaces and experiences in which the reproduction of this form of hegemony fails and the failure manifests itself in new forms of dissent. My dissertation builds on a two-year multisite fieldwork in collaboration with visual artists, Maya-Ixil researchers, and archivists.



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## Introduction

I do not own my life. I am already sold to the *finca*.  
Ixil elder from Ilom  
(2015)

### THEY DIDN'T WIN THE WAR: THE POLITICAL

The title of this dissertation goes against common sense. The *doxa* insists that the victory of counterinsurgency military is irrefutable. On what dangerous territories are we stepping in if the outcome of the counterinsurgency war is in dispute? Let us to avoid oversimplifications. “*They didn’t win the war*” is not a statement implying that the counterinsurgency military lost the war; it simply means that *they didn’t win it*. It means that it was impossible either to win or lose such a war. Let me explain.

The idea of disputing the outcome of counterinsurgency strategies came to me first from Otto Cuellar, a former *guerrillero*, who spent more than 16 years fighting the war against the counterinsurgency military at the *frente* Ho Chi Minh in the hills of the Ixil region. Nowadays, he is one of the principal collaborators at the Ixil University and takes care of most administrative responsibilities regarding the students (he is something like a student coordinator).<sup>1</sup>

I think it was when we were preparing for a class that he said it for the first time: “you, know”, staring severely at me behind his square, thick, glasses, “what sense did it make for them to sign the peace agreements? If you win a war you don’t have to invest so much energy in negotiating political treaties that eventually can be used against you.”

I was intrigued and asked his opinion about the mass killings and the reports written by guerrilla leaders (Payeras 1991) stating that the war was already lost in early 1980s. “That’s the point”, he said, “they left the region early and believed that everything

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<sup>1</sup> This was a task also carried out for more that two years by my friend and colleague, Giovanni Bat’z.

finished with their departure. They wrote their partial history but never got to know what happened after that year. We stayed here, they didn't witness the final outcome. The military didn't win the war."

Cuellar wrote the first master's thesis (2016) ever done at the Ixil university and asked me to co-supervise it.<sup>2</sup> Besides being a unique honor, for me this was an incredible learning opportunity. His hypothesis, even though controversial, opens a space of deliberations that has not been considered before by academia in the debate of the aftermath of genocide.<sup>3</sup>

Despite not having knowledge in guerrilla warfare strategies, I considered fascinating the opportunity to supervise his work. He provided data to analyze and balance the military outcomes, and his conclusion focused on the argument that the counterinsurgency military wasn't able to defeat the guerrilla in the Ixil region. Finally, Cuellar proposed that the counterinsurgency military strategy focused mostly on the mass murder of civilian populations and controlling their everyday existence with the low intensity conflict. I do not focus here on the guerrilla warfare analysis, the scorched earth campaign or the human rights anthropology, even though these aspects are fundamental.

In this dissertation, "*They didn't win the war*" is a heuristic that directs attention to the production of aesthetic experiences and processes of politicization in the aftermath of the massive human rights violations committed by the counterinsurgency military.<sup>4</sup> The existence of both genocide and counterinsurgency are given premises that address

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<sup>2</sup> The official supervisor of the thesis was Vitalino Ximilox, a prominent Maya-Kakchiquel leader.

<sup>3</sup> He proposed that the counterinsurgency military, after the strike of 1982 that led to the disappearance of Chimaltenango's front, was never capable of making any significant damage to the forces in the *Frente de la Sierra (Frente Ho Chi Minh)* in the Ixil Region, which resisted until the signing of the peace agreements in 1996.

<sup>4</sup> Massive violence is an open wound in the national imaginary, which was registered, and exposed by the Recovery of Historical Memory (1998) Project (conducted by the Office of Human Rights of the Archbishopric) and the U.N Truth Commission (1999).

the low intensity conflict in relation to the processes of Guatemala's institutionalization and democratization process in its specific historic context. The counterinsurgency campaign plans, designed and executed between 1981 and 1989, are founding blocks of Guatemala's contemporary political system.<sup>5</sup>

However, I am not interested in the creation of the political regime for itself (such is a task for political scientists), but in the production of strategies and mechanisms of depoliticization that were developed in that process. I build on Ranciere's (2006, 2010) and Wilderson's (2010) notion of the political, which is defined as the emergence of antagonisms that disrupt the stability of the regime of the sensible and the cultural field.

In other words, I consider that, parallel to the biopolitical project, the effect of counterinsurgency and low intensity conflict was to depoliticize Guatemalan society by creating mechanisms to neutralize the oppositions that led to the radical organization of the *subalterns* and parts of *middle* classes after the U.S. invasion in 1954. I propose that, parallel to the military guerrilla warfare analysis, structural racism and the human rights anthropology, it is central to understand the counterinsurgency low intensity conflict from the perspective of the political and the processes of depoliticization. The question of the victory of the counterinsurgency project makes sense in these terms. Did counterinsurgency neutralize the structure of antagonisms and therefore depoliticize and stabilize the regime of the sensible and the cultural field?

My argument revolves around the idea that counterinsurgency is a contingency that provided the conditions of possibility for the present, including the research carried out by politicized, activist, and solidary academics. In this regard, I argue that is central, for the political debate, to analyze critically and explicitly our positions and the kinds of

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<sup>5</sup> This goes from the first counterinsurgency military plans in 1982 (Victoria 82, Firmeza 83, Reencuentro Institucional 1984) until the early 1990

epistemic and political dispositions that we reproduce within the contingency of post-counterinsurgency.

In other words, this is an operative concept that draws on both ethnographic and nationwide experiences. I aim to grasp a period of political, social and cultural specificity (the aftermath of the low intensity conflict and the signing of the peace agreements) in Guatemala, in which counterinsurgency becomes contingent upon the structure of the sensible, which stresses the dialectic of politicization and depoliticization. Post-counterinsurgency is a notion intended to shed light on the historical moment in which, despite the disappearance of the counterinsurgency state, counterinsurgency becomes common sense(s) within large sectors of Guatemalans, for whom the lack of empathy towards the suffering of State-violence is normalized. This lack of empathy is basically triggered by the emergence of a field of expressivity in which the history of State violence (namely the suffering of victims of genocide, massacres, massive rapes and sexual slavery) becomes tangible and transmutes in the production of processes of politicization.

This is an attempt to understand, the socio-cultural sensorial framework in which, on the one hand, it becomes almost impossible to empathize with the victims of genocide and massive extermination; while on the other hand, the spaces and experiences in which the reproduction of this form of hegemony fails and the failure manifests itself in new forms of dissent. In other words, this is a rechanneling of the political that builds on the dialectical relation between depoliticization and politicization.

## **THE GENOCIDE TRIAL: POLITICIZATION, IDEOLOGY AND POST-COUNTERINSURGENCY**

On May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013, judge Yasmin Barrios read the sentence, declaring Rios Montt guilty of genocide against the Ixil people. The verdict condemned the former dictator to 80 years of prison. He was 87 already. We met with some friends from other Central American countries, and Mexico to celebrate. We cried, we laughed, we howled. It was excessive, we needed catharsis.

A week later, Guatemala's Constitutional Court revoked the sentence and reverted the trial to the moment before Barrios was designated presiding judge for the case. A strong affective tension between two radically oppositional poles reconfigured the basic politico-cultural structures of the nation. Everything seemed to matter, but everything felt weightless and shallow. On the one side, during their declarations, the witnesses resuscitated and expressed the horrors suffered in the early 1980s. They received support from large numbers of Guatemalans that went to the courtroom during the hearings. Several of them learned for the first time about the Counterinsurgency atrocities because of the genocide trial. The trial functioned as a space where the suffering of the victims could be seen and heard massively by other Guatemalans. The emergence of this suffering, pain, trauma, reconfigured some of the ways in which people related to the war in terms of empathy, solidarity and destabilization of the regime of the sensible.

On the other side, large numbers of Guatemalans, from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, not only defended Rios Montt and The National Army, but also vilified and denigrated in the cruelest way the victims of war. Tens of thousands of offensive and painful commentaries circulated in social media and traditional mass media against the survivors of genocide: "*los guatemaltecos no somos genocidas* (we, Guatemalans, are not genocide perpetrators)," they used to shout. "The only thing they

[the survivors] want is to obtain economic profit from the manipulation of victimhood!” the genocide deniers remarked. The hashtag *#NoHuboGenocidio* went viral.

This was a relatively effective communication strategy that soundly resonated amongst several frustrated countrymen troubled by Guatemalan flawed nationalism and internalized racism. The negation of genocide became commonsense for several Guatemalans that saw in the trial and its sentence as a chain of events that would disgrace the country. The post-counterinsurgency political operators and public opinion producers managed to align national inferiority sentiments with the idea that a genocide sentence would make the country’s reputation look even worse than it already was. Like magicians, these operators managed to disguise the fact that Rios Montt was the person standing trial for genocide with the fear that the whole country was being judged and sentenced.

A public debate, as never seen before, took place in the country. Self-claimed *Experts* multiplied in every corner, and, like fungi in the humid warm tropic, emerged from nowhere. Suddenly a large mass of public commentators colonized the public sphere, pretending to understand perfectly good matters related to human rights violations, national and international law, history, forensics, photographic analysis and comparative studies between Nazi Germany, Rwanda and Guatemala. It was unreal. In the public sphere the only important thing was to demonstrate that Guatemala wasn’t a bad place; that the army rescued the country from becoming a socialist dictatorship “like Cuba or Venezuela.” Military activists such as the Foundation Against Terrorism, the Association of Guatemalan Military Veterans (AVMILGUA), and the economic elite represented by the Coordinating Committee of Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial, and Financial Associations, (CACIF) mobilized their counterinsurgency propaganda

machinery. Even a large group Ixil demonstrators came to Guatemala City carrying banners in support to Rios Montt in those days.

Judith Butler's (2004) questions surrounding mourning and grieving could have actualized the debate: "Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? What makes for a *grievable* life?" (Butler, 2004, p. 20). The crudeness of war violence was a scar in the national epidermis; the testimonies were bare and exposed the *problematic* status of Guatemalan political project. For an ephemeral moment, I even believed that everybody would be sensitized. Of course I was wrong! There was a large and solid shield obstructing the senses towards the suffering and pain caused by counterinsurgency violence. For a large part of Guatemalans, the wound of genocide seemed neither to exist nor to matter. A new tragedy was taking place: people insulting fiercely the survivors, accusing them of causing the war, the assassination of their elders and unborn, the massacres and massive rapes, the sexual slavery; justifying the violence inflicted against them, the destruction of their world.<sup>6</sup>

A dense atmosphere expanded explosively after the sentence. The rise of some weird form of ideology was cloaking *the real* with upside-down images that evoked the Althusserian (1969, 2014) *mirror structure*. Ideology became constitutive to the *national subject*, which was galvanized against any fissure that history could open. The problem was not only the lack of understanding of the testimonies and evidences. No, something more basic, more primordial, was taking place. Beyond the counterinsurgency military and the economic elite, a large portion of Guatemalans (non related to the military) did not want to acknowledge in any way the testimonial narratives presented by the *Fiscalía*

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<sup>6</sup> As Irma Alicia Velasquez Nimatuj (2014) would put it, these were the traces left by a racialized state with a racialized sense of justice and a racialized perception of Justice. This argument is also fundamental to understand how genocide became a project of state that expressed the crudest form of racism, as Marta Elena Casaus pointed out during the Genocide Trial.

*General* (Attorney General). Further, from their perspectives, the weight of forensic data was equal to the weight of any other opinion. Any contradiction was part of the Marxist-Leninist plot to *continue the war by other means*.<sup>7</sup>

The notion of ideology was placed in the debate. It was, however, not based on any critical neo-Kantian philosophical practice. On the contrary, it was a clumsy radicalization of the idea that there are no facts, but only the confrontation of points of view and perspectives (in other words, the post-truth before it was mainstream.)



Figure 1: By Sandra Sebastian. Plaza Pública 04/23/2013

Even David Stoll (2013) went to the Ixil region to survey how many Ixiles had opinions in favor or against the verdict. He asserts having interviewed 45 Ixiles. From these 20 approved of the genocide sentence, 14 did not, 6 leaned towards the disapproval and 5 declared themselves to be neutral. He argued that on the light of these figures it was difficult to think about genocide in the Ixil region.

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<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to see the former counterinsurgency operator use this argument to devalue the Human rights struggle, considering that the notion “*war by other means*” was firstly introduced by General Alejandro Gramajo, who was the minds behind the implementation of the low intensity conflict strategy in Guatemala.



Taking on some ideas and conversations with Diane Nelson I thought that we were facing some kind of inverted/ideological reflection, like the photograph above presented, that was intending to instrumentalize some sort of twisted mathematics in relation to what can be felt and how. A form of calculation that sheltered the cruelty and barbarity of Guatemala's counterinsurgency army. At that point the definition of genocide was no longer relevant. At least two different phenomena were at stake. On the one hand, a Foucauldian, most usual, take on the construction of genocide as a category of truth and consequently a category of power. On the other hand, the production of differentiated regimes of sensibility towards the testimonies of survivors. Drawing on Butler (2004) and Nelson's (2015) method, one could therefore ask: who counts the opinions when it comes to sympathy with the victims? What opinions have the value and force to trigger the senses? What makes possible the numbness of the senses towards victims of war? Did the counterinsurgency open this horizon of sensorial possibilities?

And the answer perhaps is that the horizon of possibilities in relation to the experience of counterinsurgency violence was always open, it only intensified with the trial. If the former military created an organization such as the *Fundación Contra el Terrorismo*, whose exclusive objective is to victimize the perpetrators of counterinsurgency violence, this may mean that the voice of the human rights trials is having some other effects beyond what is specifically happening in the courtroom. A large number of Guatemalans listen and empathize with the victims; these voices also trigger indignation and desire to carry out political organization. A large number of Guatemalans started a process of radical politicization after knowing about the suffering, pain, sadness that the victims still have. The genocide trial showed that in Guatemala it is impossible for the counterinsurgency military to be the victors of this conflict. The

testimonies made possible for the naked eye to see the structure of antagonisms that constitutes Guatemala's national imagined community.

#### **WAR BY OTHER MEANS AND IMPOSSIBILITY**

My premise is that the counterinsurgency military, by introducing the notion of continuing the *war by other means*, created the conditions of impossibility for winning the war. It is important to problematize both the notion of *humanitarian war* and *war by other means*, which are constitutive to this dissertation. Before attempting to define these terms abstractly, I would like to contextualize the process that drove me to think about these notions.

I took part in the public debate described above. I used to write a column in *Plaza Pública* and the contradictions between the suffering and trauma manifested by the survivors and the negation expressed by political-media operators of the military and the local elite were a recurrent subject of my deliberations. A year before the sentence I wrote an article (Flores 2012) in response to three opinion columns written by two different authors. The journalist Juan Luis Font wrote the first two articles for *El Periodico* in January 27<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> respectively, in which he stated that the Ríos Montt case irrelevant because he, as an individual, was only going with the counterinsurgency flow, the general military-strategy, and the anticommunist geopolitics. Font believed that Ríos Montt did the same as everybody else in Guatemala during the early 1980s, and had no chance to act against the mass killings, massive rapes, and general counterinsurgency violence.

My critique of Font's opinion columns revolved around the notion of *banality of evil* introduced by Arendt (2006) in the 1960s. I did not intend to revisit in detail her

arguments on the 1963 trial against Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem; it sufficed to provide some points against the idea of perpetrators defending themselves by claiming that they belonged to massive bureaucratic apparatuses to which they were subjected, and in which they did not take the decisions. In other words, I suggested that Font's argument eventually would become something like: "they were only doing their job" or "they were only following orders".

Alfred Kaltschmitt wrote the third column in *Prensa Libre* the 31th of January. Kaltschmitt was one of the religious representatives of the Verbo millennialist church sent to the Ixil region by Rios Montt during the times of the scorched earth campaigns and the implementation of the *development poles* and *model villages*. He claims to be an eyewitness of what happened in the region in that specific moment of Guatemalan History, and gave a declaration in the genocide trial to defend Rios Montt's position. In his article (as well as in his public declaration in tribunals), he argued that instead of genocide, the Rios Montt Government brought a *humanitarian war* policy that focused on the declaration of amnesty, and relocation of civilians.

My response to Kaltshmitt focused on a very simple economic principle, revolving around how he made war and genocide a very lucrative business. I pointed out how the NGO (Fundación Agros) he runs in the Ixil Region still receives funding from the USAID and evangelical aid agencies 30 years after the highpoint of violence.

I sent a draft of the piece to Juan Carlos Mazariegos, a colleague of mine from the *Asociación Para el Avance de las Ciencias Socieales en Guatemala* (AVANCSO) who has done research in the Ixil Region. He agreed with my critique of Font, but he thought Kaltshmitt's argument belonged to a very different realm that could not be foreclosed exclusively by an economic rationality. "Something different was taking place during implementation of the *Humanitarian War* strategy, which translated directly to the

creation of *Aldeas Modelo* and Development Poles, as well as the implementation of the *fusiles y frijoles* plan. I believe they were aiming to change people's world," he said.

Drawing on Juan Carlos' feedback and some extra research on the truth reports and human rights anthropology I hypothesized that both *humanitarian war* and *winning the war by other means* were notions introduced by the counterinsurgency to expand the realm of militarism into non-military experiences of the world.<sup>8</sup> At this point I knew already that a debate on the notion of *war by other means* in relation to the *post-genocide* was taking place by Guatemalans and American colleagues. This framed the aftermath of counterinsurgency strategy within a mix of repressive state violence and "civil affairs," which produced a "novel configuration of what military theorists call low-intensity conflict and Foucault calls biopolitics: the simultaneous 'right of life and power over death'" (McAlister & Nelson 2013, p. 5). I considered that for contributing to this discussion it was fundamental also to dig in the sociopolitical production of culture in terms of the assembly of spaces and subject positions of consensus and dissent.

I was already wondering if this point of departure could provide the framework to produce ontological (the world/s), aesthetical (the senses) and eventually epistemological (the science) questions to understand the constitution of the political in the post-counterinsurgency. Which and how would be the counterinsurgency world frame the definition of the political and the modulation of the regimes of sensibility? What are/were the mechanisms designed to shape these regimes of sensibility in relation to the production of the political? And what would be the ethical and scientific paradigms that would try to introduce? In sum, as my colleague from AVANCSO said, what world was counterinsurgency attempting to exterminate and what should take its place?

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<sup>8</sup> In Chapter one I analyze how these notions were theorized and introduced by the former general Alejandro Gramajo since the late 1970s.

In order to address the complexity of these questions, I explored the notion of infrastructure (Larking, 2004, 2008a, 2008b, 2013) in relation to the production of new political horizons of intelligibility (Wilderson 2010), desire (Lacan 1978), and sensorial regimes (Ranciere 2013). In other words, I considered that it was necessary to find some interconnections between the implementation of counterinsurgency plans in relation to the production of new materialities that would affect and modulate the realm of the sensible.

Drawing on these reflections, I propose that both *humanitarian war* and *war by other means* are notions that aimed to produce politico-cultural effects not only in the specific spaces where war took place, but in the definition of the national hegemonic project. My hypothesis was that the military developed a calculated strategy to change the quotidian world that eventually would yield a transformation in the affective dimension of sociocultural relations. I firstly thought in things such as the possible outcomes that the transformation of the everyday material reality would have in the constitution of people's political feelings regarding the trial on genocide; in other words, a specific structure of feeling (Williams, 1978) could be apprehended in the analysis that was not necessarily related to political points of view and the public sphere. These structures could be related with the production of aesthetic attunements (Stewart 1996, 2011) and the design of the regime of sensibility which would yield sentient political beings conforming to a specific moment in history.

In general, I suspected that it was a matter of affects driving the political, and the trial opened a fissure in what Ranciere (2010, 2013) calls the Regime of the Sensible, which allowed both the emergence of supplementary possibilities of sensation of historic antagonisms that disrupted the nation's cultural stability, as well as the rise of groups that, metaphorically speaking, shout to the public: "there is nothing to see inside the

courtroom, *no hubo genocidio*, the victims are opportunists, everything is a lie, let's keep walking". In other words, the trial made it possible to perceive that counterinsurgency—even as it triggered a conservative social response—also generated expressions of dissent and discontent that re-politicized the reproduction of social reality.

### **AESTHETICS AS INFRASTRUCTURE**

By studying, designing, and executing ethnographic visual-arts projects, I study the socio-cultural infrastructures intrinsic to sensorial forms of counterinsurgency that spread to the aesthetic regime in contemporary Guatemala. Drawing on recent anthropological scholarship (Anand, Bach, Elyachar, & Mains 2012; Larkin 2013,) I understand infrastructures as aesthetic environments that organize the micro-political distribution and circulation of the sensible. Building upon Ranciere's (2004, 2010) aesthetics-politics entanglement, and Hardt's (1999) notion of affective labor, I engaged in a two-year multisite field research project focusing on the conditions of possibility of aesthetic practices and experiences in post-counterinsurgency Guatemala. Aesthetics has an analytical meaning: it frames the sensory experience of perception (Buck-Morss 1992), a process that encompasses not only art, but also the production and reproduction of material reality through which the subject practices everyday life (de Certeau 1984). Since built environments are direct outcomes of human sociocultural actions that transform the material possibilities of perception (namely affective labor), they entail and reproduce specific *sensorial regimes*, which shape the intensities and rhythms (Lefebvre, 1991a, 1991b, 2002, 2004) of what people feel, and how they feel. Building on this, I propose that counterinsurgency aimed at producing built environments that were intended to foreclose the general perception of political reality (I use the term "contingency" to

designate this phenomenon) by means of redefining aesthetic experiences and practices. From this point of departure, I problematize both national analyses of counterinsurgency that fixate the security-victimhood discourse in the academic debate, and the forms of aesthetic-artistic execution that resonate with this discourse. In other words, I propose that narratives and aesthetic practices that exclusively revolve around concepts of security-victimhood discourse not only re-inscribe and validate the political aim of counterinsurgency, but also occlude the social and political agency of people to overcome the effects of counterinsurgency violence. I propose that the composition of the micro, meso and macro political dimensions of reality is intertwined with—but also exceeds—the experience of everyday life within post-counterinsurgency aesthetic regimes. These experiences can be grasped by social researchers, contemporary artists, and ordinary people as forms of social and political agency gravitating around hegemony or counter-hegemony, consensus or disagreement. My research question focuses on exploring the multiplicity of sensorial/aesthetic experiences and practices emerging from the contingency given in the post-counterinsurgency material formation of the everyday.

#### **VISUAL ETHNOGRAPHY, NON-UTILITARIAN METHODS: THE ELDER OF ILOM**

I was accompanying my two colleagues, Giovanni Bat'z and Juan Carlos Mazariegos on a three-days trip to Illom, a community that belongs to the *municipio de Chajul*. Illom is one of the remotest and poorest villages in the Ixil Region, and is also known as the place where the Ixiles settled for the first time; it is the place where the sacred maize comes from; and has also been the stage for the implantation of the coffee capitalism, the creation of the *finca*, the usurpation of communitarian lands, massacres, the burn of the village and its transformation into an *aldea modelo*, the introduction of

slave labor and all other forms of violence that come with the reproduction of primitive forms of capitalist accumulation. Illom is the place where I realized for the first time that the genocide was not exceptional, it was the norm for *coffee capitalism*.

Juan Carlos, whose dissertation revolves around the relation of Guatemala's capitalism to war and genocide, just had discovered a document of hundreds of pages that registered a suit occurred in the 1950 where the Ixiles from Illom managed to recover the land that was usurped by the surrounding *fincas* (coffee plantations) in early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The goal of our trip was to return the document to the elders of Illom, so that they could have a historic record of a previous experience in which their ancestors managed to recover the lands.<sup>9</sup>

By the time we reached Illom I had already started with the visual projects that are constitutive to this dissertation. I had no idea of how this trip would reshape the scope of my research. I firstly came to contribute with my colleagues in recording the meeting they would hold with the local authorities and in making a visual register of the place and their living conditions.<sup>10</sup> My task was very basic: to make sure that the audios had good quality for a further transcriptions and to make photographs that could allow recreate the (public and private) sense of place.

When we arrived the elders were expecting us. They gathered at Don Roberto's place and were extremely excited to see *el papel* (literally means paper, but it would be something like the document). Everybody was sitting on benches not taller than 40cm. The first thing they asked us was to present ourselves, and describe for them what were we doing in the region. We explained that we were carrying out our field research for our

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<sup>9</sup> These lands, however, were retrieved to the *finqueros* (finca owners) after the U.S. invasion and the raise of counterinsurgency violence in the late 1950s.

<sup>10</sup> In other words, I was taking on basic visual anthropological methods to create a photo documentation of the space.



dissertations in sociocultural anthropology and gave them some details about what the work of each of us is about.

Giovanni explained to them that part of Juan Carlos' approach consisted in researching old documents (*papeles*) the *Archivo de Centroamérica* (Archive of Central America) and the *Archive del Registro de la Propiedad* (Register of Property Archive). Finally, Juan Carlos told them that one of the discovered documents was related to their struggle, and he thought that they would be interested in having a copy of it. He also told them that he was interested in carrying out a series of interviews to see if it was possible to reconstruct the history using both documental and oral sources.

They listened and translated what we were saying into ixil for those that did not speak Spanish. They expected that *el papel* would finally provide the evidence needed to prove that the communitarian lands were taken from them illegally in the course of one hundred years. Then, they deliberated for some minutes and several of them made short but incisive statements. They were most interested in understanding the impact that the document could have; especially if it could be the proof to finally win their case. "We are not doing this for us", one of them said, and broke into tears remarking something like "we just want to be sure that our sons have something to survive in the future". After that, he asked, "how can we work together? Can you help us to get our land back?" It was striking.

In that moment we were overwhelmed and embarrassed; we did not know what to answer. We explained that we are anthropologists, story tellers, that our expertise would not be of much help for what they needed. "But maybe there is a way", one of them remarked. We didn't want to compromise and create false expectations. "We can make a transcription of the interviews and bring them to you, it might be of some help", some of

us said. They agreed to be interviewed and told us that we could think about ways to articulate our work with their material struggle.

We carried out a total of eight interviews. The life stories were heartbreaking. They talked about the subjection to the power of the *finca* (the coffee plantation) since they were born. Their stories were of abuses, pain and suffering. They witnessed the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century capitalism; and their stories are memory landmarks that proved the way in which capital was created in that corner of the Ixil region; in the whole country.

Don Ricardo told us the story when in 1976 the guerrilla came to *Finca Santa Delfina* to carry out the execution of Luis Arenas (aka El Tigre del Ixcan). He told us that it was a payday and that all the workers were in line expecting their turn to receive their miserable salary. “The *guerrilleros* came and shot don Luis,” he said. Then we asked if he eye witnessed the execution. “No, I was working at my post in the *beneficio* as *patiero* (where they separate the skin from the coffee beans and dry them at the sun) and I could not move from there. How could I move from there? I do not own my life. I am already sold to the *finca*!” He told us later the story of his grandfather who was forced to work at the road opening in the 1930s and described with detail the moment of the massacre in 1982, when the Military killed 90 community members of Illom and forced the survivors to work for free during one year at *Finca* la Perla, where the military base was settled.

Most of the interviews were carried out by Juan Carlos and Giovanni, and each one of them corroborated the horror to which these people have been exposed during more than a century. I kept repeating myself something like this: “Genocide was not a matter of exception, but of intensification of a kind of violence that was rooted in the local history of these violated mountains.” Eventually I intervened only to ask specific aspects and pieces of information that would be relevant. Mostly, I was basically trying to figure out what kinds of photographs could be taken in that place to combine the majesty

of the landscape and the rich cultural heritage with the wounds opened by the introduction of the coffee plantations (*las Fincas*), their forms of primitive accumulation, genocide and slavery.

#### **PHOTOGRAPHIC EVENT AND SINGULARITY**

During the first interview something singular happened. I asked Don Benjamin permission to take a photograph of his kitchen. I realized that the light event that was taking place in there and the material elements distributed in space could produce an iconic photograph that would not require much indexical explication of the context and the life stories that we were witnessing. I did not feel confident to make other kinds of photographs beyond those of the margins, the spaces in which they experience their everyday and that would allow to create a visual story of contemporary Ilom. Don Benjamin agreed and allowed me to photograph the kitchen. I had to set up my tripod considering that I would require some extra time to achieve the necessary exposure under those light conditions. I shot three times to prepare the focus and finally recomposed. Then, after making the photograph, Don Benjamin took the bench moved it a little to the left and sat on it. “One with me, now” he said.

It was after that moment that I finally understood the kind of research that visual anthropology can produce. My original idea was to make an inventory in a more conventional style which would help to show the living conditions in which the elders of Illom had to live after that long history of violence and abuse. But in the moment when Don Benjamin moved the bench and sat on it to be part of the composition, everything changed in a radical anthropological way.



Figure 2: By Author

It was at that moment when I understood that the relation they were trying to create with us was going beyond the simple utilitarian exchange in which we would be *good anthropologists* that would bring back to them the results of our researches.<sup>11</sup> They were asking us to collaborate in order to produce something uncertain, something we didn't know what was going to be the outcome. I understood Don Benjamin's move as a way to say, "this is my story, this is the History of the nation, and our faces must be there, to show how history is engraved not only in our places, but also in our faces."

#### **POST-UTILITARIAN COLLABORATIVE METHODS**

The singularity of that photographic event redefined the meaning I was giving to the use of visual methods for this research. Since the beginning I was thinking about engaging in forms of collaborative methods that would allow *giving something in return*.<sup>12</sup> In other words, my original intention was to create a relation in which exchange would be not defined as a form of utilitarian reciprocity. What happened after that experience made me think that what we were doing together did not relate directly to the possibility of having quantifiable results in a specific period of time. The exchange was not supposed to be reciprocal, at least in the conventional sense. The kind of event that took place in that moment triggered the necessity of thinking about anthropology beyond the hegemony of utilitarianism, which has become hegemony in several branches of applied anthropology.

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<sup>11</sup> An indeed, we brought a small booklet with the transcriptions of their interviews and some of the portraits that were later produced. We also contributed to start a relation between them and a group of Mayan lawyers that specialize in these kinds of cases.

<sup>12</sup> Which, I believe, can be some kind of cliché if the relationship does not build upon long-term engagement and forms of collaboration.

I propose as a *metacommentary* of this dissertation that it is possible to engage in long standing commitments that aim not necessarily to establish relations with an end-means rationality that always calculates on the utilities and benefits that each part can get, but the production of forms of political/communitarian articulation that take as point of departure the history of violence that has been taking place in scorched earth spaces (and the history of capitalisms and its primitive forms of accumulation) such as Illom and most of those places that were victims of the genocide policies implemented by Guatemala's counterinsurgency military. This means that we (anthropologists) have to understand that it is impossible to alienate our methods from political positions, even if we wanted to. But this also means that not every explicit alignment with a political position can be measured in terms of hegemonic mental framework of utilitarianism. The photograph and the way in which Don Benjamin recomposed it challenged us to find these ways of non-reciprocal, excessive, alignment beyond specific means-ends rationality; beyond the pure utilities that could be measured as the result of our specific actions.

The most important thing at that moment was to understand their experience of suffering, the incommensurability that these experiences entailed. The challenge was to collaborate in producing their portraits in the way we understood they requested, that included the intersection of visual registers, life stories and their visions of excess (of primitive accumulation, racism, capitalism, etc.) In other words, the research process was based on a sort of intersubjective relation that takes on the irruption of political as point of departure. Under these conditions it is impossible to think in reciprocal terms, what could be given *in return*, from our perspectives that equals the strength of these life stories? This intersection, in some extent, made possible to visualize that the outcome of the collaboration would be beyond the realm of practical possibilities; it was an invitation

to think and re-think about the impossible. It was an invitation to subvert our own epistemic premises to engage in a different kind of ethical project.

The same as in the case of genocide, the life stories of Illom, and the photographic event when Don Benjamin took his bench to be part of the composition of the photograph, the challenge is to create and invest in visual-ethnographic relations that can contribute to disrupt the stability of the hegemonic field of vision in which the subjects emerge and subvert the solidity of the regime of the sensible. This emergence of radical alterity, of discontinuity, of the experience of the suffering, can articulate at least two different sets of non-utilitarian politics.

On the one hand, non-sensitized regions will be irritated by the presence of the voice and face of those that have been violated by colonialism, patriarchy and capitalism. This, can of course trigger a reactionary response, but can also stimulate processes of politicization that didn't exist before, by re-attuning the structures of feeling and making impossible a general consensus.

On the other hand, this can prove that these peoples, despite the experience of massive violence, suffering and trauma, have not only survived, but prevailed in an environment that systematically denies them. In other words, I believe that the non-utilitarian challenge is to invest in the creation of a community of hope, that is politicized and that can continue to exist during long periods of time enduring atrocities such as colonialism, primitive capitalism, extractivism, racism, and patriarchy.

#### **ENGAGING CONTRADICTIONS AND POTENTIALITIES IN THE POLITICS OF NON-UTILITARIAN METHODS**

My intention in drawing on the notion of non-utilitarian methods is not to imply that this research process has freed itself from the reproduction of utilitarian practices.

Taking on Hale's (2007) article about the engagement of contradictions in activist anthropology I see non-utilitarian methods as an epistemological and political horizon of research potentialities that take, as point of departure, on the tensions created between research processes and power relations in the context of complex long term political struggles.

On the one hand, the non-utilitarian methods recognize the inequalities of power existing in the research processes. In this regard, I follow Foucault (1982) and Bourdieu (1990) in considering that not only the research, but also the positions of academic speaking and writing, are determined by social conditions structured by power relations constitutive to historic and structural dimensions of reality.

My intention is not to deny the existence of power disparities (and their circulation.) I am interested in understanding the kind of research that is possible to carry out, considering that these determinants will not only affect the kind of knowledge that is produced, but also contribute to the reproduction of structures of domination such as the entanglement of primitive forms of capitalism with racial hierarchies. To achieve this goal, I consider it to be essential to move from the ethnographic practice that builds on forms of participatory observation to forms of research that allow us to understand the cultural and political singularities of others and the epistemologies inherent to their everyday practices. It is fundamental to problematize and challenge the practice in which the anthropologist sees the others, the *natives*, only as informants of first (the indigenous) and/or second order (the local researcher) and does not acknowledge that they are also epistemic subjects, making synthesis of their specific historic realities. This practice is not only problematic on ethical grounds, but highly limited in terms of making possible the production of kinds of knowledge that might entail potential political effects. The traditional participant interview-based ethnography not only reproduces the



aforementioned power structures, but also re-inscribes their social relationality in the logic of utilitarianism.

I carried out my research in conversation with three epistemological rationalities: (1) Hale's (2006; 2007) activist methods; (2) what we called "Encuentro de Saberes" at the Asociación Para el Avance de Las Ciencias Sociales en Guatemala, and (3) "los Dos Sistemas" proposed by the Ixil University. Both, the "Encuentro de Saberes" as the "Dos Sistemas" are epistemological and methodological notions that aim to find strategies to encounter and combine the kinds of knowledge that is produced in different contextual realities, which are not reduced to reified and absolute power positions. These seek to understand the circulation, relationality and complexity of historic and social singularities and their potentialities in an intersubjective space of production of social analysis. The notions of "Encuentro de Saberes" and "los Dos Sistemas" take as methodological point of departure the power hierarchy, the structural gap, created between traditional academic knowledge presented and represented in the ivory tower of academia and the kind of knowledge that is produced and reproduced among other non-academic subjects and communities. The idea is to find strategies to reduce that gap by engaging in collaborative processes not only of research and writing, but also of producing alternative strategies of expressivity and politicization, such as the visual projects carried out in this dissertation.

My methodology builds mostly on processes of experimentation seeking to establish other forms of reciprocity beyond traditional utilitarian methodologies. To me non-utilitarian methods would acknowledge the power differences and non-reciprocities between participants in research processes, and create social and epistemic relations between the subjects that are actively producing social knowledge (and, as in the case of this research, aesthetic practices). In other words, I consider that a non-utilitarian

methodology must look toward the production of knowledge in direct interaction and relation with other subjects that are actively reflexive; subjects that problematize the reproduction of the social reality. The subjects are not only study objects, but direct participants in the creation of social and political critical thinking regarding both their immediate reality, as well as the broader national and international context. The aim of no-utilitarian methods is not to produce knowledge *about* the subjects but *with* the subject, through collectively analyzing the complexities of the historic moment in which we live. I seek to take a step further in the direction proposed by the activist research methods, not only to establish a political relation of alignment with specific groups and individuals, but to build strategies to create inter-reflexive processes of knowledge production.

The challenge traced by this methodology demands that one acknowledges and engages all the contradictions present in any kind of social interaction in the relationship established between the anthropologists and the subjects with whom analysis is being produced. That is, in addition to the power inequalities in terms of knowledge, the reproduction of transversal power structures such as racial and gender inequalities that are constantly flowing in different and often contradictory directions in several directions of the social field force.

The challenge is to avoid oversimplification and petrification of identity categories for those tend to recreate dichotomist forms of understanding the reproduction of power. Rejecting oversimplification is also a project aiming to understand and expose the complexities of

forms of social reproduction in the research itself. By both being aware of the power inequalities reproduced by all of those taking part in the research process and

seeking to avoid the oversimplification and petrification of identity positionalities, the central aim is to understand and describe complex flows of power beyond binaries.

The idea of engaging in non-utilitarian methods revolves around the horizon of possibilities of closing the gap between academic knowledge and other forms of knowledge. For this dissertation, I developed an analytical strategy that intends to create such a practice which, of course, is full of contradictions that I am not interested in hiding. Each one of the experimental research processes presented in this dissertation followed this practice. The results of the collaborative work in which I engage were possible by the interaction of non-utilitarian practices, that allowed the subjects to present the research outcomes in their specific contexts. This happened every time, even before this dissertation started to be written. I did not brought back the research results, because these already were authored by the subjects I worked with. This, I consider, makes a difference in the traditional practice where the researcher “brings back” the research results, because with my strategy the knowledge not only is already something that belongs to the subjects that took part in its creation, but it finds a practical and political significance in their everyday.

#### **ANALYTICAL STRATEGY: DOCUMENTAL RESEARCH, EXPERIMENTS AND POTENTIALITIES**

The dissertation has two sections, corresponding to research carried out during the two-year multisited fieldwork, I conducted between the Fall 2014 and the Summer 2016 (Section one is called Counterinsurgency infrastructures, mimesis and over-determination, and two is called: post-counterinsurgency, experiments and potentialities;

Reproducibility and memory fetishism.)<sup>13</sup> With these sections I intend to make an analytical distinction between the singularity designed by the counterinsurgency State, that aimed to change the everyday material infrastructure of the Ixil region and the Nation-State and the aesthetic regime of indigenous peoples between the 1960 and early 1990. I intend to juxtapose this distinction with the *reverberances* and singularities opened in the post-counterinsurgency present. The argument of my dissertation, as presented above, is not only to understand the impossibility of foreclosing the political, but to demonstrate that the over-determination of counterinsurgency aesthetics can provide the conditions of possibility to disrupt its own stability. This means that despite counterinsurgency aesthetics not only is present and is contingent upon contemporary social struggles, activist and solidary research practices and political forms of art, this contingency also provides the means (singularities) to its own destabilization (potentialities). In other words, my research goal consists in producing a strategy that allows the reader to understand the present in relation to the over-determination of the past, and the past in relation to the potentialities opened in the present that I call post-counterinsurgency, which I use to conceptualize the contemporary moment of Guatemala's history.

My research method intends to engage a dialectical entanglement that articulates the continuities and discontinuities of time, infrastructure, aesthetics and subjectivity. To achieve this I engage in a series of interventions that combine archival research, multidirectional pedagogies and visual experiments. Each one of these interventions are

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<sup>13</sup> My original plan was to write three extra chapters that would give more ethnographic data. Two of them would constitute a section in which the impact of counterinsurgency in urban spaces would be studied and the last one would be the reconstruction of several life stories of Ixiles that were born in built environments created by the counterinsurgency, who are passing through processes of politicization in the present. The lack of time and funds have forced me to take the decision to present the dissertation in this form.

articulated by the aim of understanding the limits and fissures of the post-counterinsurgency era.

I start this chapter with a provocation. The intention with the second part of the title “they did not win the war” and the vignette at the beginning is to expose from my own empirical material how counterinsurgency, despite the amount of energy invested to produce a new national project (that would restructure/revive the previous finca-racist coffee capitalism described by the Elder of Ilom), also provided the condition of possibility to create new political singularities in the hegemonic aesthetic regime. I am aware of the risk of beginning with a provocation: I am trying to force the reader to read the title and the vignette in combination and understand that my aim is to connect past and present in innovative ways. I do not intend to investigate the success or failure of counterinsurgency strategies, that should be clear at this point. By explaining the methodology and my conceptualization of post-counterinsurgency society, I hope to make explicit the ambitions and limitations of this dissertation.

I have developed a twofold analytical strategy: on the one hand, I draw on archival research and, on the other hand, on three experimental interventions anchored in differentiated visual artistic projects. I focus on the minutiae designed and implemented by the counterinsurgency state to produce both a new human being (subject) and the aesthetic infrastructure in which the counterinsurgency subject should recreate his everydayness. This subject-space would represent the new model of national post-counterinsurgency project, and should also epitomize the form of hegemony desired by the military between the 1960 and the 1990s. I consider that the aim of the production of these counterinsurgency humanitarian war spaces included the production of a new form of political consensus. This was, for instance, perceived in my introductory analysis

regarding the aftermath of the Rios Montt trial presented some pages above, where several people actively denied the genocide against the Ixil people.

Despite the effect of counterinsurgency overwhelmingly visible in the present, it succeeds only partially. The new post-counterinsurgency national project was sustained by the idea of homogenizing the articulation of space/infrastructure, aesthetics and constitution of subjectivity. I propose that despite the immense intensity of these infrastructural modifications carried out by counterinsurgency, it is possible to see that it also created the spaces of singularity in which new potential forms of aesthetic dissent emerge.

This idea I propose, is the key concept that articulates every experimental intervention presented in this text and is the strategic concept to understand the nature of the second section of this dissertation. In contrast to the first section, the second one intends to trace and understand the forms of dissent expressed in the resignification of the conditions of possibility given by the counterinsurgency humanitarian war and war by other means. The dissent that emerges in the heart of the post-counterinsurgency is a dialectical relation between what I call singularity and potentiality. Singularity and potentiality articulate methodologically each one of the experimental visual approaches carried out in the field research that preceded the writing of this dissertation. I take as point of departure that over-determination is impossible, and that the present is a dialectical and dynamic flow of causal power relations and coincidences. Each one of the visual experiments carried out for this dissertation entail the dialectics established between singularity and potentiality, and is localized in the process of resignification of the aesthetic regime produced by counterinsurgency infrastructures.

I engaged in a series of ethnographic interactions with visual artists and Ixil researchers in which we explored both the overwhelming presence of counterinsurgency,

as well as the fissures in which the emergence of dissent could be identified and, eventually, exploited for processes of politicization. The point of departure in each one of these experiments consisted in discussing in depth the counterinsurgency strategies analyzed and exhibited in the first, documental, section of the dissertation.

The central interest in my methodological approach is to explore and analyze, with the subjects, the effects of counterinsurgency in the production of aesthetic forms and representations, their singularities, and the political processes of intersubjective reflexivity. This is why I insist in doing research with the subjects and not about the subjects, because I consider that is more relevant to see how these interactions produce not only social knowledge, but also the space of critical reflexivity needed to carry out processes of politicization. This experimental method functioned as a process that traditionally is carried out by philosophers in the western tradition. The difference, in these cases, however, is that the analysis of the zeitgeist was done in parallel to the production of visual forms of representation of the post-counterinsurgency reality that was left behind in the 1980s.

#### **SECTION ONE: COUNTERINSURGENCY INFRASTRUCTURES, MIMESIS AND OVER-DETERMINATION**

This section has two chapters, which articulate the first element of my analytical strategy. The aim is to carry out an analysis of the basic referents underlying the rationality of counterinsurgency infrastructures and the horizon of aesthetic and ontological experiences it intended to determine. Drawing on five months of archival research, I study the evolution of Guatemalan and U.S. counterinsurgency plans designed to transform the experience of basic everyday infrastructures from the 1960s to the 1980s.

The focus is on Military Civic Action programs set up broadly in the country under the auspices of the U.S. Government.

I analyze in detail Guatemala's plans to reconfigure communitarian living spaces in the aftermath of genocide, and U.S. counterinsurgency Military Civic Action (MCA) guides designed to modify the structures of desire in the new national project, in order to prevent the sympathy of local populations with the insurgency. After the deployment of the scorched earth campaign that destroyed ancestral living spaces and obliterated indigenous communities, a humanitarian war strategy which was based on the construction of reeducation and relocation camps (Aldeas Modelo), Development Poles, Fusiles y Frijoles (rifles and beans) and a hybrid form of military-civilian security force, the Auto-Defense Civil Patrols was carried out. Based on my findings, I claim that by transforming desires Guatemalan citizens, counterinsurgency MCA infrastructures intended to produce secured spaces of friendship (Shmitt 2007) meant to modify the sensorial experience of militarization, and system of political coordinates in "vulnerable" regions.

The second chapter of this section focuses on the notion of humanitarian war. I explore the kind of subject that was intended to be produced with the Military Civic Action programs focusing on the notions of reproducibility and mimetic faculties. This strategic focus allows me to study how counterinsurgency civic action programs deployed forms of representation that aimed to foreclose the multi-natural perspective of the Ixil population to the monistic ontology brought by utilitarianism. The information analyzed in both chapters was used later as basis to carry out the experimental collaborations analyzed in the second section of the dissertation.



## **SECTION TWO: POST-COUNTERINSURGENCY, EXPERIMENTS AND POTENTIALITIES**

Reproducibility and memory fetishism: Taking on this first approximation of mimesis, I explore the impact of counterinsurgency infrastructural projects in environments of circulation of artistic forms of representation. It focuses on the sensorial experiences and practices that are possible in spaces such as cosmopolitan art galleries. I introduce the notion of aesthetic-memory fetishism to problematize the ethical impossibility (*aporia*) of representing the pain, suffering, violence and trauma experienced by the tens of thousands of counterinsurgency's victims, in artistic built environments, which tend to re-inscribe modes of perception introduced by counterinsurgency. I carry out an analysis on the monumentalization, primitive accumulation (Marx 1867), and dispossession (Harvey 2005) of this pain of others (Sontag 2004) in the constitution of contemporary visual-arts.

This section builds on a six-months ethnographic collaborative relationship with Yasmin Hage, a Guatemalan contemporary artist that, among other art-works related to counterinsurgency, made a 1:50 model of an Aldea Modelo in 2007. The collaborative project we executed focused on the production of a sculpture (exhibited, among others, in New York and Guatemala City) in which a small excerpt of Ray Elliot's 1982 report was transliterated to ancient Mayan epigraphs. In the report, he describes the visit made by four American dentists to Nebaj (in the Ixil Region) in the same year. Elliot deliberates about the experience of these dentists, daily pulling hundreds of teeth, and compares it to the lack of a major infrastructure that would contribute to reeducate indigenous populations.

The white background in war photography: this chapter takes on a documentary film I made between 2015 and 2016 with Daniel Chauche, as well as the study of his white background photography. This chapter takes on the discussions of the production

of representations of war photography in both the moment of implementation of counterinsurgency humanitarian war politics and the moment of post-counterinsurgency. The goal of the section is to problematize the relation between war-photography and the idea of producing photographic representations beyond documentary style photography. The notion of desire and processes of interpellation becomes central during this chapter.

This relation with Chauche opened up the possibility to engage in a deep reflexive exchange, allowing me to pose theoretical questions regarding the notion of non-representational aesthetics in war photography. I take a further step reflecting on sensorial representation of war in relation to political projections of desires in the context of post-counterinsurgency society, and analyze how counterinsurgency shaped and colonized the public's perception of photography made during the 1980s.

The proposed analysis takes on the photographic style used by Chauche in the *Autopatrullero* portrait, which is characterized by a white background behind the photographed subject who is isolated from his everyday context. Although Chauche argues that his photography does not intentionally correspond to some form of documentation of war, observers permanently inscribe it as a visual document of counterinsurgency. In this regard, Chauche proposes that the white background operates as a space in which observers project their political, interpellation (Althusser 2014), desires of representation (Lacan, 1977), especially those given by the (direct or indirect) experience of counterinsurgency.

This chapter represents a particular critical moment that will be expressed in the ethnographic description but can be summarized as follows: First, it was possible to carry out the non-utilitarian methodology with Chauche, which allowed to produce a critical reflection in relation to the ideological forms of producing meaning by the public and the

artistic market in general. This synthesis of social phenomena has a potential effect to interpellate the idea of representation in relation to post-counterinsurgency aesthetics.

This was achieved, however, in the context relationship established with the photographed subject which still reproduced forms of utilitarianism, that made the project to entail a structural paradox that must be analyzed at some point with Chauche. This structural paradox is related not to the photographic gaze about the indigenous peoples (which is something extensively analyzed in the ethnographic description), but to the kinds of social relations established in the photographic event of preparing and shooting the photograph.<sup>14</sup>

The Ixil History of the 20th century: This is a section that takes on a photo exhibition taking place in February of 2016. This was the result of the research project coordinated between the Ixil University and their students, to recover the Ixil history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The exhibition is a project in which the Ixil researchers enacted their research findings of a six-month investigation process. They analyzed the historic moment when the State forced them to modify their living spaces and/or take part in the creation of built environments, including roads, model villages, and coffee plantations.

This chapter problematizes the possibility of a form of hegemony that is contingent to the success of humanitarian war strategies implemented by the counterinsurgency and proposes an exploration of alternative methods that can produce processes of politicization that build on the research and exposition of local history. I claim that this counterinsurgency low intensity conflict was not effective in achieving the plans analyzed in section one. On the contrary, the kinds of desire developed 30 years after their implementation are pointing towards alternative sociopolitical forms of

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<sup>14</sup> It is for me, however, complex to demand from the artist to implement an aesthetic non-utilitarian practice that satisfies the rigors of the anthropological gaze.

organizing the everyday. My findings suggest that young generations of Ixiles are searching for political alternatives beyond that which was established by the counterinsurgency humanitarian war strategy 30 years ago; beyond its aesthetic project. They are greatly aware of the origin of the counterinsurgency plans in which they live and constantly discuss strategies to modify them, in order to build alternative futures. This section builds on a ten-month collaboration with students of the Ixil University, located in one of the areas most affected by both the scorched earth campaign and the humanitarian war strategies of the early 1980s (CEH 1999, REHMI 1998).

## SECTION ONE: COUNTERINSURGENCY OVER-DETERMINATION, INFRASTRUCTURES, AESTHETICS, DESIRE AND MIMESIS

As stated in the introductory chapter, my intention with the notion of *they didn't win the war*, is to heuristically carry out an analytical strategy that juxtaposes contemporary aesthetic practices with counterinsurgency plans denominated *war by other means* and *humanitarian war*. My intention is to combine two different kinds of investigative approaches. The first is documental, and is presented in the first two chapters, in this section. The second approach is experimental, and performative, and is deployed along the third, fourth and fifth chapters. The combination of these research approaches intends to produce an analytical result to generate reflexive and critical arguments not only about the over-determination of counterinsurgency, but also about the possible spaces, affects, and practices that can eventually allow to destabilize it and overcome the reverberation of contemporary counterinsurgency powers.

Let us now focus on the first strategy. It builds on the notion of *discursive formations* proposed by Foucault (1982) in the *Archaeology of Knowledge*. I intend to study the logocentric textuality and contextually (what is commonly understood as discourse), and its entanglement with the production of infrastructural, material, built environments. These were intended to over-determine the definition of both subjectivity and the body within a process of fighting the war by other means and/or the production of democratic institutionalism.

In these terms, the two chapters composing this section are dedicated to understanding the immanence of the counterinsurgency project in relation to two analytical factors. First, the manufacture of discourse, which includes the design and deployment of what Larkin (2013) calls material built environments and Foucault defines

as the panopticon. Second, the production of desire, in terms of both Lacanian (1978, 2007) notion of lack and Deleuzian (1987, 1994, 1995) understanding of productivity.

The understanding of war exclusively in terms of victory or defeat is one of the central ideas I intend to contest in this dissertation. If I had followed counterinsurgency narrative related to the outcome of war in terms of a foreclosed binary, I would have concluded this analysis by validating the idea that counterinsurgency was victorious. In other words, I should foreclose the horizon of possibilities to the conclusion that counterinsurgency over-determines the present in a fashion in which it is impossible to overcome it. This, would be in any case not only a fatalistic line of reasoning, but would also be a form of understanding history not as a permanent and dialectical flow of struggles and contradictions but as a monolithic, petrified, reality. And this is precisely what neoliberal intellectuals (Fukuyama 1992) claimed in early 1990s with their famous *End of History*.

In opposition, I consider that over-determination is impossible and that the emergence of singularities within the contingency of counterinsurgency is open to the possibility of re-politicization and eventually radicalization new struggles. Building on both, Foucault's (1990) *History of Sexuality* and Deleuze's and Guattari's (1987, 1994) two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, I consider that the success of the counterinsurgency infrastructural/aesthetical goal of redefining the structure of desire gave also the conditions of possibility to the emergence of forms of dissent that would destabilize its expected over-determining nature. The strategy of carrying out and to extending a form of war by other means was based on the production of material infrastructures, desire regimes, structures of feeling, and the post-counterinsurgency Nation State project.

Building on Deleuze (1987, 1994), I insist that the destabilization of processes of over-determination must be thought within the contingency of post-counterinsurgency power. The negation of the powers deployed during the counterinsurgency era cannot be taken as a point of departure to understand the sparkle of resistance and the processes of politicization that are possible in the present. It is necessary to embrace the contingency of counterinsurgency, its contradictions, singularities and potentialities, in order to know the powers with which we are dealing in the contemporary era. I consider that it is fundamental to expose our own positionality in relation to counterinsurgency. It is after all that same counterinsurgency which provided the conditions of possibility to our own research. To me it is necessary that we as politicized, activist, and solidary academics, analyze critically and explicitly our position and the kinds of epistemic and political dispositions that we reproduce within the contingency of post-counterinsurgency.

## Chapter I

### War on desire and recuperation: Infrastructures of friendship in the transition from military civic action to humanitarian war

“While the insurgent forces are being defeated, a battle for the loyalty of the people must be fought. Even though overwhelming military strength is employed against them, guerrillas cannot be defeated as long as they hold the good will of the people. It is therefore necessary for the government to implement an effective program of psychological warfare and civic action. If the people become convinced that the government is sincerely working for them, the insurgent movement must ultimately collapse from lack of support.”  
A Guide to Military Civic Action  
(1969)

“The desires and the hearts of the people were our objectives”  
Gramajo  
(1995)

“...the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas.”  
K. Marx  
(1845)

#### INTRODUCTION

Building on the premises presented above, this chapter studies thoroughly the counterinsurgency rationalization of the quotidian produced between the 1960s and the 1990s, to understand how specific discursive formations were produced in the context of Cold War geopolitics, the re-articulation the 19<sup>th</sup> century post-colonial *finca* capitalism, and the production of Guatemala’s counterinsurgency nation state. I consider these contextual elements to be entangled with the dissemination of ideas such as *development*,



*progress* and the *betterment* of the material environment of the populations (which was typical of Kennedy's Alliance for Progress). Without interventions framed by ideas of development and progress these populations were considered to be susceptible of engaging in the revolutionary processes that were taking place in the whole Latin-American subcontinent.

As we have largely argued (2011, 2014a, 2014b, 2015) during my years as research coordinator of the Social Imaginaries Area in AVANCSO, counterinsurgency cannot (and must not) be exclusively read in terms of the re-inauguration of the colonial project, but also in the context of the articulation of a form of primitive accumulation that in Guatemala acquired the shape of the Finca-State (and/or coffee capitalism). In my opinion, the re-functionalization of the Finca-State was the background defining the interrelation of counterinsurgency politics and the implementation of *humanitarian wars* strategies. The Finca-state is a concept coined by my AVANCSO's colleague, Juan Carlos Mazariegos (2009, 2012), to understand the post-colonial state formation in the context of coffee capitalism in Guatemala, from the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the international coffee crisis in the 1990s. The creation of counterinsurgency plans within the Guatemalan national context took place as a strategy of the State to rescue the remnants of the nineteenth-century Finca-State political project.

To restate that analysis, however, is not the aim of this chapter. In contrast, I intend to provide both descriptive and analytic tools to grasp critically the plans related to both *war by other means* and *humanitarian war* strategies. This is necessary to explain the general discursive formation in which counterinsurgency is intended to produce an aesthetic regime based on the transformation of desires and affects of civilian population. In this regard, I remark that part of this transformation consisted in producing build environments in which the Schmittian (1932) friend-enemy binary would articulate the

reproduction of a *secured* everydayness of social desires and aspirations. In other words, I analyze the military rationality of altering everyday life spaces—the *lifeworld* or *Lebenswelt*—in order to produce a structural modification of culture meant to transform the processes of politicization (or depoliticization) of populations considered to be potentially subversive.

In this context, I propose that *military civic action* (MCA) programs and the *humanitarian war strategy* implemented by the Guatemalan national military, under the auspices of the U.S. government, between 1960 and 1990 are the most relevant factors in the process of transfiguring counterinsurgency from an open war, destructive strategy, into a politics of aesthetics and affects. These programs provided the material infrastructures that transformed the sensorial dispositions that would become desires, points of view, and eventually political positions of a large part of Guatemalans.

This process intended not only to modify the micropolitical social reality, but also to redefine the Nation State so to produce new subjectivities and national imaginaries, and docile bodies; bodies that would be subjected upon counterinsurgency hegemony (part of this is what I mentioned in the introduction to the dissertation). Building on Althusser's (1969) analysis on the dialectics of contradiction and *Over-determination*, I propose that counterinsurgency plans related to both *war by other means* and *humanitarian war* had an overwhelmingly effect that can be grasped, in the post-counterinsurgency era, as condition of possibility of the social reality. Already in the introductory chapter I started to point at this: civic responses against war crimes trials and the denial of genocide reconfigured the rules of the debate in the public sphere.

In this regard, what is presented in this chapter are analytical deliberations to understand the structure of the contingency that traditionally is considered to over-determine the process of de-politicization of present. My intention has been to investigate

the physical dimension of counterinsurgency, to understand how it was not exclusively a destructive one-dimensional form of exercise of violence, but a multi-dimensional power apparatus that reconfigured the structures of social reality.

This chapter, however, does not intend to show the emergence of these singularities and potentialities of reproducing hegemony or opening spaces of dissent. The goal of this chapter is to understand the architecture of the kind of over-determination that was intended to be installed in the national imaginary by the counterinsurgency. This chapter aims to comprehend the form and characteristics of the contingency that we must take as point of departure for contemporary processes of re-politicization (what I call the dialectical relation of singularity and potentiality) in which the structure of antagonisms presents itself as the potentiality of resistance.

#### **DISPLACEMENT: FROM DESIRE FOR MILITARY CIVIC ACTION TO RECUPERATION THEORY**

In the context of the long sub-continental history of counterinsurgency, Guatemala is one of the most interesting cases to analyze the implementation of military infrastructural projects, which were oriented to redefine civilian everyday life and vital spaces as a strategy to modify their sensorial perception of counterinsurgency military forces. The common understanding is that the implementation of these programs emerged during the highest moment of counterinsurgent violence that led to deploying genocidal policies early in the 1980s, as well as the *humanitarian war* strategy that aimed to militarize civilian social, economic and, cultural spaces (*Polos de Desarrollo, Aldeas Modelo, Fusiles y Frijoles* and *Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil*, PAC.) In contrast, I propose that the notion of *humanitarian war* has a longer genealogy that precedes the 1980s violence. This strategy is entrenched in a 20-year period of Military Civic Action (MCA) programs first carried out during the decade of the 1960s, overseen by the U.S. Military. By the end of the 1960s the U.S. Government considered Guatemala to be an

exemplary case for the rest of Latin American countries because of its *positive* progress in the execution of MCA programs. This quotation, from the Guide of Military Civic Action (Halstead 1969) is illustrative:

The program in Guatemala is a fine example of how a military civic action program should be initiated and carried out. The Guatemala story begins in 1960. At that time the American Embassy in Guatemala informed the Department of State that the President and Minister of Defense of Guatemala desired that a Civic Action Mobile Training Team be sent to assist in setting up a military civic action program. The first recommendation of the team's two American officers was that two senior grade Guatemalan officers be assigned to work with and learn from the team so that the Guatemalans would be capable of carrying out a civic action program when the team departed (AGMCA, 1969 p. 7)

This would eventually evolve, during the late 70s and early 80s, into the *thesis of national stability*, that introduced concepts such as *Humanitarian war*, *Development Poles* and *Aldeas Modelo*. I suggest that a displacement of counterinsurgency rationality occurred between these two periods, and consider that it is imperative to understand the underlying similarities and differences between them. This analysis must describe the contingencies and horizons of possibility of each period and the aims that differentiated counterinsurgency infrastructure strategies intended to achieve. The central modification in rationality from one period to the next can be grasped as a difference in which there was an intention: (1) to modify the desire regime of a population susceptible to being *seduced* by the desire to join insurgency and; (2) to radically transform the materiality of the everyday in order to relocate and *recuperate* a population that was considered already seduced by insurgency desires. This implied to create a new political coordinate system based on the redefinition of the friend-enemy binary.

The period from the 1960 to late 1970s was oriented to the implementation of small infrastructural projects such as the construction of schools, medical centers, and housing; as well as to re-territorialize and, re-colonize spaces such as El *Peten* and the

*Franja Transversal del Norte*, which would eventually be appropriated by Guatemalan military officers and local economic/racial elites (Solano 2013). This was a period in which the multinational and national counterinsurgency aimed to carry out short-scope programs that had little effect on the transformation of material life conditions of people, as well as their sensorial conditions of existence. However, it is during this time when the most prolific reflections revolving around the role of counterinsurgency were carried out by the U.S. Government, in regard to change economic, social and, cultural factors that would increment the sympathy of civilians towards the counterinsurgency military project.<sup>15</sup> In this regard, I suggest that during the 1960-70s period, the central objective of MCA programs was to produce a transformation in the *desire regime* (or the regime of expectations) contingent by the potential sympathy of civilian with the insurgency.

The second moment of implementation of MCA counterinsurgent infrastructures was developed as an organic element of the *Thesis of National Stability*, and the *Fusiles y Frijoles* strategy (Gramajo, 1995); this is the moment when the notion of *humanitarian war* was introduced. The point of departure was the 30/70 approach that, as stated by the General Alejandro Gramajo, meant that instead of eliminating the 100% of potential insurgents they (the national counterinsurgency) would kill only 30% of them and implement military [humanitarian war] programs to recuperate the remaining 70% (Schirmer, 1998, 1999). This approach was integrated to every *plan de campaña* (campaign plans) between 1982 and 1990.

This is the moment when counterinsurgency rationality changes from a preventive theory of the modification of desires, to a theory of *recuperation* of population. This theory of *recuperation* was meant not only to transform the desire regime, but also to

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<sup>15</sup> This can be traced very clearly in the *Revista Ejército* (Army Magazine), which published in every number a special section of the MCA programs during the whole 1960 decade.

redefine territory, space and subjectivity in a form of neo Schmittian (1934) friend-enemy coordinates scheme, which was considered to be foundational to carry out the process of stabilization of militarized zones and the nation in general.

Let us now focus on the first of these moments by analyzing in detail a Guide to Military Civic Action, which was presented by the 300th Civil Affairs Group in 1969. This document entails the most elementary formal characteristics that would define the basic features of counterinsurgency before the 1980s period. First I will describe the structure and content of the guide. Then, the analysis will focus on the relationship between counterinsurgency infrastructures, Military Civic Action and the production of aesthetic regimes.

#### **DESIRE: A GUIDE TO MILITARY CIVIC ACTION**

After the 1961 Berlin crisis that led to the construction of one of the most significant military infrastructures in recent history, *die Berliner Mauer*, the US government engaged in a series of projects focusing on linking the military and civilians in a more *comprehensive* fashion. The interest in designing non-propagandistic strategies to make ordinary people feel sentiments of friendship for military forces arose during those early years of the Cold War.

In this context the interest of the US government in implementing military civic action, as a counterinsurgency strategic complement, became quintessential. In 1966 the U.S. Army's 300<sup>th</sup> Civil Affairs Group conducted a workshop to carry out initial research to discuss the role that military civil action could play in *third world* countries, dealing with emergent Marxist guerrilla organizations.<sup>16</sup> These first results were eventually

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<sup>16</sup> The outcomes of that workshop were seminal to prepare the original inputs to the Guide to Military Civic Action that will be analyzed in following pages.

discussed with representatives of the Civil Affairs School, the Continental Army Command and the Combat Developments Command, who provided inputs to the elaboration of the final draft.<sup>17</sup>

The guide is subdivided in two parts. The first one addresses a general introduction to the basic concepts of military civic action. The first chapter explores the role of military action in country development, which includes: the definition of military action objectives, its scope, and the basic concepts it entails, the U.S. policy regarding insurgency as well as an example of implementation of military action programs (which is Guatemala). The second chapter revolves around the organization of military civic action programs, which includes agreements between the U.S. and other nations, assistance and advisory, units and teams training, special forces, the relation of civic action with governmental, international and private organizations such as the AID, the United Nations and the private sector.

The second part of the guide deals with the production of built environments under the implementation of military civic action plans. The following chapter in this guide analyzes aspects such as the relation between the military civic action and the notion of development, problems of nations where insurgency potentially can emerge, the shared characteristics of these nations, an analysis of the *circle of mass poverty*, and the role of the military within these countries. Furthermore, the guide dissects the general characteristics of the concept of insurgency, its evolutionary phases and its relation to communism, as well as the role of military civic action as a countermeasure to revert it. Finally, the last chapter in that section analyzes forms to articulate military civic action

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<sup>17</sup> In 1969 David K Halstead, major of the United States Army Reserves prefaces the final draft of the guide as follows: "In the past few years, considerable interest has been expressed in defining and exploring the use of military civic action as a counterinsurgency measure as well as an avenue for achieving broader social and economic improvements in underdeveloped nations." (AMCA, 1969, p. v).

with local national development planning, and the role of the U.S. in the definition of local national policies.

The third part of the guide focuses on the preparation of US personnel designated to implement military civic action programs in foreign countries. Here, the guide deals with aspects such as the challenges of influencing people, the role of local cultures in the planning of programs, as well as the definition of rules of effective behavior for U.S. personnel. Finally, the guide provides methodological tools designed to evaluate the appropriateness of the projects, their priority, requirements, effectiveness and the evaluation of the outcomes.

## **THE FUNDAMENTALS AND ORGANIZATION**

The point of departure for implementing military civic action programs builds on the assumed capacity of counterinsurgency to change the environment in which people live to be accomplished by specific projects of civil infrastructures. The MCA aimed to stimulate a *better* relationship of indigenous and local populations with local and American military counterinsurgency forces, and specifies that its role is to make “the soldier a brother of the people, as well as their protector.”<sup>18</sup> Building upon these concepts, the objectives of MCA are defined as follows: a) to contribute in the economic and cultural advancement of a developing country; b) to promote the desire of the communities to partake in their own progress as well as the desire to work side by side the with the military; c) to strengthen the ties of mutual respect between civilians and the

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<sup>18</sup> “Military civic action has as its purpose to extend to vast sectors of the populace the government’s help, especially in the field of social assistance, through the military organization of the nation. It is based on the premise that the use of military means to accomplish programs of economic and social welfare will awaken in the benefited population trust and sympathy towards the government and the military forces. These programs are developed without affecting the military efficiency of the armed institutions or compromising their principal functions (U.S. Army, 1963)”.



military; d) to assist in reducing the discontent among the people in order to discourage insurgency and infiltration of extremist ideologies. (AGMCA, p. 4) The scope of MCA focus on the implementation of infrastructural projects related to local agriculture, industry, transportation, health, sanitation, education, public administration, housing and social welfare. The guide also stressed that all these infrastructural projects must be conducted on a relatively small scale at “the local level” (AGMCA, p. 5) The objective of MCA in the development of counterinsurgency plans is to counter the conditions that generate resistance among indigenous populations. Finally, the guide states that MCA must contribute to economic advancement and the reduction of social inequities that encourage insurrection. (AGMCA, p. 7)

The guide establishes that a Country Team (CT), which is representative of the United States Government, must coordinate the MCA project. The American Ambassador, key members of his staff, and representatives of the United States Information Service and the Agency of International Development and the Military Assistance Program typically composed the CT. The CT was responsible for influencing the local government in order to generate interest in implementing MCA programs. The guide establishes that “any effort by the Country Team to guide the local government in the development of a realistic and workable plan should leave the impression that the plan is still conceived and directed by the host government” (AGMCA, p. 12.)

In most countries where the U.S. Government implemented MCA programs, a Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) was established as the local representative of the Secretary of Defense. The responsibility of the MAAG was to plan, execute and supervise any MCA infrastructural programs. The MAAG was also in charge of the training of MCA Mobile Training Teams, Civil Affair Units and Special Forces. Four

U.S. Officers and other enlisted men from the rest of the military usually formed a Mobile Training Team.

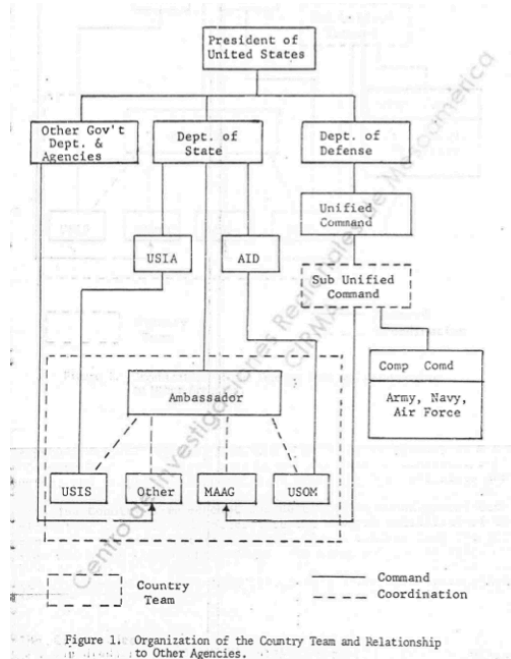


Figure 3: Organization for Civic Action (AMCA, p.11)

Their function was to “...make initial surveys and necessary local contacts and to develop and implement programs through supervision and advice” (AGMCA, p. 12). And their primary purpose was to train the local military forces and civilians to execute MCA projects. Second, the Civil Affairs Units for Civic Action were responsible of providing specialized functional teams regarding economics, commerce and industry, public welfare, public education, public communication, public transportation, public health, food and agriculture, etc. Finally, the Special Forces for Military Civic Action were responsible “to advise, train, and to support indigenous military forces in counterinsurgency operations. When Special Forces may establish operational bases and engage in guerrilla and counter guerrilla warfare operations. To supplement these

missions, Special Forces personnel can engage in military civic action utilizing their specific skills to assist host armed forces in planning and executing civic action projects” (AGMCA, p.14). The Agency for International Development (AID), which was intended also to be part of the MCA Country Team, was in charge of providing funding, loans, grants, supporting assistance and technical cooperation.<sup>19</sup> The Guide points out the relevance of U.S. Private Organizations in the implementation of infrastructural MCA programs.<sup>20</sup> These private organizations were supposed to provide support to the military civic action projects coordinated by the U.S. Government. Finally, the Guide recommends establishing alliances with development programs promoted by international organizations such as the United Nations and its agencies such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the World Health Organization (WHO).

## **POSTCOLONIAL ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT MACHINES**

The second part of the Guide intertwines the notions of development, counterinsurgency and Military Civic Action. The effects of colonialism and imperialism are considered to be causes of insurrection that eventually can lead to the rise of local insurgencies. The guide recommends developing an approach in which the

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<sup>19</sup> “AID and civic action operations share the tasks of assembling U.S. resources and expertise, securing local response and effort, and executing self-help projects. These common characteristics encourage close cooperation and mutual support between U.S. military civic action personnel and various members of the local AID mission.”

<sup>20</sup> Among the more important are the following: CARE (health and medical assistance), Near East Foundation (rural housing; and development), Rockefeller Foundation (commodity research projects), National Lutheran Council (urban social workers training programs), Technico Foundation (vocational Institute of International Education (education programs), Asia Foundation (small business assistance), and the American Red Cross and other religious organizations (general relief; welfare services).

implementation of development programs driven by military forces can operate as a mechanism to change social behaviors and political ideologies that were left behind by imperial projects. That is, to build upon the material necessities that colonialism created and left as residue in post-colonial realities in order to change social behaviors. This would imply re-attuning peoples material environments, social institutions and political ideologies.<sup>21</sup>

The Guide gives special attention to the notion of *underdeveloped countries*, which are basically understood as *poor* countries and/or *emerging nations* (these concepts are used interchangeably in the Guide) where food production fails to “equal the population increase”. The rural-urban divide is permanently present in the guide, and it is used to indicate the necessity of stimulating the desire of becoming urban and industrialized among rural populations. Rural regions are considered the places where insurgency could easily emerge.

The guide identifies six major *problems* that characterize the context of the emerging nations and rural realities: 1) uncontrollable population increase; 2) self-awareness of poverty; 3) lack of national unity; 4) cultural rigidity and lack of social innovation; 5) destruction of physical environment; 6) and the “brain drain of knowledgeable scientists, engineers, technicians, and managers from the emerging nations to the culturally affluent countries.” (AGMCA, p. 21).

Further, MCA programs were not only designed to contribute to using development as a complement to the military, but also to modify the perception of rural populations towards urban elites in order to make them a referent of aspiration and

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<sup>21</sup> “The problem involves more than just raising productivity and stabilizing population growth. Attitudes and values of literally billions of people must be changed. Social institutions and political ideologies must be altered; ignorance must be overcome.” (AGMCA, p. 18)

admiration.<sup>22</sup> The local elites were perceived as role models that could be used to implement the MCA programs in the local, as well as to become aspirational subjects of the kind of *counterinsurgent subjectivity* that these infrastructural programs intended to shape. This would mean to make rural populations to abandon their indigenous belief systems and worldviews in order to make them enter into *modernity* and *capitalism*.

The guide highlighted that kinship systems and indigenous spirituality were factors to consider seriously in the moment of planning MCA programs in order to eradicate them *peacefully* when executing the programs. The guide states that the major problem was the prevalence of non-industrial, non-modern, non-capitalist economies, in rural areas, which lacked social forces needed to produce impersonal agency and individuality. The guide highlights that these populations were in turn submerged in local and primitive forms of organization of power that were considered to be both an economic constraint and a political ideological disadvantage. This social *behavior* was considered to limit the adherence of rural and indigenous peoples to State-national collectives, and the lack of integration to modernity and to capitalism would make them prone to fall under the spell of Marxist insurgency.

The lack of a political system, with stable social institutions, was also considered to be one of the most obvious factors in the realization of effective development

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<sup>22</sup> In underdeveloped countries a gulf exists between the classes exposed to Western education and the rural peasantry, educated in the native traditions. The civil servants, merchants, politicians, army officers, and even specialists are often part of this group of people who originally served as intermediaries between the colonizers and their fellow countrymen. The characteristics of this elite group, includes the usually small middle class, sets them apart from the rural populace. Almost all live in the cities and towns and are comparatively well educated. Literacy is normal among members of the elite group and they usually speak the language of the former colonizers. This elite class is often oriented toward the West because it was educated in traditional Western manner and has been under the influence of Western ideas in the cities. It may reflect Western food habits and patterns of consumption. Although the elite class is a minority group in the total population, it usually supplies the political, military, and commercial leadership of the country. Unfortunately, the educated class is often far too small in number to meet the training manpower needs of developing nations and, having had little contact with the rural peasant, often does not fully understand and appreciate their position. (AGMCA p. 23)

processes that could connect rural populations with the political geography of (cold war) western civilization. This lack was considered to be a heritage of colonialism that never created solid social and political continuum that could articulate multiple indigenous peoples under one single state-nation banner. The only institution considered strong enough to unify the population of underdeveloped countries was the local military: "...being acutely aware of its country's needs for modernization the military is likely to be favorably disposed to civic projects. Furthermore, having had foreign military contact, officers have a rapport with advisors that facilitates the implementation of projects." (AGMCA, p. 30)

#### **THE COUNTERREVOLUTION OF RISING EXPECTATIONS: COUNTERINSURGENCY AND DESIRE**

The Guide indicates that the fundamental cause for the materialization of insurgency stems from (*real, imaginary or incited*) dissatisfactions experienced by a significant part of the population, which were driven by the desire for achieving one or several of the following aims: 1) national independence; 2) relief from actual or *alleged* oppression; 3) elimination of foreign exploitation; 4) desire for social or economic improvement; 5) elimination of corruption; 6) religious freedom. The relation between dissatisfaction and desire is described as follows:

...Insurgency is caused by the dissatisfaction of some portion of the population and their desire to improve existing conditions. Such dissatisfaction develops as the population becomes aware of other more satisfactory conditions which they contrast with their own poorer circumstances. Through recent contacts with modern nations, the impoverished people of the world have compared their lot with that of the West, found it sadly deficient, and aspired to the fruits of a modern society. Their aspirations have engendered a "Revolution of Rising Expectations...Perhaps this constitutes the single most important underlying

source of current turmoil within the less developed countries throughout the world (p. 33)

Here it is possible to identify how counterinsurgency strategy was opening a reflection on the political relevance of desire (I think here with Lacan, 1977.) However, the *self*-perception of western culture and the American way of life forecloses its conception. Hence, the lack of all material infrastructures contingent to the American way of life (or Western civilization) becomes the propelling force of insurgency desires (or the desire to join the insurgency). The relationship of *lack*, *desire* and the impossibility of *enjoyment* defined everyday reality of rural populations in developing countries. From this point of view, this relationship would lead to the reproduction of a permanent state of instability and *resentment*, which was considered to be primordial for giving life to people's desires to enlist in the insurgency. The idea of implementing MCA projects was not to reverse the sociocultural impact of Western Civilization and its regimes of desire, even though it could increase the probability of insurgency outbreaks. On the contrary, the aim was to create minimal material infrastructures that could respond to the *lack* defined in the regime of desire left by both colonial and postcolonial power regimes. In other words, western post-colonial infrastructures made possible for non-western societies to desire their way of life; the way of life they lacked. This lack is a form of *residue* (in psychoanalytical terms) named in the Guide the *Revolution of Rising Expectations*. Under this perspective, the *lack* becomes the desire to move from the *postcolonial state of scarcity*, where the Western way of life was something to see but not to enjoy, towards a material existence in which consumerism and individualism become part of the horizon of possibilities of enjoyment (even though this would be an ideological phantasy). This deserves special attention because this specific *desire formation* produces its own *residue* (the possibility of seeing the Western way of life:

look, we enjoy), its own *lack* (the impossibility of enjoyment: look but don't touch) and, some sort of imaginary form of enjoyment (the promise that through restructuring the material organization of everyday life, in the context of MCA programs, everybody would eventually have access to it: perhaps you can touch, but you better don't). This, however, becomes both, the element that can trigger the desire to join the insurgency as well as the point of departure to carry out counterinsurgent military civic action infrastructural projects that can counteract the desire to join the insurgency.

In other words, this regime of desires produces the space of enmity and the space of friendship in which a new inter-subjective practice must be performed within the limits given by counterinsurgency sensorial infrastructures. Both spaces are given by the same condition of existence: underdevelopment, poverty and, scarcity; but in opposition to the insurgency, for counterinsurgency, the solution was to provide immediate forms of enjoyment, which would be materialized in small infrastructure projects: schools, medical posts, roads, etc. Taking on this, the counterinsurgency could criticize the insurgency, because the latter was not providing immediate sources of enjoyment; they provided only an idea that would eventually offer enjoyment, but only after the end of the war and the triumph of the revolution.

From this point of view, the principal goal of communism was to dominate the World (AMCA p. 34), and the means to achieve it was to transform insurgency into a desiring machine that would transform normal guerrilla warfare into the "People's War" (AMCA, p. 34) which could eventually transform the *Revolution of Rising Expectations* in a material reality for ordinary people in developing countries. In other words, for counterinsurgency MCA philosophy the most important aspect to reverse was the desire-monopoly that *insurgency* had over the promise of transformation of the material condition of social reproduction of human existence and to bring some possibility of



immediate enjoyment of the materiality promised by the Western way of life. Counterinsurgency was then not supposed to concentrate exclusively in the destruction and elimination of communist local insurgencies, but also in the assembling of the war machine (Deleuze & Guattari 1987) that would transform the state apparatus into a desire machine, a desire assemblage. This means that the counterinsurgent project was also thinking as a mechanism to *reinvent* the world after the moment of military destruction that military operations would bring.

#### ***PRIMITIVE NEOLIBERAL MULTICULTURALISM, ETHNOGRAPHIC METHOD, AND POSITIONALITY***

There is no error in claiming that the military civic action education shared disturbing characteristics with the ethnographic method used by anthropologists and sociologists to carry out social research (McAlister 2003.) The training of MCA advisors was very similar to basic ethnographic training. The Guide highlights that the major challenge for MCA operators and officers was to convince people to accept their projects by implementing tactics and strategies such as: 1) The kind of changes brought by MCA had to be deployed in the context of a collaborative dynamics where efforts from indigenous populations became voluntary. 2) The outcomes from MCA projects had to be rapidly palpable, considering that peoples in “developing areas now expect dramatic changes take place in a few years, or at most, in a few decades.” (AMCA, p. 52); 3) the MCA officer had to develop a behavioral flexibility to adapt better to cultural differences in diverse contexts. 4) To evaluate every aspect of MCA projects in contrast to local

systems of law, beliefs, knowledge, art, morals, customs, skills, mores, attitudes, and institutions.<sup>23</sup>

The educational process of MCA officers revolved around what I call a *primitive form of neoliberal multiculturalism*, which problematized the positionality of MCA operators and officers vis a vis local indigenous populations.<sup>24</sup> This analysis of positionality was a precondition for the success or failure of concrete projects that eventually would transform the potential desire of people to enroll in the insurgency. To achieve this end, the American military should pass through a process tending to decenter its own cultural exceptionalism in order to be more effective and more efficient in influencing other cultural realities. In this regard, the MCA operator had “to know how being an American [would] help or hinder [...] civic action missions.” (AMCA, p. 58) The guide emphasizes defining and analyzing a set of oppositional value-binaries that would be essential to the best implementation of MCA programs; for instance: moral-immoral, legal-illegal, right-wrong, success-failure, clean-dirty, modern-outmoded, civilized-primitive, practical-impractical, introvert-extrovert, secular-religious, Christian-pagan. The recommendation of the guide was to move from the Manichean, black-white, judgment values to a form of strategic cultural relativism that should be reflected in the way they practiced MCA theory.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> In effect, the civic action worker must take a step back in time to with many people living in depressed areas of the world. This means that the modern American must gear his way of thinking and attitudes to blend with a culture and state of society which may be ancient and simple by comparison. Money and equipment alone will not produce desired changes. The implementer or field worker himself becomes the key ingredient in the civic action process.” (AGMCA, p. 55)

<sup>24</sup> The notion of neoliberal multiculturalism was introduced by Hale (2002, 2009) to analyze the way in which capitalism has appropriated the discourse on identity politics. I propose here that here is possible to identify a genealogic process in which counterinsurgency was also thinking about this even before multiculturalism became a political matter of debate.

<sup>25</sup> “A non-Westerner is more apt to be guided by horror of impropriety or possible shame rather than by cut-and-dried principles of right and wrong.” (AGMCA, p. 58)

Further, the guide analyzes alternative techniques to engage with indigenous populations based on non-Western binary morals that otherwise would be alien to American military instructors. For instance: 1) combining work and play during the implementation of the MCA programs; 2) conceiving that time is related to seasonal cycles and emergencies and that it does not equate to money; 3) to get used to the idea that effort does not necessarily means optimism; 4) success is not always measured in terms of material goods (instead non-Western cultures concentrate their satisfaction in other directions, often by striving for spiritual and esthetic excellence rather than tangible material goods, and); 5) Authority systems are not always based on equality of opportunities and representation for every citizen. These are authority systems, which instead are based on “local usages of titles, formal forms of address, language and manners of courtesy, and deference” (AGMCA, p. 62).

Finally, the guide provides a series of *rules for effective behavior* in the process of implementing MCA programs. The more salient are: 1) to appear they were originated in the local space; 2) turn over projects to the people in order to install pride of authorship and self-confidence; 3) recognition of cultural and technical relativity regarding behavior and opinions; MCA advisors should be close to the people and not assume the position of experts in the field; 4) learn the indigenous language; 5) recreational time shared with locals; 6) adoption of local social forms and conventions; 7) “the American must learn to ignore unpleasant or repugnant sights, sounds, and smells over which he has no control and learn to live with them.” (AMCA, p. 64)

Building upon the idea of de-centering the cultural point of view of the MCA operator/officer, the guide provides practical solutions to create rapport among indigenous populations. This training had a disciplining effect on the operators, which were supposed to practically *unlearn* their culture in order to implement infrastructural

programs that could eventually prevent the appearance of insurgencies in *developing* countries.

#### **AFFECTIVE LABOR AND AESTHETIC REGIMES**

The hypothesis I pondered during the fieldwork revolves around MCA counterinsurgency programs and their effects in transforming the *regime of the sensible* as a mechanism to expand and territorialize new spaces of friendship. This means that counterinsurgency was not necessarily concerned with satisfying the material needs of the population; but instead, in transforming the forms of perception that people could have of military forces, the postcolonial condition and primitive accumulation that was prevailing in regions where insurgency could eventually appear. In other words, these counterinsurgency plans aimed at the production of new aesthetic regimes, attuning what and how people feel social reality and its inscription in the historical-political context. This is a level of materiality that Michael Hardt (1999) names *affective labor*, which was used by the counterinsurgent military years before the rise of postmodern capitalism.

Counterinsurgency focused on the production of affects that would invert the feeling of the population towards the insurgency. The aim was to use, against them, the expectation people had regarding a possible revolution that would bring the possibility of satisfying their socio-economic needs. In other words, the politicization brought by the desire of revolutionary transformation would be inversed and used as a force to preserve the order of things. To localize desire in the material process of rebuilding the aesthetics of friendship was an innovative idea of counterinsurgency, however it would be radicalized only in the 1980s.

Aesthetics here does not mean the creation of a more beautiful environment, but instead the production of spaces that open the possibility to modify forms of perception. Here, with Benjamin (2008), I consider that Counterinsurgency carried out an aestheticization of politics, which implied a sensory alienation.<sup>26</sup> The concept of humanitarian war, the military civic action plans, development poles and *aldeas modelo*, where expressions of early forms of production of politicized affects carried out by counterinsurgency military. However, these processes are never completely successful.

In other chapters of this dissertation I intend to analyze the political singularities that arose from these spaces, where processes of politicization of aesthetics show the emergence of sociocultural processes that revert the hegemony that counterinsurgency aesthetics tried to establish.<sup>27</sup> These are forms of politicization that irrupt in the aesthetic regime, which exist “as a deviation from this normal order of things. It is this anomaly that is expressed in the nature of political subjects, which are not social groups but rather forms of inscription that (ac)count for the unaccounted” (Ranciere, 2010, p. 35).

I mentioned above that the second moment of displacement of counterinsurgency rationality occurred in the 1980s and focused on a recuperation theory that builds upon affective labor and aesthetic regimes theory. The central differences are that these projects were implemented more radically and directly after the deployment of the *scorched earth campaign* and focused on the reconstruction of the material environments in which local communities would practice the everyday. In this regard, this is no longer an intervention in the material conditions of existence to prevent the political

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<sup>26</sup> Benjamin makes a basic distinction between aestheticization of politics and politicization of art. The aestheticization of politics meant the sensory alienation carried out by fascism to *conduct* the masses. The politicization of art was the answer of communism, which would eventually imply the production of propaganda.

<sup>27</sup> This is something different to the concept of politicization of art. I intend to elaborate a complete argument about this on the next chapter.

identification of the population with the insurgency, but instead a theory of creation of population that was condensed in the notion of *recuperation*. The question is: what was meant by *recuperation of population* for the 1980s Counterinsurgency?<sup>28</sup>

## TOWARDS A THEORY OF RECUPERATION OF THE PEOPLE IN RESISTANCE

*Recuperar* was a commonly used concept during those years. For instance, in the *Plan de Campaña Victoria 82*, Guatemala's National army states as one of its objectives to: "Recuperate all those possible members of the *Fuerzas Irregulares Locales*, while, at the same time, eliminate the subversive not willing to lay down arms (PCV82 1982, p. 1)" In the *plan Firmeza 83*, the idea of recuperation is concerned with a strategy of *psychological operations*, which are defined as those civic-military operations leaning to strengthen the feeling of unity between the people and the Army. Their aims were: 1) to promote nationalist sentiments among the population; 2) to build mental frames of trust that would allow people to accept counterinsurgent presence and influence; 3) to create the mental conditions that induce the population to operate in the effort of national

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<sup>28</sup> Analyses such as Diane Nelson's (1986) text on the *Polos de Desarrollo* describe with great ethnographic detail the perspective of people living in those areas, and provides throughout details of how these reeducation experiences were lived by the *Recuperated* people, which had deep impact not only in the forcibly displacement and re-concentration of population, but also in ethnic-cultural changes. In this direction, most recently the *Historic Memory Recuperation Report, Guatemala Nunca Más (Guatemala Never Again)* carried out by the Human Right's Office of Guatemala's Archbishop and The report of the Commission For Historical Clarification, *Memoria del Silencio (Memory of Silence)*. Both provided relevant information regarding the implementation of Military Civic Action programs that in the 1980s took the shape of Development Poles and *Aldeas Modelo*, as well as rich detail on human rights violations in these military *Recuperation* infrastructures. Finally, both reports confirmed the effect of the *aldeas modelo* in changing the geography of local spaces after the deployment of the *scorched-earth* campaign in 1982, which produced massive displacement of population that survived the massacres and escaped to the *Montaña*, and, the posterior resettlement in in urban-form rearranged *pueblos*, where they even had to provide free labor for both the construction of the *aldea* basic infrastructure, as well as for other infrastructures (rspecially roads) that were fundamental to the deployment and advance of counterinsurgent military presence.

pacification and, finally; 4) to create the desire that drives the population to take part voluntarily in counterinsurgent national development plans (PF83, 1983).

The *Plan de Campaña Firmeza* 87 states the need to recuperate the refugees settled in Mexico as well as the displaced population (internal displaced) in the regions where guerrilla presence is highest. In order to achieve this goal, the *plan* stipulates that special security and reeducation procedures must be established. The *Plan de Campaña Fortalecimiento Institucional* 89 emphasized in the previous campaign plans, which were focused in *protecting* the population while keeping up institutional pressure against the insurgents. (PCFI, 1989).

Let me use an example to better illustrate this argument. In 1990 Infantry Lieutenant Colonel Alvaro Fabriel Rivas Cifuentes won first place of the *Scientific Social Field Essay Contest* organized by the *Colección Centenario del Estado Mayor de la Defensa Nacional* with the article *Medidas para Recuperar la Población en Resistencia* (Measures to Recuperate the Population in Resistance) (1990). Rivas defines the *Recuperado* as the civilian who can be *Población en Resistencia* (Resistance Population) and has been taken away from the subversives, either by use of military force, or by psychological actions. Secondly, Rivas defines the *Población en Resistencia* as those populations who have resisted surrendering themselves to the National Army; those who are willing to support and partake in the revolutionary struggle, as well as those who are kept against their will by the *guerrilla*.<sup>29</sup>

Rivas states that the *recuperated* individual had to pass through a special process of reincorporation to *normality* guided by the military. An Asuntos Civiles (Military

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<sup>29</sup> Rivas Cifuentes speaks specifically of the CPR or *Comunidades de Población en Resistencia*, which were displaced populations that did not want to subject to the power and violence of Guatemalan Military and that escaped to the Mountain. In 1990, the Guatemalan anthropologist Myrna Mack was murdered because of the research she was conducting on the *despazados internos* (internal displaced people) for the *Asociación para el Avance de las Ciencias Sociales en Guatemala*.

Civic Matters) officer had to carry out this process. This officer was also known as the *psychological operator* (who by preference should be a local indigenous female), and her task was to restore the *recuperado's* trust in the *Military*. Among other things, this operator was responsible for actions such as: 1) preparing a warm welcome for the *recuperado*; 2) making him/her know the value given by the military to the fact that he/she was able to pass through subversive controls without being detected; 3) organizing and conducting a thanksgiving religious ritual to celebrate his/her recently regained freedom; 4) making the *recuperado* feel that the military and the government are very pleased with his/her decision to abandon the insurgency. Once the military-civic operator tasks had been completed, the process of reeducation of the *recuperado* should be focused on the indoctrination of civic concepts such as freedom, constitutional rights, and democracy; as well as the feeling that the suffering they went through was caused by the *subversion*, which aimed to establish a totalitarian regime which would be possible only by the destruction of traditional cultural structures.

Rivas emphasized that military and psychological actions would not suffice in the process of recuperation of *Población in Resistencia* and, that the military should provide the material resources that would allow these populations to be reincorporated into normality. His main inspiration was the role played by the *Polos de Desarrollo*, and the *Aldeas Modelo* after the *Scorched Earth* campaign in the early 1980s. He insisted on the idea of converting the *Polos de Desarrollo* and *Aldeas Modelo* into comprehensive programs of development in regions where the insurgency was present. In this regard, development programs would eventually become a complementary *non-military, non-psychological* strategy to support *military actions*. This was the basis for the creation of a permanent cross-sectional commission in 1989, which was intended to focus on the use of military resources in the transformation of the material living conditions of the



population. He names it the *Consejos de Desarrollo Urbano y Rural*. It was supposed to be composed of the *Comandante de Campaña de Asuntos Civiles*, the *Alcalde Municipal Mayor*, a State officer, an NGO representative and representatives of the *recuperated population*. The *Consejo* should have had presence in local/municipal commissions, which were responsible for mapping, and urbanizing the terrain, localizing water sources, sanitizing living spaces, designing basic services infrastructures and, organizing the community in *Comités Voluntarios de Defensa Civil (C.V.D.C.)*.

Rivas states that the main space to be modified is the traditional structure of settlement reproduced by indigenous communities, which was not functional for the achievement of Counterinsurgency goals because of its physical dispersion. Instead, he proposes to implement urban grids where families should be grouped into compacted clusters. The urban design should take into account the opinion of the community's representatives in order to select the specific location to place the new settlement. He distinguishes between two different kinds of traces: plane and corrugated (see illustrations 4&5).

First: The *recuperado* settlements must be organized in grids. There must be enough space for having a latrine, a domestic animal yard and, space for fruit trees and family gardens. Each grid must be composed of 10 cluster groups; with a 4m wide street separating them.

Second: Rivas distinguishes *Basic Infrastructure* from *Social Community Infrastructures*. Basic infrastructures are those that deliver an increase in health and hygiene and provide a sense of well-being to the inhabitants of each cluster. Rivas identifies four specific basic infrastructures to provide the following services: latrines, water, waste disposal, and electricity. The *Social Community Infrastructures* are those

that improve the whole community's quality life: School, electricity, water, recreational spaces, health posts, standardized housing, community rooms, and a church.

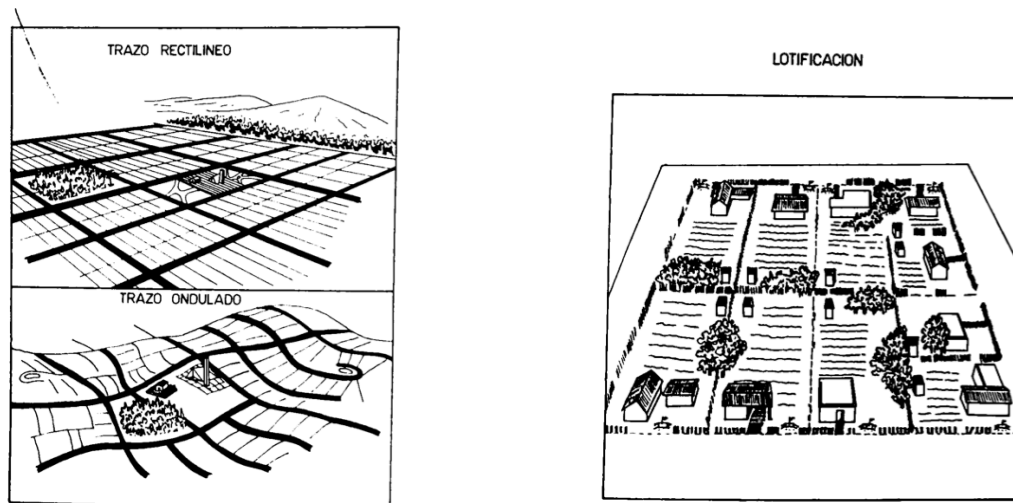


Figure 4: Trazos de comunidades recuperadas (Source: Rivas-Cifuentes, 1991)

Third: Rivas proposes the integration of the population into communitarian civilian security committees (*C.V.D.C.*), which were a late form of the *Patrullas de Autodefesa Civil* (*P.A.C.*) created in the early 1980s. The *C.V.D.C.* were supposed to be responsible for taking part of the counterinsurgent concept of *Autodefensa*, which included *all measures taken by an organized population in order to protect the community from every kind of calamity or catastrophe*, including: declared war and attacks committed by the subversive and terrorists. Rivas also expands the concept of *Defensa Civil* to other aspects such as the protection of the community against common delinquency, struggle against ignorance, defense against underdevelopment, etc. Rivas emphasizes indoctrinating the *C.V.D.C.* with ideas such as: 1) the enemy exists and uses all kinds of tricks to dissolve the *autodefensas*; 2) the only goal of the enemy is to seize

power by means of a bloodthirsty struggle; 3) the enemy responds only to the commands of international communism; 4) the enemy uses the *CPR* (Resisting Populations) only to obtain free labor; 5) the enemy never built a school, a road, or a health post; and, on the contrary, their actions brought only more misery and destruction.

### **POLITICS OF FRIENDSHIP, BEYOND POLITICS OF WAR**

The most interesting aspect of Rivas-Cifuentes's analysis is the detailed attention he gives to the material forms of organization of the *community spaces* to redefine the political point of view of recuperated population. This rationality was defined in the 1980 period of Military Civic Action. As General Gramajo (1995) stated, since the early 1980s one of the primordial goals of Guatemala's National Army was to transform the political world by fighting the war by other means (Schirmer 1999; MaCallister & Nelson 2013). In other words, politics would eventually become a prolongation of war, which would also be an inversion of Clausewitz' classic axiom that states that war is a prolongation of politics by other means. Although there is something very specific in counterinsurgency logics, this idea is not necessarily new. The German political philosopher Carl Schmitt (1932), during the dawn of National Socialism, argues that a pure process of politicization happens exclusively in the moment that the antagonism friend-enemy is established. His political definition of enmity is basically the same used in war rationality. Hence, the enemy is someone against whom a struggle to the death has been declared; is someone that "I"—the political unity—wishes to die, violently if possible. Here, the identity of a political unity is defined thus by the identification of the enemy and the desire to have him killed. This opens the possibility for understand what was being done by counterinsurgency in the context of the *Recuperation* programs.

Particularly when it comes to implementing a processes of normalization and reconstruction, which is already implicit in the notion of *recuperation of resisting population*. And here it is utterly important to understand that the political, in relation to the creation of spaces of friendship (the *Recuperated population*), is complementary to the spaces of enmity.

In other words, it is possible to argue that the *recuperation* strategy aimed at the creation of some kind of politics of friendship, depended upon the expansion of a more complex politics of enmity, based on the consideration of everyday spaces as the foundation of every possible political experience. The re-foundation of the political for the *recuperado*, from the perspective of the counterinsurgency, is a form of establishing a double bind that paradoxically includes and excludes the subject—what Spivak (1999), building on Lacan, call foreclosure (*forclusion*) to problematize the subject position of the native informant in anthropological research: on the one hand, expands the space of friendship between the counterinsurgency and the population that has been relocated in the new counterinsurgency distribution of space and, on the other hand, redefines the position of friendship and its identity, which becomes dependent to the position and identity of the enemy.

In concrete, this means to produce a process of politicization that would tend to assimilate all kinds of dissent and/or antagonism, by incrementing the spaces of friendship, where the presence of the enemy remains latent. This is why since the 1960s Military Civic Action programs used notions such as progress, development, institutionalization and even democratization, because one of the cornerstones of counterinsurgency was to modify the material living conditions of large groups of the population that could potentially sympathize with the insurgency. Also, these groups

were those that, in case of necessity, would both declare war on old or new enemies while keeping loyal and stable.

Instead of a process depoliticizing the political, *Recuperation* firstly meant to depoliticize the material conditions of reality in order to structure the political, which is contingent to that materiality. And to depoliticize meant to eradicate, at least for a part of the population, the material conditions of existence that could eventually lead to the emergence of antagonisms between the people and the Counterinsurgent State. Counterinsurgency rationality, instead of engaging with massive propaganda machineries, looked towards the reconstitution of the everyday and the possibilities of reproducing the material conditions of existence.

## CONCLUSION

The analyzed manuals help to understand the link that counterinsurgency intended to create between the production of material infrastructures and the modification of the political coordinate system. This analysis has established a differentiation of two periods in which counterinsurgency carried out these strategies. The first one depended upon the military civic action programs that were designed directly by the American Government between the 1960 and the 1970s. The second one was introduced parallel to the deploy of the scorched earth campaign and was the epitome of the low intensity conflict's axiom of *continuing the war by other means* in which the heads and hearts of the population became the main non-military objective. Here is important to highlight the role that the transformation of the materiality as an aesthetical infrastructure was being considered as an effective means to define the friendship-enmity binary and use this as the basis for a

new definition of the political. In the following chapter I will explore the meaning of the notion of humanitarian war, which was central in the low intensity conflict.

## Chapter II

### The Ray Elliot report: Mimetic faculties and counterinsurgency humanism

...on important occasions, human life is still bestially concentrated in the mouth: rage makes men grind their teeth, while terror and atrocious suffering turn the mouth into the organ of rending screams. On this subject it is easy to observe that the overwhelmed individual throws back his head while frenetically stretching his neck in such a way that the mouth becomes, as much as possible, an extension of the spinal column, *in other words, in the position it normally occupies in the constitution of animals*. As if explosive impulses were to spurt directly out of the body through the mouth, in the form of screams.

Visions of Excess, G. Bataille

...the importance of the notion of properties in magic is that one of the major preoccupations of magic has been to determine the use and the specific, generic or universal powers of beings, things, even ideas.

Hubert & Mauss

To declare that writing itself is a mimetic exchange with the world also means that it involves the relatively unexplored but everyday capacity to imagine, if not become,

Other.

M. Taussig

#### INTRODUCTION

As in the previous chapter, my analysis in this chapter is based on documental sources. My intention in this chapter is to take a step forward, and study not only the immanence of counterinsurgency plans intended to over-determine the new subject production and national imaginary (discourse), but also to study its direct implementation in the context of what was denominated *humanitarian war*. The goal is to problematize and to reflect around questions such as *what was the meaning of being human for the counterinsurgency? And/or what kind of human being was intended to be produced by the counterinsurgency?*

Since my interest in the theme I am analyzing in this dissertation started many years ago, it is necessary to explicitly acknowledge that this chapter builds on my previous work (Flores 2011, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2015) carried out within the space of reflection created within the Asociación del Avance para las Ciencias Sociales (AVANCSO) and the Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales (CLACSO). I want to explicitly reveal that in my practice, the research I am presenting in this dissertation, is the continuation of reflection and research that started earlier in my career, and that I believe that this dissertation is but another space that will influence my future research and practice. To me, the type of research in which I am interested is never totally completed it is rather a process that is in continuous movement.

As I have extensively reflected elsewhere (Flores 2014a, 2015) humanization in the context of Guatemala's post-colonial history could be thought about as historically contingent to the production of racial categories. This process started during the invasion, conquest and colonial period, between the 15<sup>th</sup> and the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which ended up in the materialization of the Finca-State mentioned above. My central argument has been what I called the analytics of racism, which focused on the production of categories to racialize humans in colonial and postcolonial discursive and aesthetic formations. My previous studies aimed to understand the production of differentiated and hierarchized forms of humanity, such as the indio, ladino, mulato, criollo, blanco, etc., and its displacements, that made possible the process hegemony production that, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, created the indio-ladino binary (Flores 2010). I have proposed (Flores 2015) that it is imperative to understand how the creation and development of racial regimes is deeply intertwined with the evolution of the notion of *the human*. In this regard, the human is not a stable moral category, but an analytical tool and a power category that has been contested during the 500 years of colonialism and primitive accumulation capitalism



in Guatemala. From that understanding, in the analysis I am presenting here, the premise I investigated in my earlier work i.e. the evolution of the notion of the human, is the germinal idea that allows me to relate analytically to the *humanitarian war* counterinsurgency strategy as another form of colonial and postcolonial formation of racial discourse. In that sense, both this and the previous chapters are to me a continuation of my research project on colonialism, the definition of the human and the production of power-race categories.

The new advance of my life-long research project is that in this dissertation I propose that counterinsurgency established concrete material, mimetic and representational mechanisms to create specific kinds of humans, with determined subjectivities, regimes of desires and affect. In this chapter, however, I calibrate my analytical compass and restate some questions posed on my original research on racism (it is possible to say that the previous chapter followed a very similar methodology). I do not analyze exclusively the strategies of *subjectivization* and *humanization*, such as the MCA programs, but a document about a concrete process of humanization of indigenous populations (the Ray Elliot Report).

I also take a step further in introducing anthropological theory to study how these forms of humanization were carried out as forms of mimetic powers, intended to foreclose and limit the sociopolitical reality. In this chapter I propose that it is necessary to understand the notion of over-determination in the context of a post-humanistic analytical frameworks, dialoguing not only with the multispecies theoretical agenda proposed by philosophers such as Donna Haraway, but also with the Nietzschean and Deleuzean approach, in which the hegemonic power circumscribes the human to the subjection to coordinate systems of moral superiority and production of desires that must be subjected to strategies aiming to its destabilization.

I consider that the notion of *humanitarian war* and the whole process of humanization carried out by the counterinsurgency cannot (and must not) be detached from the pre-colonial moment (such as the Valladolid debates in late 15<sup>th</sup> century) in which the relation between the human and the indigenous population is established.

This is something that will certainly help to understand the articulation of the second section of the dissertation, where the processes of experimentation revolves around the relation of counterinsurgency over-determination, singularity and potentiality. Again, the method here does not intend to prove the success or failure of counterinsurgency project, but to understand the characteristics of the contingency it created, which can eventually become a singularity to produce processes of destabilization and politicization of the entanglement of historic/colonial racial formations with the counterinsurgency project.

In this regard, I consider necessary to remark that singularity helps to carry out research processes that are not focusing on the forms of normalization (what is equal) but on those divergent spaces, phenomena, affects and aesthetic experiences and practices that potentially can trigger forms of politicization that contest the reproduction of structural antagonisms.

This chapter draws on the archival research I carried out at CIRMA (*Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica*) between Fall 2014 and Spring 2015.<sup>30</sup> As presented in chapter one, this archive research allowed me to find historical records to understand the interrelation of counterinsurgency and infrastructure from the early 1960s to 1980s. I seek to understand how *humanitarian war* was a key concept that shaped the production of material infrastructures during the war, and how these exist to this day.

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<sup>30</sup> CIRMA has the most extensive and best systematized historic collections regarding Guatemala's counterinsurgency.

These infrastructures, aimed at transforming the regime of desire of the indigenous populations considered, by the counterinsurgency, to orient them toward taking part in the revolutionary struggle. This analysis revolved around the concept of *military civic action* and its investment in producing military forms of affective labor which I consider are entailed in contemporary post-counterinsurgency infrastructure plans.

In this chapter, I take a step further. The archival research opened up the possibility to engage also in an anthropological analysis of mimetic faculties, and mimetic exchanges in the context of the 1980s genocide in the Ixil Region. My analysis draws on the Ray Elliot report, in which he ponders the visit of four dentists sent by American evangelical churches. This endeavor was framed in the *humanitarian war* strategy carried out by the former dictator Efraín Ríos Montt. Elliot's report describes the context and the process by which these dentists were brought to Nebaj during the moment of highest counterinsurgency violence.

This chapter revolves around the process of *humanization* carried out by the counterinsurgency military. I suggest that counterinsurgency was struggling to *humanize* the Ixiles and their region in order to impose a monistic ontology that preceded both the ontological and the post-humanist turn. I propose that the counterinsurgency military intended to eradicate all other non-human agents/actors that were taking part in the political dispute, which included sacred places, infra-worldly authorities, and everyday magical/spiritual entities. I build upon a post-Cartesian perspective, in which other non-human agencies/entities play central roles in the definition of local sovereignties.

I consider that a form of mimetic strategy was taking place during the implementation of the *humanitarian war* strategy. For instance, using medical metaphors, Elliot reflects on the necessity of defining strategies that would allow Guatemala's national army to *cure* indigenous populations that were considered to be somehow

infected by ideas and spirits, instead of killing them massively. He mentions some of the infrastructural endeavors described in chapter one, but also adds new ones. The idea of *humanization* of the Ixil communities does not appear explicitly in his report. However, it lies in the background of the military strategy carried out in those years, in which evangelical millennialism played a central role. This, however, is not an analysis of the introduction of evangelism, but of the concept of *humanization* as a strategy to win the war by other means.

These additions to the notion of *humanitarian war* form part of a different kind of struggle that was fought in a completely different frontline that exceeded the outreach of material reality, and the concept of religious conversion. Taking on this report, its iterations, mechanisms of reproducibility, proliferation and other forms of representation, I advance some hypotheses regarding the mimetic faculties and exchanges occurring in the context of this struggle. This report also intended to deny any possible interaction between the Ixiles and all other entities that inhabit the region.

**THE RAY ELLIOT REPORT: DE-FRAGMENTED COPIES, FRANKENSTEIN TEXTS,  
*HUMANIZATION* TEXTS**

I believe it was a Tuesday, while reading a bunch of photocopies that a strange document came into my hands. It was an old 21-page photocopy, full of scars and stiches, written by Ray Elliot. A previous restoration process was evident. Some of the original information was lost in the process and it was impossible to establish, on each fragment, who did what and why.

RAT 954

The trip to Nebaj which Helen and I were asked to participate in came about as a result of a number of agencies and factors which the Lord brought together. For decades Nebaj, and the Ixil area in general, has been subject to abuse and neglect. Legitimate complaints had long been left either unlistened to or deliberately suppressed. Now it has become a focus of both communist propaganda and guerrilla warfare, and the government of Guatemala is acutely interested in at least reverging the military situation there. In addition, the Wycliffe teams assigned to the Ixil area had been talking for some time with Behrhorst Foundation people, especially Dr. Carroll Behrhorst and Harris Whitbeck (who is a member of the Foundation board of directors) about ways and means for getting both short-range and long-range help to the Ixil area. More recently, because of their ties to the new President of Guatemala, people at Verbo Church, and especially the missionary staff there, were seeking ways by which getting help into the Ixil area could be used as a wedge for further evangelistic activity. Then four dentists, all from the area of northern California near the mission headquarters of Gospel Outreach (which had started Verbo church several years ago) volunteered to come down to Guatemala to help with dental problems. People in 60 churches at home contributed supplies; fellow dentists lent instruments. After considerable discussion, the mission decided to have all four of them spend the time in Nebaj --if they could find interpreters for them. When you look around, there just don't seem to be all that many people who speak both English and Ixil. The Verbo people knew about us, because they had just recently helped us send to Nebaj 50 sacks of corn (5000 pounds) provided by Food for the Hungry. So they asked if we could go to interpret for the dentists. We could! The President of Guatemala ordered the Air Force to provide helicopter transport for us and our gear. It was a cooperative project in many ways.

The dentists were Norman Hall, John Coney, Randal Thomson, and Richard Holven. They were (and are!) great guys, and everyone in Nebaj sensed their gentle concern for their patients' wellbeing. We'd be delighted to see any and all of the four come again.

For us, personally, it was our first opportunity to get back to Nebaj since December 1, 1980. We hoped to renew friendships, visit the churches, encourage distribution of the Scriptures we'd recently published in Nebaj Ixil, lay the groundwork for a "lending library" of cassette players and cassette tapes with recordings of Scripture on them, check on our garage-office into which all our stuff had been stacked for us earlier this year when we gave up the house we'd been renting since 1974, and to get a first-hand view of what the community needs are.

We traveled to Nebaj Monday morning July 5, 1982. In addition to the four dentists, Helen, and myself, Alfred Kaltschmidt of Gospel Outreach/Verbo Church went along, hoping to have a while in town to see us organized and get some first-hand ideas himself of what the current situation is. So far as we knew, no advance word had been given of our trip nor purpose; we'd be hitting the town absolutely cold. One thing we talked about in advance was, "what do we do while waiting for the word to get out and people to start trickling around for dental help?" Helen and I mentioned various possibilities, mostly having to do with walking around town and the immediately surrounding area to give the four visiting dentists an idea of the geographical setting --but since we didn't know just what the situation would be, we said we'd simply have to wait till we got there and make some decisions then. As it turned out, the town.....

secretary asked the town rescue squad to use its truck with a loud speaker to drive around the town .....

Helen served a pre-cooked dinner she had brought for us --slices of pork with potatoes and green beans in gravy, plus a cabbage and fruit salad. The pension provided tortillas, and it was delicious! While we were still eating, we heard a helicopter come in. Within a few minutes Alfred rushed in carrying my black brief case and asked me if I had a black brief case. I said sure, right here in my room, I'll get it. We left me my brief case (actually Steve's --I had used mine to get things back to Houston in, and Steve hadn't taken his to Mexico) and took from me the pilot's black brief case which had been unloaded by mistake. (Sounds like a scene out of a spy movie!). It had secret army orders in it, he said, which had been worth making a return trip for! He said thanks, rushed out, and in just a few minutes we heard the helicopter take off and pass overhead.

After we had lunch, I went in to pick up some things I needed for the afternoon, and just happened to look at a brown plastic portfolio I had along, and was a bit puzzled to see a packet of long white envelopes sticking partly out of it, stapled together. I casually looked at them and was horrified to see the imprint of the Guatemalan army on them with the big rubber stamp TOP SECRET all over them. I ignored the rain, dashed out to the guard post of the barracks and told the sentry I urgently needed to see the commander. This was at the corner of Enrique's "hotel" --just across the street from what was don Armando's store. The sentry pointed

across the empty plaza to Humberto Leon's house where the shells fell for a while, up the hill above don Carlos's store, and said, "There he is, he's now going into that door." I said thank you, crossed the plaza in front of the church, saw a man with a rifle, and he immediately took me to the house where I just found this packet of letters, please excuse me he looked shocked, flipped through them, saw they were latest, said thank you, and indicated (body language) I'd better go now. I went!

During our stay in town, there was what the commander described later as an unusual amount of military action. We didn't learn until Wednesday that on Monday night, the day we arrived, a civilian patrol escorted by a military patrol was returning to Nebaj and just beyond the airstrip (which is a few kilometers north of town, on the 'hot' fork of the road we take toward 'El' Jul Case and points north and west) they were ambushed. Six soldiers were killed and several wounded. On this trip back, a pack mule fell into a V-type pit in the bottom of which sharpened stakes had been planted. The impaled animal had to be killed. Later on, the hindquarters of a horse fell into another, but they got it out and the injuries were being treated in town Tuesday to see if the animal could be saved.

Tuesday morning we watched and listened to a firefight between a helicopter and men returning fire from the ground. It was the first live war I had actually witnessed, and it left an impression on me. The men on the ground were up on a ridge which the road from town goes around before it gets down to where the plants electrica was. Several truckloads of troops were sent to the area, and they brought in three dead guerrillas, identified as men from Chajul. Helen and the visiting dentists saw the bodies brought in, dumped out of the truck and dragged into the improvised morgue, then later that afternoon dragged back and loaded into the back of a pickup and taken to the ditch which serves as a grave for such cases. Someone dumped water on the cement tile floor and washed the blood out. We were glad we'd decided to work in the corridor.

I've already mentioned the swarm of people who crowded around to have teeth pulled. The dentists had brought a folding chair with them, and when we investigated we found that the padded dental chair (which was

Figure 5: Fragments from the Ray Elliot Report

The first thing drawing my attention was that the stitched pieces belonged to different versions of the document. It was some sort of Frankenstein text, made by parts of other bodies that together created a complete and autonomous organism. I read quickly

through it. It was a single new assemblage made by fragments of other copies. Copies that also were copies of an original document. After the first glance, I could detect a textual constellation composed by an original report that I never got to see; parts of copies of the original report; a sum of all these parts that together formed an assemblage, which had a deeper significance than the mere sum of its parts; and a history narrated by Ray Elliot about the visit to Nebaj in 1982 of four dentists that pulled hundreds of teeth, while a genocide was taking place around them.

### **HUMANITARIAN WAR AND HUMANIZATION**

I will briefly summarize some of the elements that comprise the Ray Elliot report.<sup>31</sup> Elliot is a prolific writer, who does not economize in the description of the events he witnesses. He describes the tasks in which he engaged during the time he spent during that tour. This was a *humanitarian war* project, meant to introduce evangelical churches into the region. His local interlocutors, Harris Whitbeck and Alfred Kaltschmit, belonged to the Verbo Church (the millennialist church created by the former dictator Rios Montt).<sup>32</sup> Besides the four dentists, Elliott's wife Hellen, also took part in the trip. This was the result of the coordination of different American and Guatemalan Religious agencies (the Wickliffe teams, Berhost Foundation and Verbo Church), the Rios Montt Government representatives and the National Army.<sup>33</sup> Elliot reflects on how, by implementing these kinds of medical assistance programs, it was possible to reverse the influence of communist propaganda and guerrilla warfare among the Ixiles. He also sees

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<sup>31</sup> I do not intend to describe each one of the points treated by Elliot in his report, however. I order to advance the argument the general description will be followed by a focus on the elements related to the notion of mimetic sympathy.

<sup>32</sup> Elliot does not use this concept in his description. It is broadly used by others, such as Alfred Kaltshimtt, who were present in the Ixil región at the same time.

<sup>33</sup> As stated in the same document, the Verbo Church in Guatemala was introduced by the Gospel Outreach.

in these actions “a wedge for further evangelistic activity.”<sup>34</sup> His obsession for enabling the best conditions for the dentists to pull as many teeth as possible stands out in Elliot’s description. The detail of his records showed an exponential growth in the number of teeth pulled. The same day they arrived, they got to pull one hundred teeth, the second nine hundred, and so on.

In contrast to what I analyzed in chapter one, in which I revealed how Military Civic Action programs were intended to modify aesthetics in order to produce a new desire regime, here I examine the direct implementation of such programs in a more fundamental process of *humanitation*. To *humanize* here acquires a specific meaning that differs from the common sense that attributes directly a positive moral value to the notion of the *human*. *Humanization* here is understood as a process in which the multi-natural life experience of the Ixiles is directly attacked in the context of non-military war strategies. The point of departure for this analysis reveals itself as the introduction of counterinsurgency infrastructures that are accompanied by processes of evangelization, which was part of the psychological warfare.<sup>35</sup> This psychological warfare was a sociocultural, ontological, warfare. Evangelization and *humanization* of the Ixiles was a process meant to de-structure and restructure the multiple planes of reality in which the Ixiles reproduced their everyday.

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<sup>34</sup> Perhaps is necessary to remember that one of the central components of what was named as “humanitarian war” during Rios Montt government revolved around eradicating the *costumbre* (Mayan contemporary religion) and the effects of the *Acción Católica*, which was identified by the counterinsurgency as two of the major sources of rebellion.

<sup>35</sup> This is something that has been broadly researched in the truth commission reports and other independent researches that I will mention further.

## ANOTHER FRAGMENT: BUREAUCRACY, AESTHETICS OF HORROR AND UTILITARIANISM

Elliot's report adds something new to this dissertation's analysis. It is not only the textual lexis and mimesis of material built environments, military civil action processes, and the production and reproduction of euphemisms, such as "humanitarian war" in the context neo-Cartesian human rights defense.<sup>36</sup> A form of *humanitarian war*, in which a struggle for the representation of what distinguishes the *human* from the *non-human*, was taking place in the context of *winning the war by other means*.<sup>37</sup> The possible relations between the Ixiles and other worlds was considered central in the war strategy. In this regard, Elliot's Report functions as: (1) a witness of the point of view of those involved in implementing such programs, (2) an insight of the "banalization" of massive violence, (3) its eventual self-reflexive discernments and, (4) the material production of multinatural perspectives that entail in themselves traces of what can be named by anthropologist as "mimetic sympathy". To illuminate these three points, I copy below an excerpt of the report:

During our stay in town, there was what the commander described later as an unusual amount of military action. We didn't learn until Wednesday that on Monday Night, the day we arrived, a civilian patrol was returning to Nebaj and just beyond the airstrip (which is few kilometers north of town, on the Su'mal fork of the road we take toward Tzi' Jul Chee, and points north and west) they were ambushed. Six soldiers were killed and several wounded. On this trip back; a pack mule fell in a VN-type pit in the bottom of which sharpened stakes had been planted. The impaled animal had to be killed. Later on, the hindquarters of a horse fell into another, but they got it out and the injuries were being treated in town Tuesday to see if the animal could be saved.

Tuesday morning we watched and listened to a firefight between a helicopter and men returning fire from the ground. It was the first live war I had actually

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<sup>36</sup> In this regard, I find especially appealing the way De Delón (2015) describes the uses of euphemisms as infrastructures of death. The same for Taussig's (1997) notion of Spaces of Death.

<sup>37</sup> The notion of post-humanism can be traced to philosophers such as Nietzsche (2003) in the 19th century and Althusser in the 20th century. In recent years, the post humanist turn with the development of Haraway's (2007) philosophic project on interspecies relations.



witnessed, and it left an impression on me. The men on the ground were up to a ridge which the road from town goes around before it gets down to where the planta eléctrica was. Several truckloads of troops were sent to the area, and they brought in three dead guerrillas, identified as men from Chajul. Hellen and the visiting dentists saw the bodies brought in, dumped out of the truck and dragged into the improvised morgue, then later that afternoon dragged back and loaded into the back of a pickup and taken to the ditch which serves as a grave for such cases. Someone dumped water on the cement tile floor and swished the blood out. We were glad we decided to work in the corridor.<sup>38</sup>

I've already mentioned the swarm of people who crowded around to have teeth pulled. The dentists had brought a folding chair with them, and when we investigated we found that the padded dental chair (which was part of the equipment Don Lawrence had left to the town in 1980) could be bolted back together. It was carried over for us and we assembled it on the corridor. Various sizes and shapes of tables were brought out of the various town offices, and some straight chairs also, and the dentists laid out their instruments, anesthesia, sterilizing solutions, and so on, on these tables, between the two dental chairs. Helen handled people coming from one direction, and I the other. We helped a dentist on each end of the work area identify the problem, the patients were anesthetized, put in chairs nearby to wait their turn in the dental chairs, while the other two dentists extracted the teeth. There was some rotation of duties, so that the injecting dentist could spell the extracting dentists; even so, one developed an arm cramp. Coming directly from a situation in which heroic measures are often taken to save teeth and where pulling one is only a last resort (pullings in their practices back home ranged between a few a week to a few a month), here they were doing nothing but pulling aching, rotted, broken, abscessed teeth, one after another after another. It was hard for them to get used to, even though that was what they had come for. We tried to help them realize that they were bringing relief to a lot of people whose teeth had been aching for months. It was depressing to have a woman or child open her mouth (the men were usually on patrol or work crew during the day!) and display a string of seven or eight stumps in a row, or merely holes from which roots were sticking out. Some children of five to ten years old did not have any good tooth left in the whole upper jaw. And so on-try to imagine some dental difficulty and we saw it! We worked till after six, when it became too dark for the dentist to see what they were doing in the mouths, and then we almost had to forcibly stop, because we were still being besieged with people who were told to come back tomorrow. I explained to some of the people that it was too dark, the dentist might try to pull a tooth and get a tongue by

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<sup>38</sup> This sentence was confusing in the beginning because it is referred to some part of the document that was not included in the copy I was working with. I understood its significance some days later, when I received other iteration of the document that is presented in the following section of this chapter.

mistake. Everyone laughed, but that more than anything else seemed to satisfy people that the dentists couldn't work any longer that night.

The dentists had not known in advance that electricity might be available in the town, and they very much lamented not having brought some neat compact drilling kits, etc., which would have made fillings possible. As a matter of fact, guerrillas had at times cut power lines, but while we were there the current was on continuously. A lot of the teeth could have been saved, but of course it would also have meant that not nearly as many people could have been taken care of since it takes a lot longer to save a tooth than it does to pull it. (An object lesson here: some people favor simply wiping out all the Indians in the region to bring an end to problems; it takes longer to do something constructive than it does to kill the "enemy".) When it's possible to repeat this kind of dental mission, a larger corps of dentist will be needed so that as many fillings as possible can be made in addition to the teeth which will have to be pulled.

Tuesday we worked from 8 to after 12 and from 2 to after 6. It was tiring for all of us, unaccustomed to being on our feet all day, and with no let-up in the lines of people. We deliberately tried to force ourselves to take short breaks, especially so the dentists could relieve aching back muscles, but it wasn't easy to persuade them to rest with long lines of people waiting. And based on Monday afternoon's experience, instead of two lines from opposite directions with the dentists working in the middle, we established one line only, with two dentists taking patients one at a time, identifying the teeth which had to come out, giving us their numbers which we wrote on a slip of paper and gave to the patient to hold after which the patients were injected and put into the line along a bench to await their turn in the chairs manned by the other two dentists. This proved to be more efficient than handling it all via two separate lines. It also allowed me more freedom to do some of the other things I needed to see about while we were there. The injecting dentists and the extracting dentists rotated among themselves, so as to give each other a break from the steady duty, but especially to allow some rest for sore arm muscles which were not accustomed to full time tooth-pulling. I told them they obviously hadn't doing much milking lately.

I will take distance from the most usual interpretation of the kind of events that focus on the notions of biopolitics (Foucault 1990, 2010; Agamben 1998) and necropolitics (Mbembe 2003).<sup>39</sup> Hannah Arendt (2006) coined the concept the banality of

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<sup>39</sup> Generally speaking, biopolitics can be understood as the faculty that the sovereign possess to decide who might live and who might be left to die. This is also known as the state of exception, which is the moment when specific individuals are disposed from their juridical subjectivity and lose all their juridical rights. On the contrary, Necropolitics is notion that explains how someone can be killed in name of sovereignty. Some

evil to describe how any average person can take part in processes of massive extermination and genocide. For Arendt, this does not necessarily respond to an ideological conviction, but to the normalization of extreme violence and systematic murder in the machinery of bureaucracy. For this research it is necessary to problematize and raise questions to destabilize the notion of the banality of evil. These questions are related to the kinds of representations made during the war, which were used to achieve specific aims in the transformation of the Ixil world.

My concern with Elliot's report problematizes the relation established between the massive pulling of teeth and some kind of mimetic sympathy that can be grasped either as a practice of writing derived from direct contact with mass violence, which involved already a form of mimesis.<sup>40</sup> This is a practice of allegorical representation of the punishment and massive killings of rebellious ixiles; or the mimetic metaphor for their eventual "healing" and "recuperation", though a process of humanization that involves more direct mimetic actions that aim not only to represent the subject to be healed, but also to create him/her.

It must be clear that the notion of mimesis distances here from the tradition that links Plato to Marx, in which it is treated "as a source of deception and a false representation of reality."<sup>41</sup> Instead, mimesis relates the practices of representation to the anthropological tradition that studies phenomena of possession and dispossession. Building on Mauss & Hubert, (2005) and Taussig (1993), I understand mimesis as processes of repetition and representation aimed at both producing a subject and its

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studies (Mazariegos 2012) have already posed hypotheses taking on both concepts in the case of the mass killings in the Ixil region during the same years that Elliot, Hellena and the four dentists visited Nebaj.

<sup>40</sup> This is the point of departure of Taussig's (1993) analysis on Kafka.

<sup>41</sup> Matthew Potolsky (2006) has written a comprehensive philosophical history of the evolution of the notion of mimesis.

agency, as well as a phenomenon that manifests not only the power of what was originally represented, but newly gained force created in the practice of representation.

What is the first impression one has when reading this excerpt of Elliot's report? The aesthetic experience of reading this report made me feel like I was seeing some kind of surrealistic Texan-horror film from 1970s, full of killings, full of amputations, full of spaces of death. There is some level of normalization of the large amounts of violence, a description of the war zone that builds on both the narration of human and non-human deaths. This impressed Elliot to the point that he made an explicit commentary stating that this is the first time that he witnessed war.

When Elliot remarks on the three dead guerrilleros he also comments that they (him, Helena and the dentists) were glad of having decided to work in the corridor because the first room they were offered was used as a morgue and sometimes the number of bodies was so large that they had to pile them on the floor.<sup>42</sup> In other words, Elliot's report was writing in a material context, in specific spaces, human built environments of death that had specific actions in a means-ends rationality that can be related to some form of utilitarianism.

Elliot and his companions (the dentists and his Hellena) were able to witness the horror that was taking place around them. However, there are several points that make the

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<sup>42</sup> Given that this commentary was not included on the first copy of the document I didn't understand his observation. It was until some days later, when I received another copy of the document translated to Spanish, that I understood the meaning of that comment. Originally, the municipal secretary offered to the dentist to work in room in the municipal hall. They preferred to work in the corridor instead. Sometime later, they got to know that the room they were offered was also a makeshift morgue that sometimes had so much bodies in it, that they had to pile the bodies. In other words, the description also takes serious consideration of the spaces and built environments meant for the dead:

*El Secretario municipal y Jacinto Pérez Marcos (quien era alcalde hasta mediados de junio), estuvieron presentes y nos recibieron calurosamente. cuando supieron que habíamos venido para sacar dientes, pusieron todo a nuestra disposición. Como lugar de trabajo escogimos un corredor abierto frente al salón municipal. Había un cuarto vacío al final de las oficinas municipales. Descubrimos después que era la morgue, donde colocaban los cadáveres (a veces uno encima del otro) hasta que se daba la orden para enterrarlos.*

description uncanny. At some moment, the description becomes a merely technical report, almost bureaucratic (in the sense of Arendt's Banality of evil), in which the pulled teeth are daily registered. A description balancing the efficiency of the executed strategies, correcting it frequently to make it better the next day. They are particularly concerned to carry out the teeth-pulling in the most efficient possible way. Thus, the permanent process of trial and error becomes a structural element that articulates not only their experience but the way in which the narrative is displayed: the measurement of the workload, the shifts, the direction of the queues, the resistance and strengths of the dentist's muscles, the lighting, etc. All these elements are central human and non-human actants that take part of the process of pulling as many teeth as possible. However, these non-human actants also shaped other forms of agency, which directly relate to forms of representation and magical thinking.

If there is a bureaucracy behind of this horror scene, it functions as the reproduction of mimetic images of excess (Bataille, 1985), belonging to a different aesthetical realm that does not coincide exclusively with the banality of evil. When facing the horrors of massive killings Eliot's senses are both numbed and enhanced, making the dialectics between anaesthesia and aesthesis evident (Buck-Morss 1992). This does not mean he was not able to understand the massive violence, but that he was not really able to feel it in other dimension beyond the counterinsurgency humanitarian war strategy and its utilitarian aesthetics. On the one hand, it can be stated that there is no affect in genocide. Genocide is the final obliteration of the sensorial; which takes the form of a death-scape, a place where moaning becomes impossible, and all that matters is to carry out the task (whichever it is). On the other hand, Elliot seems not to consider the role he plays in the counterinsurgency strategy. This kind of awareness would have demanded from him an acknowledgement that he was contributing in the genocide. And this would

have implied that he was not only witnessing, but also being part of the bureaucracy of death.

## MIMETIC SYMPATHY AND ONTOLOGICAL DIS-POSSESSION

I propose to take upon the theory of mimesis and representation firstly proposed by Mauss and Hubert (2005) in the General Theory of Magic.<sup>43</sup> Drawing on this I would like to return to one specific excerpt of Elliot's report:

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<sup>43</sup> Mauss distinguishes two kinds of representations: these can be individual, collective; impersonal and personal (and a combination of both). I am interested in addressing first the forms of personal representation, which is the representation of a specific individual or group. The personal representation establishes forms of *mimetic causality*, which means that the imitation or the copy produces an effect on what is imitated or copied. A cause-effect relation between the representation and its impact on the subject is established.

Three forms of sympathetic relation base the mimetic causality: contiguity, similarity and opposition. The contiguity is a principle in which two processes take place. First, the embodiment the whole in the part, in which the individual's body and identity are indivisible from the individual itself: "the simplest expression of the notion of sympathetic contiguity is the identification of a part with the whole. The part stands for the complete object. Teeth, saliva, sweat, nails, hair represent a total person, in such a way that through these parts one can perform directly on the individual concerned, to be either bewitched or enchanted. Separation in no way disturbs the contiguity; a whole person can even be reconstituted or resuscitated with the aid of one of these parts." (Mauss & Hubert 2005, p 70) The contiguity also entail an indivisibility of the individual from the group. The same as a part of the individual represents the whole identity of the individual, the individual represents the whole group. One tooth represents an Ixil-subject and this represents the Ixiles as an ethnic group or as a people.

The contiguity principle also functions as a process of contagion, in which everything that comes close to these parts that embody the whole. In this regard, specific objects that come in contact with the victim/patient can also represent in a specific mode the subject; and both, the individual and the object are permanently linked in a single continuum that produces a desired effect. If the tooth is sick, the whole individual is sick and the Ixiles as a whole are sick. Further, the sympathetic continuity and its contagion faculty involves the transmission of personal characteristics, such as illness, luck, life, ideas and so on. The sickness of a tooth represents also the sickness of the Ixil spirit that has been infected with insurgency forms of sickness.

The second law, similarity, revolves around the notion of mimetic sympathy. This has two principal formulas. "like produces like, *similia similibus evocantur*; and like acts upon like, and, in particular, cures like, *similia similibus curantur*." (Mauss & Hubert 2005, p. 84) The first formula of the law of similarity establishes a relation between images (drawings, dolls, proper names, symbols etc.) and contiguity faculties. Either the image of the part becomes an extension—or a continuation—of the subject, or the image of the subject becomes an extension of the group—or both. Here, the only linking the image to the subject (victim) is a convention that associates both the subject and its allegorical representation. However, the specific functions of the image are to produce the subject (Mauss & Hubert 2005 p. 85) and to assimilate the subject. In the second formula of the law of similarity the image produces and assimilates the represented subject, and also aims at directing/controlling/affecting/determining its actions. By representing the ixiles in their pulled teeth Elliot could also produce the body of Ixil-individuals and also produced the

The dentists had not known in advance that electricity might be available in the town, and they very much lamented not having brought some neat compact drilling kits, etc., which would have made fillings possible. As a matter of fact, guerrillas had at times cut power lines, but while we were there the current was on continuously. A lot of the teeth could have been saved, but of course it would also have meant that not nearly as many people could have been taken care of since it takes a lot longer to save a tooth than it does to pull it. (An object lesson here: some people favor simply whipping out all the Indians in the region to bring an end to problems; it takes longer to do something constructive than it does to kill the “enemy”.)

As I stated in the introduction to this dissertation one of my research interest revolves around the notion of humanitarian war in the context of the deployment of counterinsurgency and post-counterinsurgency strategies. I propose that the Humanitarian War, in relation to the implementation of religious-change strategies, was a concept rooted in the multiplication of mimetic faculties; a struggle was being fought, in which the reproduction of mimetic practices was disputed.<sup>44</sup> For instance, the personal and impersonal representations found in Elliot’s reports, that intertwined human and non-

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body of the Ixil-group and he expects this representation that happens both, on the pulled teeth and the narration of the event, is supposed to assimilate the subject in order to modify its behavior. This representation produced the sick subject that could be cured by the direct intervention of the dentist, and further by the intervention of the counterinsurgency military that was supposed to heal a sick social body, which was infected with some sort of insurgency magic faculties.

This takes us to the final law of impersonal representation: the opposition. The formula is: similarity cannot exist without opposition and opposition cannot exist without similarity. Being inseparable from the law of similarity, the opposition is defined as: “like drives out like in order to produce the opposite.” (Mauss & Hubert 2005 p. 88) What characterizes this intrinsic relation is that the similarity produces its reverse, Mauss proposes this first formula can be decomposed in three maxims: “like produces like; like acts on like; opposite acts on opposite. They differ only in the ordering of their elements. In the first case, we think primarily of the absence of a state; in the second, we are dealing first with the presence of a state; in the third, we are dealing with the presence of a state opposite to that which is desired. In the first, we think in terms of the absence of rain, which has to be produced through a symbol; in the second, we think of falling rain which is made to stop through a symbol; in the third, rain is conjured up and then brought to a stop by evoking its opposite through a symbol. In this way abstract notions of similarity and opposition may both be encompassed by the more general idea of traditional symbolism.” (Mauss & Hubert 2005 p.89).

<sup>44</sup> It has been largely studied (CEH, 1999; Garrard Burnet 2011; Samson 2010) that the counterinsurgency project aimed at obliterating progressive Catholicism by killing massively the liberation theology’s parishioners. Guatemala’s counterinsurgency army saw in them a source of indigenous uprising and revolt. It has also been largely stated that millennialism sects (Canton-Delgado, 1998; Schäfer, 1992) were deployed in the Ixil region. C. Mathew Samson (2012) has a very interesting essay regarding the subject of religious change and pentecostalism.

human mimicry, were intrinsic to counterinsurgency strategies. These are concrete impersonal images (in the report there is no reference to a single Ixil-individual regarding the tooth pulling), which characterize not only representations, but also the transmission and contagion of properties and qualities (Mauss & Hubert 2005 p. 93) that were considered to be proper of the insurgency.<sup>45</sup> Insurgency was considered to be a kind of sickness, and the Ixiles were seen as subjects of greater vulnerability to be infected.

Elliot's report deploys forms of magical thinking related to concrete practices of mimesis. The relationship that Elliot establishes between the teeth and the Ixiles encompasses Mauss' principle of contiguity. The teeth embody the whole, and epitomize an extensive image, not necessarily of individuals, but of all Ixiles and of the region itself. Also, the instruments used by the dentists to pull the teeth became both a material extension of the Verbo Evangelists project, and, most importantly, of the process of "recuperation" (the concept mentioned in chapter one), and immunization of indigenous populations previously contaminated with insurgency ideology. Finally, the contraposition of pulling and healing teeth interweaves with images of both massive killings and mimetic dis-possession –exorcism– of the Ixiles. In other words, these forms of magical thinking were quintessential to the implementation of the humanitarian war strategy because they intended to redefine and monopolize the mimetic exchange during, and after the war.

Further, by implementing humanitarian war strategies, a peculiar combination of impersonal and personal mimetic practices was carried out. This consisted in representing indigenous populations either as: (1) non-human objects, (2) non-animal entities, (3)

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<sup>45</sup> Here it would be interesting to study what kinds of qualities were inscribed in the reproduction of the *costumbre* from the perspective of the counterinsurgency. One recurrent idea expressed by the ixiles during the time I spent in the Region, was that military considered that the *costumbre* was a cause of insurrection and rebellion in the region, and that this is why they killed almost all spiritual guides in 1982.



animals, and animal-parts (also non-human), (4) non-human guerrilleros, (5) humans (6) mutilated human fragments or, (7) human communities. In the gaze of the counterinsurgency, this chain of similarities jointed the emergence and proliferation of the insurgency with the emancipation of the rebellious indigenous spirit (what I have named *indio rebelde* in other texts, and its eventual re-humanization.)<sup>46</sup> While a sick tooth corresponded with a sick subject-community, it also epitomized the victim of the insurgency that was infected with a radical form of alterity, namely, an emancipatory political ideology. A guerrillero was an inhabitant of the *montaña*, and it co-existed with other non-humans and animalistic entities. On the one hand, the solution to treat these subjects was to pull all teeth as soon as possible; this meant, to kill all irrecoverable guerrilleros-Ixiles. On the other hand, the desired plan of the counterinsurgency was to extract only those teeth that were incurable, and to fill the rest, which was the same as to recuperate all indigenous that still were recoverable. Filling teeth in this context was an allegory of indigenous peoples needed to be emptied, and considered to be sick not as a whole, but in specific parts of their communitarian/individual bodies. This also means that kind of infection for irretrievable subjects was of the whole body, and not only in specific parts.

#### **COUNTERINSURGENCY AESTHETICS: GUERRILLA-DEMONS, AND MONISTIC WARS ON INFRASTRUCTURE**

I have proposed above that one of the principal drivers of counterinsurgency strategy was given by the production and re-production of mimetic practices that impersonated forms of possession and dis-possession –both spirit exorcisms and

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<sup>46</sup> Charles Hale (2006), in his book *Mas que un Indio*, also provides a description of this politicized indigenous individual, from the perspective of the ladino hegemony.

accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2009). These were identified by the counterinsurgency with specific political ideologies embodied in the guerrilla. Thus, the insurgency political ideology took the form of an infectious spirit, an infra-worldly agency that possessed the Ixiles and also directed their will/agency. These mimetic practices, would eventually erase the line between what Foucault (1994) calls the medical gaze and the magic of the State (Taussig, 1997). From the perspective of the counterinsurgency, magical rituals would, in the first place, be executed by the guerrilla, that enchanted and infected the indigenous populations represented in demons, animals, and no-human entities that had practiced forms of sorcery over the Ixiles. Let's take a small detour to illustrate this point better.

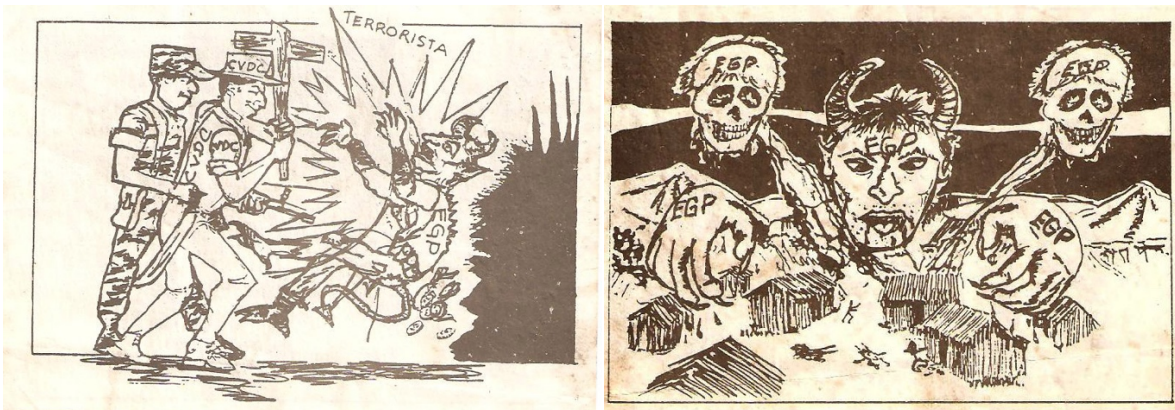


Figure 6: Military propaganda

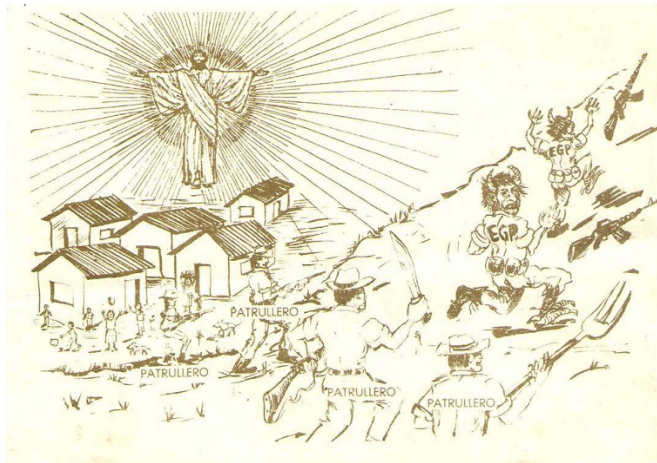


Figure 7: Military propaganda

In these three images, that I obtained from a friend's personal archive (whose family was victim of counterinsurgency violence), it is possible to see how counterinsurgency practiced forms of mimetic representations, in which all elements of sympathetic magic can be identified. Whereas in Elliot's report the identification was established between sick teeth and the whole Ixil people, within these images mimesis produces subjects that have been completely transformed into non-human demon-shaped entities. Their bodies are assemblages composed in part by animals (chicken feet, horns), in part by under-wordily creatures, and in part by humans.

In the first one of the images, it is possible to identify one of these demon-guerrillas that is repelled by a *recovered* PAC (Self Defense Patrol) with a cross. Behind him stands a military holding his back. The guerrilla, who is falling, shows a spiky tale, a uniform, and several coins that fall from the bags in his belt. In image three, the PACs chase back these same demon-guerrilla to the mountain, where they belong. In image two these demoniac figures are emerging directly from the mountain in some sort of spirit formation.

I will not stop to describe the ontological difference between the monistic and utilitarian ontology that was being deployed by counterinsurgency in contrast to the ontological perspective of the Ixiles. There have been some works that shed light on it, though. For instance, it can be traced in the prayers of the *baalbastiix* (the spiritual guide) Pap Shas that were registered in Benjamin and Lore Colby's (1981) ethnography. It was also registered in previous pieces, such as Lincoln's (1945) ethnography on the Ixiles. To sum up, the mountain plays a central role in the spiritual everyday life of the Ixiles. As Tally (2014) puts it:

“the spatiality of being-in-the-Ixil-world designates the way in which the Ixiles have named, hierarchized and structured their space. This space is not only physical, but also physic-spiritual, ontic-ontological. For the Ixiles, the mountains are not only mountains, but also living entities that have their own personality and authority; they confront each other, and are capable of causing great topographic transformations during their struggles. The mountains are also the places in which angels inhabit and where they meet when it rains. The angels are those who monitor, watch and protect the mountains and bring their prayers to the supreme God, but they are also who punish the mountain if it misbehaves, if they disobey, or if they do not invoke them and feed them in the sacred places (...). The Ixil spatiality also involves a spiritual and sociopolitical organizational structure, in which both hierarchies converge, reflect in each other, and align in a way that is balanced with the four cardinal points, which also trace the path to the sunset and the hiding of the moon.”<sup>47</sup>

To sum, counterinsurgency strategy also revolved around producing mimetic actions that would eventually acquire the faculty to reduce the Ixil ancestral and multi-natural existence. These mimetic actions were carried out to cure the *communist possession* by means of introducing sympathetic objects that could take the form of human parts or even material infrastructures. These, were designed to eliminate the relation between the Ixiles and all other non-human entities.

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<sup>47</sup> My own translation



Figure 8: Military propaganda

In illustration 12, we appreciate fantastic/fantasies of spaces and bodies that have been not only sanitized by the introduction of new infrastructures, but also *cured* by counterinsurgency mimetic faculties. I propose that the implementation of the civic action programs was intended to function as what De la Cadena (2010) and Viveros de Castro (2014) understand in terms of ontology and the ontological turn, which revolves around the *perspectivist multi-natural* reality.<sup>48</sup> This, would be translated as the production of counterinsurgency social and material infrastructures that were intended to prevent the circulation of the Ixiles within their own multiple worlds (in which existed entities such as the mountain, the animals, the cargadores, regidores, mayors, secretarios, and, particularly, the *guerrilleros*), and to restrain them to circulate exclusively in the ordinary post-counterinsurgent monistic world.<sup>49</sup>

The humanitarian war was, therefore, a monistic war for redefining relational spaces of human circulation, that established that the guerrillas, given their faculty to enter and exit between the post-counterinsurgency world and the magical space of the

<sup>48</sup> Christopher Chiappari (2015) has written a beautiful paper in which analyzes the notion of new animism and subject production among Kich'ees in Guatemala.

<sup>49</sup> However, as we will see in chapter five, this was a project that never succeeded completely.

mountain, had not only the ability to merge and mimic with the natural and supernatural world (to some extent, the natural and supernatural world are the same in the ixil reality), but also to mimic with “normal” humans. This mimetic faculty was also what made it possible for them to both infect and possess other indigenous peoples. This is also why the redefinition of the everyday infrastructure was quintessential to counterinsurgency. These new built environments would confine not only humans, but also animals and plants, a process that would prevent every interaction with the exteriority non-human world, especially the *guerrilla*.

#### **COUNTER-AESTHETICS: *CATÓLICOS EN EL EXILIO*, MIMETIC EXCHANGE**

The same week that I received the English –Frankenstein-shaped– copy of Elliot’s report, Thelma brought me another version of the document. This new iteration was part of a pamphlet, translated in Spanish, and published by the *Iglesia Guatemalteca en el Exilio* (Exiled Guatemalan Church) in Nicaragua in 1983. This *replica* had several other additions, made by the editors. First, it contained an introduction in which the *Católicos en el Exilio* stated that now 95% of Nebaj’s inhabitant were part of evangelical sects that didn’t exist two years before, a radical transformation rooted in the counterinsurgency program. Further, the *Católicos* stated that Elliot, with local military representatives, was in charge of supervising and organizing two *aldeas modelo* in Nebaj. The *Católicos* stated that around 3,500 indigenous people lived as prisoners, and that most were survivors of the massacres perpetrated by the military.

They also affirmed that Elliot came to Nebaj in 1954—after the U.S. invasion of Guatemala, and the instauration of the military dictator Castillo Armas—and that he left in early 1970s. In Nebaj Elliot worked as translator for the *Sociedades Bíblicas* and he communicated to “his central” on a frequent basis using a radio transmitter. Once a

month, they affirmed, Elliot received in the mailbox two checks: one coming from the *Sociedades Bíblicas* and the other from the U.S. Army.

El martes en la mañana miramos y escuchamos un intercambio de fuego entre un helicóptero y hombres en la tierra. Era la primera vez que yo había visto la guerra en vivo y me impresionó. Los hombres estaban en los altos, arriba en la carretera entre Nebaj y Chajul. Varios camiones fueron mandados al área, y regresaron con 3 guerrilleros muertos, todos chajuleños. Helen y los dentistas vieron la llegada de los cadáveres, cómo fueron tirados del camión y arrastrados hacia la morgue. En la tarde fueron llevados otra vez en un pick-up y tirados en un barranco que sirve como sepultura en casos así. (C-IGE- Los cadáveres de los supuestos guerrilleros no se entierran. El ejército no lo permite. Son arrojados a un barranco para que los perros, los cerdos y los zopilotes se los coman y con la esperanza de que sus familiares lleguen a recogerlos y así poder hacer más prisioneros o muertos.) Después alguien echó agua en el cuarto y con una escoba sacó la sangre. Nos alegramos de haber tomado la decisión de trabajar en el corredor y no en ese cuarto.

Los dentistas no sabían que el pueblo tenía electricidad, y lamentaban el hecho de no haber traído más instrumentos. Hubieran podido salvar muchos dientes, pero en este caso no hubieran podido atender a tanta gente, se necesitaba mucho más tiempo para salvar un diente que para sacarlo. Una lección aquí, alguna gente quiere acabar con todos los indios en la región para terminar así con los problemas—demora más hacer hacer algo constructivo que matar al enemigo. Los guerrilleros varias veces han cortado la electricidad en el pueblo, pero durante el tiempo que nosotros estuvimos allá, nunca falló. Cuando sea posible repetir ese tipo de misión dental, se requiere un equipo más grande de dentistas, para curar dientes y no sólo para sacarlos.



Figure 9: By Católicos en el Exilio

After checking this introduction, two of the aforementioned interventions drew powerfully my attention. These weren't marginal notes, but pieces of contextual information introduced by the editors all around the text; these were *intra-textual* inlays embedded in the body of Elliot's report. Their manifest function was to describe the

context of the narrative, and to make political and social commentaries. The index of these interventions was given by their relational position towards the text, the use of parentheses and the acronym *C-IGS* (*Comentario — Iglesia Guatemaltecos en el Exilio*), and the use of italics—something that creates a complete different typographic aesthetics allowing the reader to understand its *alien* origin.

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The second kind of intervention was a series of pictographic representation of Elliot's narrative. In my eyes, these were even more powerful intermediations. The kind of iconography implemented was inspired in ancient Mayan-style pictographs. These are very effective because they also function like ideographs that could be independent from the text itself; these are not only illustrations of the texts, but also indexes designed within the boundaries of some kind of archaeological gaze.

In image 5 it is possible to appreciate that the order of the text differs from the *original* photocopy I obtained from Cirma; in this iteration, the second paragraph precedes the fourth. The text looks like this:

Tuesday morning we watched and listened to a firefight between a helicopter and a man returning fire from the ground. It was the first live war I had actually



witnessed, and it left an impression on me. The Men on the ground were up to a ridge, which the road from town goes around before it gets down to where the planta eléctrica was. Several truckloads of troops were sent to the area, and they brought in three dead guerrillas, identified as men from Chajul. Helen and the visiting dentists saw the bodies brought in, dumped out of the truck and dragged into the improvised morgue, then later that afternoon dragged back and loaded into the back of a pickup and taken to the ditch which serves as a grave for such cases. Someone dumped water on the cement tile floor and swished the blood out. We were glad we decided to work in the corridor.

Just after the “...*the ditch which serves as a grave for such cases*” the textual/contextual intervention appears for the first time as a form of intratextuality. It states:

(C-IGE- Los cadáveres de los supuestos guerrilleros no se entierran. El ejército no lo permite. Son arrojados a un barranco para que los perros, los cerdos y los zopilotes se los coman y con la esperanza de que sus familiares lleguen a recogerlos y así poder hacer más prisioneros o muertos.)

(the corpses of the alleged guerrilla are not buried. The Army does not allow it. They are thrown into a ditch, so that the dogs, the pigs and the vultures will eat them up and, with some hope that their relatives will come to pick them, in order to take more prisoners or dead bodies.)<sup>50</sup>

Immediately after, it is possible to read the scene where he reflects on pulling all the teeth and killing all Indians instead of filling them.

The dentists had not known in advance that electricity might be available in the town, and they very much lamented not having brought some neat compact drilling kits, etc., which would have made fillings possible. As a matter of fact, guerrillas had at times cut power lines, but while we were there the current was on continuously. A lot of the teeth could have been saved, but of course it would also have meant that not nearly as many people could have been taken care of since it takes a lot longer to save a tooth than it does to pull it. (An object lesson here: some people favor simply whipping out all the Indians in the region to bring an end to problems; it takes longer to do something constructive than it does to kill the “enemy”).<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Free translation by author

<sup>51</sup> Free translation by author

In the end, the icons describing a row composed by two women, one man and three kids.



Figure 10: By Católicos en el Exilio

The first woman, with the mouth open, stands in front of the dentists, waiting to get a tooth pulled. The second one, on her knees, carries a baby on the back, and waits for her turn to get her teeth pulled. A man sits in the middle, between the women and the children, seems to be more resigned to accept his faith, his eyes are closed and his arms crossed. On the left end, the dentist holds the instrument he uses for pulling teeth. Finally, on the right end, Elliot (or Helena) seems to control everything; his hands are deformed, they resemble claws, which he waves to scare the people in the queue and to keep them aligned.

Michael Taussig (1993) states that writing is a form of a mimetic exchange with the world that involves the capacity to imagine, and become, others. The wonder of mimesis is that the copy is not a text or a drawing merely imitating the original, but a representation that has assumed the powers of the original. These powers can be used to offset the colonial dominion, and to counter dominant forms of mimetic exchange. In this regard, I believe that both, the intertextual interventions and the pictograms are

functioning in this last iteration of the text as forms of representation of the ixiles that bring them back to their multi-natural reality. In these drawings can also be appreciated the blurring of the line that separates the human from the natural worlds; especially when comparing the two women in the line. I mentioned already that the woman on her knees carries a child on her back. But if we see carefully the woman standing in front of the dentist, is possible to appreciate that, instead of a child, she carries a *milpa* (the corn plant), which is one of the most sacred being for the Ixiles (Colby & Colby 1981; Lincoln 1945), but also is the representation of life itself; it is also the symbol that identifies Nebaj. Even though the *humanitarian violence* of the counterinsurgency aimed to restrict the Ixiles to exist and circulate only within the human infrastructures, it becomes an impossible task. My hypothesis is that counterinsurgency never had the capacity to win this war despite genocide, massive violence and reeducation programs.

To recapitulate, we have at least XX forms of mimetic exchange revolving around this specific text. The first one, was the original text itself, written by Elliot in 1982, in which he describes the visit of the four dentists to Nebaj. The second one, was the curation made by the restaurateur/archivists that put the fragments of different originals together. The third one is the mimetic exchange established through the composition of sympathetic faculties, in which the teeth are condensed representations of the underworld/sickness suffered Ixiles infected by the guerrilla, which had to foreclose the everyday of the Ixiles to the unidimensionality of existing in counterinsurgency infrastructures. The fourth is the translation of the text into Spanish and its reproduction in the *Catolicos en el exilio* booklet. The fifth is the intratextual intervention of the translation itself, that destabilizes Elliot's discourse. Finally, the sixth are the drawings, that function as a measure to cancel the effects that the teeth had in the original

translation, by relocating the Ixiles in their multi-natural/multi/ontological self-representation.

## **CONCLUSION**

It is difficult to assert that counterinsurgency's aim of reducing the specter of political agents (human and non-human) taking part in the definition of the political was successful. There was a major intervention in the everyday that radically transformed the contingency of sovereign relations that was registered in survivor's testimonies in which non-human entities played a foremost role after the implementation of the scorched earth campaign. This intervention redirected the relation of the State towards the indigenous populations, which I think were considered to be susceptible to mimetic practices that linked non-human agents with the proliferation of subversive practices in the locality. The Ray Elliot Report helps to understand the multidimensionality of these mimetic practices and their configuration in the context of the scorched earth campaign. In this regard, the process of humanization was also a constitutive element that counterinsurgency used to reduce the indigenous resistance. It is necessary to continue the research in this subject to understand the deep impacts that this strategy had in the reproduction of the everydayness. In the next chapter I will analyze another iteration of the Ray Elliot Report that was created as part of this ethnography. This consisted in a collaborative artistic project.

## **SECTION TWO: POST-COUNTERINSURGENCY, EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH, SINGULARITIES AND POTENTIALITIES**

As stated in the introductory chapter this dissertation aims to carry out a twofold methodological strategy. In the previous two chapters I investigated some aspects related to the architecture behind the *humanitarian war* strategy, which was constitutive to the counterinsurgency axiom of fighting the war by other means. With that first approach I seek to understand the discursive structures that intended to over-determine cultural, social and political processes inherent to the post-counterinsurgency nation state. I did so through exploring the military civic action and the processes of counterinsurgency *humanization* of indigenous populations. The idea of humanization is directly related to the genealogy of production of colonial and postcolonial subject categories as I argued in the previous chapters.

In this section I am interested in engaging in the second methodological strategy. To problematize the notion of over-determination that was in the background of the two previous chapters, I draw here on a series of experimental visual projects that I carried out during my fieldwork. One of my central concerns revolves around subject production, which was not only articulated into a logocentric understanding of discourse, but also into a multidimensional register of the sensorial (the infrastructures of what can be felt, how and with which intensities). I propose that this multidimensionality of the sensorial was intended to re-define the structures of feeling of the post-counterinsurgency era.

Taking on the notion of Aesthetics proposed by philosophers such as Benjamin (2008) and Buck-Mors (1977, 1991, 1992, 1992) I consider that the sensorial is not suspended in a metaphysical dimension, which is independent of culture and society. On the contrary, the sensorial is intertwined with the development of political/historical

processes that can be traced not only in material forms of culture and representation, but in the productive and cathartic dimension of the arts.

Building on Williams (1978) and Ranciere (2010, 2013), I am interested in researching the entanglement of history with the potentiality of altering the sensorial dimension of politics. Since the beginning of my work this dissertation I have aimed to problematize the apparent consensus regarding the over-determining *victory* of the counterinsurgency project. In opposition to that axiom, I have proposed that the overwhelmingly presence of counterinsurgency must be considered as a historic contingency—instead of an over-determination—that created the conditions of possibility of the present. I consider that, in terms of politicization, this contingency must also be taken in consideration to re-think the definition of contemporary social struggles.

Each one of the visual experiments that I present in the following three chapters intended to apprehend not only the specificity of the counterinsurgency contingency, but also the dialectical relation between singularity and potentiality. I am not seeking to validate specific hypothesis, but to engage in a methodological research process that takes on the production of visual projects that put, in the playground of dialectics, the counterinsurgency contingency, the singularities and the potentialities, in play.

The epistemological standpoint is that the knowledge produced during the research process is not exclusively a result of my own creation based on the utilization of first and second order informants. Instead, this knowledge is the result of an intersubjective process of analysis carried out in parallel to the production of the visual projects. The following chapters must not be read as a study about the subjects I collaborated with. Instead these are the result of a multidirectional epistemology in which the distinction between the subject and object of knowledge is permanently problematized.

In other words, what I have intended to do is to problematize the notion of counterinsurgency over-determination in collaboration with the subjects I worked with for two years. This process implied not only to carry out specific artistic projects to “represent” or “advocate” for the victims of the counterinsurgency, but instead to generate multidirectional reflexive processes in relation to the contingency of counterinsurgency, which we produced in processes of mutual interpellation and learning. Each one of the experimental artistic singularities presented in the following chapters intends to express this methodological process, which I call non-utilitarian method. The contradictions and complexities that the non-utilitarian method implies and the way in which I dealt with them are described in detail in each chapter.

## Chapter III

### **The work of art in the age of 3D digital reproducibility: The commodification of pain & the fetishization of memory**

It might be stated as a general formula that the technology of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the sphere of tradition. By replicating the work many times over, it substitutes a mass existence for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to reach the recipient in his or her own situation, it actualizes that which

is reproduced.

W. Benjamin

...nothing's real. Everything's far away. Everything's a copy of a copy of a copy.  
Palahniuk/ Durden?

#### INTRODUCTION

This is chapter is the first singularity in which the contingency of counterinsurgency was deeply problematized. It revolves around the prolongation of counterinsurgency, utilitarian, infrastructures into contemporary art projects that deal with the representation of suffering and trauma of the victims of the war. This experimental visual singularity allows to problematize the prolongation of forms of alienation, fetishization and production of exchange value of political arts in cosmopolitan markets. The process that emerges from these singularities, allows to re-frame the debate on sort post-Marxist *ideologie kritik* and the entanglement of capitalism with the infrastructures of circulation of contemporary arts.

The emergence of aesthetic/analytical process is, in my opinion, an opening to a form of re-politicization in which the relation between capitalism and counterinsurgency contingency becomes not only the subject of academic debate, but also of artistic intervention and self-reflexivity. In other words, this is an intervention in the reproduction of political arts that emerged in the aftermath of the signing of the peace



agreements. I expect that these kinds of interventions might allow to radicalize both the understanding of cultural production within the field of contemporary arts, and the kinds of interventions that are being produced in a more explicit alignment with political processes that eventually could fissure the contingency of the post-counterinsurgency era.

The experimental intervention presented in this chapter builds from the documental research presented in the previous chapters. Along this chapter I situate the positionality of this intervention, involving the privileges that people like me (an educated upper middle-class ladino intellectual male) and the subject I collaborated with (an upper-class non-indigenous woman) enjoy. The gender, class and race privileges that we both enjoy are explicitly traced in the ethnographic description. It entails a process of construction of trust and sharing life experiences in both personal and professional dimensions. It must be remarked that, in a good extent, the collaboration we were able to carry out was partially possible because of the articulation of structural forms of economic reproduction/coffee capitalism, and racial privileges in the contingency given by the post-counterinsurgency.

It is not the aim of this dissertation to trace the complexity of my genealogy. This complexity, however, might help to understand how and what social structuring-structures were affecting the collaborative process we engaged. I am the son of an upper middle-class woman, whose father was a doctor coming from a wealthy family. Despite my grandfather inherited a *finca* (coffee plantation) he never really took advantage of it. He was more interested in his medical practice. I do not remember the *Finca* (this is how my siblings used to talk about it), because at some point it was too dangerous to travel to the *Boca Costa*, where it used to be, in the context of the counterinsurgency war.

My father was the son of a barber and a cook, who lived most of their lives in Guatemala's City urban poverty, first in the Barrio Gerona, at the *palomares* (houses where several families used to live together) and later at the Colonia Primero de Julio (a neighborhood created for working class people constructed during the 1970s). My grandmother died of diabetes and my grandfather of emphysema and alcoholism. They had a very limited access to medical attention. Despite his economical background, my father was a very cultivated man, who taught me, since I was a little boy, about philosophy, literature, and art.

The decision of my mother to marry my father, who back in the day was a working class fanonian-marxist that managed to access to public higher education, was a scandal for some members of my mother's family. However, she was more interested in the revolutionary project and had more coincidence with my father than with her disapproving relatives.

These classists and racial differences, that were part of my everydayness all my life, also allowed me to learn how to transit from one world into another. I learnt that in some spaces I had to hide my popular working class background and show only the privilege parts of my heritage. It was until I was studying sociology at the Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, that I was able to criticize the reproduction of these social practices. However, I knew that I had a tool, which was also a privilege, in terms of being able to function in upper class spaces.<sup>52</sup> I possessed cultural, social, and economical sorts of capital that give me an advantage in Guatemala's society. This was also something extended to my intellectual and research interests.

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<sup>52</sup> This is what María Lugones (1987) calls "World"-Traveling, to analyze the cross-racial and class transitions that take place in these complex contingencies where positionalities cannot be reduced to binaries.

When I first started to work with Yasmin Hage I tried to use this tools/privileges to make the collaboration easier. It is interesting, however, that the complexities of Guatemala's racial and class structures take place often in ways that we do not anticipate with our flattening sociological categories. In my imagination, when we started the work with Yasmin, I was sure that she would know that I wasn't a member of the upper class. However, I thought I should be able to display my social and cultural capitals to reduce the structural gaps in order to make our work more productive. One day I invited her to eat at my house and when we were at the table, she looked at an early 20<sup>th</sup> century portrait of my mothers' grandparents. Then she asked me something like: "do you know when did they stopped using the *traje* (the indigenous ethnic costume)?" "No, no idea", I replayed.

In that moment, I knew that she had a more transparent image of who I was. I did not have to manipulate my relative privileges to being able to work with her. She knew that I had a cultural capital that was above Guatemala's media and also acknowledged the relationality and positionality that allowed us to work together. The singularity of our particular situation, in the context of Guatemala's contingency, opened a space of potentialities and possibilities that I intend to describe in this chapter.

In this chapter I take on the collaborative project carried out with the visual artist Yasmin Hage between December 2014 and April 2015. Drawing on fragments of the Ray Elliot report, this five-month collaboration yielded a sculpture that was exhibited in New York, Quetzaltenango City, and Guatemala City. Our work was framed in the *Guatemala Después* contemporary art project, coordinated between the New School and *Ciudad de la Imaginación*.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ciudad de la Imaginación is a cultural initiative in Quetzaltenango Guatemala that aims at building citizenship through the implementation of experimental artistic endeavors.

The point of departure of this chapter is given by the processes of alienation of pain and memory fetishism in relation to the production of aesthetic experiences representing post-genocide realities. I propose that both genocide and its forms of representation must be framed in the context of multinational cultural capitalism, geopolitical history, and national and local (non) experiences of State violence. I analyze the life story of Yasmin Hage to understand the development and evolution of her aesthetic point of view from her perspective as a political artist, and upper class urban Guatemalan. This is the basis to localize the post-counterinsurgency and post-genocide production of aesthetic experiences, and forms of representation and catharsis (what is named “non-representational aesthetics” in further chapters) within the specific, and differentiated, historic Guatemalan contexts. Finally, the analysis frames the collaborative process that we engaged to produce the 3D digital printed the aforementioned anti-memorial piece, that we to develop a participant ethnographic visual project that was helpful to locate our self-reflexive analysis within the reproduction of post-counterinsurgency aesthetics.

The goal of this chapter is to understand not only the infrastructural foreclosures that counterinsurgency intended to implement with its military civic action programs and the *humanitarian* war, but also its eventual reverberations in the field of contemporary art, and its manifestation in post-counterinsurgency aesthetics.<sup>54</sup> This chapter will address

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<sup>54</sup> In the previous two chapters, the analysis of counterinsurgency focused on the problematization of the representational forms inherent to the plans of massive extermination, and population control mechanisms (namely, the military civic action programs). I proposed that these representational forms envisioned to limit the access to the multi-ontological universe that is contingent upon the definition of the political in the Ixil region. In turn, I’ve been suggesting that counterinsurgency strategy aimed at framing the political whitening the parameters of the friend-enemy binary. I saw this as an attempt to re-inscribe Schmitt’s seminal definition of politics in the counterinsurgent project. This, consequently would distress the production of the world’s intelligibility (ontology) in which the humanitarian war was implemented. This was meant to be possible by destabilizing the plurality of interactions between the Ixiles and non-human beings taking part in the politics of the everyday, which constituted a horizon of intelligibility radically alien for the counterinsurgency. I hypothesize that counterinsurgency’s intention was to re-stabilize and foreclose

four fundamental processes: first, the intersection of counterinsurgency and Guatemala's capitalism as the contingency that opens the possibility of contemporary political art. Second, how this intersection is reprocessed in the production of artistic forms, which gain abstract value from the appropriation and intervention of counterinsurgency infrastructures. Third, how these two previous processes have been destabilized in Yasmin Hage's artistic trajectory, which questions the presence of the intersection of neoliberalism and counterinsurgency in contemporary arts. And fourth, the intervention of neoliberal infrastructures that capitalize on the production and circulation of these forms of abstract value.

By implementing visual anthropological methods, I intend to bridge the notion of mimesis —that draws on Mauss and Taussig ethnographic theory— with analytical concepts such as reproducibility, aestheticization of politics and politicization of arts— studied by neo Marxists such as Benjamin (2008) and Horkheimer & Adorno (1969). This bridge, however, intends to give a recount of particular ethnographic experiences that we used to theorize the collaborative process in several dimensions.

## **ESTRANGED SUFFERING**

The collaboration with Hage opened the possibility to problematize the relation between reproducibility and alienation, which is contingent upon the circulation of *post-*

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politics within the realm of the human. The human, thus, was considered to be the exclusive kind of entity allowed to take part in local post-counterinsurgency politics. Becoming human translates as the identification and declaration of a death struggle against the (non-human) enemy. Ultimately, the concept of humanitarian war defined the existence of the other, who was necessary to eliminate from any possible political and/or social political interaction. In this regard, I have analyzed two different strategies derived from the notion of humanitarian war. The first one grasped the notions of military civic action and infrastructure in counterinsurgency plans. The second one, focused on the implementation of one humanitarian war example (the Ray Elliot Report), that translated in the production of mimetic faculties and exchanges.

*counterinsurgency* aesthetics and neoliberal art-infrastructures. One of the outcomes of this problematization is the notion of *aesthetic-memory fetishism* (or fetishization of memory), which provides heuristic insights to the question about the impact of counterinsurgency in contemporary political arts.

I analyze the built environments in which the sensorial dimension of counterinsurgency is reproduced, displayed, and exchanged. As pointed out in the introduction to this dissertation, aesthetics is defined as the infrastructure that opens the possibility for the sensible (what can/must be felt, with what intensity, frequency, rhythm, etc.) In this regard, *aesthetic memory fetishism* is a concept that aims to understand the transformation of the sensorial dimension of pain and suffering experienced by the victims of counterinsurgency and its consecutive commodification.

The findings that emerged during the long discussions with Hage revolved around how the gallery, in which politicized art circulates, is always at risk of becoming a market-place in which counterinsurgent aesthetics articulates with logics of *alienation* and *accumulation of pain*. The premise is that the process, in which suffering is estranged from the subject, provides both exchange and circulation values to aesthetic forms of representation of memory in post-counterinsurgency artistic infrastructures.<sup>55</sup> These are characterized, first of all, by the fact that most of the *victims* of counterinsurgency are alienated from these spaces. It is extremely rare to see direct victims of counterinsurgency violence taking part and interacting with the subjects —artists, curators, dealers, collectors, etc.— that are common in these places. It is important to remark that these process are not necessarily driven by the intentional action of specific

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<sup>55</sup> To some extent this is something that could be also attributed to ethnographic fieldwork, taking into consideration that most academic reports circulate in spaces that are alien to the subjects that suffered counterinsurgency violence.

artistic agents, but by the agency of the field of art in itself. My interest here is to understand the immanence of the field of contemporary political art in today's capitalism.

Building on the Frankfurt School analysis on cultural industry and Bourdieu's sociology of culture (1993, 1996), it could be stated that the field of art is relatively subordinated to external and complex forces. The question of what it means to become *successful* in contemporary political arts was one of the points of departure in our conversations with Yasmin. Taking on her informed insights to the field, we realized that *becoming successful* in the arts was an aspirational idea frequently related to the ability of the artist to get access to privileged curatorial circles that subsequently would allow them to know the "important people" in order to get recommendations, references, grants, etc., that would contribute to position their work (and their names) in national and international galleries and market places. Being a successful artist means to be able to gaining prestige and recognition, to be exhibited in respected cosmopolitan biennales, in order to become a self-sustaining subject. Taking on this, we realized with Yasmin that contemporary political artists become precarious subjects who must decide whether to participate in the neoliberal infrastructure of art or to disappear.<sup>56</sup> And this precariousness becomes also relatively determinant of the regime of desire and aspiration in which the artist produces her/his concepts and executes them in the heart of neoliberal globalization.

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<sup>56</sup> As Bourdieu (1993) stated, these structural-structuring practices would produce a dialectics in which the *avant-grade* (the contemporary) becomes eventually hegemonic in the field of art, and this new hegemony would try to counter the emergence of new artists and artistic innovations; at least until these become hegemonic, and so on. These processes have been long studied by French and German cultural sociologists and it is not necessary to focus on them once again. In any case, the Guatemalan artist Juan Pensamiento (2014) wrote a very interesting approach to this phenomenon describing some intimacies of the local field of contemporary art that would be an excellent point of departure for anyone attracted to research Guatemala's contemporary arts.

We developed a special interest in understanding how representations of pain, suffering and trauma evolve into forms of exchange value in national and multinational markets. We considered that the precarious environment in which contemporary art reproduces itself—which provides also the infrastructure for its actors to take part in cultural production—determines not only the processes of alienation that can be reflected in the *aesthetization* of memory and the *politicization* of art (Benjamin 2008), but it also transcends them. Further, we also realized that these forms of commodification estrange the experience of the aftermath of war, in which the process of healing and restoration of the social fabric have been taking place during the last 30 years. Finally, we agreed that the commodification of pain has, at least, a double effect in re-inscribing counterinsurgency: First, by mimicking, fixing, petrifying the actors/agents exclusively in the experience of suffering lived during the implementation of genocidal violence. And second, by alienating these subjects from the spaces where the representation of their suffering is exhibited and displayed.

Do the *metropolitan* infrastructures of contemporary art demand the representation (or mimetic performance) of pain and violence? Do the artists need to reproduce, mimic and impersonate the suffering of others in order to earn acknowledgment, recognition and legitimation in the field of contemporary political arts? Are these aesthetic practices linked to the most general and global dynamic of primitive accumulation and neoliberalism? We realized that commodification of pain and fetishization of memory is a dialectical relation that deals with the ethical impossibility of representing and performing the suffering experienced by the tens of thousands of counterinsurgency's victims.



**YASMIN HAGE**



Figure 11: By author

We agreed to meet at 10am at Café León, which is in downtown Guatemala, near to the Congress of the Republic. I came fifteen minutes earlier, which gave me some time to fine-tune the topics we would discuss during the interview. While waiting for her, I ordered an Americano, no sugar and no milk, and read through my notes. Fifteen minutes later she phoned me to ask where I was. She was already in the coffee shop waiting for me. I raised my eyes and looked around the place. “you are not here”, I told her. “Yes I am”, she replayed. “Where?” I didn’t realize, when making the appointment, that there are two Café León’s and that both are just few blocks away from the Congress of the Republic. She was in the other one. “I’ll come in five” –I told her with nervousness, and hung up.

She was sitting on a high bench while la Roja, her companion dog, was resting on the floor. I sat and ordered a glass of water. “An excess of caffeine would affect

negatively our first interview”, I thought. I was already aware of her work before the meeting. Karen, a colleague and close friend, told me in advance about some of Yasmin’s previous pieces in which she drew on counterinsurgency, *aldeas modelo* and genocide. The ideas from the prospectus defense were still fresh in my head and resonated perfectly with her work. I explained to her that engaging with artists that developed aesthetical approaches to critically conceptualize Guatemala’s counterinsurgency was central to the kind of research I was carrying out. I told her that my interest in working with former *aldeas modelo* revolved around the production of space and aesthetics that tended to attune the regime of the sensible in the everyday. I remarked on how I believed that aesthetics had a determinant effect in the constitution of the political in a broader national sense.

She listened to me carefully until I stopped talking, then, she said that one of her most significant pieces was a 1:50 scale model of an *aldea modelo* in which she worked for several years. After that, we kept talking about different subjects and all kinds of projects, ideas, and anecdotes. The *Guatemala Después* project became of special interest. One of the key notions of that project was to promote collaborative work between artists and academics. We agreed immediately to work together. Initially, I asked her if it was possible to begin with a series of interviews to reconstruct her life and artistic story. She agreed.

## **EARLY YEARS**

Yasmin Hage describes her family as multinational, mixed-race right wing, new rich entrepreneurial. She is the daughter of a Lebanese father who, in order to avoid the forced military service, came to Guatemala in the 1970s. Her mother is half Nicaraguan

and half Guatemalan. Her maternal grandfather was a collaborator of the former dictator Castillo Armas in the late 1950s, and was imprisoned because of his opposition against the deposed president Jacobo Arbenz during the 1940s.

She sees that the French-Lebanese colonial history determined her father's generation, which was educated in the French school system. She considers that Lebanese people do not express classism and racism in the same crude way as Guatemalans do. She studied at Guatemala's French Scholar Program (Julio Verne School) and considers that her childhood happened in a relative open, calmed, space—she never lived in gated communities and/or securitized spaces until she was a teenager.

Her childhood memories of politics during the 1980s are few. The perspectives and opinions about the war in Guatemala were always filtered for her by her family. She remembers, though, the Rios Montt Sunday's sermons, which mixed religious fervor and political discourse. His nervousness and agitated pitch made her feel uncomfortable, even when she was six years old. Either at home or school Yasmin never received any kind of religious education. However, Rios Montt was a scary character, and everybody in the country could feel it, even little children. For her, the imposition of a mixture of evangelism and politics felt caustic. She is aware that during those years almost nobody in the City knew about the massacres and human rights violations happening in the countryside. Like most upper class Guatemalans during their childhood and teen-age years she lived disconnected from the political situation. Politics was something that seldom appeared during dinner conversations. Only after the occurrence of sensationalistic events, such as the bombing of a bridge or a coup, would they discuss it.

During her early adolescence, she and her family moved from the *Zona 11* to the *Zona 14*, the most exclusive sector in Guatemala City. They experienced a dramatic upper social mobility in those years that happened also at the same time when her father

suffered a car accident from which he never recovered. He was in a coma for several years, and her new home became a clinic, with the permanent presence of doctors and nurses. She considers that this process influenced her to experience her feeling more intensely, which would resonate later in the developing of her artistic sensibility.

It was not until the 1990s that she met in person someone who took part in the war. His name was Fernando, a middle aged man who became a bodyguard just after his military service finished. Most of his duty—as Yasmin remembers it—was to be her chauffeur and *baby sitter*. “No other adult member of the family had to waste time driving me”, she says. It was not until the late 1990s, after the increase of kidnappings of upper class people in the aftermath of the signing of the peace agreements that Fernando was sent to a special training program. This was part of the services of an Israeli security company that also was linked to the counterinsurgency during the 1980s. After finishing his training Fernando became the family’s chief of security. Other bodyguards were now under his command. “Some of them were ladinos and other indigenous”, she says, “it changed all the time.” By then, it had become *normal* for upper class Guatemalans to be permanently shadowed by bodyguards. It was not only a matter of security, but prestige and status. Almost in every case, these were former counterinsurgency military. The *richest*, could even afford Israeli bodyguards and shielded vehicles.

She was mostly angry and upset in those days because the bodyguards were active surveillance and control *instruments* for her parents to normalize her social behavior in general and her gender conduct in particular. She remembers well every time her mother punished her because one of the bodyguards *snitched on* her whenever she smoked weed or dated someone she wasn’t allowed to. Consequently, whenever she could, she escaped from the gaze of the bodyguards, until one day a family member was

kidnapped. To live permanently accompanied by the bodyguard was not in question any longer.

This also impacted the housekeeping and the domestic spaces. After her father passed, only women lived in her home. It was out of the question to allow the bodyguards to enter the house. This kind of class and gendered intimacy was extended to the relation that other *servants* had with the security personnel. Her *nana* saw them as poor unmannered visitors, lacking of hygiene and sense of decency. She also expressed that such privacy tends to disappear almost completely, since the bodyguards are permanently there (in the car, the house, the school, etc.), listening to her conversations with her closest friends, inspecting who she was talking to at bars or discos. Thus, she felt that the gaze of the bodyguards became an omnipresent figure in the everydayness of upper class Guatemalans.

Finally, she embraced the permanent presence of the bodyguards in her life and integrated them in to her artistic reflexivity and production. For instance, she planned a performance in which a bodyguard and two other participants poured blood over the asphalt at *Plaza Central*. They also became a kind of artistic resource for other artists, who asked to the bodyguards to collaborate in their projects. For instance, Alejandro Paz made a studio photograph of the bodyguards named Family Portrait. Also, a scene in a movie of Mario Rosales, depicting a nightmare in which several bodies, buried on the beach, come back to life. One of these undead was Fernando.

## **BECOMING AN ARTIST**

Her social milieu was partially constituted by liberal entrepreneurs, most of them coming from France, who encouraged the young generation to make up their own minds,

and to take their own decisions. The rest, were upper middle class uptight Guatemalans, with more traditional and conservative viewpoints. The exchanges she held with other artists, writers and musicians during her adolescence were of great importance for deciding to become an artist, a choice that was not well taken by her family, however. They wanted her to become the manager of the family business in industrial production of wood.

Like several Guatemalan political artists, Yasmin learned about the postwar and the relevance it had in their everyday reality mostly by interacting with other former activists, militants, and creative people through common cultural circles. She had a formal artistic education, though, that differentiates her from most of her generation. First she studied at the *Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas* (ENAP), where she learned from the world renowned contemporary artist Anibal Lopez. She considers, though, that here relation with Lopez during her time at the ENAP didn't impact strongly in her aesthetic development. Lopez was constrained to the syllabus designed by the ENAP, which was traditional from an artistic point of view. The impact that he made on her happened beyond the classrooms, in other kind of exchanges in the emerging contemporary art world of post-counterinsurgency Guatemala.

She studied with Danny Shafer (a prominent modernist who trained several generations of Guatemalan Artists) and became one of his most salient apprentices in the middle of the 1990s, and it was then when she developed a greater interest in Guatemalan politics. She found in politics not only a source of inspiration and a space to make social commentary, but also a material with which she could engage more deeply in deconstructing and intervening national post-counterinsurgency aesthetics from a raw creative practice. This training moved her short time later to get in a Boston Art School, where she did four years of formal art studies.

Even though her social milieu during the adolescence was mostly constituted by open minded foreign liberals, the time she spent in Boston draw her attention to the differences of living in the cosmopolitan reality. This change in the field of vision destabilized the exceptionalism which is constitutive to the perception that upper middle class and upper class Guatemalans have of themselves. One of the things that impacted her life in Boston was to realize the upper class Guatemalans tendency to provincialism and parochialism, their utter classism, racism and patriarchalism. This drove her to problematize deeper her positionality in Guatemala's social and political reality, and especially pushed her to relocate her own life story in the country's political and economic history. She still was in Boston when the *Firma de la Paz* (the peace agreements signing) happened. Despite the geographical distance, she realized the magnitude and significance this event would have in her future artistic development, that she was by that time able to label as *Arte de posguerra* (post-war art).<sup>57</sup>

Yasmin entered the art world by mastering painting and drawing. In the beginning, she remembers, this was a practice of introspection that helped her to go through the grief process after her father died. Later, when already in Boston, she realized that these two disciplines could also be part of her long-term artistic project. Drawing was for her a means to access postmodern forms of representation and to take distance from modernist formal abstraction. Her artistic mentor, Danny Shafer, practiced a modernist approach, which was problematic for Yasmin, because its aesthetic disconnection from the historical world/reality. For her, art is a medium that should stimulate other kinds of experiences beyond the boundaries of the world of art in itself. Her relation to art, in a broader sense, dialogs with social forms, emerging from the

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<sup>57</sup> This is a disputed term that not all contemporary artists embrace and several of them criticize. I use it here as a colloquial expression.

national reality that concretely problematized *normalized* spaces of representation. Even if abstraction is present in her work, it is not an end in itself, but a means to achieve a concrete, communicable artistic representation that aims to produce interpellations in the reproduction of the social reality.

Her painting firstly drew on a conception of the human form as a material index of everyday language. While she considers her relation to spoken and written language not to be very strong, after contemplating modern forms of art, she also realized the need to engage with some kind of language, which had to be incorporated into her visual art. Beyond the reproduction of written language (sociological and historical concepts, to be more precise) her work had to become organic to create strong and precise forms of communication. Yasmin is a strong critic of the kind of art that considers its aesthetics as a matter of pure style and taste. She considered that contemporary debates taking on that perspective are shallow and alienated. In a very Benjaminian way of thinking, she insists that art must build on the observation of the world, which in turn produces the politicization of art. Her aim is thus to create *visual phrases*, that communicate meaning through non-verbal language.

She draws upon late modernists and early postmoderns such as Marcel Duchamp, Lucian Freud, Joseph Beuys, Ana Mendieta, Tim Hawkinson. However, she feels more compelled by local figures, particularly by Danny Shafe and Anibal Lopez. Finally, she claims that several of her local influences were figures like Jorge de Leon, Alejandro Paz, Benvenuto Chabajay, Gabriel Rodríguez, as well as writers such as Alan Mills, María Victoria Véliz, Maurice Echeverría. She sees in these interlocutors not only sources of inspiration, but the zeitgeist of her own generation.



## CONTEMPORARY ART AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Media, technological advances, style, ruptures with modernism, realism and romanticism, are not necessarily the elements defining the contemporary. Contemporary art is for Yasmin an affective state in which the artist perceives the singularity of the present as a tension between history and infinity. Endless modes of existence entangled with multiple and simultaneous temporalities, in which genocide and war are not just sequential series of violent events that occurred 30 years in the past, but processes in permanent actualization of the large scale of social reproduction and the micro universe of the everyday. The present becomes an incommensurable *thing* in itself, at the same time that is a *retroversive* sight that constantly perceives and transforms the aesthetics of the quotidian. The contemporaneity of the present is an extrinsic *panopticon* that produces the interpellation in the artist, who sees back at the same time that is observed. For her, the consciousness of being part of the soluble state of the present-time, which endlessly reifies the past, defines the contemporary and its politics. Contemporary art is thus an effort to bring to the foreground the impossibility of a metaphysical present.

In Boston Yasmin realized she was a singularity. This perception of herself was now objectified by the gaze of an American contemporary young generation of artists. She learned that being a Latina triggered different kinds of desire, when she was an object of curiosity to her peers, who saw in her a potential subject of artistic representation. She felt that this process updated her existentiality in terms of problematizing the way in which she saw the life experience of others in the Guatemalan context. The contemporary became for her a practice of life in which she was not only an observer of the social and political reality of others, but also the center of attention and desire for exoticization.

This reflection was behind her first series of self-portraits. She saw herself as the subject for doing artistic research and experimentation. This was carried out not as a naïve experiment of self-representation reflected in the self-portraiture, but as an interpellation of her singular being-in-the-world. This kind of *Dasein* highlighted her distinctiveness in the context of white American art students in juxtaposition to her social and political background in Guatemala, which brought her back into a reflection about the nature of her own positionality.

Her fascination and interpellation of the *self* was an aesthetic formation established in a specific contextual reality. She realized that the personal and intimate dimensions in contemporary arts were a recurrent phenomenon among her classmates. Her peers were frequently fixated with their own psychologies, life experiences, histories and traumas. She saw in this a limitation to entangling with broader social processes, and realized that psychoanalytic and individualistic aesthetics were constitutive to the formation of the local culture. She concluded that a lack of sociological, historical and political engagement limited the aesthetical potential to grasp the complexity of her self-portraiture. She decided then to abandon that series, and began to look towards forms of contemporary art that allowed her to connect her own life experience with larger historic processes.

Consequently, in order to develop a deeper sociological and anthropological sensibility, she committed herself to transcend the psychological self-centered aesthetics. This drove her to practice photography, so that she could engage in situations that demanded more complex and intense social interactions. She developed interest in depicting both intimate and public spaces in order to destabilize her specific sociocultural context. The photographic project became a self-reflexive instance in the development of her sensibility.

Later, she committed herself to interventions in public spaces that were historically and politically charged. The first piece in this series was the *Partido de Futbol* (The Soccer Game), and took place in a soccer field that was crossed by the border between Guatemala and Belize. This was an opportunity for her to make a commentary about the territorial disputes between the two countries. In this context, the problematization of nationalism and its relation to soccer was mediated by the homogenization of the uniforms of both teams, so that it was impossible to distinguish one from another.

Another of the pieces that was central to this moment was named *Cinismo*. She went to Guatemala's registry of property in order to obtain the rights of property over the word *Cinism*. This happened in the context of the use of generic medicines and the rising criticism that Rigoberta Menchú received in those days because she became a mayor shareholder of *Farmacias Simi*, a chain of drugstores that sells generic drugs exclusively. This was an argument that right wing politicians and business people used to diminish her relevance in the left-wing opposition.

This piece happened during the same time when Rios Montt was attempting to be the presidential candidate for the political party *Frente Republicano Guatemalteco*.<sup>58</sup> She considered that there was an overlap between the allegations against the use of generic drugs, the critiques of Rigoberta Menchú and the nomination of Rios Montt that could be expressed in an art piece in which the word *cinismo* would be privatized in the register in a form of intellectual property.

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<sup>58</sup> He managed to be candidate despite the fact that the Guatemalan Constitution had a prohibition on it.

### **POST-COUNTERINSURGENCY: *MADERA-BALA* (THE SHOT IN THE THREE)**

The piece *Madera-Bala* was central to this new moment in her artistic development. The installation emerged from an anecdote regarding one of the sawmill/wood factories that belong to her family that produces wood boards. A tree entered the production line and soon after it broke the saw causing the shutdown of the whole production line. When the workers investigated the failure, they found that a bullet was embedded in the tree.

The caliber of that bullet is not allowed to be used by civilians in Guatemala. The rumors among the workers and her family revolved around the question if this bullet was shot in combat during the war, by drug traffickers, or by hunters illegally using military ammunition. During the time that this speculation happened Yasmin saw that an aesthetic value, in terms of contemporary arts, could be found.<sup>59</sup>

She decided to perform a reproduction of the event. This was done with small changes, however. In her piece, she used two trees instead of only one. On the first one she shot a caliber used by the counterinsurgency, and on the second one a caliber used by the guerrillas. She wanted to oppose Israeli/American weapons vs. Russian weapons. Her idea was to recreate the cold war affect and inscribe it in the industrial process that transformed trees into commodities.

The visual effect that took the shot on the wood had the form of history, she said. This allowed her to express a political past that was embodied as a wound that indexed the social fabric and everyday reality in specific places of Guatemala.<sup>60</sup> These indexes, however, were obscure and not necessarily easy to interpret as part of the political process of the past. The *interpretant*, in this regard, would not have the chance to provide

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<sup>59</sup> Yasmin here also dialogues with several of Anibal Lopez pieces that used gunshots in different surfaces.

<sup>60</sup> I could not stop thinking about Pierce semiotics during this moment of the interview.

concrete referential meaning to the whole in the wood boards. What she wanted to communicate was that history only shows itself as remainders of processes that are not accessible to the present.<sup>61</sup>

She also took into consideration that the tree came from the *Sierra de las Minas* the place where the first guerrillas emerged in the 1960s. For Yasmin, the tree was a kind of non-human actor that in some particular moment in the past was related to human history. It was later left alone in the forest, until the woodcutters took it back to a relation with humans that transformed it into an industrial commodity. None of this, however, was possible to corroborate with factual data. The only residual index remained crystalized in the surface of the wood. This was a metaphor of Guatemala's history. A history that will emerge, even though one is not looking for it, and nobody has the real capacity to understand it.

### **THE ALDEA MODELO PROJECT**

Yasmin was my Facebook contact since January 2013. We never had any kind of personal exchange or communication before. I knew she was taking part in the execution of Shafer's mural on a building that mimicked a bird traditionally seen in Mayan textiles, which still is exhibited in Cuatro Grados Norte (a recently gentrified area in Guatemala City). It was not until she posted on Facebook a panoramic photograph showing an *aldea modelo* that my attention was drawn toward her work. She used the photograph to advertise the *Guatemala Después* call to participate in collaborative artistic-academic projects. In the beginning, I didn't pay much attention to it (my colleague Karen did, however). What I noticed was that she had this peculiar piece about an *aldea modelo*.

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<sup>61</sup> I will come back to this point later to discuss some of Benjamin Ideas.

During that time my research object was delimited by some sort of infrastructural comparison between the Aldeas Modelo and the gated communities that had proliferated in urban spaces.

For Yasmin, the point of departure to open a dialog about the Aldeas Modelo revolved around the problematization of the generalized ignorance regarding these kinds of military civic action programs. First of all, she had to be pragmatic and use the tools and resources she had on hand to inform her artistic process. For her, the urbanized structure in which people were forced to live after the war had a specific aesthetic significance that was necessary to unearth. She developed her own archaeology that combined the performance of excavations, interviews, and photographic analyses.

The archaeological method was not necessarily a metaphor. Besides interviewing former military engineers that took part in the creation of *aldeas modelo* in the Ixil Region, she actually performed an archeological/forensic excavation to find the traces of one original that could be replicated. With the collaboration of members of the community *la Técnica Agropecuaria* in el *Petén*, she cleaned away the brush of the lot in which the original *aldea modelo* was settled in the 1980s.

The first part of the installation consisted thus in carrying out an archeological/forensic performance that would allow her to find the original traces of a real *Aldeas Modelo*. This would provide her with the possibility of outlining a copy on paper, which consequently would be executed as a scale model installed in the same spot where it was originally built. She never found any traces of the original, though. The forest and the earth consumed them long before her arrival. After realizing that the traces were impossible to find, in opposition to the *bullet in the tree*, she tried to question the possibility to communicate something that has lost its indexical trace. This lack of reference was ironically an index by itself; an object that only could exist as emptiness,

oblivion and ephemerality. The forms of violence carried out by the counterinsurgency existed as expressions of memory that resembled this oblivion.

It was only after this first performative archaeology ended that she started the reconstruction of oral histories in collaboration with the former inhabitants of the *Aldea Modelo*. During the process, she also worked with a curatorial multidisciplinary team, composed of one philosopher, one sociologist, and one graphic designer. Drawing on their conversations she realized that the testimonies would provide the archeological material needed to recreate the original trace. The oral history was thus the original drawing she was looking for. With it, she could create the diagram of the 1:50 scale model. The transcribed text would thus be the basis to carry out the visual display of the installation.



Figure 12: The Aldea Modelo Project. By Yasmin Hage

Her intention in doing a 1:50 scale model instead of a *real* size model was simple. She aimed to use the reduced dimensions of the model to generate a visual interpellation for the people circulating through it. The participants were supposed to feel that they were giants while crossing the *Aldea Modelo*. This should produce an affective state in which everyone could experience the excess of power and brutality practiced by the counterinsurgency.

In order to execute the project, she requested the collaboration of soldiers from a military base located near the community. After getting the approval and support of the local commanding officer, she managed to carry out the installation involving them in its construction. For her, seeing the oversized bodies of the military in opposition to the reduced infrastructure allowed the public to visualize the disproportionate dimension of counterinsurgency violence. By juxtaposing human bodies to these small dimensional infrastructures she finally unearthed the poetic material that was constitutive to her visual take on counterinsurgency.

The next step was to convince the people from the community to take part in the project. She decided to create a guided tour by using signage panels with written overviews describing what the Aldeas Modelo were. She embraced, as a form of irony, the concept of seeing these military civic infrastructure as a theme park. With this, she intended to problematized the idea of entrepreneurship, which became hegemonic in post-counterinsurgency Guatemala. “What can we offer for tourism that other nations like Mexico don’t?” she asked me, “oh, yes, the history of counterinsurgency and its military civic action plans. Let’s do a theme park of it!” Then she smiled showing some hopelessness in her eye.

Yasmin was already aware of the processes of commodification of memory and history related to counterinsurgency. And these forms of commodification became central



to the execution and exhibition of her installation, that was immediately intervened by the community members who asked her how could they have some kind of economic benefit of it. There was none, of course, unless something else happens. Something like its estrangement and relocation in infrastructures and markets of political art. But even this would not benefit the descendants of genocidal violence. The non-reciprocal exchange established between the participants of the field of art and the *ordinary* people that suffered the effects of counterinsurgency is incommensurable. And this is the concept behind Yasmin's *Aldea Modelo*. She wanted to bring to the foreground the paradox of politicization of arts in the time of neoliberal post-counterinsurgency. Benjamin was being challenged. This is what I understood, at least. The installation showed the impossibility of post-counterinsurgency political art. The effects that non-human agencies (the forest) had in the transformation of the landscape and the conditions of global capitalism made it uncanny, disruptor.

Building on this, the notion of materiality was at stake. The model was possible by the use of testimonies and oral tradition, which were considered by Yasmin to be immaterial. The installation was the result of the process of materialization of oral language, which, for her, was immaterial. I asked her if it was possible to decode this phenomenon in terms of some kind of postmodern historic materialism. She followed a method in which the relation between material (use) value and abstract (exchange) value was being inverted and staged in the installation. Her working inverted style also the method used by other contemporary visual artists. Normally, an installation, performance or intervention produces a social commentary that travels orally from person to person after the experience of the installation has occurred. Reversely, Yasmin aimed to trace infrastructural forms created by the counterinsurgency taking on oral history to create a material language that could be expressed in visual arts. Here, she sees history as a raw

material that can be transformed by the intervention of human labor. This intervention allows her to materialize the interrelation between accumulation and dissemination of counterinsurgency forms such as the *Aldeas Modelo*.

The installations *Shoot in the Tree* and the *Aldea Modelo* expressed a something that I didn't see before in other expressions of post-counterinsurgency arts. I perceived in both a meta-critical aesthetics that aimed not only to represent the violence exercised during the counterinsurgency, but, by making evident its conditions of possibility, to destabilize the politicization of art. In other words, Yasmin was positioning herself in the contingency of Guatemala's capitalism and neoliberalism, that is basically rooted in the military civic action programs set up by 1980s counterinsurgency.

The relation she established between the notions of ephemerality and preservation was of special interest to visual anthropologist. The 1:50 model of the *Aldea Modelo* could never really become a theme park, as she stated before, because it never produced any revenue for the community. She knew from the beginning that the project could not have any economic viability in that specific space. And she knew that the idea of transforming the scale model into a theme park was based in the same kind of rhetoric that counterinsurgency used regarding the development by means of the implementation of military civic action programs in the early 1980s. The artistic statement and the meta-critical commentary are at stake, though. Some months after the project was finished in 2007 she came back to the community and realized that the locals had started to use the scaled houses as henhouses. That was the only use value that the scale model could have ever had for the locals. The theme park was taking place in the gallery, where another version of the *Aldea Modelo* was exhibited.

Eventually the whole installation, which was made of organic materials extracted from the surroundings such as palms and wood sticks, was digested by the forest. Once

again, the *Aldea Modelo* began to disappear, leaving behind ruins and remnants of post-counterinsurgency and neoliberal dystopia. Today, she thinks, the few remainders left behind are gone. Everything returned to the earth, nothing stayed. The artistic reproducibility of the *real* focused thus on the impermanence of the residue and its evolution into material oblivion, which is the only thing that survives. This proves, once again, that the real, as Lacan (1978, 2007) point out, becomes non-representable unless it is expressed as a form of commodity that fetishizes the memory of pain, suffering and trauma. For this to happened, other process must take place. A second remainder that dialogs directly with the notion of preservation and documentation.

#### **THE PHOTOGRAPHIC REGISTER OF THE ALDEA MODELO ¿DOCUMENT OR ART?**

She made a photoshoot in the *Aldea Modelo* portraying several members of the community and the soldiers that participated in the construction. For her, the use of photography was not only a means to tell the story of the process. It was the beginning of a new aesthetic intervention. She has a strong critique against the notion of photo documentary itself. At least, when it deals with the construction of the notion of ephemerality in political arts. She criticizes the alleged objectivity that photography has. The aim of photographing installations and performances is to open the possibility for these forms of political art to be exhibited the galleries. Thus, the ephemeral dimension of these artistic expressions is relative. And she made a concept of this reflection that also intervened in her own installation by using the photographic documentation of her own installation. This consisted in the production of a new set of artistic pieces.

One of these was a pop-up book that replicated the *Aldea Modelo*. The pop-up book was basically a gallery model of the 1:50 scaled model. The copy of the copy of the

copy. For her, the photographs were the raw materials she used to stick to paperboards. She named this the *photographic camp*. The ephemerality of the original copy was lost.



Figure 13: Gallery Model, Popup book. By Yasmin Hage

This reflection problematized the distinction she makes between the *sacred* status of documentary photography and *profane* status of art photography. She questioned how photography is intended to have a documenting function of other processes that are artistic interventions by themselves. The piece must develop a life of its own that escapes the pure intentions of the artists and becomes something new after it is finished. However, the ephemeral nature of this kind of art piece depends on forms of documentation that allow the artist (and the field of art) to present and exhibit their work

in locations beyond the place in which they were originally displayed. She detaches, thus, the piece displayed in the forest from what was later displayed in galleries and exhibitions. Visual documentation is thus taken and transformed by a new form of intervention in order to produce artistic commodities that will acquire exchange value in these specific infrastructures of art.

Taking on Sontag's (2001, 2004) argument, Yasmin criticizes the fetishization of photography as a pure representation of violence, pain, and suffering and extends this critique to its interaction with other aesthetic forms.<sup>62</sup> She claims the same as Sontag for the general context of contemporary arts dealing with the national trauma left by the genocide. Photography and video are for her an object/practice that need to be desacralized. The consciousness behind the decisions taken by the artist in the moment of documenting the piece are forms of representation that produce new aesthetic events that depend on the original, but also are, at some point, emancipated from the original. Pure documental representation is an illusion.

#### **RAY ELLIOT AND EL OLVIDO QUE NO SABE QUE ES OLVIDO**

We drew on Yasmin's previous work (specially the *Shoot in the Tree* and the *Aldea Modelo*) to produce the concept for the piece we presented at the *Guatemala Después Project*. The first step we took was to analyze the nature of the different kinds of materials that she used in the *Aldea Modelo*. The only non-organic components were the signage panels, on which she wrote the artistic statements and the description of the *Aldeas Modelo*. These labels were made of some kind of polymer or plastic. Her idea in using these plastic components was to intervene and disrupt the ephemerality and its

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<sup>62</sup> I think this negotiates also with what Elaik (2016) names *Incurable Image*

relation to the degradability of the piece. The agency of the forest would find more resistance. However, she knew that the community members would eventually use them in other, more pragmatic, fashion. The human agency would therefore allow the signage and its textuality to circulate within unforeseen social events and processes. The prolonged life of signage panels was for her an evocation of ancient Mayan stelas, that would communicate and outlive beyond their creators' timespan. Their circulation and reproducibility would not depend exclusively upon the oral recreation of memory because they could be interpreted in the future in some archaeological fashion.

From the first time we discussed our collaboration, it was clear that the piece would emerge from a conversation between her *Aldea Modelo*, and the research I was doing in the archive. During that time I was analyzing both the Ray Elliot report, and the military civic action plans. I was interested in showing Yasmin how the counterinsurgency carried out a strategy that appeared to be inspired in both Foucault's (1995) analyses on the disciplinary society, and Deleuze's (1992) society of control, and how the study of the notion of *humanitarian war* could build on this debate. These notions were my access doors to the field research, and they later became the point of departure to problematize my whole project while collaborating with Yasmin.

#### **AESTHETIC-MEMORY FETISHISM**

When analyzing her artistic production Yasmin explained that counterinsurgency incarnates a *thing* that subverts the linear definition of time. Taking on her projects she showed that the temporal frame of counterinsurgency is the present; which means, that counterinsurgency is contemporary. I was colonized by the historic discourse, which was driving me to see counterinsurgency exclusively in the past. The interaction with Yasmin

and her aesthetic practices allowed me to identify and to question the blind spot in which I was standing. This *thing* (namely counterinsurgency, history, archaeology, etc.), and the aesthetic practices it triggers, might not be perceived as replicas or copies of original events, but as the contingency of the present, which shapes not only what people say and how they do it, but also what people feel, and how they feel it.<sup>63</sup>

The disruption in the linear perception of time also intervened in my understanding of mimesis and reproducibility. From now on, mimesis could be partially detached from the idea that the reproduction is a copy that was preceded by an original. On the contrary, from this viewpoint, the reproduction not only came before the original, but it created the original. This perspective was closer to Benjamin's (2008) and Taussig's (1993) mimesis, not only in the sense that the copy becomes something different that possesses its own political force, but also because it becomes a potentiality embedded in some sort of (anti-Hegelian) reverse dialectics of history.

Both, discourse and affect (in a post-disciplinary sense), intertwine with processes of accumulation of pain expressed through trauma, and the generation of exchange value in the field of expressions of contemporary art that open fissures in the politics of memory. These fissures, are near to the psychoanalytical notion of melancholia, which is fixated with a permanent resignification of a phantasmagoric past; the resignification of a past that I understand as fetishized memory. Thus, fetishization of memory is regressive, because it returns from the actual state of things to the past in order to produce a new affectively charged object/commodity that circulates within the infrastructures of contemporary cultural capitalism (namely art galleries). Fetishized memory (namely post-counterinsurgency) is not a dialectical synthesis of insurgency and counterinsurgency, but

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<sup>63</sup> For me, this was the inception of the notion of post-counterinsurgency that I use in this dissertation.

the return of a neoliberal post-counterinsurgency world that redirects the gaze towards to the tragedy of the past in order to assemble social practices, discourses, and aesthetic experiences and practices. It is, perhaps, Klee's *Angelus Novus* that Benjamin identifies with the Angel of History that only sees debris in the storm of progress...

### **PERFORMATIVE ARCHAEOLOGY**

As seen in Chapter two, I was mesmerized by the proliferation of reproducibility-practices that the Rey Elliot Report passed during the years.<sup>64</sup> Reproducibility, I hypothesized, became the foremost element of circulation for the humanitarian war project, and it was executed at three different levels. The production of standardized and replicable *aldeas modelo*, the deployment of mimetic violence, and the measures taken by expressions of resistance to counter the mimetic violence, which were also based on the intervention into these representations.

What the collaboration with Hage brought to the debate was a new dimension, a new kind of reproducibility that aimed to actualize both the mimetic was contingency given by the counterinsurgency and the aesthetic destabilization of memory fetishism. The same as I, Yasmin wanted to re-explore the notion of archaeology, and it became central, once again. Even though her *Aldea Modelo* was presented almost a decade before, Yasmin still was thrilled by the force that the archaeological performance could have in the production of non-representational aesthetics. Thus, this wasn't a poststructuralist take on the notion of archaeology (at least in the Foucauldian sense). We agreed that it should not follow the method that historicizes the systems of knowledge,

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<sup>64</sup> From its first elaboration, its translation into Spanish and publication by the *Católicos en el Exilio* in Nicaragua, the several reproductions they kept in the Archive and the effects it had in the deploy of a counterinsurgency ontological war



discursive formations and/or episteme (Foucault, 1982). On the contrary, it should build on a performative iteration of the archaeological method practiced by conventional archaeologists. This kind of performative archaeology was already part of her retrospective and also was basic for the method I intended to use to analyze the multiple versions of Elliot's Report. We discussed thus to incorporate at some point of the work an archaeologist to the project.<sup>65</sup>

I showed her the photocopies of the Report's iterations that were in my possession. One of the aspects that first draw her attention was the iconic representation made by the *Catolicos en el Exilio* Spanish version, which mimic iconic styles intending to dialogue with Mayan aesthetics. We analyzed these drawings carefully. The first thing we asked ourselves was, "what were they trying to achieve with these drawings?" I told her about my hypothesis that this was a mimetic form of producing a reverse effect on the processes of *humanitarian war*. Yasmin explained to me that these drawings were icons trying to achieve a form of communication that could represent itself without the need of further references, which is part of the visual language that seems to be common among contemporary visual artists. To explain it even better, she invited me to attend an exhibit of the Venezuelan artist, Yucef Mehrhi, who just exhibited a series of large installation at Concepción Cuarentaiuno, an open-air gallery in Antigua Guatemala. These were Mayan epigraphs inscribed on the ground, and each one of them was made of the material it was supposed to signify.<sup>66</sup> (The symbol for wood was made of wood, the stone of stone, and so on.)

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<sup>65</sup> Laura Gamez and Camilo Luin gave us important references regarding the meaning and pragmatics of the estelas in the ancient Mayan world.

<sup>66</sup> I made a comment about the indexical relation to the artist that wasn't welcomed. It seems he was trying to point out with it that there would be a point in which language would not be necessary any more.



Figure 14: By Lizeth Castañeda

Yasmin believed that the inscriptions on the report were something different. These drawings were more complex and could not be made of the materials they represented, at least in the way we ontologically define the *material*. “Those, in Elliot’s Report, are icons”, she told me when we were still in Yucef’s exhibition. Then I remembered some of the semiotic classes I took in grad school and understood immediately what she meant. Taking on that basic distinction, we discussed once again the possibility of working with some of the elements registered on the report.

By this time Yasmin was already taking an epigraphy class at the Universidad Francisco Marroquin. She wasn’t very sure if that was going to be of some utility for our project. However, she was very enthusiastic about the idea of performing some kind of archaeological research to carry out the project. And this could be a good beginning. She was keen to invite her epigraphy instructor to take part in the project. He could help us to carry out the performative archaeology we were discussing. It was also interesting to see

how excited Yasmin was of learning these new linguistic and archaeological techniques. She felt like a fish in the water by drawing the Mayan symbols, and very quickly started to produce her own inscriptions. She became notorious among her classmates because of her beautiful handwriting.

### **IXIL UNIVERSITY: FIRST CONTACT**

By then, I had already started to visit the Ixil region in order to prepare the one of the collaborations originally planned in my prospectus. The first time I arrived in the Ixil Country, I was invited to take part in the Examining Board of the second generation of technicians in *desarrollo rural comunitario* (rural-communitarian development) at the *Universidad Ixil*.<sup>67</sup> I spoke with the current dean of the Ixil University and told him about my interests in carrying out a photography workshop to study the evolution of the infrastructures of counterinsurgency. He told me that the project seemed to be very interesting and that he was keen to support it if I were open to make some modifications. One of these changes was to find a way to involve the students in a broader historical analysis. We agreed that we would keep up the conversation in order to find a way to engage that.

Some days later I phoned Yasmin. We exchanged ideas for about an hour and we revisited several of the concepts we had already in mind. It was during that call that we finally decided to do a stela. Part of that conversation revolved around the discussion I had with the dean of the Ixil University. We saw there the opportunity to carry out a project in which the collaboration would not be exclusively limited to the relation of

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<sup>67</sup> I took advantage of that opportunity to take a series of photographs of the events that happened during those three days at the municipios of Nebaj, Chajul And Cotzal. I thought that those photographs could be for some use for the Universidad Ixil, and that could lead the way to contribute in a deeper way.

academics and artists. It would eventually involve the participation of the Ixil University's students. This idea could evolve into the realization of several memorials executed in the places where the genocidal violence directly happened. These memorials could be used for future generations of Ixil professors to teach local history and its relation to national history. This kind of update of memory would also function as a way to counter the fetishization of memory that we conceptualized in previous interviews. Here, the final product would be focusing on the use value of history in the process of reconstruction of the social fabric that the counterinsurgency tried to destroy.

A few days later we went to Nebaj and visited the dean. It was night already, but he was very enthusiastic about Yasmin and the ideas we were pondering. We agreed to carry out a process of research and teaching of local Ixil history, that would precede any visual project. After, with the research results already on hand, we could find a way to design an art class that could become the basis of the production of the stelas in which the Ixiles would tell the history of the Ixiles. We also discussed the possibility of inviting other contemporary artists to take part in the project. The next day, we visited several places to install the stelas, and left the idea on hold.

Everything depended on the economic resources we could access and by that time we had not accessed any funding. We decided with Yasmin that the piece for the Guatemala Después project should be a preliminary experiment, which we could return to later. In any case, since it was part of my original research and I did have funding for it, I would work the historic part with the Ixil University and the result of the research/class became be a series of photographs in which the students/researchers enacted the historic moments they researched.

## **THE GALLERY: MATERIALITY, IMMATERIALITY AND 3D DIGITAL REPRODUCIBILITY**

Both of us were aware of the debates regarding memory, representation and violence, carried out during the last 30 years by historians and cultural studies authors. Even though we considered these to be valuable and rich, our point of departure was different. The cultural object was not necessarily something given beforehand. Instead, it was something in permanent construction, evolution, mutation and incompleteness. Ours was an artistic and ethnographic collaboration rooted in two pivotal connections. Yasmin's artistic retrospective problematized the interrelation between capitalism and counterinsurgency aesthetics, which had an impact in the method (namely, the performative archaeology) we used to research and prepare the conditions to produce and execute our piece.



Figure 15: By Lizeth Castañeda

Consequently, the heuristic question revolved around what was the aesthetic effect we were intending to produce. This question was framed in the background of

Yasmin's previous installations, but also in the new long-term goals defined with the representatives of the Ixil University and the archive research I was carrying out at CIRMA. Beyond any kind of memory representation, our concern was about how we could produce a sensorial event that transgressed post-counterinsurgency aesthetics. The high complexity and prolonged temporality of this challenge made us focus exclusively on the *Guatemala Después* project. Later, with some experience and preparation we could return to the Universidad Ixil's long-term partnership. Ours was supposed to be an intervention into the spaces in which the piece was planned to be displayed. The disruptive element we intended to introduce revolved around this idea. We were talking basically of creating an interrogation that questioned if the art gallery (here we were talking about the gallery as a general concept) becomes some kind of post-counterinsurgency infrastructure in which counterinsurgency and neoliberal aesthetics resonate. And we finally thought that the Ray Elliot Report could provide some references to disturb the gallery's atmospheric attunement.

By then Yasmin was relatively proficient in writing epigraphy, and knew that the transliteration of the whole document was unpractical and unrealistic. We decided to deal exclusively with one specific segment of the Report to deliberate about two central aspects. First, would be the text to be used in the piece; and second, what would be its physicality. The discussion about materiality, immateriality, and ephemerality became central, again. The idea of doing a stela was still valid. The remaining questions, though, were what format would it have and what parts of the text would it contain. The size and the physical presence of the monument depended, upon the amount of text we would use.

Even if we were not using the whole text, I thought, we could use a larger part of it, like the excerpt presented in chapter 2. I believed that if the piece was supposed to be a stela, it could be done in a large format that displayed several of the most important

contents of the Report. I still was thinking of producing a monument similar to those existing in actual archaeological sites, that combine symbols and icons in large pieces of engraved rock. This was not feasible, however. Yasmin showed me how extensive the transliteration could become. The details and work it takes to transform the Spanish script into Mayan epigraphs is excessive. And the amount of space needed to make the inscription was incommensurable. We had to be selective and cool headed. We agreed to revisit the text and scheduled a future meeting.

A few days later we met to discuss our findings, and ended up picking two small segments that, somehow, reflected what we believed was the essential aura of the text. The segments of the text came from two of the English iterations of the text and one Spanish version (the later was a segment that could not be found in the English version).<sup>68</sup> Later, we made a depuration of those segments, to give it a minimalistic form and reduce them to their minimal expression.

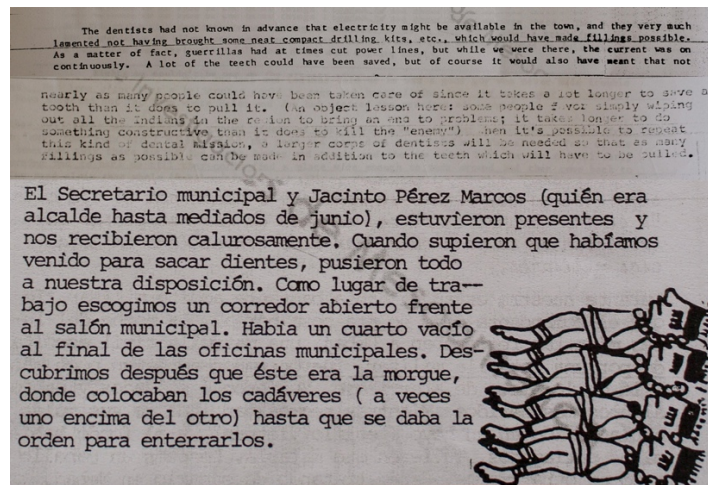


Figure 16: By Ray Elliot & Católicos en el Exilio

<sup>68</sup> The same as what was presented in Chapter two, this was now our own *Frankenstein* Report

Regarding the physical format, we discussed and analyzed many alternatives in the course of several weeks. We were clear that the links between capitalism and counterinsurgency were phenomena around which our concept should gravitate. We were interested in the intimacy of the teeth-pulling as the frame of military civic action programs in relation to contemporary post-counterinsurgency infrastructures. And now, we had a more educated opinion regarding the ethical and political problems stemming from the petrification of suffering of others in monuments of memory (memorials). After a long deliberation, we concluded that all these elements should be constitutive to the piece, but instead of producing a petrified memorial we would create a reverse memorial or an “anti-memorial”. This should allow us to put two basic notions in motion: intimacy and oblivion. From that moment on the piece finally had a concept and a name: *El olvido que no sabe que es olvido* (the oblivion that doesn’t know that it has been forgotten).

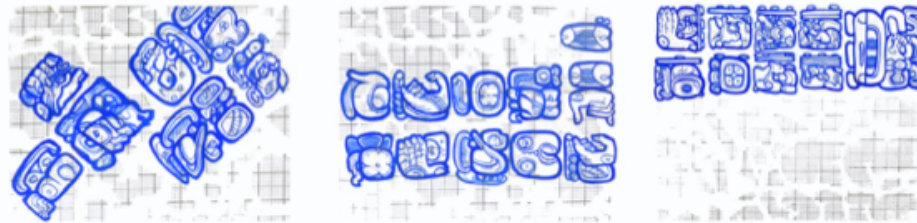


Figure 17: Transliterated fragments. By Yasmin Hage

The intention was to intervene both in the concept of the general project as well as the physicality of the artistic post-counterinsurgency infrastructure. Our intention was to make an indecipherable monument displayed in the middle of the *Guatemala Después* (Guatemala Afterwards) concept; which also implied on intervening the physical space in which other pieces of the project would be displayed. With this, we intended to create a trace that denoted the impossibility of representing the intimacy of violence, suffering



and trauma experienced by the victims of the counterinsurgency, unless, of course, we positioned ourselves in the same naïve space that Elliot filled as both the author of the report and the performer of military civic action programs. In other words, we were retaking the meta-critical spirit of Yasmin’s previous pieces, but this time we brought it directly to the middle of the gallery.

With this in mind the notion of ephemerality became important again. We thought that making some kind of 3D laser projection on a smoke screen would work. The laser and smoke would produce a visual effect in which the pain of others would be impossible to solidify. This would function also as a transliteration, but now, instead of passing scripts into epigraphs, it would be to transform from historic material into both gaseous and photonic intangible materials. This would attempt to reproduce and express the transmutation that happens when memory becomes oblivion and vice versa.

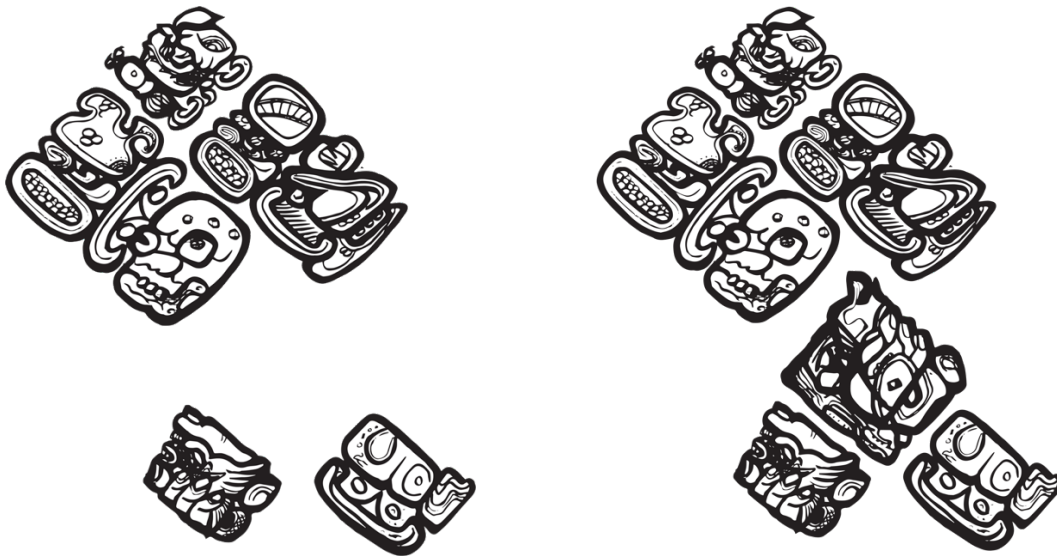


Figure 18: Vectored epigraphs. By Yasmin Hage

In the meantime, Yasmin finished the transliterations and made the respective vectorizations (See figure 24) so that we could manipulate the epigraphs more conveniently and tried to make some projections on a smokebox made with wood and plastic. The visual effect we obtained didn't reflect our expectations. We sat again at the design table.



Figure 19: Original and 3D scanned fragment

Finally, we focused in developing an alternative to keep the idea going of a performative archaeology. Yasmin had good relations with archaeologists working at the Popol Vuh Museum, at the Francisco Marroquin University, who allowed her to make a 3D scan of a fragment of a stela that was found in Caminal Juyú. The fragment was a great allusion to the concept of the piece, because it allowed us to play with the subject of fragmentation and defragmentation of memory, which worked on both the digital and the social discourse.

This 3D scan functioned as the template used later for inscribing the fragments of the text with the computer. We debated revolving the display of the epigraphs in the

stone, so that we would not alter the original inscriptions it had on it. We decided to use most of the back and some sides to make the inscriptions.

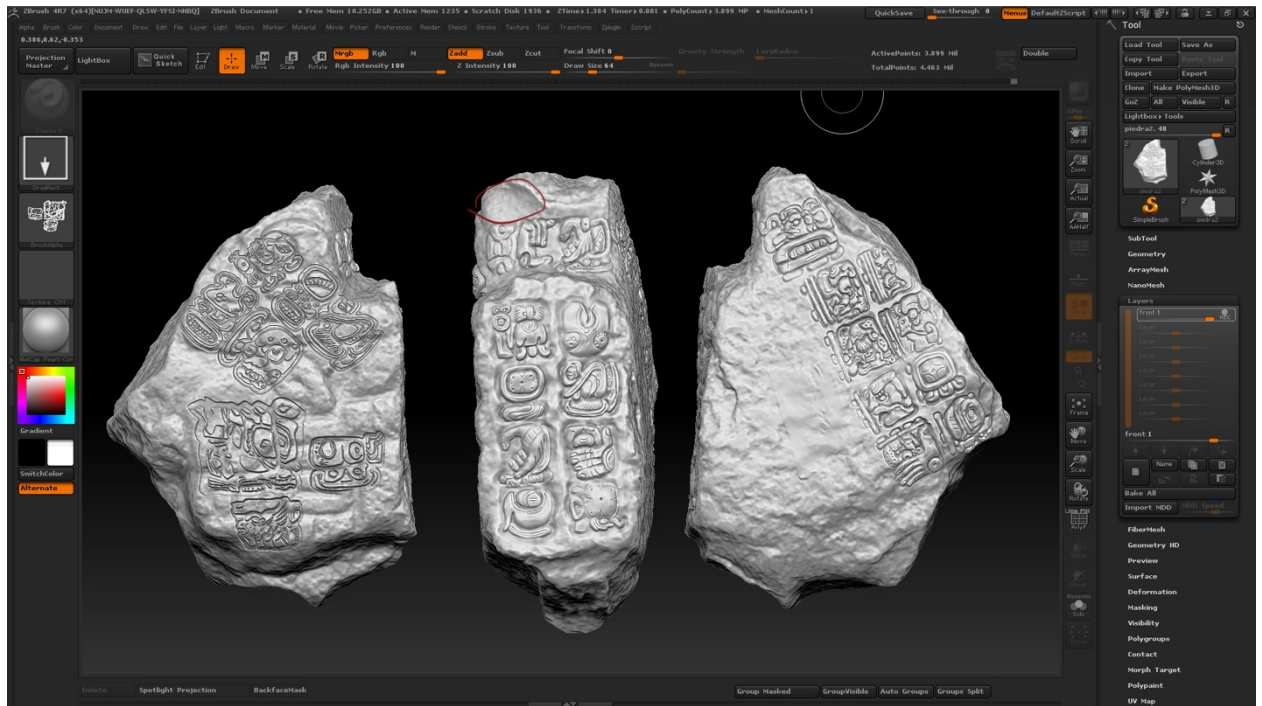


Figure 20: Digital 3D molding. By Yasmin Hage

The files were done in Guatemala, and sent by email to New York, where the final piece would be printed in a polymer and displayed in the New School's Gallery. The digital reproducibility allowed us to exhibit the tangible, material, piece in the gallery without us having ever touched it. A few months later, it came to Guatemala, for the first time, and was exhibited respectively in the Ciudad de la Imaginación and Centro Cultural de España's galleries. If these places were finally intervened in the way we wanted is an open question, that neither of us would want to answer. That was, however, the whole idea of the experiment. Perhaps it helped us more to think about aesthetics and social

concepts, than to achieve the specific atmospheric disruption that we were seeking to achieve.



Figure 21: Centro Cultural de España, Guatemala City. By author.

## CONCLUSION

The ethnographic process that preceded this chapter was a mechanism that allows to understand the limits of post-counterinsurgency aesthetics and its relation to global neoliberalism. In this regard, this chapter has provided elements to problematize Benjamin's canonical divide between the aesthetization of politics and politicization of arts. There is a more fundamental process taking place in relation to the production of aesthetics in general and political art in specific, in which abstract value is created in the general context of reproduction of capitalism. This analysis contributes to raise questions in relation to the production of radicalized forms of political arts that problematize the

inherent articulation between memory fetishism and alienation of pain, suffering and trauma. The outcome of this ethnographic collaboration revolves around making the process of creation of exchange value, based on the notion of memory fetishism, the subject of deconstruction in contemporary arts.

## **EPILOGUE**

Today we still talk by skype once or twice every semester to discuss the possibilities of finishing the process with the Ixil University. Yasmin is by the moment in the Middle East in a trip to find her cultural origins. When she is done with that and I have finished the dissertation, the most probable thing is that we will finish the project. The friendship ties with the ixil university are open. The reconstruction of the history the 20<sup>th</sup> century Ixil region was done one year later, and the photographs and enactments were made and exhibited in Nebaj in February 2016.

## Chapter IV

### **The gaze of desire in fine art “war photography”: Chauche, *el Autodefensor*, and non-representational aesthetics.**

#### INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the second intervention in which I intend to problematize the idea that counterinsurgency over-determines the possibilities of making synthesis of the present. As already noted in the first chapter, my intention is to explore, through the execution of experimental visual interventions, the possibilities of re-politicizing the structures of feeling on the post-counterinsurgency. Despite a series of contingencies reproducing specific structures of power, it is still possible to carry out radical and self-reflexive thinking taking on the exploration of these kinds of singularities.

The intervention I discuss here allowed me to reflect and ponder on the dynamics of power positions that were at stake during the research process and the dispositions toward collaboration manifested in the same process. This process involved the interaction between the anthropologist and the artist as well as a relation with other subjects who directly or indirectly participate in the creative practice. This is a highly complex endeavor by way of which I seek to explore and expose the dialectical relation of knowledge production with long-term structures of domination such as capitalism and racism. The methodological approach used for this chapter might allow transcending the relation of singularity and potentiality to a moment in which is possible to grasp the fissures of both the multiplicity of *cognoscent* subjects and the regime of the sensible.

The importance of studying the relation between historic structures of domination and the emergence of singularities is to evaluate and ponder the power positions and dispositions manifested during the research process in which not only the anthropologist and the artist interact, but also the relation toward other subjects that directly or indirectly

participate in the research process. The complexity, in this regard, is extremely high, and we must resist the temptation to reduce it to oversimplifications and/or moral judgments. The aim is to understand the dialectical nature of relational processes of knowledge production and localize it within the long term structures of domination such as the primitive capitalism and structural racism. The production and collaboration with visual artists will be frequently framed in the reproduction of structural forms of power that will affect and be affected by both the social position of the actors, their dispositions and interaction.

These processes are complex and can be articulated in what my former professor, Donna DeCesare defines as the triadic of photography, in which three different photographic events relate to three different kinds of subjects: the protagonist, the photographer/artist/documenter, and the public. This chapter is an attempt to carry out an ethnographic description in which the interaction between these three subject positions is exposed as a complex and very often contradictory process. As I stated in the introductory chapter, my intention has been to carry out non-utilitarian ethnographic relations with subjects interested in producing visual singularities that might allow to re-politicize the regime of the sensible. Some of these processes, such as the one that is presented in this chapter, are more difficult because the dynamic established in the triadic relationality of the photographic event is multidimensional and therefore more complicated than other artistic interventions, such as the recuperation of archival materials, as the one presented in the previous chapter.

This chapter must be read taking these reflections as the contextuality of the specific ethnographic description. In this regard, the participants of the collaboration were basically Daniel Chauche and I, who have a privileged position not only in

Guatemala's society, but also in the field of arts. Other people like Andres Zepeda, Birgit Vleugels and Maria Elena del Valle took part in specific moments of the process.

I can say, however, that our social positions are not that distant one from the other and that the kind of reciprocity established was less complicated than in other cases. In contrast, the debate regarding the participation of the photographed subject, that was the point of departure to carry out this collaboration, don Manuel, became more complicated. Don Manuel is a Maya Mam indigenous former civilian patrolman from San Juan Atitan, one of the most economic depressed areas in Guatemala that suffered of large military control during the counterinsurgency era and had a power position distance from ours, who were mostly privileged urban researchers.

The complexity of this relationality exposes a specific and paradoxical singularity in relation to the aim to carry out non-utilitarian research methods. The contingency of the post-colonial state/Finca State, the structural racism and counterinsurgency reveals itself in the recruiting process and the photographic event in a crude and realistic way that was registered in the documentary film that was made with Chauche, and which is the point of departure to the development of this this chapter (the film can be seen in in this web address: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7sLHLdazhgo>.)

In both the film and the ethnographic description, it is possible to trace the remaining of structures of power that conform the complexity of Guatemala's everyday reality in relation to the production of photographic projects of this nature. In this regard, I embrace classic reflections posed on the dilemmas analyzed by visual anthropologist (Ruby, 1992; MacDougall, 1992) that problematize the processes of representation in the creation of documentaries of oppressed peoples and the debates on indigeneity that question the prolongation of the colonial project in the general project of visual anthropology (Willson & Stewart, 2008).



There are some specificities that must be taken in consideration in order to understand the differences, and possible hierarchies, that can exist between the ethnographic practices and aesthetic performances. In order to critically grasp the reproduction of these hierarchies I consider that, in engaging in non-utilitarian methods and their contradictions, one must settle a challenge to produce reciprocal forms of interpellation. On the one hand, we discussed with the members that took part of this project about the necessity to engage in longer term relations with the protagonists to avoid the reproduction of the colonial project that could eventually yield to capture the protagonist exclusively in the gaze of the photographer (or journalist, documentarist, etc.) On the other hand, we also discussed about the difficulties and gaps that exist between the privilege position we hold in the academia when judging artistic projects that prolong during several decades with the communities.

If we do not pay attention to the ways that artists have articulated their long-term projects, we are also reproducing a form of power that, in general, define the problematic position of the Ivory Tower of academia that criticizes everything without rationalizing its own positionality of privilege. My position in relation to both, the protagonist of the photograph and the artist (Chauche, in this case), can become problematic if I do not make transparent to him that my cultural capital as philosopher, sociologist, anthropologist and cultural critic. This lack would put me in a non-reciprocal relation of power if I try to disapprove other people's aesthetic and everyday practices exclusively in academic terms. I consider that part of Chauche's 40 years' artistic engagement, which include two or three yearly visit to these communities, can allow us to state that he has had an interest achieving relations that are not as superficial as one can imagine from the exterior position of the academic critique of representation. On the other hand, the economic reality of the people living in these places, and the distance that the world of art

has from their everyday reality, affects the kind of relationship that can be established (as seen in the film and the ethnographic description, it is not casual that don Manuel, the protagonist of his photograph, wanted money from Chauche). In these cases, the most possible outcome is that forms of utilitarianism will appear, as it is shown both in the film and the ethnographic description. I propose in the last chapter, however, an alternative that might help to relatively reduce the reproduction of these utilitarianism practices. These contradictions must be engaged in the ethnographic description from a self-reflexive perspective.

In this chapter, I intend to analyze other problem, related to the possibility to make visible tat counterinsurgency aesthetics is not only present in contemporary arts, but also that it affects the gaze of the public (including the academia) that reacts to aesthetic forms that are not inherently foreclosed by the counterinsurgency narrative.

The possibility of producing a reflexive intervention with Chauche is framed in the articulation of the triadic nature war photography, in order to destabilize processes related to the formation of artistic visual representations of these kinds of social conflicts.<sup>69</sup> This singularity embodies, in any case, a potentiality to politicize the regime of the sensible in which these kinds of complexities are hidden. Instead of producing a judgment value about this photographic practice, my aim has been to present of these events with transparency, to trigger an ideological interpellation that is largely analyzed in the following pages.

This interpellation contributes to the analysis of non-representational aesthetics in the reconstitution of memory of counterinsurgency. I aim to find the fissure in which the

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<sup>69</sup> An aspect that is important to note is that Chauche, the same as others like Johnathan Moller, is a fine art photographer that negotiates with war photographers such as Susan Meiselas. In this regard, it is important to acknowledge that photography can have a documentary value, specially in relation to war journalism and processes of massive information of war atrocities that take place in real time.

singularity of producing a reflective knowledge emerges and expresses the potentiality of a form of *ideologie kritik* that is articulated around the development of visual anthropological processes. In other words, I intend to take the notion of counterinsurgency contingency into a different level, in which the exposition not only of the photographic images, but also the universe of contradictory complexities within it, can produce a break with naïve uses of artistic photographs intended to create meaning related to counterinsurgency.

Building upon a one-year collaborative relation with the French-American photographer Daniel Chauche, in this chapter I aim to analyze the relation between (war)photography and desire as an expression of non-representational aesthetics. To achieve this I have traced an analytical strategy as follows: I summarize Chauche's life story, and analyze the underlying multidimensionality of his political positioning. Drawing specifically on his *white background* series of I explore the notion of desire, which I consider can be constitutive non-representational aesthetics. In this regard, the argumentative strand revolves around the idea that beyond representation, the gaze of the subject (the public) —which is intersected by gender, race and class horizons of intelligibility— must be set in some sort of material *post*-phenomenological—and psychoanalytical—parenthesis. This will contribute to understand the effect of counterinsurgency aesthetics beyond the reproduction and re-inscription of commodity fetishism.

With this premise I explore Chauche's photographic practice, which is located somewhere in between modernism and postmodernism. In this regard, the photographic event derived from that practice focuses not only on the taking and making of the photograph, but also extends to the production, developing, circulation and appropriation of his portraits. Further, there is a post-poietic and post-cathartic dimension of aesthetics

that interconnects both the traditional questioning of exteriority posed by ethical phenomenology, as well as the *Ideologiekritik* introduced by Marxism.

The aim of this argument is to analyze the pre-ideological affective moment, where the material and formal constitution of the visual world is not only colonized by a specific affective energy (the wound of counterinsurgency), but also colonizes the forms of perception contingent to the possibility of ideology and therefore the possibility of subject production. In this regard, I draw on Althusser's (2014) notion of *interpellation* to understand and problematize the notion of counterinsurgency ideology as the contingency of post-counterinsurgency aesthetics. I consider that the effect that Chauche's white background produces can be framed in similar terms as the moment when the subject is directly questioned by the authority in Althusser's allegory of the police saying to the subject "Hey, you, there!" In this regard, however, instead of the intervention of the authority, what makes the subject realize that he/she lives in an ideological world is his propensity to fill up the empty space provided by the background in Chauches photography. I reflect on how Chauche's white background portraits function as a mechanism to make ideology transparent, as long as the it becomes a space that apparently provides stability to the image and the subject that is suspended within it, but destabilizes the subject (public) that makes from the emptiness a space in which her/his basic desires and anxieties can be located.

Ethnographically, this chapter is based upon a collaborative visual project in which Chauche and a small crew (me included) engaged in several trips to find the most iconic subject in his photography. This project was the point of departure of a relationship that produced a reflective process in which I had the opportunity to discuss in profundity the essential concepts of Chauche's photography.

## **A LIFE MAKING PORTRAITS**

Daniel Chauche started an interesting series of portraits some time before coming to Guatemala. Despite the fact these photos being taken from the front-seat of a taxicab that he drove for a year, these photographs were executed with graceful talent, and gifted skills.

A different character emerged, willing to tell him a new story, during each trip. Sometimes these tales described cases of mental illness, phantasies, phantasmagorias, and under-worldly events. Each passenger was a potential new photographic character. Every day he was armed with a 35mm SLR camera, already pre focused to the distance between him and the back seat, the aperture and shutter speed pre-calculated, as well as a hot flash ready to fire. The photographic event depended upon the passenger's consent to be portrayed, and to be suspended in the timeless phantasmagoria of portrait photography. Neither the passengers nor Chauche knew they were taking part of a form art that would evolve as it did. For the moment it was enough to know that a visual register of that ephemeral journey was made. The art and the aesthetic attunement came some time later. Chauche named these first portraits the *Taxi-Series*.

In 1975 Chauche and his former wife decided to travel to Veracruz, Mexico. Their plan was to spend six months exploring that different world, so close but so far away from the American culture. They wanted to spend some days in Guatemala before. They hear from friends it was an interesting and lovely place to visit. They never reached Veracruz. Guatemala was meant to become their final destination. They rented a house in San Juan Sacatepéquez and lived there for two years. San Juan was a small town during those days, where they could develop independent projects.

Neither of them wanted to be moored to academic institutions. Both of them had just finished their university studies. He majored in zoology and she in anthropology, and

knew already that academia was not his element. The long and boring procedures to get and process data, as well as to produce research outcomes were bureaucratic and antiseptic. Not his taste, definitely. His sensibility longed for something else than the science cathedrals and ivory towers.

With the prior positive experience of the *Taxi* series, Chauche decided to focus exclusively on his photography. When he came to Guatemala, he brought the necessary gear to make both a photo-studio and a dark room. But his plans had to wait some time. The 1976 earthquake happened just few weeks after their arrival. The country was completely destroyed and Chauche was recruited to work as pile loader operator and later as a coordinator in a rural reconstruction program throughout the municipality of San Juan Sacatepequez.

After the 1976's earthquake, when a relative social and political stability was reached in the country, Chauche began his second portraiture project. He named it *Foto-Gringo*. One day Chauche's wife decided to sell donuts in San Juan Sacatepéquez. She was interested in establishing a deeper relation with other women in town. Every market day Chauche helped her carrying the basket with the donuts and her *petate* to seat on. Eventually Chauche planned to take part in the local market dynamic (which happened one day a week) in order to experiment with his photography. That could be a good strategy to resume the course of his photographic career, and to earn some extra money. The next marked day, he brought his medium format camera, a tripod and a framed photograph. He offered his services to the people in town. He wanted to keep this as real as possible. Thus, he thought that the best way to proceed was to sell his services as photographer. By doing so, the people from San Juan would eventually take part in his photography.

What characterizes this second series of portraits depends upon a series of compositions created with a very wide-angle lens. The complete body of the model as well as the contour was meant to fit in the frame. This provided the models the chance to visually localize themselves within their specific ecologies and atmospheres. Chauche let himself be partially directed by the models. They defined most elements in the background, and usually explained to him how they wanted to be depicted in the photograph. His intention during those days was to allow people to openly show the identification they had with their respective locations; the places in which they felt rooted.

Both series, *Taxi* and *Foto-Gringo* provided him enough material to compile a portfolio that was the key for him to enter in the Art Program at the University of Florida in Gainesville. There he obtained an MFA degree. During the time he was in the university, Chauche remembers, his major interest was to negotiate with some specific parts of the social and cultural world in Guatemala. He knew already that being a photographer meant not only to master the technique and the complexity of composition. Chauche distanced himself from the kinds of photography uninterested in engaging with people's worlds; the kind of photography that produces a melancholic gaze of everyday life. For Chauche, the *making* of a photograph involves at least some level of inter-affective connection between the people taking part in the photographic event, the photographer and the developing and printing.



Figure 22: By author

That was the basic reason for him to come to Guatemala in 1978. He had to finish his MFA thesis, but at the same time he was dealing with the contingency of his future career. He connected deeply with Guatemala's western contemporary Mayans. He had all the potential to contribute in raising quintessential questions regarding indigenous peoples, nation-state representations, and non-romantic iconographies. In other words, he was engaged in a project in which indigenous peoples are not represented as remnants of the past. On the contrary, his original project was to show how these indigenous faces are shaping Guatemala's contemporary everyday life. The concept of contemporary art was still in its infancy, however, Chauche started an early struggle to interrogate the political dimension of contemporaneity within the artistic gaze contingent to colonialism and orientalism (Said, 1978) and the *poetics of otherness* (Trouillot, 1991.)



After having concluded his MFA and several summer trips later, Chauche finally decided to come back to Guatemala. His first thought was he could make a life working as commercial photographer. In 1983 he believed the political violence was declining and that the country was somehow safer than 1982. During that time Chauche continued with his *Foto-Gringo* series, and sometime later he also begins a new series of portraits. These were characterized by the use of more explicit techniques of illumination in the context of a narrower depth of field. This series name is *Flash*, and focuses on the intimacy of the face that is surrounded by a blurred background and a speed-light frontal illumination. Now it is possible to appreciate a turn in Chauche's photographic project. He knew that the effect produced by a heavy *bokeh* (the background blur) that blows away the background provides the conditions of possibility for a blunter intersection of gazes, which would reverberate in a stronger aesthetical effect and, therefore, a deeper political inquiry. This combination would allow him to get closer to the subject.

After the *Flash* series, Chauche began the *White Background* project. A humanitarian NGO needed a pro bono collaboration for a fundraising campaign for street children living in Zones 1, 4, and 9, in Guatemala City. He felt some dissatisfaction with the limitations imposed by the flash series and shot the first white background portrait. In the beginning he mounted a small studio in the residence of the kids, in Zone 18. Soon after he decided to use the resources of the photographic studio in exteriors. He designed and constructed a set of devices that allowed him to bring the aesthetic atmosphere of the photographic studio in remote and open spaces. He developed a style based on the use of natural light in outdoors. This is the series of portraits that defined Chauche's most known photography. For Chauche:

...if one is aware, interested and commands an overall vision of the culture, one can recognize within daily life the places, persons or moments that are representative of the culture and the changes within it, that respond to the larger movements within the greater society. That understanding combined with a professional level understanding of photography, or better what needs to be done when making the picture to affectively reproduce the “feeling” that originally drew my attention to the subject photographed.

This was the outcome he was looking for during all these years of experimentation and struggle. After this moment he knew his portraits were not supposed to appeal to any kind of melancholic sociological representation of the photographed subject. He knew his portraits had to provoke an affective reaction tending to dislocate the certainties of traditional ethnocentric gazes. The white background was finally the aporetic space of photography he was trying to construct.

#### **THE BEGINNING OF AN ETHNOGRAPHIC PROJECT**

We were returning from a short fieldtrip to Chicabal Lagoon. Daniel Perera and I offered to assist our journalist friend, Andres Zepeda, to make a video and photo documentation of the misty lagoon. That was the last element for Andres to finish a multi-media chronicle on *mestizaje* on which he had been working for several years.

Already in my place in Antigua Guatemala we made a quick review of the materials. We spent some time listening to audio samples to combine with the video. We were looking for something that allowed overlapping the harmony of the clouds dancing with the water’s surface. Daniel and I still had to deliver a copy of the materials to Andres, but we needed a couple of days to finish the post-processing work. We decided to meet at Andres’ place three days after.

It was late in the night when we came to his apartment. After passing through the threshold of the door it was possible to appreciate a soberly decorated, unpretentious, space. An atmosphere shaped by Scandinavian furniture prevailed. It was possible to see some artistic treasures hanging on the walls. Two 30x40 portraits authored by Daniel Chauche governed the living room. They hung perfectly centered and aligned on the largest wall. I disconnected myself from the environment, and I was interested only in the contemplation. I was haunted.



Figure 23: El Autodefensor. By Daniel Chauche

The one on the left showed a woman carrying a pack of wood suspended in the air by the *mecapal* on her forehead. The tiredness in her sight accentuated a three-dimensional face covered by harsh wrinkles. Her crooked body stood with help of a tree branch. Her right arm crossed her body and ended in a closed hand holding the crosier. Her left arm also held the stick and her other hand touched a very delicately smaller hand. This one belonged to a boy, who was about five years old. The boy's face expressed some mistrust and sadness, but also curiosity and some interest. She was wearing a Huipil from San Mateo Ixtatán, which was possible to see under a dirty and patched sweater that protected her from the elements. The boy also wore a ratty sweater that was about to disintegrate.

The second portrait was the renowned *Autodefensor*. It showed a young man fully dressed with San Juan Atitán's traditional clothing. His hat was mounted on a rag covering his head, in which it was possible to appreciate an embroidery of three delicate flowers in different gray scales. The *morral's* cord crossed a dark and thick *capixay* (vest) made of wool. Only one hand appears in the frame, which firmly holds a rifle. Two sharp, beautiful, cheekbones framed a gaze coming from an intriguing, deep, almost inscrutable face. That gaze looked defiant, intense, and defensive. However, after a more careful scrutiny, it was possible to see an expression of mistrust and suspicion.

The three of us stood there for several minutes, to contemplate the portraits. Then, Andres told us that his wife, Birgit Vleugels, bought them some months earlier. Since that moment, they developed a great friendship with Chauche and his new wife, Maria Elena de Valle. Birgit proposed a fascinating idea during a weekend they spent in Chauche's B&B in Antigua Guatemala. She was charmed with the idea of tracking and finding the *Autodefensor*. As she told me some time later, she wanted to know what happened with him to understand who this person really is. She was definitely

overwhelmed by his gaze in the portrait and asked Chauche if he ever thought of going back to San Juan Atitan to find him again. Chauche had already been working on a project named *re-fotografía* since a couple of years already. Everything seemed to fit perfectly.

Andres was aware from some time before of my interest in taking part in collaborative projects that could involve some articulation of visual arts and ethnographic experiences. During the trip we made to the Chicabal Lagoon I told him about my field research strategy, which is based on visual anthropological methods. As described in Chapter Three, I already had experience working with Yasmin Hage, which allowed us to problematize the infrastructural dimension of galleries and the processes of commodification of memory. We could establish a relation between notions like *primitive accumulation*, the exploitation of the pain of others, and what we later named *memory fetishism*. I thought that taking part in a project like this might offer possibilities to go deeper in the reflection we started with Yasmin. I was still in the process of preparation of the conditions of possibility to study aesthetics in the aftermath of Guatemala's civil war. Andres was aware of my interest in engaging collaborative work with visual artists. I explained to him in detail the methods I prepared for the prospectus and also told him that having the chance to engage in a project like that would be a large contribution to my research. He knew I was trying to conceptualize the aesthetical transformations of security infrastructures in the post-counterinsurgency, and he believed that the idea was fascinating.

When we finished the contemplation of Chauche's portraits Andres invited me to take part in the project to find the *Autodefensor*. This was not considered on my original research plan, but it certainly opened possibilities to engage in visual-anthropological methods.

A few months later, Andres and Birgit moved to Ethiopia. He told me he was coming back soon to start the *búsqueda del Autodefensor*. He proposed that my role in the project could revolve around the production of the video documentation. I had some experience editing and filming from my years in Berlin, when I worked as a video editor in several visual projects for the *Latein Amerika Institut* at the *Freie Universität Berlin*. I knew I could dust off some of those skills.



Figure 24: By Author

I met Chauche some months later. Andres and I went to Chimaltenango to assist him in a new photographic series that he is developing. He wanted to make a quick scout-trip to study the places he could visit later with his medium-format camera to execute a new series that combines portraits and urban panoramas. I was mostly passive during that

first occasion. The intention was to give Chauche the chance get to know me. He still had to decide if it made any sense at all to let me jump in the *búsqueda del Autodefensor* project.

He did a quick street shoot in the *Mercado de Animales* with his DSLR. It was impressive to see how Chauche moved among the people, the objects and animals. He moved like a fish in the water when talking with the people, requesting consent to make photographs of them, their animals or their market stalls. After finishing the shoot we went to a nearby shopping mall located on the side of the road. We needed to use the toilet and also wanted something to eat. Already there, Chauche asked me some basic questions. “This is going to be a job interview”, I thought. He was trying to figure me out before he officially invited me. “*Do you prefer stills or video?*” he asked me. “*I’m more interested in stills, but I certainly can work with video. I’m not necessarily a videographer, but I know some of the theory and I have some experience,*” I replay. “*Video is important in this time...*” he said, and something draw his attention away.

At that moment Andres came. His face expressed a gesture of desperation and anger; he was pale and his eyes red with anger. He told us that his wallet, and notebook were missing. In that notebook he had all the information to be used to continue his journalistic work on Guatemala while living in Ethiopia. Interviews, field notes, names, addresses were lost. Chauche looked him in the eye. Then, he turned down, looked sardonically his boxers and said: “*esas te las robaron de la pantaloneta, vos*”. I felt bad about this and offered my help to go back and look for the notebook. Chauche did not ask me anything else. He was still interested in me. Then he said something like: “*Andres, we leave to San Juan Atitán in May, isn’t?*” Andrés nodded and didn’t say a thing. The annoyance in his face did not despair yet. Then Chauche looked at me and

said: "Alejandro Are you interested in doing the video documentation for this trip?" I just replayed "sure, I'll do it!"

The next day I ordered some extra memory cards, batteries and a new wide-angle lens for my DSLR, and chatted with Alvaro Torres, a very good friend that just obtained an MFA at the Radio Television and Film Program at UT Austin. He gave me very useful technical and compositional advices to create a more cinematic atmosphere in the documentation. He also recommended I take some shots in black and white, to experiment with alternatives to color. I thought it could be a good idea, taking into consideration that the *Autodefensor* belonged to a Black and White series. It could match in some dimension with his aesthetical proposal. I planned to make three different kinds of documentation. The first one aiming at the road trip, the second one registering the encounter with the model in San Juan Atitan, and the third one focusing on interviews.



Figure 25: Before the first trip. By author

I thought I could advance in a first interview with Chauche during the time we had to spend in the car. These first shoots were made in black and white. In a short period



of time he narrated how the original photograph was taken 30 years ago. I learned for the first time how it happened in the context of collaboration with Victor Perera in order to make a photography-writing trip—The *Autodefensor* is the cover of the book based on that experience named Unfinished Conquest. In that moment I thought of Walker Evans and James Agee (2001) and the trip they made to the American South in the 1930s, which can be considered one of the pivotal moments in the history of photographic documentary style. After six hours we arrived at Huehuetenango. There, Chauche meet with his wife, Maria Elena. We had dinner all together and discussed some last minutes the details to prepare the strategy for the next two days.

Very early in the morning we met to quickly eat breakfast. Then we jumped into Chauche's car. The trip to San Juan Atitan was about forty-five minutes long. He wanted to be there early to take advantage of the natural light before noon. The plan was to take some photographs with the white background while doing some inquiries to find out if it was possible to find the *Autodefensor*. I just requested them to make a quick stop to take some panoramic shoots from the other side of the mountain, where it was possible to appreciate the rugged landscape surrounding San Juan Atitan.

Once we arrived, Andrés and Maria Elena helped Daniel to carry the equipment: one half format camera, one white background, several steel tubes that Daniel designed specifically to hold the background, an envelope with Chauche's original portraits, a blue umbrella, and several rolls of film. I had all my equipment to carry and did not help them.

The first thing we did was to visit the *Alcaldía Auxiliar*, where the indigenous authorities were gathered. I was amazed because of the quick interaction Chauche and Maria Elena had with the local authorities. They spoke for a few minutes and then went inside the *Alcadía*. The authorities engaged very smoothly with the project and agreed relatively easily in taking part. There, Chauche and Maria Elena opened the envelope

with the original portraits and asked if there were some familiar faces. They helped to find the people in the portraits. Some of them were the *autoridades* present in the *Alcaldía*.

Chauche and Andres mounted the background in the basketball court, which is in front of the *Alcaldía*, while Maria Elena spoke with some of the models photographed a quarter of a century earlier. She also asked the rest of *autoridades* about the *Autodefensor*, whose photograph was circulating from hand to hand in the *Alcaldía*.

Finally, on the second day, one of the *autoridades* said he knew him. He lived on the bottom of the mountain. After negotiating with him some minutes he agreed to show us the way to his place. We had to hike down the mountain, find him, convince him, and coming back up the hill. Meanwhile, Chauche and Maria Elena would stay in town taking more portraits.

During those days I was out of shape and I knew since the beginning that hiking up the mountain was going to be very painful. However, it was important to have some documental register of the decisive moment of encountering el *Autodefensor*. It took us roughly thirty minutes to find his place. He was about to eat lunch when we came. The person that guided us called him and they discussed something in Mam. I had the camera ready and started to record the event.

The *Autodefensor* had a name now: Don Manuel. When Chauche took the first portrait he wasn't in the company of any assistant, and could not write his name. Andrés explained to him that Chauche, the *gringo* photographer that came to San Juan Atitán more than thirty years ago was in town again. "*He wants to say hi to you and he brings the photograph of you. He wants to make a new one. What do you think?*" he said.

Don Manuel turned to our guide and said something in Mam. Then, he turned back to Andrés and told him a story about this old woman on the other side of the

mountain that received two thousand quetzales for a photograph someone made of her some time ago. Andrés replied seriously. He said Chauche would not be available to pay that amount. “He has the original portrait and it is for you”, he said. Don Manuel insisted on the two thousand quetzales. Then, his wife came out and they spoke in mam once again. The only thing I could understand was “*dosmile quezale*”. He turned to Andres once again and said: “Ok, I’ll go. But I haven’t eaten my lunch”. “*yo invito a comer a él y austed, pero arriba*”, replaied Andres stating he would invite him and our guide to have lunch up in town. He finally accepted the offer and told us to go first. Andres told him that we could wait for him.

I knew I would not be capable to walk at the same pace as the rest. I wanted to be there when they met again with Chauche, though. Thus I told to Andrés that I would go first to prepare things. Of course I got lost and was the last to come.



Figure 26: El Autodefensor 2.0. By Daniel Chauche

We ate lunch and then Chauche did the shoot. It was a long day, but the general feeling was that everything happened too fast and too well. Chauche's work was done; the photograph was taken. Andres still wanted to interview don Manuel, but not in this occasion. I was taking notes and figuring out the process. During the trip we discussed making several outcomes that would include the new photograph made by Chauche, a chronicle written by Andrés and the documentary, made by myself. We agreed to come some months later in the company of Birgit, who proposed the idea for this project, to make the interview to don Manuel. Then, we could consider our task over. Of course we were wrong.



Figure 27: Alejandro and Andres. By Daniel Chauche

**PRODUCING DOCUMENTARY FILM WHILE BEING A PHOTOGRAPHY APPRENTICE:  
POLITICS OF INTERPELLATION AND NON-REPRESENTATIVE AESTHETICS**

Chauche knew from the beginning that I was interested in both finding don Manuel and in engaging in an ethnographic relationship. I was transparent since the first time we meet that I was interested in using visual anthropology methods as a way to engage in collaboration with the ethnographic subjects. In this case, I was to carry out a research of his photographic project, to understand the dissemination of counterinsurgency aesthetics in contemporary arts. He also knew that my interest in photography was not only academic, I was also interested in becoming a photographer, a visual anthropologist. I knew that Chauche was interested in having a documentary film that registers his production and creative processes. I knew that he was aware of his position in the visual culture in Guatemala and that this collaborative relationship could make a contribution in the consolidation of that position. For him, the documentation of that experience was a means to get a visual register of his artistic process.

Chauche told me to come to his place one week after our trip to San Juan Atitan, because we had matters to discuss. I told him that it would fit better for me to come some time later. I had a trip to Europe planned already and I would be back one month later. Besides, I wanted to organize the material obtained from the trip and, once having that done, we could discuss some ideas of how to edit it. I came on a Monday in the morning and gave him a copy of all my files and a raw cut in which I proposed already the general concepts that would be explored in the film. Because going through all materials was a task that would take a long time, we decided to meet the next day, so that he would have time to see it all.

On the next day I came as planned. He started the conversation saying that he was very satisfied with the results, which expressed in a very accurate fashion his whole process. Then I told him that it was only the beginning and that I had to work much more in this project to get something decent. I told him also that I still wanted to make individual interviews with each one of the participants, including Birgit. It would take some time. He agreed with me and proposed that given my interest in becoming a photographer he could take on me as his apprentice in the meantime. He would lend me a photography book every week that I had to study carefully and he would lecture me about it. Chauche's main idea was for me to understand matters of composition and form, mostly. He also was very interested in me learning from his main influences and inspirations, as well as the documentary style to which he considers to belong.

#### **CHAUCHE'S DOCUMENTARY STYLE, NON-REPRESENTATIONAL AESTHETICS**

I published an essay on desire and Guatemala's 2015 mobilizations in a local newspaper during those first days of collaborative work. The essay came in to Chauche's hands and he gave me this speech stating that he was somehow impressed that I had a philosophical education. Then I told him that most of my time in Berlin I studied German and French sociologists and philosophers. He has never studied philosophy and felt that part of my collaboration with the project could be to make the hermeneutics of our discussions.

In terms of style there is a decisive moment that differs largely from what we usually recognize in Cartier-Bresson tradition and/or the schools that look towards the creation of kinds of *candid* and/or *spontaneous* photography. Chauche's negotiates in a very transparent way with the contingency that make these styles possible, but he

partially eliminates the intention of producing a representation of the *decisive moment* that generates a replication of a History already defined in sociological or anthropological terms. Chauche's work is inscribed in the tradition of photographers such as Walker Evans, Robert Frank, William Eggleston, Irvin Penn, Richard Avedon, Flor Garduño, Gabriela Iturbide, Mariana Yamopolsky, among others, who rejected the idea of a spontaneous, *verité*, photography. For them it is difficult to reconcile the moment the photographed subject poses for the camera and the photographer's pretensions of producing an image that expresses pure spontaneity, mimics the real, and/or therefore represents it.

This form of making photographs, that borrows compositional elements from documentary photography, but that also positions itself in the impossibility of producing a spontaneous representation of the real, is what Chauche calls *documentary style photography*. For him, photographs are always producing and/or subscribing to a preexisting narrative that needs to be problematized. This preexisting narrative colonizes the point of view of the spectator. For him, the most important part to use the documentary style photography is to destabilize the naïve of the point of view that considers itself to be in a *natural position*. To some extent, Chauche engages a project that exists in both the phenomenological transparent experience of the world and the psychoanalytical/ideological specular/reflective reality of the *interpelled* subject.

For instance, Husserl's (1913) phenomenology also intended to produce a suspension of what he called the *natürliche Einstellung* (natural attitude) by deploying the critical self-reflective *phanomenologische epoche*, which is a radical form of skepticism intending to suspend every naïve idea of the existence of an external, real, world and rejecting the possibility for experiencing metaphysics. To do so the phenomenologist must *in Klammern setzen* (to place in brackets or bracketing) every

preconceived notion of exteriority in direct relation to the unique position that the observer has in the world. In other words, all forms of exterior reality will depend upon the point of view of the observer and the radical critique to every observation will depend on the suspension and interrogation of that point of view.

Beyond the obvious distances, there is some kind of unavoidable invocation to Husserl's phenomenology and Chauche's photographic project built upon the pretention to destabilizing the position of the observer (the suspension of the subject). The difference is that the destabilization of the *natural attitude* in Chauche's photographic project is carried out not from a sophisticated philosophical architecture of logical argumentation. Instead, Chauche aims to affect directly the *structure of feeling* (Williams 1978), which also could eventually yield a modification in what Ranciere (2004) names *aesthetic regimes*. This is, to perform an iconography that eventually can produce an affective interrogation to the positionality of every one of the people relating with the photograph. And here comes the second great difference between both projects. On the one hand, for Husserl's phenomenology the illusion of exteriority depends upon rational correlates that exist in the consciousness of the subject (the eye). The world is itself a rational correlate that presents and represents in human's *Bewusstsein* (consciousness). And here I believe it is important to point out that the German word for consciousness means both the state and potentiality of humans to recognize their world/environment, as well as to understand it and rationalize it. For Chauche's photography, the most important aspect to destabilize is the aesthetic/political structure of the world. This is, Chauche's photography intends to dislocate the potentiality to perceive, to feel, the world in one and no other way.

A fine and perfectly executed photography, which is supposed to make evident that the photographer is making a specific point of view, and that this point of view is



everything but neutral is one of his arguments. The other argument is that the point of view of the spectator has something previous that makes him or her to see in the photograph what he or she wants to. And this is the point where Chauche's photography can also open a debate with the notion of desire, which would be understood in this point of the argument as the potentiality of being a member of a particular affective community. Pharraprasing Ansel Adams, Chauche told me one day something like this: "you never take a photograph, you make it". In this regard, Chauche frequently questions the intentions of photographic realism and its pretensions to *take* photographs in terms of *taking something from reality; taking something from the world, which somehow freezes the world in the photograph*. He warned me several times of how photographers tend to build compositions that will resonate more and better with specific publics that will be prone to identify these photographs as better representations of reality. To some extent, this is something similar to what Sontag (2004) points out in her essay *Regarding the Pain of Others* and the processes of loss of sensibility produced by the massification of war photography.

As far as he considers himself to be in some liminal space-time between modernism and postmodernism he rejects the idea of pure representation in terms of politics of aesthetics and/or aesthetics of politics. Chauche pointed out to me how frequently documentary photography tends to produce forms of romanticization of others, which essentially are forms of production of the real that, in the worst case-scenario, could be considered orientalist. He continuously struggles against pretensions of both pure realism and romanticization, which he considers to be opposite sides of the same coin. And the problems here do not only lie on the moment of the composition and the fabrication of visual representations, but also in the social space of identification where the image will be received.

This is the basis of the clear distinction he makes between *documentary photography* and the *documentary style photography*. While documentary photography pretends to mimic *the real* of a particular *event*, documentary style photography inhabits the aesthetics contingent to the impossible world-reality. Building on this, Chauche proposes that his focus is not in producing meaning, but instead in problematizing the eternal projection in the photographs of people's own hopes, demons, dreams and nightmares. This perhaps the distinction that Lacan (1978) recovers from Merleau Ponty (2013) to differentiate between the eye and the gaze. In other words, we could say his project negotiates with the *aporia* of the real and its radical substitution for a politics of desire, which could be found in Lacanian psychoanalysis that returns to the realm of the hermeneutic, imagination and symbolism.

The position Chauche inhabits in his photographic project is built upon a mixed mood of frustration and fascination regarding the reaction of most people to his work. On the one hand, he feels frustrated how critics, curators, dealers and the public in general would not have a finer sensibility to understand the line that separates a pure documentary photography from a kind of fine-art photography that stylistically borrows from documentary photography. On the other hand, he feels fascinated by this lack of sensibility shared by these differentiated subjects because that is the event where it is possible to appreciate the political radicalism of his aesthetical approach.

I mentioned above the idea of a different kind of decisive moment. In this regard, I propose that the paradoxical relation that combines both frustration and fascination in a single affective frame embodies also a kind of radical critique of representation. The documentary style Chauche advocates for emancipates itself from the need of representation as a starting and ending point in his aesthetics. This decisive moment does not depend upon a fraction of a second determined by the mechanical impact of the

shutter that captures *THAT* moment, piece, or part of reality that the image mimics (almost everything will be staged), neither the intentions of the photographer to localize the subject in a particular landscape/geography (Thrift 2007) from where sociological conclusions can be drawn. This is a moment when photography becomes deconstructive in a non-discursive and a non-logocentric (Derrida 2016) sense. This is, an event located in a sort of ethics of the face, which in Levinasian (1969; 1998) terms is both inaccessible and infinite; an event that interpellates the point of view of every single subject—the public as well—taking part in the production visual meaning. In other words, the point of view of all subjects that believe that a particular image (or a series of images) produces a specific meaning that represent reality is to be questioned.

All these debates also affected me deeply. The photograph that interested me mainly, and that pushed me to adventure in an ethnographic collaboration with Chauche was the *Autodefensor*. In some extent I believed it would be possible to find in this collaboration some kind of validation of my preconceived points of view or hypotheses regarding aesthetics, infrastructures of security and postcounterinsurgency Guatemala. My point of departure was biased towards the processes of representation and understanding of civil war and war photography. My desire was to find in Chauche's photograph a history of war that eventually developed in some kind of history of securitization of Guatemala's everyday infrastructures.

My original idea changed enormously. For me it was more plausible to think now that instead of being a documentary photography portraying specific moments of civil war Chauche's documentary style tends to permanently evolve into some sort of non-representational aesthetics that could be in discussion with some of Thrift's (2008) arguments. In any case, this aesthetics is not necessarily focused on producing and/or reproducing discourse, pure description; instead it intends to explore the affective

disturbances that Chauche's portraits produce in the affective ambient—this is similar to what Kathleen Steward (2011) names atmospheric attunements. These attunements are, I believe, discussing already more explicitly with an anthropological debate of aesthetics in a non-representational sense, which somehow would be *pre-ideological*. This means that the space of affection of affects precedes what Marx (1980, 1992, 2016) would perform as *Ideologiekritik* in his theoretical development. I would like to dig a little deeper in the ethnographic experience to unwrap this argument.

### **COLLABORATIVE DOCUMENTARY: MAKING ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE WHITE BACKGROUND?**

I came back to Guatemala a month after our road trip to San Juan Atitan. We met, as planned, in his place at 11:00am. I came with a copy of all materials—I wanted to store a copy of all videos, audios and photographs in his computer to prevent the case of my hard drive failing—and a raw edition in which the structure of the documentary was already settled. I made a very simplistic organization of the materials, placed all the scenes together and classified them using this sequence: First, road trip; second, everything that could help to produce a visual contextualization of San Juan Atitan; third, all cuts from the process in which he and his wife interacted with the indigenous authorities in order to identify the previously photographed subjects; fourth, everything related to the moment of reencounter with *El Autodefensor* and the final shoot. During that moment I still believed this collaboration would help me to create an ethnographic narrative about war-photography. However, things got more complex.

Officially, I was already Chauche's photography *apprentice* and I had to come to his place every week or two. I understood his idea of having weekly meetings was twofold. On the one hand, he would school me in photography so that I could understand the implications of the documentary style photography (by the time I still was unaware of

the hermeneutic process described in the previous section) as well as to improve my photography. On the other hand, we would work further in the edition of the documentary in order to get a product based on a deeper interaction between us. Eventually, we would go also to shoot together in Chimaltenango.

One of the things I considered very important was to carry out a series of interviews with him, Maria Elena, Andrés and Birgit. We could advance the first two interviews before Andres and Birgit came back to Guatemala. We planned a second trip to find don Manuel, in order facilitate Andres the conditions to interview him. His part of the deal—the journalistic chronicle—depended upon it. That moment would be also the opportunity for me to interview Andres and Birgit.

I planned the interviews to Chauche and Maria Elena relatively soon after my return from Europe. Maria Elena provided detailed information about the process involved in coming back to the communities after so many years, finding the subjects, gaining their sympathy and trust, and making from the whole experience something pleasant for everyone, where everybody feels not only comfortable but also emotionally engaged. Chauche's interview focused mostly on his artistic processes and evolutions, which I basically described in the beginning of this chapter. It was the moment when he, for the first time, uttered that he was not interested in producing sociological or anthropological representations of indigenous peoples, the civil war or everyday violence. Instead, his portraits were meant to produce something he names a psychological effect that intends to interpellate the normality in which every body believes they live.

As pointed out in the beginning of this chapter, the three most representative moments of Chauche's photography involve a struggle he had for several years to understand the implications of positioning the portrayed subjects in different backgrounds as well as to understand the aesthetical and political consequences of each variant. *Foto*

*Taxi* was a project in which the subjects were positioned on the backseat of the taxicab. In *Foto-Gringo*, he requested the subjects select the location for the composition in order to consent with them the place they would like to be identified. During these series it was possible to see everything in detail because of the use of wide-angle lenses and large depths of field. During *Flash* he started to blow away the context by using a longer lens that, combined with a frontal speed-lite, blurred considerably the background. Finally, in *Fondo Blanco (white background)* he completely gets rid of the surroundings by placing a white background that isolates the subject in a very dramatic way. This *Fondo-Blanco series* is where he finally feels satisfied with the kind of aesthetic attunement he has been trying to achieve for several years.

Of course there is a strong influence of Richard Avedon in this series, but there is also something very specific and authentic in the process that brought Chauche to this point. Everything that came before this series was a process of trial and error that would cause huge internal aesthetical dilemmas in Chauche's creative process. He felt that by presenting the photographed subjects without any background he would finally find the kind of identification he was looking for. This identification was the impossibility of representing the real itself. In conversations we held in his car during a trip to Chimaltenango Chauche told me something like this:

Most people don't understand what I do. And that's good, you know. Even people highly educated in fine arts frequently think that my white background photos tend to romanticize the subjects I've been working with for so many years. What I have intended to do is to produce a kind of photography so finely executed that, to some extent, it would force people to ask themselves "what am I seen here?" "What is expected from me in seeing this photograph?" Most of these people will never realize that what they see in these portraits is a person like them; that inhabits a space very close to theirs; that are very similar to them. And that is, I think, because they do not have these reference points in the map that explains the whole story. They try to compensate for that lack of context that the white

background produces with some political narrative. People tend to project their own politics into the empty white space behind the subject.

My hope was that the production of this documentary film would allow me to articulate somehow this point Chauche expressed so clearly in the car that day. However, the struggle I had with the documentation materials, the contents of the interviews, and the specific interests he had in making a documentary film showing his work created a larger distance from that goal. Chauche needed something very specific that could help him to present the experience we had in our search for the *Autodefensor* that would also be a way to introduce the general public to his work. On my side, I wanted to make an ethnographic film that would pose these questions about the critique of representation, interpellation and destabilization of aesthetic hegemonic infrastructures.

A few months later Andres and Birgit finally came back to Guatemala. We prepared the trip so that everybody could go to San Juan Atitan this time. Andres would interview don Manuel; I would video and audio record the interview. Later, I would also interview Andrés and Birgit. I thought this would be a good time to fill the gaps I still had unresolved. This would help me to eventually achieve the aim of doing an ethnographic film on the complexities of war photography and its *aporetic* moments. Chauche allowed me to understand that war photography was frequently based on the community of feeling for whom the photograph was taken and that somehow the representation made in the photograph would correlate with the space of desire and affective identification defined in the community of feeling where the photograph circulates.

Chauche and Maria Elena would not be available to come until the next day. I traveled with Andres and Birgit. Already in Huehuetenango, we went out to dinner in a local Italian restaurant. We prepared the interview for don Manuel just after eating. The plan was to make a structure where Andres could question from the general context he

was living in 1989 in order to, later, question him about the specific moment when the original photograph was taken.

We were back in San Juan Atitan in the middle of November of 2015. This time we did not find any indigenous authorities in the *Alcaldía Indígena*. There was no *Mercado* day either. The *aldea* was partially deserted. We had to walk all the way across the mountain once again to see if we could find don Manuel. It was a matter of luck. We had a telephone number to call a relative of his, but nobody answered. We did not know if he would be there. This time we did not have a guide either. We asked some of the few people in town until a woman told us that she was going down the mountain. We could come with her if we wanted to. She barely spoke Spanish and we did not speak any mam either. It was uncertain where she was leading us. In the middle of the way she told us she had arrived her destination. Then she told us goodbye. This time our luck was different.

I came close to Andres and told him: “do you think we can find the place?” he looked very skeptical and answered something like: “We’re screwed but we don’t have any alternative?” We were lost for about three hours. It was a very steep mountain. The corn crops created a tridimensional maze that made everything more difficult. We were lost in a three-dimensional space. I thought it would be easy if we only walked down. There was a river, which we could follow until don Manuel’s house. However, when you are lost in such a mountain, things will never be that simple.

After three hours we found don Manuel’s place. We were exhausted and unmotivated. The morale was very low. We traveled so long that we had to finish our task, though. We would not have any other chance in the near future to return. Birgit was supposed to leave next week back to Ethiopia.

We were in don Manuel’s patio when his wife told us he was doing seasonal work in the sugar-cane *fincas* in the *boca costa*. The frustration was shared. “At least we get to



show her the part of the film we have advanced. She appears there...” I thought. She only laughed when she saw it.

On our way up to town I had another *experience*. My physical condition was not better than the first time we came to visit. The difference this time was that we got lost for so many hours. I did not have any energy left to go up the mountain. It was very embarrassing to see that Chauche and Maria Elena (both over 60) did not have any trouble hiking up that mountain. I was delaying everybody. I told them to go first. I would come some minute later. It was better. They left and Andres stayed to walk with me. We came up half an hour later.

We were very surprised and happy when finding out that Chauche came across don Manuel by coincidence when he was already up in the town. Don Manuel was coming back from la Mesilla (a border town between Guatemala and Mexico). He escorted his nephew, who just migrated to the U.S. He seemed to be happy to see us again. We told him that Andres was interested in interviewing him. We went to eat at the same place we did the first time. Andrés asked me to show him the advances we had of the film. I took the computer and my hard drive out of my backpack and played it. He did not give much attention to it.

Later, Andres and Birgit engaged in a conversation with Don Manuel. They intended to explain to him the whole project and the relevance of the interview. They convinced him relatively quickly. His only concern was the language. His Spanish was not fluid and our Mam inexistent. I settle the audio recorder and mounted my DSLR on the tripod. Chauche distanced himself from the event. Although he was very interested in knowing what could come out from that experience, he also knew that the interview was not his task. Andres was the one who had to write the chronicle. I was recording in order to document the process, which eventually could also be used in the film.

After we finished the interview, don Manuel asked if we had some dollars in our pockets. This time he was not asking for the original two thousand quetzals. Only the change we could have in our pockets. I was the only one with twenty dollars in my wallet. I handed the twenty dollars to him, and we left.



Figure 28: Interview with Don Manuel. By Daniel Chauche

The outcome of the interview was basic. The linguistic and sociocultural gap between Andres, Birgit and don Manuel was very large. The information we obtained was not extensive. It helped mostly to corroborate some of the data we had from the beginning. Perhaps our expectations were too high. Chauche told us on the first trip that in such a project it is better to keep the expectations low. Of course we heard him but did not listened. We expected a coherent and completed story about the context in which the photograph was taken. We wanted a story of the *autopatrullero* a story of the war and counterinsurgency violence. To sum, we wanted to fill the white background of desire that Chauche criticizes with his photography.

Perhaps he did not want to talk about it because he barely knew us. Perhaps we should have planned the interview using an ethnographic and not a journalistic approach. We could not answer the questions that the interview arose.

The next day I interviewed Andres and Birgit. Those were the last pieces I needed to finish the film. Andres' point of view was mostly determined by a sociological analysis. He focused on the transformation he had experienced between the moment he saw the photograph for the first time and now, when he could be finally available to fill in the white background with socio-economic realities, which to some extent were also subjected to our ideological desires. He spoke about structural violence for a long time and correlated that violence with the *Autodefensor's* eyes. He said that it was a gaze that look you in the eyes and questions you.

There was a strong coincidence between some of Birgit's and Andres' arguments. Both commented on how the *autodefensor's gaze interpellated* them in several levels. However, something very specific emerged from Brigit's interview. She remarked on how this *Autodefensor* portrait—but all the white-background series in general—entails a critical questioning of her position in the world as well as her general social, economic and cultural context and the idea of contemporaneity. She observed that the paradoxical nature of the notion of contemporaneity within these white-background series depends upon the feeling of violence they produce, which overlaps the past with the present. Her comment continues pointing out how the first time she saw the portrait she immediately thought: “this is a guerrilla fighter from the 1980s”. It was only some time later, when she knew more of Guatemala's history, that she understood that this person belonged to the *patrullas de auto defensas civil* (PAC), that were created by the national army in early 80s as a central part of the counterinsurgency strategy. She also told me that this phenomenon of linking the *Autodefensor's* portrait with the guerrilla happened very

frequently to other expats that, like her, come to Guatemala to work in international organizations and NGOs. It was also very recurrent that when expats visited them almost immediately linked the *Autodefensor* portrait to indigenous peoples' struggles or human rights causes or both.

On the contrary, "most urban Guatemalans that visited us barely noticed the portrait", she said. After the interview I asked what could be the cause of this difference in the appreciation and the level of identification with the *Autodefensor*, and she responded something like:

They [urban ladino Guatemalans] see this scene every day, all around: An indigenous young man holding a gun is not something alien to them; it is something that belongs to their quotidian life; they are surrounded by them. Wherever they go in the city they see this same image. In their condos, their gated communities, the supermarkets, the shopping malls, their offices; all around they see this image of a young man holding a rifle or a shotgun.

I think that the kind of interpellation she felt in the presence of the *Autodefensor's* portrait came from that moment of destabilization of representation itself. In the beginning she could not correlate this portrait with the face of Guatemala's genocidal State. The first time she saw it, she projected a guerrilla fighter on to it. In addition, a celebrated American photographer made this portrait in the 1980s; this was a photographer who, in theory, was supposed to have witnessed the horrors of war and the consequences of the scorched earth strategy that lead to both genocide and the implementation of the *humanitarian war* strategy. This was also a portrait that appears in Victor Perera's book *Unfinished Conquest*, which, to some extent, is the first book that *educated expats* see and read before they come to Guatemala. In other words, this portrait is already contingent to the possibility of some sort multinational circulation of Guatemala's visual post-counterinsurgency culture. As Chauche told me onetime:

Everybody will fill up the white background with whatever they want to see. People tend to project themselves in photography. And they do this not only in my photography, but also in all kinds of photography. The only difference is that I provide the possibility to the public to make their projection in an explicit fashion, whereas other photographers exploit this condition without even knowing they are also projecting themselves. And this is something especially accentuated in war photography.

And this commentary and the recent experience produced such a crisis that it even endangered the completion of the documentary. This crisis was based in three different events at least. First, there was Don Manuel, who kind of liked us, but did not trust us very much, and saw in us the opportunity to get some extra cash. Second, the aspects related to our social positionality in relation to don Manuel (I believe every one of us was aware of our positionality in Guatemala's structure of power.) This is basically what Andres remarked during the interview. And this is a very important sociological approach to the debate on social positions and dispositions and the production and reproduction of hierarchies and inequalities of power during these kinds of undertakings. This even included the presence of forms of utilitarian exchanges.

This was also something we discussed with Chauche and Maria Elena, when they explained to me the complexities inherent to this photographic project that has been going on for more than 30 years. During the time he instructed me in photography Chauche insisted on the importance of establishing forms of reciprocity with the photographed subjects, not only to reduce the asymmetries that exist between the photographer and the photographed, but also to increase the engagement of the subjects in the production of the photograph.

This translates in a photographic praxis in places like San Juan Atitan, where the first thing they do is to talk with the local authorities, to request their authorization to take the photographs and to always give them copies of the images (original b/w half format if possible, or digital copies when printed in situ). I had these appealing thoughts about the

paradoxes of the concept of contemporaneity that emerged from this specific portrait (and the rest of the white background portraits) and how this opened a space of interpellation that fissured the possibility of representation among the people that eventually had the chance to appreciate it.

Like a kid in a candy store I wanted to cover all these aspects in the documentary and also in my dissertation. This, however, would have implied stopping the other projects I was working to finish my research goals in order to work exclusively in this specific project. And this would also have meant to radically change my research process. This process began as a research of Daniel and his notion of war photography. And I should not change that, even if the problematization of the reproduction of forms of utilitarianism was present in the trip. I was doing an ethnography of how Daniel creates a space of visibility with the white background that destabilizes the position of the observer. I could not afford to lose my way, I had started already collaborative ethnographic relationships with other projects and it would be completely irresponsible from me to abandon them. There was also the complexity that Chauche wanted a film that could help him to present his work in relation to the specific trips we made to find the *Autodefensor*.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> I wrote an email to my visual anthropology professor, Craig Campbell, seeking some advice, and sent him a copy of the version of the film I had at the time. His answer was straightforward. He told me to finish the documentary so Chauche can use it. Then, he proposed that, given the case, I could do a second edit or even an interactive website exploring all these ideas. This was a perfect solution for everybody. Actually, in this moment, we have discussed with Andres and Chauche the possibility of doing this interactive website in the near future. We already have the necessary infrastructure. We only lack the time at this moment.

## THE GAZE OF DESIRE: WAR PHOTOGRAPHY AND INTERPELLATION

During this chapter I have shared my ethnographic experience in order to give elements to support the hypothesis that Chauche's *white background* photography entails a form of non-representative aesthetics that destabilizes the unawareness that the subject occupies at the moment of contemplation of his white background portraits. My hypothesis, then, is that when Chauche eliminates the contextual background the subject has the chance to fill it with whatever he or she wants. This is what Chauche highlights when pointing out that people permanently project themselves in the photograph. The lack of a specific geographic or sociological context not only opens the portrait to any ideological production of meaning, but also opens the desired epistemological context.

Andrés was still in Guatemala. During those days we were having a discussion regarding the elements that should be included in the collaboration. As stated before, the basic components were supposed to be the old and the new photograph, a chronicle relating the process and the documentary film. One morning I was checking on my Facebook and a new event regarding the photograph happened. It was too good to be truth.

I do try to follow systematically the Facebook pages of post-counterinsurgency relevant personalities. One of them is Ricardo Méndez Ruiz, who directs the Fundación Contra el Terrorismo. This is the more active and virulent organization that today works actively to create public opinion in favor of former counterinsurgent military war criminals. This organization also works to produce public opinion against human rights and social activists. Part of their tactics is to play the Justice System to criminalize activists that struggle for social justice in Guatemala. That morning I was on my routine monitoring when I saw this in the *Fundación contra el Terrorismo* page:



Figure 29: Screenshot of *Fundación Contra el Terrorismo* Facebook page. By author.

In that moment I made the screenshot and sent an email with it to Andres and Chauche. Chauche wrote a message to Ricardo Mendez Ruiz asking him to remove the photograph from his Facebook page because it was not meant to be used in the way they were doing it. Some minutes later, Mendez Ruiz removed the photograph, but instead linked it from Chauche's website and wrote a larger text glorifying the role of the *patrucheros* in Guatemala's Civil War. It was intriguing that the iteration of the *Autodefensor* was made by Ricardo Mendez Ruiz, and his *Fundación contra el Terrorismo*

It is fascinating to follow the trajectory of this portrait, from its origins in the 1980s until now, when the *Fundación Contra el Terrorismo* used it to promote its cause. Building upon the history of the *Autodefensor's* portrait it is possible to appreciate how



the lack of background and the intensification of the face in Chauche's portraiture produces an effect in which people try to project themselves into the void that the background opens. When I propose that Chauche's portraiture engages in a non-representational aesthetics I do not intend to argue that representation disappears completely from the photograph. Instead, I propose that several of the moments of representation are also accompanied by other elements constitutive to the relation of desire to aesthetics. And this is the aspect that invites us to transcend the mere phenomenological analysis and dig into some psychoanalytical ideas.

As Birgit said during her interview, the gaze of the subject interpellated her. This interpellation is something that allows linking Althusser's (2014) notion of subject and Lacan's (1978) conceptualization of the gaze. Instead of producing an interpellation by the authority who tells the subject "hey, you there!" the intersection of gazes between the public and the portrait brings to the foreground the reflection that every possible interpretation is preceded by the subject's desire.

And this is how I try to frame the notion of non-representational aesthetics, which transforms both the poietic and the cathartic element of the piece into a performative act, in which the subject is able to realize his or her belonging to a specific moment in time and space, by realizing that the image makes him or her see something beyond, which is based on the impossibility of knowing who the photographed subject is. Chauche's portraits are not pointing in the direction of mimicking the life conditions of the photographed subjects, instead they produce a bare gaze in which the spectator realizes that what he sees in the portrait is nothing more than a virtual space, a mirror that reflects in front of another mirror and that whoever is that person on the photograph belongs to the realm of metaphysics. Isn't this, in political terms, more radical than any possible representation?

Two gazes are crossed, but only one has the privilege to see, and what it sees is the reflection of its own desires, anxieties, fears, expectations. The gaze of privilege, when realizing this, it does not know what to do with the other gaze, the inaccessible one. That is the moment when representation crumbles and vanishes in the impossibility of accessing the real.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has contributed in understanding the impossibility of foreclosing the aesthetic regime. The research experience with Daniel Chauche yielded the possibility to problematize the idea of war photography as an exclusive documentary/observational process that reflects the *real*. This impossibility of representing the *real* produced a kind of non-representational aesthetics that can be taken as point of departure in exploring the emergence of forms of dissent that destabilize the processes of depoliticization that counterinsurgency intended to generalize in the cultural field. By making transparent that desire is in the middle of representation Chauche's white background photography re-opens the possibility of engaging in processes of radicalization of the political beyond the limits of the aesthetic regime. This is the emergence of the supplement that Ranciere considers to be in the center of the politicization, and can be understood as the need of problematizing the political positionality when producing politicized arts.

## Chapter V

### **The gift of history in the Ixil region: Multidirectional pedagogies, aesthetics, and visual anthropology**

#### INTRODUCTION

The final chapter of the dissertation emerges from the epicenter where both counterinsurgency plans of massive extermination and humanitarian war strategies were deployed. This chapter revolves around two interdependent aspects in relation to the heuristic idea presented with the *they did not win the war* title. First, the search of spaces, phenomena, affects, singularities in which processes of re-politicization take place. Second the intent to research, write and tell the history of the Ixil from a perspective that contests both the hegemonic counterinsurgency discourse and the alienation of academic research from the Ixil everyday reality.

To make this clear, let me share a field note I made during one of my early visits to the Ixil region. David Stoll's (1994) *Between two Armies* is the anthropological and historical narrative that mostly resonates with Guatemala's former counterinsurgency military and, in some extent, has also reverberated with most of genocide deniers in the national level and the public sphere described in the introductory chapter. One of the first things I noted in my fieldwork when coming to the Ixil region in early 2015 was that Stoll's narrative disseminated extensively in the region (I am very sure that everyone who has done research in the Ixil region in recent years can corroborate this.)

Given the case that I followed the thesis on the overdetermination of counterinsurgency, I should certainly ask if this was the proof needed to validate the thesis about the indisputability of counterinsurgency victory. And probably, as counterinsurgency organic intellectuals do, everyone following the linear, non-dialectical, research method would answer that that counterinsurgency victory became not only

hegemonic, but indisputable. Most of the times, the problem with this hypothetic-deductive method resides in the superficiality of the information obtained, which is a consequence of poor research technics that do not engage in the complexity of the situation. Instead of looking for singularities and anomalies, these methods are interested in regularities and normality. This impacts in the reproduction of foreclosed theses that are not able to understand the political processes that are taking place in that specific intersection of time and space. However, the complexity, its singularities and potentialities emerge quickly when doing ethnography; especially when this ethnography intends to problematize also the hegemonic Nation-State discourse that has also been validated by academia.

I stated already that the original idea of this dissertation's title came to me from a former guerrilla fighter who actually noticed the permanence of singularities that could be seen as a prolongation of a process of politicization that not ended with the massive extermination plans carried out by the counterinsurgency. This chapter originates in a conversation I had with Ixil organic intellectuals in early 2015 that considered necessary to produce history of the Ixil region that would be carried out, performed and presented by Ixiles. To some extent, their interest was to explore mechanisms that would allow not only to dispute the version of history that was disseminated in their living spaces, but also to look for mechanism to tell their historic discourse it in a way that could communicate more efficiently with ordinary people. This is why we thought about the possibility of engaging in non-logocentric forms of expression of history, such as visual and performative forms of discourse. This engagement fits perfectly with the visual anthropological project I was carrying out in the previous chapters.

In the final chapter of this dissertation I strive to express in the clearest way possible the dialectic of singularity and potentiality that builds on the contingency of the

post-counterinsurgency. The project presented in this chapter, the photo essay, and the photo exhibition presented in the annex is the result of an investigative process that was carried out mostly by Ixil researchers aiming to dispute the narrative that supports the counterinsurgency version of history (I will make some annotation on Benjamin's aphorism regarding the relation of victory and the writing of history). The Ixiles had already started before the start of our collaboration a process of re-enactments that could function to achieve the goal of telling their research results; telling their history. This was a way of producing non-logocentric history based on performing, reenacting and photographing their research result.

My specific contribution, taking on contemporary visual anthropology and reenactment debates (Daugbjerg, Rivka & Knudsen 2014; Nagib 2014, 2016; Ten Brink & Oppenheimer 2012)—as well as on previous conversation with Yasmin Hage—in this project, was to integrate the photographic register in order to articulate with the intention of producing non-logocentric historic discourse. The photographic component could yield a final product that would last longer in time and that could be used by future generations of researchers and teachers.

Building on Ranciere's (1991) *Ignorant School Master* we aimed to develop a process to transcend the traditional scholar professor-student practice. In this regard, we intended to construct a relationship based on the intersubjective articulation of the different kinds of knowledge we had. Even though I, in collaboration with Juan Carlos Mazariegos, designed the structure of the class/research and shared with the Ixil students the structures of periodization that conform the academic cannon, the students/researchers of the Ixil university carried out the investigation in their local spaces. On my side, I could contribute with my knowledge on research methods, the visual/photographic resources and the historic canon to understand the periodization of

the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They would contribute with their own methodology to carry out research in their communities, the production of information with elders and leaders, and their knowledge in performing arts.

Finally, the analytical process was carried out in a space of intersubjective and interepistemic interaction, where the Ixil researchers and me discussed and tried to construct interpretative and synthetic significance. This allowed to produce not only a hermeneutics that was different and contested the academic canon promoted by the counterinsurgency (Stoll 1994), but also allowed to design the form in which the research findings should be shared with the community (that is the role of the reenactments and the photographic exhibitions).

This was the most powerful experiment of the dissertation, in which the knowledge produced entered immediately in a space of contestation of academic and political perspectives. This is the kind of counter-power that I consider that non-utilitarian methods can achieve, taking on the epistemic positionality/relationality related to the contingency of dialectics of counterinsurgency, singularity and potentiality.

It is important to remark that most of the Ixil researchers who participated in the investigation, production, curation and exhibition of this Ixil history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century grew up in spaces created by the counterinsurgency to *recuperate* population. Most of these spaces were *aldeas modelo*, just as those described in Chapter Two. In some extent it is possible to trace that despite the efforts invested by the counterinsurgency to create a new desires and aesthetic regime (the material build environment), they did not completely succeed in their aim of producing docile subjects that would be included in their new politico-ontological reduction of the world (which can also be called the post-counterinsurgency nation state).

It is important to highlight that the ethnographic report presented in this chapter corresponds to something that the Ixil researchers and I created and presented in Nebaj in February 2015. Thus, my principal claim of authorship in this chapter is the ethnographic description. The research process and the photographs were done in continuous collaboration and inter-reflexive non-utilitarian interaction between the ixil researchers and me.

This chapter does not intend to produce a representation or a hermeneutics of the potentiality of the Ixil politicization, rather it is an account of events that took place between 2015 and 2016 in which we engaged in a collaborative project that is presented in this chapter and the photo exhibition of the annex. And, of course, it is fundamental to understand this is a work in progress. Currently those involved in the collaboration, that is the Ixil researchers and I, are planning to carry out another series of visual experiments to reenact and tell other moments of history that they have investigated during the eight months I have been writing and defending this dissertation.

#### **UNIVERSIDAD IXIL, THE GIFT OF HISTORY: EXCESS, DESIRE AND MULTIDIRECTIONAL PEDAGOGIES**

I first visited the Ixil region in 1990. I traveled there with my sister and her husband, José Luis, who was the grandson of Giuseppe Azzari, an Italian farmer who arrived in the 1940s to Acul, Nebaj, escaping the flagrant poverty rampant in northern Italy in the interwar years. In Acul, Giuseppe dedicated his life to produce a cheese, known as *queso de Chancol* (a fine, yellow firm cheese that resembles some variants of *Manchego* or *Romano*). The name *Chancol* comes from the place in *Huehuetenango* where he first started to produce it. We spent some days at the *Hacienda San Antonio* (Giuseppe's farm) and visited several places in the region.

I was only 13 years old, and even at that age it was possible to feel the sense of place left by the counterinsurgency, which was saturated with the remnants of horror, harassment, hopelessness and violence, stemming from the previous decade. The road, which was built by the military during the highest moment of violence, was dusty but new and functional. Its presence was somehow terrifying, though. When seen from the distance of my limited memory, it looked like a deep scar violently carved into the sacred mountains. Although the Peace Accords started to be negotiated in 1991, the process took another six years for the signing of the last accord on firm and lasting peace. The militarization of the region was visible to the naked eye.

In contrast to the majority of middle class teenage *ladinos de la capital* (non-indigenous urban teenagers), I knew a little more about the war and the violence that whipped the region just a few years earlier. This knowledge didn't arise from a precocious interest in Guatemala's recent history. It was rooted, instead, in some kind of (paradoxical) family privilege, which exposed me to political debates since I was a child.

I am the 4th generation of academics. My grandfather's uncle was a lawyer. My grandfather was a Doctor who served as Guardia Miliciano (Revolutionary Militia Man) just after the 1944 revolution and sympathized with the socialist politics of presidents Arevalo and Arbenz. My grandfather's sympathies with socialism and popular politics were probably influenced by the years he spent in Peron's Argentina, while he was enrolled in a postgraduate program at the University of Buenos Aires.

My parents are social workers and sociologists from San Carlos University. They witnessed the worst moments of political repression, between the 1960s and 1970s. News about murdered, tortured and disappeared friends came to them on a daily basis. During those years, they became pupils and close friends with the Marxist-Fanonian intellectual Carlos Guzmán Böckler, who is considered to be the inspiring theorist of two of



Guatemala's major revolutionary organizations (Organización del Pueblo en Armas and the Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres). Before I was born my parents had to flee to a one-year exile in Tegucigalpa, Honduras.

From the 1960s until the early 1980s my parents acted as collaborator of the Guerrilla. Several times, without anybody knowing, they hid weapons, combatants, and refugees, at our home. My grandfather frequently took young students who had been wounded at demonstrations to provide them medical attention in his library room. Furthermore, my grandfather was very close friend with several priests who belonged to the "Liberation Theology" movement, and supported them with money, medicines or by attending to the sick. On one occasion the whole family of Micaela, a woman from Quiché who worked for the priests, took refuge in our house. We frequently received the visit of high ranked commanders such as Gustavo Palma Lau and Eduardo Aguilera, who died in combat in the early 1980s. My mother had a drugstore, and its backroom was frequently used as a clandestine clinic to attend the wounded that came from the war zones in el Quiché.

During the second half of the 1980s Mariel, my sister and my brother-in-law studied biology and chemical engineering respectively, also at the San Carlos University. They took part on the student movement during those years and still witnessed the last lashes of political repression against young intellectuals.

This genealogy gives me a paradoxical privilege. My infancy passed in the middle of conversations that drew on the country's political situation. A significant part of these talks revolved around the Ixil region and the genocide that was taking place during the 1980s. The memory of murdered friends and the wounds of State violence was an insidious part of our everyday. This was a wound that I could perceive from the pain of my parents and their losses.

The hope given by the dream that a radical change in society was also at stake. My sister used to play revolutionary Cuban, Chilean and Nicaraguan music on an old record player for me since I was a little child. My dad and mom used to tell me why there were people fighting and why there were people dying all around us. This was a fight in which they believed. Instead of some kind of Christian heaven, one of the first utopian notions that my father taught me was the idea of a communist society. I already loved science fiction, and this resonated strongly.

I remember the day we came to Acul, that José Luis told me and my friend Hugo something about the massacres, and the creation of the *aldea modelo* that had happened in the village some years earlier. This was the first time I saw the consequences of genocide in the face. That memory never left me.

## **OVERLAPS**

Twenty-three years passed until I returned to Nebaj, in the summer of 2013. I had just finished my first year at the Ph.D. Anthropology program, and was carrying out predissertation fieldwork. We made the trip with my friend and colleague, Juan Carlos Mazariegos, and my partner Lizeth Castañeda. Juan Carlos was also planning to do his prospectus and comprehensive exams in the following year, and this expedition was key to carry out our dissertation plans.

On that occasion, we had the chance to meet the authorities of the Ixil university. First we met Tixh in Nebaj, the next day we held a meeting with Pablo Ceto, the University's Dean, and don Chon, the *Alcalde Indígena* of Cotzal in San Felipe Chenlá. I knew Tixh and don Chon already. Our friend and colleague from the UT Anthropology

Program, Giovanni B'atz, had introduced us some months earlier, when they came at the University to present the case related to their struggle against a hydroelectric owned by the Italian company Enel and the Familia Brol.<sup>71</sup>

In January 2015 I formally started my fieldwork in the region. I was invited to take part in the examination committee of the second generation of *Técnicos en Desarrollo Rural Comunitario* (Technicians in communitarian development).<sup>72</sup> During the individual exams I noticed that the students frequently mentioned the history of colonialism and the genocide as the causal explication for all cases study during their defenses. When I introduced myself to Pablo Ceto (The current University Dean), he told me to think about possible ways of engaging in collaborative projects. We talked about carrying out a project in which the students could develop a historical knowledge by investigating oral sources. In the same occasion, I explained to Pablo what my research project was about, and asked him if he could help me to make contact with people in the area. I explained that I was interested in studying the production of place and the infrastructures of security in post-counterinsurgency Guatemala. His reply turned my project upside down. The challenge, was very interesting, though. He told me that I should try to link my research with the topic we were discussing about the reconstruction of the local Ixil history. “How can we do this, Pablo?” I asked. And he replied something like, “you can make a course that can help the students learn how to do historic research

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<sup>71</sup> Giovannin Batz' (2017) dissertation revolves around the struggle that the community members of San Felipe Chenlá have carried out in the last years.

<sup>72</sup> I also made a series or photographs and wrote a photo-essay that was also published in PlazaPública online newspaper (Flores 2015).

using oral sources. Maybe you can combine a conventional history class with an experimental component in which they become researchers.” Then I asked about my initial idea of doing visual ethnography. And, with calm in his eyes, he answered again, “we will figure it out together. The most important thing here is that we bring our knowledges together, that we learn from each other.”

That night I could not sleep. I was at Poppis, a local hostel which was very convenient because it is one of the few places in Nebaj with high speed internet. The price for it, however, is that you share the room with other guests. I wanted to write my notes down so that I would not forget anything of what was discussed with Pablo earlier that day, but everybody was asleep after 11pm. I had to wait until next day, before breakfast, to write. The next day I wrote several pages with possible ideas. Also sketched the structure of a possible syllabus, that I used later to design the course and research. The idea was then to combine a course in which a traditional history class could be taught at the time that they would create their own history using alternative methods. This process, I thought, could entail several photographic components, such as visual documentations and eventual forms of producing representations of the historic moments they researched.

Sometime later, I returned with Yasmin, to introduce her to Pablo, the U-Ixil’s dean, and to talk about the ideas we had about linking our energies in a common direction. We were already advanced with Yasmin in the production of the 3D sculpture we exhibited in New York. Our idea was that in collaboration with the researchers we could do the class/research about the 20<sup>th</sup> century history, and then we could carry out a

photographic series in which the findings of the research would be enacted. Finally, we could try to replicate somehow the experiment we did for the *Guatemala Después* project, but with larger format monuments, that could be of use by the Ixil University to teach future generations about the local history.

Pablo received us at his place and gave us dinner. He was very excited about the ideas and also invited Yasmin to think about the possibility of creating an art course for the Ixil University. The next day we visited several places in which the monuments would eventually be installed. We haven't completed our plans with Yasmin by the moment of writing this dissertation, but the project is still open.

#### **MULTIDIRECTIONAL PEDAGOGIES, ACTIVISM BEYOND UTILITARIANISM**

In February 2016 I sent an email to Craig Campbell showing him the outcomes of the previous six-months of work. I was a little overwhelmed by the actual meaning of it. We had produced a series of 43 photographs that narrated the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century from the perspective of the Ixil region, which included several historic distinctions. My uncertainty was rooted in the combination of different methodologies that combined “conventional” research strategies with higher education pedagogies and visual ethnography methods.

“What does Ixil history mean?” “how should it be framed?” “which are the best periods to understand it?” “What does a proper Ixil historic-epistemology looks like?” “How to traced the boundaries between oral tradition and Ixil research methods?” These were questions I wasn't able to answer. And perhaps I still can't give a satisfactory answer today. All I have is an experience based on collaborative work that started in

august 2015 and ended in July 2016.<sup>73</sup> And this experience yielded something that, in his reply to my email, Campbell named as multidirectional pedagogy. I took some time to think about this notion and tried to create some theoretical and political links.

To some extent, I see multidirectional pedagogy to be related to activist research methods (Hale 2006, 2007).<sup>74</sup> These take as the point of departure an “alignment” of the researcher with the political struggle of one specific social and/or political movement, which defines his/her political positionality during the research process. Epistemologically speaking, this process of making explicit the political alignments gives an advantage to the researcher, who knows precisely from which point of view she/he is investigating, and creates a stronger sense of objectivity, in terms that it gives an account of the blind spot, namely the social position, from which the research is produced. This acknowledgment contrasts with the traditional research that claims impartiality but does not assume that it is being produced from a perspective that has political, and ideological determinants given by the specific positionality of the researchers.

Multidirectional pedagogy also takes as point of departure the alignment of the research process with concrete political struggles but it is located in a shared sense of history and resistance that is complex and open. For instance, my point of departure to establish a relationship with the Ixil University was based in positioning myself in relation to their political process, that demanded me to consider their political becoming

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<sup>73</sup> A second collaboration was carried out immediately after the photographic project was presented in February 2016. The aim was to study what we called *la mirada alzada de la historia Ixil* (the subverted gaze of the Ixil history), in which the researchers interviewed several former guerrilla fighters to understand the causes and processes that led the Ixiles uprising in arms in the 1970s and 1980s. However, I do not include it in this dissertation, because it would be the subject of a new deeper research.

<sup>74</sup> Eventually this would be interesting to discuss with the decolonial critique. That theoretical approach didn't frame in any case this work, however. Giovanni Bat'z (2017) has included a chapter in his dissertation in which he explores the debate between the pedagogic practice of the Ixil University and decolonial theory.

as highly complex, not homogenous and/or foreclosed.<sup>75</sup> Multidirectional pedagogy is a notion that helped me not necessarily to grasp the multiplicity of positions existing in the Ixil region but to understand the historic political positions in which we could create a space of mutual learning that facilitated the articulation of the research process with the political struggle.

The historic overlaps allowed us to speak a common language in which it was usual to share and have opinions about the history of the social struggles, their complexities, the experience of state violence and repression, and the *stubbornness* to imagining the possibility of a utopian world. This is a kind of complicity that is difficult to explain in terms of *rational choices*, but that happens very frequently in these kinds of encounters. It is as if the history of war in Guatemala created a broader community in which feelings, points of view, experiences, struggles, desires and disenchantments are easily exchanged. It happens very often that anecdotes of war, memories of disappeared friends, or heroic stories of combat are shared. The notion of multidirectional pedagogy, thus, produces spaces of exchange in which our pasts intersect in the re-organization of the political process that aims at transforming the conditions that make possible the reproduction of social injustices.

In concrete, in a similar way as in activist research, the definition of the research goals is the result of a process of analysis of historical patterns of domination and constitution of fields of hegemony. These are both epistemically and politically relevant, not only because of their shared intersubjective origin, but also because of the positioning of the research process in a political field that transcends the walls of the Ivory Tower and/or the local political struggles.

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<sup>75</sup> I use the *becoming* as a dialectical alternative to the more static notion of being.

During my time working at the *Asociación Para el Avance de las Ciencias Sociales en Guatemala*, we used to call this *Encuentro de Saberes* (knowledges encounter), and the aim was to consider that the research process could also be understood as a learning and political process in which the political interaction produces knowledge that contributes to enhance both research and political processes. In other words, the relation established during the research/pedagogic process would open a space in which there is no form of direct reciprocation in terms of utilitarianism, but a dynamic of inter-reflexivity that would affect the constitution of the community of knowledge/politics.

Since the time I visited the region in 2013, there was an unspoken understanding of the possible overlaps of our political positionality with the researchers of the Ixil University. The notion of positionality, in contrast to what is ordinarily understood in the United States (an accounting of our identity-power inequalities and relative social, gender and economic privileges), revolved around an inter-reflexive process that identifies the political intersections between our own biographies in the context of Guatemala's political history and the engagement in long term political transformations. Both my family history and my own individual history (the political militancy with the *Unidad Revolucionaria Guatemalteca* during my years at the Universidad de San Carlos, the transition to peace after 1996, the participation and collaboration with social research institutions such as AVANCSO, and social movements such as the Plataforma Agraria) gave me the chance to create intersubjective common areas in the construction of the ethnographic relation. And this was also the point of departure to open a discussion that later translated in the creation of research goals that would be aligned with the redefinition of the political and epistemological field in the region and in the nation.



One of the most powerful reflections brought by the Ixil Universtity was that the Ixil knowledge was there, within the communities, held and shared by the elders, and that the young Ixil researchers should begin a contestation of the kind of knowledge that was being produced about the region.

In some extent, there was a shared interest in investigating the articulation of post-counterinsurgency and neoliberalism. Thus, the aim of the multidirectional pedagogy was determined by the study of these, as well as the possible mechanism to overcome them. This would be the production of a kind of aesthetics that achieves to emancipate itself from the contingency of counterinsurgency and neoliberalism. What we saw in Chapter three and four was that contemporary political art is permanently affected by a kind of utilitarianism and counterinsurgency, which re-inscribes its critical aesthetics in the commodity fetishism and market exchange. In contrast, the notion of multidirectional pedagogy seeks to create spaces of production and exchange that are based on a *gift* exchange economy. This is what I call *the Gift of History in the Ixil Region...*

#### **THE GIFT OF HISTORY, EXCESS AND EXPENDITURE**

Drawing on Mauss (2000) gift economy, Bataille's visions of excess (1985) and the general economy (1998) I intend to analyze a form of political exchange based on criteria beyond utilitarianism.<sup>76</sup> One of the most important challenges posed in contemporary political anthropology arises from the possibility of engaging in collaborative processes that exceed forms of liberal practices of activism. Is it possible to trace, rethink and relocate one of the most classical and canonical anthropological

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<sup>76</sup> This is also explored in detail by Ferguson (1994) in his classic *Anti-Politics Machine*.

theories—the gift economy—within contemporary politics in order to provide a frame of intelligibility to counter the hegemony of utilitarian commodity-market rationalism?

The crisis of multicultural neo-liberalism recently unveiled made evident that a radical and alternative political rationality must be considered and developed.<sup>77</sup> The problem to overcome is, at least, twofold: On the one hand, utilitarianism was the technocratic cornerstone of the notion of *humanitarian war* created and implemented by the counterinsurgency. These practices of activism became constitutive to the institutionalist philosophical apparatus that eventually colonized *common sense* in post-counterinsurgency societies (just as it happened in Guatemala in the context of the post war and the introduction of international aid programs fueled with both millions of dollars and the idea of multicultural development.) The notion of *humanization* coined by the *humanitarian war strategy* was inherent to liberal forms of politics. It remained not only relatively intact during the last 25 years, but also was normalized and naturalized in activist practice.

On the other hand, as long as it naturalizes capitalist modernity and neoliberal strategies of governmentality, which are coded, decoded and displayed as universal vectors of every contemporary society, utilitarianism produces an undermining effect in the political understanding of history. This also weakened the potential production of politicized structures —where hopes, despair or the foreclosure of the future are shared— of feeling (Williams 1978) that could destabilize the reproduction of hegemony and threaten concrete forms of domination.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> That can be easily grasped with the rise of neo-fascist political parties and the proliferation of populist extreme right governments in Europe and the United States.

<sup>78</sup> I am not trying to point out that is not necessary to analyze the social inequalities and their reproduction among political processes and social organizations. On the contrary, I think it is fundamental. My argument, however, tries to explore a path to generate a common ground that

The most evident effect has been the atomization of the social struggle, which entered into a pernicious logic of competition for international funding. This created a state of dis-articulation in which every social struggle could see the *other* either as an ally or as a rival. The result can be grasped in what some of my fellow Guatemalans label as the *oenegización* (NGOization) of the social struggle and the neutralization of the political potential of civil society.

The core of this process of de-politicization lies in the multiplication and dissemination of commodity/market rationality, which sees in every social and political action and interaction forms of expenditure that must demonstrate their correspondence to *ends* in direct relation to specific *utilities*.

Collaborative work must counter the utilitarian rationality in order to re-encounter sociopolitical actions and interactions in which the expenditure returns to the realm of the ritual—which is also the realm of excess. This form of political expenditure does not have any direct, measurable, or quantifiable utility. Instead, it is a form of investment in the production and multiplication of politicized communities (not in the sense of Anderson 2016), whose members encounter themselves in the history of social struggle and the overcoming of State violence.

My argument aims to produce bridges that strengthen communitarian processes of politicization in a broader sense. History provides the shared ground needed to identify the commonality of having faced and prevailed after massive violence and extermination attempts. As Benjamin (XXX) pointed out, history is written by the victors; and history is seen as the ruins of progress. The question I pose intends to fissure the notion of the victor, at least as it is commonly understood. Is the victor the one who deployed more

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articulates the different struggles in a counterhegemonic understanding of history and its role in the politicization of the present.

violence? The one who killed more people? Is the victor the bully? Perhaps we can find the victor in that space where all these stories of struggle and hope intersect, survive, and allow themselves to be told. These incommensurable personal and collective stories weave together the history of the authentic victors, who today still stand and fight.

So, the writing of history must be understood in the same sense as anthropology sees the gift: it is a ritual expenditure. History can embody the principle of hope (Bloch, 1995a, 1995b, 1995c). Of course, the victor is the one who writes history. The Ixiles are writing their history and they are telling this History to other Ixiles.

#### **MAKING HISTORY, TELLING HISTORY, LEARNING HISTORY**

With the collaboration of my colleague Juan Carlos Mazariegos, who was already doing fieldwork in the region, we designed a history class which was divided in two pedagogical components: the first one was a school dynamic based on a conventional teaching-learning practice, that Juan Carlos and I carried out. The purpose was to *teach* Guatemala's 20<sup>th</sup> century political and economic history. The content of this component was basically the canon of historic discourse, which was also used to propose a periodization in order to heuristically differentiate the historic processes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The second component intended to involve the researchers in planning and producing their own research projects. These aimed to reconstruct the local history from the perspective of their communities and the interaction with previous generations. The goal was to generate a visual narrative that would *interpellate* to the canon we proposed in the research design/syllabus. In other words, this narrative should be a history articulated from the perspective of the experience of political and economic transformations during the 20<sup>th</sup> century that was fissured by the experience of the Ixiles

during the same period of time. This would be a history investigated, analyzed and told by the Ixil students. The process was planned and subdivided in four modules that were carefully discussed with Juan Carlos and Pablo Ceto. This covered a timeframe from 1871 to 1996:

*Finca regime and primitive accumulation (1871-1944):* The contents of this module revolved around the expropriation and privatization of communitarian-collective lands during the late 19th century, the creation of the debt system, the mozo colono (permanent finca worker), the jornalero (temporary worker), the Finca plantation and what Juan Carlos (Mazariegos, 2012) names the Finca State. We analyzed how these transformations still have an impact in the way that the local economy has being transformed into a form of primitive capitalism.

*Revolution, political parties, Acción Católica and Costumbre:* In this module we discussed the process that led to the 1944 revolution and the Arevalo and Arbenz governments that opened a 10-years period of democratic government before the 1954 American invasion. We paid special attention to the creation of cooperatives in the rural regions of the country, that were specifically created to carry out the 900 decree, which entailed the principles of the agrarian reform.

*Ixil resistance, and revolutionary organizations:* This module focused on the historic development of the guerrillas in Guatemala. From the first FAR (Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes) until the EGP. ORPA, PGT, and the FAR were discussed and analyzed.

*Military dictatorships and counterinsurgency:* this module studied the military dictatorships that occurred in Guatemala between 1954 and 1986. The key concept of analysis was the counterinsurgency. We discussed in detail the military civic action programs, the alianza para el progreso policies, the notion of humanitarian war, as well as

the fusiles y frijoles, patrullas de autodefensa civil and the creation of the aldeas modelo after the implementation of the scorched earth campaign.

Juan Carlos and I met every second week to *teach* the history class. The method used in class was very simple. Every time we meet the researchers, they presented their findings for a period of time that could vary between two and two hours.<sup>79</sup> The rest of the time we lectured on the day's topic. Some minutes before the end of the class we used to give small questionnaires that the researchers had to use (these were optional and intended to be guides, they could also come with their own questions) during the following two weeks. Their task was to go to their communities and interview an elder or someone who had information about the respective historic period. The quality of the information was very good, and on several times we requested them to carry out a deeper investigation.

The topics of most importance to the participants can be subdivided in three: First, expropriation and usurpation of the communitarian lands in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In this regard, the oral history was alive and there was an abundance of stories that described the subjugation that forced their parents and grandparents to be subjected to the *fincas*. They also remembered the days that they had to come themselves with their parents to work in the coffee plantations and sugar cane *fincas*.

Second, Counterinsurgency and genocide was a central topic drawing their attention. Almost all the participants were born during the armed conflict and grew up in *Aldeas Modelo*.

Third, the stories of rebellion, armed uprising and the participation in the guerrillas. They were capable of retrieving several stories from family members and other

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<sup>79</sup> From now on I will refer to the participants as researchers

community members that took part of the guerrilla warfare. They were also interested in reconstructing the mythical dimension that was created with the image of the *guerrillero*. For instance, they told stories about the *super powers* of guerrilla fighters, who could see in the dark, spend several weeks without eating and were capable of jumping from the top of one mountain to the other. The interest that this topic created among the participants motivated a second research project: *Mirada Alzada de la Historia Ixil* (the upraised gaze of Ixil history) that took place between March and July of 2016. This consisted in the creation of several research teams that reconstructed oral histories of former guerrilleros. They were interested in understanding the motivations that lead their predecessors to raise up in arms and declare war against the Guatemalan State.



Figure 30: Final presentations. By author

As stated above, our aim was not to produce conventional historic documents. This research process was part of a project in which we were interested in producing visual resources that could contribute to future Ixil intellectuals in narrating their history. Since the beginning, we agreed that the final project would have the form of a large photo-exhibit, that eventually could evolve into some other aesthetic form of expression of historic narratives.<sup>80</sup>

### **THE PHOTOGRAPHIC SERIES: AESTHETICS, AND POST-UTILITARIAN ECONOMIES**

The first step of this exercise consisted in giving to some of the researchers a point and shoot camera, that they used to take snapshots of the spaces they considered to be related to their investigation. The following week, after the oral presentation, they showed the images and explained what were they documenting. This process was rich, sometimes confusing, but very pedagogic.

They frequently focused on photographing their everyday. Then, they managed to find things within their quotidian world that dialogued with both the particular assignment and the historic narrative they obtained during the interview. Sometimes, for instance, they went to their maize fields or the places where they feed the animals to photograph a creek that demarcated the land borders, which they related directly with the process of privatization of communitarian and municipal lands carried out in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Another times, they came with images of the remainders of a bomb found in their communities, which could be seen locally as a non-intentional memorial that reflected the war wounds open in the region.

Often, when presenting their fortnightly reports, they also used to bring tools, clothes, food, and other everyday objects to illustrate the recovered stories. These were

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<sup>80</sup> Which was the discussion with Pablo Ceto and Yasmin Hage that has been presented in chapter three and above in this chapter.



significant components that made the reconstruction of history *more real* and the significance of objects, and the production of collective memory helped to make history something that also belonged to them. The exhibit of everyday objects allowed the researchers to establish a material connection with the spoken word so that the experience could be grasped in a multidimensional sensorial register.



Figure 31: By Magdalena Terraza & Diego Paz.<sup>81</sup>

Our research goal was to produce historic data and resources to produce a photographic exhibit.<sup>82</sup> We expected to use the information and the other material

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<sup>81</sup> Magdalena Terraza (2015) also wrote a report about her life in the Comunidades de Población en Resistencia, which is incredibly rich to understand the kinds of singularities we are exploring in this dissertation

<sup>82</sup> At this moment we also discussed about the possibility of making a photography history book. This is an alternative I still have in mind to work with when coming back to Guatemala.

resources to produce, shoot and exhibit a photographic series in which they would enact each historic moment investigated in the previous months.

## **PRODUCTION**

In order to produce the photo-shoot, after finishing the research process, we held a meeting that lasted for two complete mornings. We analyzed every historic period we covered and made a chart on the blackboard to examine, discard and select possible scenes that would be relevant to re-enact during the shoot. They proposed and decided who among them was going to take part in each enactment. They also selected the backgrounds, foregrounds, story, costume design, props. Originally, we planned a schedule for a two-days shoot, but we decided to reduce it to only one day, given that most of them had other everyday activities to carry out. We created a word-table to put everything together and to organize and prepare for the day of the shoot (see figure 41).

The process of selecting the location and getting the military costumes was highly interesting. For those photographs related to the counterinsurgency, they proposed to request permission from Nebaj's military base to use their infrastructures and to request them to lend us some military uniforms. Given that this place was the infrastructure from where the 1980s State violence was planned and executed they considered that there would be no better location to enact the scenes of counterinsurgency. We formed a commission and the next day, in two tuk-tuks (auto rickshaw or mototaxi), we went to the location. It felt really uncanny to come so relaxed into the base that represented the most brutal exercise of power that Guatemala witnessed during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Régimen Finquero-Revolución liberal				
No	Foto	Participantes	Descripción de dramatización	Recursos
1	Familia frente a rancho	María, <del>Cax</del> , Madre de María y nenes.	La familia posa de pie frente al rancho	Machete y hojas para montar rancho
2	Familia frente a parcela	María, <del>Cax</del> , Madre de María y nenes.	La familia posa de pie frente al rancho	Se necesita de una parcela de maíz
3	Anticipo	Juan (da anticipo) Enrique y <del>Roselia</del> (reciben anticipo)	Juan Carlos le entrega dinero a Enrique y a <del>Roselia</del> como anticipo. Todos deben de posar serios. Juan Luis puede tener los botones de la camisa desabrochados y tiene que hacer una pose muy masculina.	Aquí sólo se necesitará dinero en efectivo.
4	Cola de pago	Juan Luis (administrador) Juan Carlos (caporal) Todos (hacen cola frente a mesa)	Juan Luis se sienta a la mesa. Juan Carlos se encuentra de pie al lado derecho de Juan Luis. Ambos hacen cara de reto. El resto hace fila, todos hacen cara de tristeza y algunos de enojo.	Una mesa y una silla
5	Cosecha de Café	Cristina, Magdalena, Feliciano, <del>Roselia</del> , Tino, Gerónimo.	Todos se colocan frente a los cafetales y hacen la mímica de estar cosechando café.	
6	Gente durmiendo en Galera	Cristina, Magdalena, Feliciano, <del>Roselia</del> , Tino, Gerónimo.	Se acuestan sobre los petates y simulan estar durmiendo.	
7	Familia caminando	Martina (mamá) <del>Cax</del> (Papá) Helena (Abuela) Pablo (Abuelo) Cristina (tía)	Todos caminan y con cara de cansancio el padre y la madre cargan a los niños en el <del>cacaxte</del> . (¿deben estar descalzos?)	<del>Cacaxte</del>
8	Familia comiendo	Martina (mamá) <del>Cax</del> (Papá) Helena (Abuela) Pablo (Abuelo) Cristina (tía)	Todos los participantes se tiran en el suelo a comer. Preferiblemente tienen que hacerlo sobre la tierra	<del>Tamalones</del> y <del>Corn Flake</del> Maya
9	Hombre picando piedra		El hombre pica piedra con una almadana	Almadana

Figure 31: Example of logistic table.

I decided not to bring my camera in that moment. It could produce a sense of suspicion and mistrust that was better to avoid. Some years earlier, with the sense of almightiness that impunity gives, the military were used to speaking “freely” and “unreservedly”.<sup>83</sup> With the increase of human-rights denunciations, however, they became more cautious, especially in the aftermath of the genocide trial and several other human rights cases that were at stake at that moment.

A feeling of uncanniness and horror possessed my body during the minutes of the walk from the main road to the entrance to the military compound. I thought about how, not that long ago, many people had done that walk before being killed, mutilated, tortured, raped. My Ixil researcher companions, in contrast, were much more relaxed, and

<sup>83</sup> This is something easily to appreciate for instance in Joshua Oppenheimer’s *The Act of Killing*, where the perpetrators are the ones that carry out the reenactments.

even playful. It was something I could not process easily. Several of them lost relatives during the war, some of them were former guerrilla fighters. It was, probably, not only that the time was different, but that they weren't in the disposition of showing fear at the entrance of the base. It was possible that they are used to negotiating the complexities of the everyday in the Ixil region, where the line between victims and perpetrators is porous and fluid. Some of them were married to former military, other people took part on the *Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil* (PAC) or were active soldiers in the National Army during the 1990s.

Two soldiers stood inside the gatehouse when we finally made it to the entrance. They looked at us intrigued, they had no idea of what we could be doing there. One of them came out of the gatehouse and asked us what we wanted. His tone, despite expressing disorientation, was amiable. One of the researchers responded to him in Ixil. A few seconds later others also took part in the conversations which continued for several minutes. At some point everybody stopped and translated to me. They asked if I could show them my UT-ID and explain them what the project was about. After presenting my *credentials*, the soldier called his superior officer with his radio. In his reply, the officer asked them to put me on the radio to clarify why we wanted to use their installations and uniforms. I explained him that we were producing a series of photographs to illustrate the regional history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and we wanted to carry use it for part corresponding to the 1980s. He stated that, because of security regulations, he was not allowed to give us permission, especially if we intended to take photographs. He also stated that they do not have any uniforms to lend. My fellow Ixil researchers insisted, but after roughly 20 minutes we all gave up. We asked permission to walk around the base, just to wander around and rest. He gave us permission to enter only to the soccer field and a small forest, but he told us that the pass to the barracks was denied. It was a nice, but strange

afternoon. We finished talking about the costumes in the installations of the military base. Several researchers decided to bring or make their uniforms.

The photographs were taken mostly in Nebaj and Chajul. The proposed location for making the first shoots was the land of María's mother. María was one of the researchers, who supported the project since the beginning. She had thought carefully about what could be done in every corner of that location. It offered several different landscapes that could easily be adapted to make the images related to the *Finca*-State. It also offered the advantage that it is exactly in the vicinity of the Fundación Agros, which is Alfred Kaltshmitt's NOG. (This person is one of the civilians mentioned in the introduction that defended Rios Montt in the genocide trial.) The second location was Vi' Patna, which is Chajul's former military base. This was given to Fundamaya as part of the peace process. I was particularly happy with this last choice.<sup>84</sup> Vi'patna was one of the places where I had the first contact with the Ixil University a year earlier and it was there where I first talked with Pablo Ceto about the possibility of carrying out this project. It would be wonderful to close the circle in that way.

## SHOOT

Some days later we met at Fundamaya before sunrise. Benito, a Frenchman who is one of the founders of The Ixil University, and has been working and supporting social struggles in the region since the early 1990s, drove the whole group in his zebra style

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<sup>84</sup> Fundamaya is a local organization created after the signing of the peace accords. It has built on former webs of organization and support created by the EGP during the war and has accompanied several political and social justice and human rights juridical processes in the last two decades. Fundamaya can be also considered the organization that conceived and made possible the project of the Universidad Ixil. The dissertation of my dear friend and colleague, Giovanni B'atz, will make a detailed description of the role of Funamaya and its relation to the Ixil University.

<sup>84</sup> I consider Benito one of the non-Ixiles who best know the region's political and economic history. He is also a very generous person, who shares and helps in every occasion that is needed. I hope to have a chance in the future to write something specific about him and his life story.

painted pickup truck.<sup>85</sup> A group of 25 Ixil researchers came to the shoot. Some of them participated in in the morning, others in the afternoon and some the whole day. The amount of work and concentration for me was overwhelming. I was in charge of directing, shooting, and planning the technical possibilities to carry out the scenes in situ. I had to check every one of the proposed enactments, and try to find the best spot to compose and take the photograph. Perhaps, because of this, I don't have much recollection either in my head or my memory of what happened the day of the shoot.

We split the work in two groups. While we were taking the photographs in one spot, the other group was designated to prepare the costumes and location for the following photograph. The final decision was to make emphases on three of the periods they researched, which would be the *Finca* State, the Counterinsurgency and the *Alzamiento*. We would also make photographs of the 1944 revolution, but these would be only of places that were created during that specific period. We worked 14 hours roughly that day. The shoot ended well, but was very tiring.

I made two copies of the original raw files and hid the hard-drives in different backpacks. The one with my gear was the most vulnerable. I had another backpack with clothes that was less obvious. I also keep the photos in the memory cards, which I hid in my underwear during the *viaje en camioneta* (bus-trip) back home. I never had any problem during my time in the field, but the *asaltos* (robberies) are almost normalized in Guatemala's public transportation system. It was not until I was at my mother's home that I had the chance to make a copy of the photos and uploaded them to the cloud.

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<sup>85</sup> I consider Benito one of the non-Ixiles who best know the region's political and economic history. He is also a very generous person, who shares and helps in every occasion that is needed. I hope to have a chance in the future to write something specific about him and his life story.

I was still working with Daniel Chauche in the edition and the interviews for the film (showed in Chapter Four and analyzed in the previous chapter) and we had a meeting planned. I told him about the whole process and showed him some photographs. I was a little scared of his commentary. Even though we developed this wonderful collaborative relationship that resulted in a nice friendship, I still was his photography apprentice. He checked the photos, looked at me and said something like: “not bad, but for the next time, ask someone to help you. You must focus on the making of the photographs. It is impossible for you alone to do everything.”

He was right. However, I also thought that when doing visual anthropology, one is barely working in optimal conditions. At least, from the exclusive photographic point of view. I was taking a step further in distancing myself from the *verité* photographic style and was not engaging in any kind of documentary photography that would have produced a completely different result. Instead, we were trying to engage more in the practice and debate that filmmakers such as Openheimer have opened in relation to the notion of enactment. We talked a little longer and he was interested in the reflection. In any case, I was intending to look for forms to radicalize Chauche’s idea of producing documentary style photographs that would have a concrete interpellation in the subject and that would contribute to destabilizing the reproduction of hegemonic ideology. To some extent, what we planned with the other researchers of the Ixil University was that these images should be seen more as written academic articles than purely photographic material.

In other words, the photographic event is deeply rooted in the research process that has multiple dimensions. These photographs were preceded by six months of preparation and were framed in the multidirectional pedagogy method we intended to create along the way. But I was also developing a central component for my dissertation,

which would have a significance beyond the pure multi directional-pedagogical relation. This photographic event, would be constitutive to the possibility for me to obtain the Ph.D. degree, which made me think that I could be falling again into a kind of utilitarian mindset?

It was not only about taking photographs with aesthetical exchange-value, as we also discussed and analyzed with Yasmin Hage (Chapter three). The whole point at this moment was to produce a form of expression of history that would contribute to socialize the outcome of the Ixil vernacular research. And that was not exclusively my responsibility. It was a commitment we made since we started the History class and research. They got my back, I got theirs.

## **POST PRODUCTION**

We ended up making a total of 1,500 photos. Most of them were iterations of the same re-enactment. I made a subsequent selection, post production and printing of the photographs. First, I identified 163 photos, from these, with the help of Lizeth Castañeda, I refined and ended up choosing a total of 44 images. The post production was relatively simple. Drawing on the ethnographic experience with the Ixiles, I had no intention of producing blurry, unsaturated, melancholic images. I tried, on the contrary, to find a form of communication of what I learned from Ixil aesthetics during the previous months.

A pet project I carried out consisted in making portraits of the people I was interviewing during the research process. I brought all of my interviewees a printed copy of these portraits. I tried to involve them the most that I could in both the composition of the images, as well as the possible post production alternatives. On several occasions I sent them before copies of their portraits with alternative color balances, brightness and



contrasts adjustments. With time, I learned that they prefer highly saturated, highly contrasted over desaturated and blurrier images.



Figure 32: Postproduction. By Lizeth Castañeda

I tried thus to post-produce the images taking on that learning experience. My intention was not to impose my own aesthetic values, but to adapt and deepen in the multidirectional pedagogy process, so that there would be an easier identification and appropriation of the final results.

After the post-production was done, I sent to print in luster high quality 8 x 12' paper and frame them in a 12' x 14' fine carton. The way in which the photographs were framed resembled the original polaroid format. On the left, right and, top sides I left one-inch margin and three at the bottom. I used one of these black tape labeling machines to enumerate each image.

Juan Carlos was already back in the United States. We held a skype meeting to make a summary of the research results presented by the Ixil researchers when he still was in Guatemala. With that summary, we prepared 18 *gallery texts* in which the research findings were exposed. Each one of these gallery texts indicates which groups of photographs corresponded with their designated numbers printed on the black labels.

### **EXHIBIT AND CEREMONY**

Everything was ready. I took Chauche's advise and asked my colleague, Daniel Perera, to accompany me on this trip, so that he could document the process. He agreed eagerly, but his camera had just broken a couple of weeks earlier. I told him to use one of my cameras and my lenses, I didn't expect to be able to shoot many pictures, anyway.

The exhibition day was settled to be during the same week of the Ixil New Year and the graduation of the third generation of *Técnicos en Desarrollo Rural*.<sup>86</sup> We could take part in several of the New Year ceremonies and also include the photo exhibit as part of the general festivities in Nebaj and the specific festivity of the Ixil university. I was invited to participate in at three different Ixil ceremonies, one in Nebaj, one in Cotzal and the last one in Chajul (this last one was the celebration of the Pap Chajul, the second Friday of *cuaresma*/lent, and happens in the Church of Chajul). These ceremonies are central to the Ixil year change, in which they can pray for their maize fields, animals, family members. Part of the ceremony consists in straightening everything that was crooked in the previous year, something that is achieved when the *baalbatix* (the spiritual guide) lashes you with peache branches. I felt this was also a way in which I was being received as part of the whole event, in which I was being considered a close friend. It was

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<sup>86</sup> This happened exactly one year from the moment I write these lines.

a good chance to prepare and to straighten in advance, with the peach branches used by the *baalbasttix* (the spiritual guide) during the ceremony, everything that could go crooked in the following days.

First we agreed to carry out the exhibit in parallel to the graduation. We wanted to mount the images in some part of the municipal salon where it was going to happen, so that the guests could see them before or after the graduation event.

A total of 43 photographs was the final product of the work. (All of them presented in the photo essay in the preceding chapter.) I packed, and ordered all of them carefully, so that any damage during the trip could be prevented. This time I wasn't traveling in *camioneta*, but in Daniel's car, which was a safer way to travel with delicate materials. The way the images pre-established a sequence and a composition was directly related to the gallery texts, which were the principal curatorial criterion I considered until then.

### **THE IXIL CURATION**

The Universidad-Ixil researchers who took part in the production of the exhibit were very satisfied when they saw the photographs. They had something different in mind for the exhibit, though. They wanted to carry out a preliminary exhibit at the plaza, two days before the official presentation on the graduation day. We met at the plaza with some Ixil researchers to figure out in what place we could hang the images. In my traditional mind, I was expecting to have a wall to hang them. They were not that concerned about it, though. "We'll think about it tomorrow, when everybody is here", they insisted. I stayed for several hours wandering the plaza. With Daniel we discussed

and analyzed every corner, every bench. Neither of us could figure out how to display the photographs.

It was a gray, rainy morning. “It’s impossible to carry out the open air exhibit with this weather”, I told Daniel. He looked at me with concern and said “the photographs can be damaged with the rain”. We had to meet the group of Ixil researchers at 7am. I phoned Cristina and Feliciano, who had been organizing several of activities planned for that week, and told them about my concerns. “come to the Plaza”, they said. “We will fix it here.”

I brought the envelope with the 46 photographs to the Plaza. Daniel had already prepared the equipment. I insisted once again that the rain could ruin the fine-prints, and the only possibility to re-print them would be back in Guatemala City, which was more than 8 hours away. The rain wasn’t very strong, though. It is what we call the *chipi-chipi*, which is a kind of dense drizzle. Pedro (he was a researcher and also an *autoridad* Ixil in Nebaj) told us to go to the *Alcaldía Indígena* room, so we could show the photos and figure out what to do. They observed the prints with great satisfaction in their faces and talked in Ixil for several minutes.

Then, Kax, said something like: “ok, we will make a selection of the photographs, then we will wrap them with the plastic we use to wrap school notebooks.” In that moment I understood that the curatorial process had started a new direction that didn’t depend on me any longer. They knew exactly what they wanted to. They added some photographs that they printed and included them in the series. Then, they made a large plastic sheet and taped the photos on it. With the rest of the plastic, they covered the front of the photographs and took the sheet to the plaza to hang it from a fence near the church. They had a speaker already there. Mat took the microphone and started to narrate their research on Ixil history. When she was tired, a relief took her place, and so on. Several of

the people at the plaza came to hear what she was saying. It was a festivity day and it was also the space where most people meet to socialize. The teenagers use the plaza also as a space to flirt and it is there where political meetings take place.

Two days later we did the exhibit at the municipal hall, as it was originally planned. Dozens of neighbors came this time to see the activities. There were also local TV channels, authorities of other Mayan groups, representatives of Guatemala's Government and the United Nations.

**PHOTO ESSAY: EXHIBIT**



Figure 33: By Daniel Perera



Figure 34: By Daniel Perera



Figure 35: By Daniel Perera



Figure 36: By Daniel Perera





Figure 37: By Daniel Perera



Figure 38: By Daniel Perera



Figure 39: By Daniel Perera



Figure 40: By Daniel Perera



Figure 41: By Daniel Perera



Figure 42: By Daniel Perera



Figure 43: By Daniel Perera



Figure 44: By Daniel Perera





Figure 45: By Daniel Perera



Figure 46: By Daniel Perera



Figure 47: By Daniel Perera



Figure 48: By Daniel Perera



Figure 49: By Daniel Perera



Figure 50: By Daniel Perera



Figure 51: By Daniel Perera



Figure 52: By Daniel Perera





Figure 53: By Daniel Perera

## CONCLUSION

This final experience and chapter has allowed exploring collaborative non-utilitarian research projects. The place of encounter provided by history works either as an epistemological space to generate political positioning and/or an epistemological space from where it is possible to exchange questions and to trace the goals of the research project. This form of exchange is not circumscribed upon the rationality of liberal and neoliberal capitalism, but upon the need for creating social bonds that can contribute in articulating a political community based on the dissent against the national project (and its monistic understanding of economic development, and cultural/national identity).

This aims, on the one hand, for the production of aesthetic attunements expressing forms of radical alterity related to the experience of Guatemala's coffee capitalism (Guatemala's modernity) and the post-counterinsurgency imagined community. On the other hand, these attunements focus not in the reproduction and petrification of the suffering, but on the inversion (*Umkehrung*) of the notion of *victors*, in relation to the narration of history. The multidirectional pedagogy intends to articulate this space of possibilities, in which different kinds of knowledges are exchanged and aligned in the direction of producing a political effect defined by a history that is told by those who experienced its aftermath, in the spaces/places where it happened.

Even though it is almost impossible to escape from all kinds of utilitarian relations, the types of exchange produced in these experiences build on the idea of the *gift of history*. The gift is related to its most simple anthropological meaning, in which something is given without expecting a direct, individual reciprocation. The gift of history in the context of multidirectional pedagogical projects is intended to see what comes from the past as something that the ancestors gave beyond any expectation of reciprocity.

Beyond academia, the use of alternative expressive strategies is quintessential in the generation of non-utilitarian forms of political research. In other political/sociocultural realities, the utilization of visual forms of language can contribute to a more comprehensive and communicative way of transmitting historic knowledges and affects. Writing history, in this regard, is a challenge that has to overcome the logocentric act of writing, in order to engage in other forms of producing discourse. Visual language can contribute to organizing the findings of local researchers in a coherent and communicable discourse that can be later socialized with other members of the alternative political community. This is a form of expression that is not intended exclusively to reproduce a form of knowledge, but also to capture and show the specific affect that emerges from the lived experience of history.

## Conclusions

### WHAT WAS THIS ABOUT?

The point of departure to this dissertation was the problematization of the outcome of the low intensity conflict in post-war Guatemala. In the introduction I proposed that this idea was not supposed to be seen as a hypothesis that I intended to validate in a positivistic rationality, but as a heuristic that opens possibilities of thinking and politicizing the present. The aim was to destabilize the production and reproduction of cultural hegemony in relation to the indisputability of military victory, which yields complicity with counterinsurgency ideology.

Building on the ethnographic relation established with a former guerrilla fighter I proposed that it is possible to dispute the idea of an absolute counterinsurgency victory. I frame this by establishing the post-counterinsurgency as the factor that would allow making not only innovative hermeneutics of the present, but also to invest in intersubjective processes of reflexivity in which the notion of singularity would interact dialectically with the notion of potentiality. The context of the post-counterinsurgency was specified in a twofold analytical strategy that intended to grasp how counterinsurgency was a strategy designed to over-determine the present under the axiom of fighting the war by other means. Thus, the notion of over-determination was permanently questioned and, in its place, I propose that counter insurgency can be understood as a contingency with which, contemporary social struggles and solidary research, must deal.

In order to achieve this goal of problematizing the notion of counterinsurgency over-determination, I carried out a series of experiments in relation to the production of aesthetic reflections and visual anthropological ethnographic experiments/singularities in which these kinds of questions were posed.

Aesthetics was analytically delimited as the production of a regime of the sensible (or cultural field) in which the aftermath of counterinsurgency politics works as a mechanism to stress the dialectical relation between politicization and depoliticization. To frame the aesthetic dimension of post-counterinsurgency (and the dialectics of singularity and potentiality) I draw on the notions of *war by other means* and *humanitarian war* in order to grasp the production of a regime of the sensible in which consensus with counterinsurgency ideology is intended to be achieved. In this regard, I propose that the contingency of post-counterinsurgency aesthetics can further be grasped as built environments in which the sensible is modulated and attuned in order to produce spaces of identification with the affective dimension of politics imposed by counterinsurgency.

Both *war by other means* and *humanitarian war* were strategies/notions designed in the context of the low intensity conflict in order to neutralize and stabilize the aesthetic regime. However, my proposition was that this process of stabilization and depoliticization never succeeded completely. In this dissertation I have intended to provide analytical deliberations and ethnographical experiences that aimed at showing the impossibility of creating spaces that completely succeed in the desensitization and neutralization of politics. I proposed, in contrast, that the emergence of the voices, narratives, faces and testimonies of survivors of counterinsurgency politics are contingent upon the emergence of new forms of dissent and radicalization of political spaces of sensibility. To analyze this in a deeper fashion I developed a multisite ethnography composed by archival research, and three visual-arts collaborations.

First, I studied the design, implementation and impact of humanitarian war strategies, in order to provide documental references to understand how counterinsurgency introduced the notion of military civic actions. The counterinsurgency

aim—as is well known—was to produce a change in the minds and hearts of population that could be prone to sympathize with the insurgency.

This was a fundamental element to the structuration of counterinsurgency low intensity conflict and has an evolution that spans for more than thirty years (from the 1960s to the 1990s). I propose that during the 1980s the *military civic action* evolves organically into the development of low intensity conflict, which was constitutive to the introduction of the *humanitarian war* notion. This process focused firstly on the implementation of low impact actions based on the creation of infrastructures (medical posts, schools, small roads) designed to modify the *traditional* structure of indigenous communities and, later, on the implementation of more comprehensive notions of development which included the *aldeas modelo* and *de polos de desarrollo*. These concepts arose parallel to U.S. international politics such as Kennedy's Alliance for Progress and Nixon's National Security Doctrine.

This dissertation provided an analysis of the structure and content of Guatemalan and U.S. documentations designed to transform the material reality of the population in order to prevent them from becoming *communists*. This investigation led to reflections on the effect that *humanitarian war* has in the transformation of the affective (and *desiring*) atmospheres in which civilians reproduced their everyday life by re-attuning the material conditions of existence of the population. In this regard, I have proposed that this strategy was also designed to create a desire regime which intended to reconfigure and stabilize the structure of antagonisms constitutive of the political in local spaces.

Then I linked the Benjaminian notion of reproducibility with Mauss & Hubert's mimetic faculties. The analysis focused on the study of a report written by Ray Elliot that narrates the tour made by four dentists to Nebaj in 1982. The description, which grasps the obsession with perfecting teeth pulling process in the middle of the genocide, allows

to take a step further: The use of visual and written forms of representation in which the Ixiles are inscribed in relation to counterinsurgency *representational mechanism* allows to hypothesize that the integration *mimetic faculties* was constitutive to the process of *humanization* implemented by *military civic actions*.

I proposed that counterinsurgency civic action programs intended to foreclose the ontological multiplicity in which the Ixiles reproduced their everyday. *Military civic action programs* aimed to transform the political sensorial and mimetic regime into an enclosed *monistic* relation between the representations of friendship and the representations of enmity. The goal of counterinsurgency was to foreclose the ontological status of the human upon representations that extended the logic of war in the context of implementing development/medical aid programs.

Finally, I presented and analyzed the collaborative project carried out with Yasmin Hage in which the gallery was problematized as a space in which counterinsurgency mimetic faculties can extend as forms of multinational neoliberal capitalism. I introduced the notions of *alienation of pain* and *memory fetishism* to analyze the process in which the work of political art in the post-counterinsurgency achieves to produce and obtain *abstract exchange value*.

I draw on Benjamin's canonical essay, "The work of art in the age of mechanical reproducibility," to understand how, behind the opposition of fascist aesthetization of politics aesthetics and the socialist politicization of arts, lies a form of neoliberal capitalism that alienates not only the pain of others, but also the Other from the built environments in which the representations memory, suffering, trauma, and pain, take place. In this regard, I analyze how contemporary art has the potential to disrupt the forms of production and reproduction of capitalism.

Later I focused on the artistic production of Daniel Chauche war photography in relation to process of projection of desire in the post-counterinsurgency. This analysis builds firstly on a documentary film I made in 2015 to register the expedition made to find the *autodefensor*, one of the most iconic characters in Chauche's photography. The whole section articulates Chauche's artistic story, with his aesthetics and politics, in order to understand what constitutes the core of desire production and reproduction in the age of post-counterinsurgency.

Chauche's documentary style photography does not aim to generate representations of war, or the documentation of the *real*, but to use the style of documentary photography as a fine art practice that triggers aesthetical, psychological and political reactions. This practice stresses the desires of the spectator, by undressing his gaze from any pretention of neutrality.

The difference between documentary photography and documentary style photography resides in the separation between the expectations and calculations of the photographer in relation to the emotional response that the photograph will produce in the spectator, who has a predetermined narrative that colonizes the act of observation and production of meaning. Post counterinsurgency war photography has the tendency to trigger political projections that can be unveiled by following and analyzing the trajectory of specific iconic images related to the counterinsurgency (which was the specific case of the *autopatrullero* portrait and the documentary film included in this dissertation).

In this regard Chauche's is a kind of non-representational photography, especially the white background series, in which he subtracts the photographed subject from his context. This functions as a mechanism to interrogate the spectator, who tends to fill the white background with any kind of political and social desire. The white background



series functions as a form of contemporary art installation that aims to bring to the foreground the relevance of counterinsurgency in the constitution of the political gaze.

The final section was devoted to the analysis of the collaborative project carried out with the Universidad Ixil, in which a process of reconstruction of 20<sup>th</sup> century history was made. The results of this research combined the canonical historic discourse with the recuperation of oral sources that allowed the Ixil researchers/students to create a narrative located within their most immediate reality. The first part of this section is the reproduction of the photographic exhibition (a photo essay) that presents the research results exhibited in Nebaj in February 2016, and the second part is an analysis of the process in which the notion of multi-directional pedagogy is introduced.

This collaboration allowed to propose a mechanism to engage in forms of activist research that are actively investing in transcending the hegemony of utilitarianism in the post-counterinsurgency. This aims to produce processes of political alignment that are not defined by an end-means rationality in which the outcomes of every inter-action can be calculated as a specific form of utility, but as a process of production of political community built on the uncertainty of history. It was suggested in this section that history can be understood as a gift (in a canonical sense) that was given by the survivors and victims of counterinsurgency and 20<sup>th</sup> century capitalism and that stimulated processes of articulation in the post-counterinsurgency era. This gift not only contributed in the reconstruction of the historic narrative and photographic exhibition, but also in the articulation of new forms of political engagement in both the local and national planes.

In this regard, this dissertation achieved to engage partially in the kind of experimental relation in terms of creating non-utilitarian forms of aesthetic production. Taking in consideration that the idea of analyzing the collaborative work in non-utilitarian terms was originated during the research process, it is normal to consider that

more work must be done in that direction. I consider, however, that in both the Ixil University and the Yasmin Hage cases, there was a deeper possibility in practicing non-utilitarian forms of reciprocity, to engage deeper in historical and theoretical analysis, and political practices. In both cases, I have established a longer-term commitment and we are planning to carry out other experiments to analyze deeper the idea of non-utilitarian collaborations. With the Ixil University, there is already a conversation to work in the recuperation of the life stories of former Ixil guerrilla fighters and to look towards forms of visual presentation of these stories. The idea is to create a form of visual archive that presents the history of the uprising from their perspective.

Despite a lack of non-utilitarian forms of reciprocity could be identified in in the case of the collaboration with Chauche, one of the central arguments of this dissertation emerged in at this point. This is related to the need to destabilize the position of public, which directly assign specific meaning to forms of art related to war photography in particular and political art in general.

### **THEY DIDN'T WIN THE WAR?**

The point of departure to this dissertation consisted in problematizing the *doxa* that makes common sense the idea that counterinsurgency's victory is undeniable. In this dissertation I have presented ethnographical experiences that allow to think that, on the cultural-aesthetic dimension, it is possible to dispute the idea of an overwhelming victory that redefined the political coordinate system by neutralizing the structure of antagonisms that constitute the political in Guatemala. Even though there are large numbers of Guatemalans that embrace counterinsurgency hegemony, there are also several initiatives and social processes and new subjectivities, in which dynamics of politicization and

radicalization are taking place. This dissertation provides a piece of evidence to support the idea that the regime of the sensible created in the aftermath of the genocide trial is not stable, and that it created the conditions of impossibility to achieve stability in the aesthetic regime by introducing the notion of war by other means.

What I presented in this dissertation were just few of these forms of politicization and questioning of counterinsurgency hegemony. This dissertation has built on a contingency that implies that, even if counterinsurgency defines the possibilities of politicized aesthetics, it also provides the conditions of possibility to fissure it. In other words, what this dissertation has aimed is to open a debate regarding the constitution of aesthetic dimensions of reality that contest the stability of neoliberal post-counterinsurgency era.

It is impossible thus to consider that the war was won in terms of cultural and political production and reproduction after the democratization and pacification. What we are able to witness is the emergence of political practices that entail the potentiality to articulate dynamics that tend to subvert counterinsurgency ideology. This can be grasped by analyzing not only the processes that produce massive victimhood genocide representations (the structure of antagonism), but particularly by the understanding of the resilience and proliferation of forms of dissent that can contribute in creating an eventual community of hope.

#### **REGARDING POSITIONALITY, RACISM AND GENDER**

I consider it is important for the future version of this text, which I hope to be a book, to problematize deeper the pending aspect regarding positionality, racism and gender. I believe this lack is mostly evident in the chapter related to war photography,

where the relations we established with the *Autodefensor* were described, but still lacked of depth in the analysis of the power inequalities related to class and race expressed in the triadic articulation of the photographic event.

As pointed out in Chauche's chapter, I believe, that this reflection must take as point of departure the problematization of a potential flattening academic gaze that do not engage in processes of mutual interpellation and collaborative processes with artists and protagonists of these forms of representation. This is something I consider have done in my dissertation, but it is necessary to explore forms of communication and exposition of these complexities within academic spaces that are not used to engage in doing research in the context of the production of aesthetic practices.

The second aspect I would like to explore deeper is the description of the ethnographic process in the last chapter, in order to provide more contextual data that would allow to know better the demographics, gender and ethical specificities of the ixil researchers. Despite I do have the information, the limitations of time and funding to finish this dissertation did not allow me to carry out this task.

## **PENDING TASKS**

My original research goal was to articulate the notion of post-counterinsurgency with the proliferation of urban private security aesthetics. In this regard, it was possible to carry out the ethnographic research in exclusive zones of Guatemala City. This included the organization of a photographic exhibition that allowed to produce reflexive processes to denaturalize the dissemination of post-counterinsurgency aesthetics in their everyday life. The outcome of this experience was enlightening in terms of studying and understanding the mechanisms by which counterinsurgency became hegemony among

several upper middle class sectors in Guatemala City. In case of getting a post-doc and/or preparing a book, I expect to invest more time in analyzing and writing at least two or three chapters about this experience. In doing so, I would be able to produce a comprehensive picture regarding the reproduction of post-counterinsurgency security aesthetics in the urban everydayness.

Given that opportunity, I would be interested in showing not only how this post-counterinsurgency security aesthetics has transformed and colonized the social reproduction in the micro political level, but also how it fails with relatively ease. The most rewarding learning experience obtained during the preparation and execution of this photo exhibition was that urban Guatemalans can develop awareness of the presence and dominance of counterinsurgency aesthetics within the architectonics of urban everyday life. Then, they are able to criticize it and realize how they have become consumers of specific forms of affective labor that produce value by appropriating their own ordinary fears.

The second pending task that I would like to develop is related to the life stories of some of Ixil researchers that took part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century history project. In doing so, I would be able to express more clearly the way in which they were able not only to survive counterinsurgency violence, but to prevail in terms of establishing new processes of politicization. These processes are articulated with two dimensions. The first one is related to the understanding of how historical processes affected the constitution of their everyday life; and the second one with the understanding that the quotidian built environments are affected by the *humanitarian* war policies during the 1980s.

In this regard, the interviews I carried out would provide evidence to support the hypothesis that counterinsurgency did not achieved their goal of producing a new form of

hegemony that would neutralize and stabilize the spaces in which politicization tends to radicalize.

Both *they didn't win the war* and *post-counterinsurgency* are notions that open a debate that aims to understand the possibilities of articulating processes of politicization with the constitution of aesthetic experiences and practices. But as I insisted during the whole text, these notions are not over-determinations, but contingent elements of the social reality. In this regard, I consider fundamental to continue the collaborative process with the subjects that took part of this ethnography, in order to find deeper methods to question the reproduction of the social order and to imagine possible strategic alternatives.

I have already carried out a second history class/research with the students of the Ixil University that focused on the uprising of former guerrilla fighters and we are preparing a document in which these stories will be told.

I consider that, in the same way that this investigation used visual media to carry out the research, it is important to find ways to develop forms of expression that allow presenting these findings beyond the traditional written format. This implies the production of visual projects that allow the participants to present their research findings for those who are not used to take part of the academic writing culture. Building a political relation upon this is the challenge I am interested to carry out for the following years.

## **Appendix**

### **The Ixil history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Photo Exhibit)**

#### **PRESENTATION**

This is an expositive and not an analytical appendix intended to show the final outcome of a six-month collaborative research project on the 20<sup>th</sup> century's Ixil history. This research was carried out by the *Universidad Ixil* and was part of a history and research class coordinated by me and Juan Carlos Mazariegos.

Neither of us claim total authorship of these research results. On the contrary, the authorship of these is shared with the ixil researchers that carried out the reconstruction of their local histories. This was a process in which the researchers engaged in biweekly assignments to survey among their communities how specific periods were experienced and how they are remembered and told in the oral tradition. The project consisted in designing specific enactments in order to represent the historic periods researched by the participants in their localities.

The exhibition took place during the last week of February 2016, in Nebaj. It was first presented in the central plaza and later in the municipal hall, parallel to the graduation of the XXX promotion of Ixil technicians in rural development.

## DEBT AND COFFEE PLANTATIONS

### 01 Endeudamiento y habilitaciones.

Con la transformación de la economía a finales del siglo XIX la finca cafetalera se convierte en el principal eje de producción en Guatemala. Algo que caracterizaba a la finca cafetalera era la demanda masiva de mano de obra para cosechar el café. Uno de los mecanismos para lograr obtener esa mano de obra consistió en el endeudamiento de las poblaciones indígenas. El Estado de Guatemala aprobó leyes para obligar a las comunidades indígenas a endeudarse con los finqueros. El habilitador era el personaje que usualmente se encargaba de crear estas deudas para luego forzar a los trabajadores a ir a trabajar a las fincas. En esta imagen, los estudiantes de la Universidad Ixil hacen una representación de el momento en que las deudas eran adquiridas que era también el momento en el que sus abuelos y abuelas quedaban sujetos a la voluntad de las fincas.

### 01 Indebtedness and *habilitaciones*

With the transformation of the economy during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the coffee plantation (*finca*) became the main productive axis of Guatemala's economy. One of the main characteristics of the *finca* was the demand it had for massive amounts of labor for the harvesting of coffee. The most common mechanism to obtain this labor was the creation of indebtedness systems that directly affected the indigenous populations. Guatemala's State passed several laws to force the indigenous communities to establish debts with the *finca* owner (el *finquero*). The *habilitador/enganchador* (or intermediary) was the character in charge of creating and implementing these debt systems to force the workers to go to the *fincas* during the harvesting season. In this image, researchers from Ixil-University carry out an enactment of the moment in which the debt was acquired, which was also the moment in which their grandparents were subjected to the will of the *fincas*.





02/03 Preparación para el trabajo en las fincas.

Previo a ir a trabajar a las fincas los ixiles tenían que alistar los preparativos necesarios. Las mujeres se encargaban de preparar alimentos especiales que aguantaran varios días sin descomponerse. En este díptico los estudiantes de la Universidad Ixil han realizado una dramatización en la que se representa el momento de preparación de los alimentos.

02/03 Preparation for the work at the *fincas*

Before having to work at the *fincas* as seasonal laborers, the Ixiles had to arrange all necessary preparations to carry out the trip that could last several days. The women were in charge of preparing special food that would last the duration of the journey without spoiling. This diptych shows the enactment in which the Ixil demonstrate the process by which the food was prepared.





04/05 Camino a las fincas de café.

El camino a las fincas duraba varios días. Las familias enteras caminaban muchos kilómetros, casi siempre sin calzado, por senderos y montañas hasta llegar a sus destinos. Los niños, que muchas veces no tenían la energía suficiente para caminar todo el recorrido, eran cargados en unas plataformas especiales llamadas *cacaxtes*. En este díptico los estudiantes de la Universidad ixil han hecho una representación de esa parte de la historia que les tocó vivir no solo a sus ancestros, sino también a varios de ellos.

04/05 The trip to the coffee *fincas*

The trip to the *fincas* lasted several days. Entire families walked several kilometers, barefoot, through rocky trails and mountains until they arrived at their destination. The children, who frequently didn't have the energy to walk the entire route, were carried by the parents in a special platform named *cacaxte*. This diptych shows the enactment that the Ixil researchers did to represent that moment of history that their ancestors and some of them experienced during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.





06-09 Cosecha del café.

La cosecha del café se prolongaba por varios meses. Los trabajadores quedaban atados a la finca durante ese tiempo, sin poder disponer libremente de su tiempo y voluntad. En la mayoría de los casos eran los jefes de familia (padres y abuelos) los que adquirían la deuda. Las mujeres ayudaban a sacar el jornal, pero casi nunca recibían contrato o se les pagaba menos. En esta composición de cuatro fotografías los estudiantes de la Universidad Ixil han elaborado una dramatización para representar el tiempo que los antepasados tuvieron que pasar cosechando en las plantaciones cafetaleras para el beneficio de los finqueros.

06-09 Coffee Harvest

The coffee harvest lasted for several months. The Ixil workers were generally obliged to stay with the *finca* during that time. In most cases the heads of household (fathers and grandfathers that lend money to pay food or medicines) acquired the debt. The women helped to *sacar el jornal* (to finish the workload), but it was rare for them to receive any kind of contract or they were paid much less than the men. The Ixil researchers, in this composition of four photographs, undertake a re-enactment of the time in which their ancestors passed entire seasons harvesting coffee in the plantations, which was basically for the benefit of the *finquero* (*coffee plantation owner*).











#### 10 Parcelas en las fincas.

Además de los trabajadores temporales (*jornaleros*), también existían los *mozos colonos* en las fincas. Estos no migraban desde la región ixil, sino que permanecían permanentemente dentro de los linderos de la plantación cafetalera. La vida de estos trabajadores se encontraba sometida a la voluntad de los *finqueros*. Los *mozos colonos* nacían y morían en la finca. En la mayoría de las vees, en vez de recibir un salario, a los *mozos colonos* les era “prestada” una parcela de tierra en la cual pudieran cultivar el maíz necesario para alimentarse. En esta fotografía los estudiantes de la universidad ixil han hecho una representación de los *mozos colonos* frente a la parcela que se les otorgaba en la finca.

#### 10 *Parcelas* (patches of land) within the *fincas*

In addition to the seasonal workers (*jornaleros*), another kind of worker, called *mozos colonos* lived on the *fincas*. These people didn't migrate from the Ixil region (some of them did), but remained permanently within the boundaries of the coffee plantation. These workers' lives were subjected to the will of the *finqueros*. The *mozos colonos* were born and died in the *finca*. Most of the time, instead of a salary, they received a *parcela* (patch of land) that they used for growing maize fields to produce their food. In this photograph the Ixil researchers made an enactment to show a group of *mozos colonos* standing at the *parcela* which was given to them at the *finca*.



### 11 Pago de jornales

La forma de control del trabajo que llevaban a cabo los finqueros era denominada jornal. El jornal era registrado en un libro en la finca y en una libreta de papel que se denominaba libreta de jornales. Para saldar las deudas adquiridas con el finquero y recibir un mínimo salario, los trabajadores debían de cumplir una cantidad diaria de jornales. Según las investigaciones que realizaron los estudiantes de la Universidad Ixil, una queja frecuente era que los administradores no anotaban correctamente la cantidad de jornales. Esto afectaba a los trabajadores, quienes tenían que repetir el trabajo que ya habían realizado. Para mantener bajo control a los trabajadores, era común que el recurrir al miedo o al uso de la violencia, que en ocasiones podía derivar en el asesinato del trabajador que llegase a protestar. Estas formas de violencia nunca fueron castigadas por el Estado. Por el contrario, hasta los años 40 del siglo XX, el Estado le daba una autoridad casi absoluta a los finqueros para mantener bajo control a los trabajadores mediante el uso de la violencia. En algunas fincas, incluso, existían celdas para encarcelar a los trabajadores durante el tiempo que el finquero considerara necesario. En esta imagen los estudiantes de la Universidad Ixil han hecho una dramatización del momento en el que era pagado el jornal.

### 11 Payment of *Jornales* (working-day)

The *finqueros* controlled the workers using the mechanism named *jornales*. The *jornal* was [an account?] registered in a notebook that belonged to the *finca*, as well as in a *libreta de jornales* (working-day card). In order to pay the debts acquired with the *finquero* and to receive a minimal salary, the workers were forced to carry out a specific amount of *jornales*. The Ixil researchers found out that a frequent complaint was that the *finca* overseers did not correctly write the number of *jornales* done by the worker. This was a way to force them to do extra *jornales* and to repeat the workload they carried out already. In order to subjugate protesting workers the use of violence was frequent, and could include the murder of rebellious workers. These forms of violence were never controlled or punished by the State. On the contrary, until the 1940s, Guatemala's State gave the *finqueros* absolute power over the life and death of the indigenous workers. At some *fincas* there were even cells to imprison the rebellious workers when the *finquero* or the overseer considered it necessary. In this image the Ixil researchers have done an enactment in which the *jornal* payment was done.





12/13 Galeras

Las condiciones de vida de los trabajadores temporales en las fincas eran precarias. Muchas veces dormían en galeras improvisadas, en el suelo de tierra, y no tenían acceso a ningún servicio sanitario o agua potable, lo que hacía que enfermedades como la disentería fuera común entre los niños. También eran comunes las pulgas, chinches y otros bichos que transmitían enfermedades y ponían en riesgo la vida de todos. Las investigaciones realizadas por los estudiantes arrojaron testimonios no sólo de los abuelos y los padres, sino también de algunos ellos mismos, a quienes les tocó vivir esa situación durante su infancia. En este díptico los estudiantes de la Universidad Ixil realizaron una dramatización para representar las inclemencias a las que eran expuestos en las fincas.

12/13 *Galeras*

The seasonal workers' life conditions at the *fincas* were precarious. They often had to sleep on the floor, in makeshift *galeras*, with no access to drinking water or any sanitary service, which made the outbreak of diseases such as dysentery among children common. Fleas, bedbugs, and other pests were present everywhere, exposing all the workers to sickness and discomfort. The investigation carried out by the Ixil researchers with their grandparents, parents and themselves expressed the hard living conditions that they had suffered since their infancy. This diptych shows the dramatization made by the Ixil researchers in which they represented the *galeras* and the inclemencies to which they were exposed during their time in the *fincas*.





## 1. *Vialidad* And Vagrancy.

14/15 Trabajos de vialidad y leyes de vagancia.

Durante el último cuarto del siglo XIX surgió otra modalidad para obligar a los ixiles a trabajar sin derecho a obtener un salario. El Estado de Guatemala aprobó las leyes de vialidad. Según estas leyes, aquellos Ixiles que no fueran mozos colonos, que no tuvieran una deuda con alguna finca, o que no pudieran pagar altos impuesto anuales, tenían que trabajar en la construcción de carreteras o vías de ferrocarril en todo el país. A estos trabajadores se les llamó *Zapadores*. Para evitar estos trabajos pesados, muchos Ixiles no tenían más opción que endeudarse o convertirse en mozos colonos de alguna finca. Ya en el siglo XX, en los años 1930's, el Estado de Guatemala también aprobó las leyes contra la vagancia. Según estas leyes, era "vago" todo aquel que no tuviera un "contrato" de trabajo con alguna finca, que no tuviera una profesión u oficio reconocido por el Estado, o que no tuviera cultivadas mas de tres manzanas de tierra con café, azúcar o tabaco, o cuatro manzanas cultivadas con maíz. Las personas que no cumplían con estos mandatos debían al Estado hasta 150 días de trabajo sin derecho a salario alguno. Las personas que no cumplían con estas leyes eran llevadas a la cárcel por varios meses.

14/15 *Trabajos de vialidad* and Vagrancy laws

A new technique of exploiting Ixiles and forcing them to work for free emerged in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century through a state sponsored law called "*leyes de vialidad*". These laws stated that men and women who did not work as *mozos colonos*, who didn't have any debt with the *fincas*, and who could not pay for the annual taxes, were forced to work in the construction of infrastructure such as roads and railroad all around the country. These workers were named *zapadores*. To avoid this non-remunerated work, some Ixiles had no alternative than getting in deb or becoming *mozos colonos* in some *finca*. They did not have a choice.

Guatemala's State approved the *leyes contra la vagancia* (vagrancy laws) in the 1930s, which defined idle people as everyone that did not have a contract with a finca, professional career or occupation acknowledged by Guatemala's State. Idle people were also those that didn't own at least three *manzanas* (local area measurement system) of land cropped with maize fields. The people (males) that did not comply with these requirements were forced to give 150 days of free labor. Those that did not comply were imprisoned for undetermined periods of time. The Ixil researchers have done an enactment of how their ancestors were forced to work in the construction of the road to Nebaj in the 1930s





## 1944 REVOLUTION

### 16-20 Período 44-54

Si bien con la revolución del 44 se produjeron cambios significativos en la política guatemalteca a nivel nacional, las investigaciones realizadas por los estudiantes de la universidad ixil muestran que en la localidad no se vivieron cambios significativos en el modo de vida. Se identificó el apareamiento de los partidos políticos, así como el apareamiento de instituciones del Estado (escuelas y el IGSS). Uno de los aspectos que sí identificaron fue la formación de Comités Agrarios Locales y los procesos de expropiación de tierras ociosas, que fue uno de los pilares de la Reforma Agraria. En esta composición de cinco fotografías, los estudiantes identificaron lugares específicos que fueron relevantes durante ese período.

### 16-20 1944-1954 period

1944 revolution produced sensible changes in Guatemala's national politics, but the investigation carried out by the Ixil researchers showed that these changes were barely felt in the Ixil region. The Ixil researchers found that the political parties, and state institutions such as social security appeared in the region for the first time. However, one of the central topics they identified was the formation of the *Comités Agrarios Locales* (agrarian reform committees) and the expropriation of idle lands owned by the *finqueros* that led to the Agrarian Reform. In this composition of five photographs the researchers identified places that were relevant during that time.













## UPRAISING

### 21 Sublevación ixil

Los abusos que los finqueros habían cometido contra la población ixil se tradujeron en la acumulación de la rabia y el descontento. Estos sentimientos, eventualmente, llevarían a que muchos ixiles decidieran sublevarse contra la finca y el Estado de Guatemala que le servía. En esta fotografía una estudiante de la Universidad Ixil hace una representación del momento previo a la sublevación.

### 21 Ixil Uprising

The abuses committed against the Ixiles during the 20<sup>th</sup> century evolved as accumulated rage and discontent. These feelings led eventually to the Indigenous uprising against the *finca system*. This was later expressed by the Ixiles as a rebellion against the State of Guatemala. In this photograph, an Ixil researcher performs a re-enactment of the moment that preceded the uprising and the insurgency.



22/23 Fuerzas irregulares locales y comités clandestinos locales

Este hartazgo de los ixiles por los abusos de las fincas y el Estado de Guatemala coincidió con el momento en el que el Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres (EGP) inició a formar su frente militar en la región. En la primera imagen de este díptico se aprecia una dramatización hecha por los estudiantes de la Universidad Ixil en la que representan los primero acercamientos hacia los ixiles de un representante del comité clandestino local. En la segunda imagen los estudiantes realizaron una dramatización para mostrar el momento en el que los ixiles suben a la montaña por primera vez, para recibir su entrenamiento.

22/23

The desperation experienced by the Ixiles, mostly coming from the *fincas* and Guatemala's state, coincided with the emergence of the guerrilla organization *Ejercito Guerrillero de los Pobres* (EGP), who formed a military insurgent front in the region in the 1970s. The Ixil researchers have demonstrated with the first photograph of this diptych the moment in which a guerrilla establishes the first contact with a *comité clandestino local* (the local clandestine committee). In the second image, the researchers showed a dramatization in which some Ixiles have already decided to rise in arms and receive guerrilla warfare training for the first time.







24/25 Entrenamiento en la guerrilla

La decisión del alzamiento no era tomada de forma precipitada. La vida en la montaña conllevaba una serie de precariedades y sacrificios muy grande. Los estudiantes de la Universidad Ixil entrevistaron a varios conocidos y familiares, quienes les informaron de su participación como combatientes del EGP. En este díptico realizaron una dramatización del entrenamiento guerrillero, así como la imagen de un guerrillero ya formado.

24/25 Guerrilla warfare training

The decision to rise up in arms was not taken carelessly. The life in the mountain was full of precariousness and large sacrifices. The Ixil researchers interviewed several relatives and acquaintances that told them their stories as *guerrilleros* within the EGP. For this diptych the Ixil researchers have done a dramatization of the guerrilla training, as well as an image of a guerrilla front already formed.





26/27 Guerra de guerrillas

Desde 1976 inicia la guerra de guerrillas en la que participaron muchísimos ixiles. Uno de los fundamentos que motivó la participación fue la sublevación indígena y campesina. En este díptico los estudiantes realizaron una dramatización para representar una emboscada que la guerrilla hace al Ejército de Guatemala.

26/27 Guerrilla Warfare

In 1976 the guerrilla warfare starts in the region. The Ixil researchers concluded that the central aspect that motivated it was the indigenous and peasant uprising against the coffee plantations. In this diptych the Researchers show a dramatization in which the guerrilla ambushes Guatemala's military.





## COUNTERINSURGENCY

### 28 Reclutamiento forzoso de civiles

Una de las estrategias que utilizó el Ejército de Guatemala consistió en forzar a jóvenes a que se integraran a sus filas para revertir el avance militar de la guerrilla. En esta imagen los estudiantes de la Universidad Ixil realizaron una dramatización del momento de la captura y reclutamiento forzoso de jóvenes.

### 28 Civilian's forced recruitment

One of the central strategies implemented by Guatemala's National Military was to force young Ixiles to take part of the counterinsurgency in order to reverse the advancement of the guerrilla forces. In this photograph, the Ixil researchers made a dramatization showing the moment in which these forced recruitments happened.





### 29 Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil

El ejército también utilizó como estrategia contrainsurgente la creación de Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil. Con ello, forzó a muchísima población adulta a convertirse en colaboradores de Estado de Guatemala. En esta fotografía los estudiantes de la universidad Ixil realizaron una representación del momento en el que las pac recibían la doctrina contrainsurgente.

### 29 Self Defense Civil Patrols (PAC)

The National Military also used as strategy the creation of Civilian Self Defense Patrols. Within these, they forced all adult males become collaborators of Guatemalan State. In this photograph, the Ixil researchers made a representation of the moment in which the PAC received the counterinsurgency doctrine.



### 30-32 Control, vigilancia y desplazamiento

Durante la implementación de la estrategia contrainsurgente el Ejército de Guatemala expulsó y relocalizó de forma forzada a miles de ixiles. El ejército también realizaba actividades diarias de control y vigilancia de la población civil. En sus investigaciones varios estudiantes recuerdan el momento en el que esto sucedió. Muchas familias quedaron separadas durante todo el tiempo que se prolongó la guerra. Algunos quedaron concentrados en los espacios de control y vigilancia que el Ejército había creado, otros se refugiaron en la montaña en las Comunidades de Población en Resistencia (CPR). En este tríptico los estudiantes de la Universidad Ixil han realizado dos representaciones. En las primeras dos fotografías, muestran el momento en el que eran vigilados por el Ejército de Guatemala y en la última el momento en el que son concentrados en un campo, después de haber sido expulsados de sus comunidades.

### 30-32 Surveillance, control, displacement

With the deployment of the counterinsurgency strategy, Guatemala's Military forcibly displaced and relocated thousands of Ixiles. The army carried out daily surveillance and control practices over the civilian population. With their investigations the Ixil researchers reconstructed the moment in which several families were separated during wartime. Some of them were relocated to spaces of control and surveillance named *aldeas modelo*, others escaped to the mountains to hid at the Communities of Population in Resistance (CPR). In this tryptic the researchers show these moments of everyday surveillance and control, as well as the moment their ancestors were centered in a field, just after being expelled from their communities.







### 33-39 Tierra arrasada y aldeas modelo

Una de las estrategias principales del Ejército de Guatemala consistió en atacar directamente a la población civil. Esto es lo que se denominó la estrategia de tierra arrasada, que eventualmente conduciría al genocidio en contra de los ixiles. Con el fin de perfeccionar los mecanismos de vigilancia y control, el Ejército de Guatemala masacró a grandes números de población civil. Posteriormente, quemó pueblos y aldeas, sobre los cuales construyó las denominadas Aldeas Modelo, en las que eran relocalizadas las poblaciones civiles que habían sufrido de la violencia contrainsurgente. Estas aldeas ya no reproducían la estructura vital del espacio que existía previo a la violencia contrainsurgente, sino que implementaban un diseño cuadrangular, mediante el cual se le facilitaba al ejército de Guatemala la distribución de personas y su control. Estas aldeas modelo cumplían la función de campos de concentración, en los que la vigilancia era permanente. Éstos o eran reclutados como Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil, o eran monitoreados permanentemente por el Ejército mismo. En esta composición de siete imágenes, los estudiantes de la Universidad Ixil han realizado una representación de la implementación de la estrategia de tierra arrasada, la quema de las aldeas, la creación de las aldeas modelo y los procesos de control y vigilancia que se realizaban en los accesos a las mismas.

### 33-39 Scorched earth and *Aldeas Modelo*

One of the cornerstones of the counterinsurgency was to massively eliminate civilian populations. This was named scorched earth strategy, which eventually led to the implementation of genocidal policies against the Ixiles. In order to enhance the control and surveillance mechanisms, the counterinsurgency military massacred large parts of the civilian population, and subsequently they burned towns and villages and on the top of the ruins they built the *Aldeas Modelo*, to which the civilians were forcibly relocated. These *Aldeas* did not reproduce the distribution of space that existed before the counterinsurgency violence. In contrast, the army designed a square-design village, which facilitated the army control of the circulation of people. These *aldeas modelo* had the function of concentration camps, in which the surveillance was permanent. In this composition of seven images the Ixil researchers show their findings through a representation of the Scorched Earth campaign, the burn of the traditional *Aldea*, and the construction of the *Aldea Modelo*, and the practice of surveillance in the access check-points that these had.

















## NEOLIBERALISM

### 40-44 Neoliberalism

Uno de los resultados de la implementación de la estrategia contrainsurgente fue la imposición del modelo neoliberal en la región ixil. Esto trajo como consecuencia la modificación de aspectos relacionados con la economía, el medio ambiente, las migraciones y la transformación de los usos socioculturales de los ixiles. En esta composición de cuatro imágenes, los estudiantes de la Universidad Ixil han elaborado una representación de algunos de los elementos más visibles de esas transformaciones. Con el apareamiento de las hidroeléctricas la contaminación del agua se ha incrementado, así mismo, han aparecido semillas genéticamente modificadas y el uso desmedido de fertilizantes en los procesos productivos. Así mismo, la nueva economía ha expulsado a muchos ixiles a buscar formas para capitalizarse por medio de las migraciones y el envío de remesas a las familias que permanecen en la región ixil. Finalmente, nuevas formas de endeudamiento han aparecido, algunas con los coyotes que se dedican a mediar los procesos de migración, otras con modelos como el implementado por la Fundación Agros, que viene reproduciéndose desde la creación de las aldeas modelo durante la etapa más dura de la guerra.

### 40-44 Neoliberalism

The Ixil researchers concluded that one of the most palpable effects of counterinsurgency was the imposition of the neoliberal economic model in the Region. This brought as consequence the modification of the environment, migration and the transformation of sociocultural Ixil practices. The composition of these four images shows the places identified by the Ixil researchers to represent these transformations. The hydroelectric projects have contributed to the pollution of rivers. Genetically modified seeds have changed the kinds of local maize that was traditionally produced, which also had a spiritual meaning for the Ixiles. Also, the new neoliberal economy has expelled thousands of ixilies to the economic exile in the United States, which has also translated into the creation of new forms of indebtedness.













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