

**HEALING SPACES: MEMORIAL EXPRESSION IN GUATEMALAN
GENOCIDE MUSEUMS AND MURALS**

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ABSTRACT

Healing Spaces: Memorial Expression in Guatemalan Genocide Museums and Murals

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Literature Review

The growth of genocide memorialization as a field of study is accompanied by multiple perspectives on form, function, and the defining concepts of memorials and memorialization. According to Louis Bickford (2014), there has been a “paradigm shift in public memorialization” away from celebrating a nation’s glorious past to one in which commemoration draws attention away from the atrocities committed by the state usually against its own nationals. Memorials have multiple responsibilities in post-genocidal reconstruction. These include bearing witness, honoring memory, serving as sites of healing, aiding in truth and justice initiatives, and acting as symbolic reparations. Memorials embrace a variety of presentations and are broadly defined to include memorials and monuments, murals, and museums, as well as the performative activities associated with memorialization (Shaheed 2014). This research pays particular attention to murals and museums.

Early scholarship on genocide memorialization has its origins in the Holocaust (Ziezler 2001; Smith 2002) which set the tone for subsequent research. Pioneers in the field include James Young (1994), whose canonical scholarship laid out in his book, *The Texture of Memory* defined our concepts and understanding of memorials. Janet Jacobs observes that remembrance and

Holocaust memorialization is central to “the emerging scholarship on collective memory” and she is also instrumental for providing a “feminist gaze” into memorialization.

Paul Williams’s *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocity* (2007) evaluates variation of memorial expression worldwide in the context of museums. His work, along with that of many others (De-Simine 2013; Rose 2016), proposes a framework to read these spaces as a part of a larger story of healing and cultural restoration. In understanding memorials, context is fundamental to analysis. I situate these sites in a relational context prescribed by Bickford (2014) depending on the goals of each memorial—either a private/reflective or public/educative—and whether they are authentic or symbolic sites. These sites serve these particular functions as a consequence of their location and narrative structure. They can also serve multiple functions, and incorporate both private/reflective and public/educative elements into their memorial expression intentionally or otherwise.

Paul Williams (2015) later draws attention to the current “memory boom” in popular culture, which has also reached Guatemala, as evidenced by newfound attention to memorialization, leading even to initiatives like the *Memoria Para la Concordia*, which seeks to map all of these spaces in a virtual context. Geographers Michael K. Steinburg and Matthew J. Taylor survey murals and monuments throughout Guatemala’s post-conflict landscape, analyzing both authentic sites and symbolic sites. However, their last publication was in 2006, and mostly draws attention to the sites and their condition, predominately evaluating how these memorials have answered the proposal for the clarification of human rights violations, through methods including memorial expression, by the Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH) after the end of the country’s 36-year internal armed conflict. Nevertheless, memorialization frameworks have been vigorously applied to other atrocities, and many other post-genocidal landscapes like

Rwanda, Bosnia, and Cambodia, in both edited volumes and journal articles (Eltringham and Maclean 2014; Gigilotti 2016), but memorialization in Guatemala remains an understudied topic.

Thesis Statement

Memorial expression in post-conflict societies acts as a facilitator of transitional justice and an agent of reconstructive processes such as cultural and personal healing. These spaces perform these roles differently depending on their goals—private/reflective and/or public/educative.

Theoretical Framework

In her submission to the United Nations General Assembly Human Rights Council, Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, Farida Shaheed puts forward a framework that creates a typology of memorial types based on function and context. These distinctions consist of private/reflective and public/educative, and authentic sites and symbolic sites. I look at the composition of the memorials through this lens, and use standard museology methodologies and archetypal symbolism to read narrative in spaces of memory.

Project Description

Following the signing of the Guatemalan Peace Accords in December 1996 ending the country's 36-year internal armed conflict, the Commission for Historical Clarification was formally established. Its purpose was to clarify human rights violations that occurred throughout the conflict as well as during the genocidal period between 1981 and 1983. One of the CEH's recommendations called for the remembrance of the victims that included public memorialization in coordination with civil society organizations. Memorial efforts in the country since the signing of the peace accords range in form, purpose, accessibility, and efficacy. These sites are largely understudied. This project evaluates three memorials of the Guatemalan genocide—two murals,

and one memorial museum—based on extensive field notes collected on two separate non-participant ethnographic research trips in 2017. The project evaluates each memorial according to a typology of private/reflective and public/educative functions of memorial expression. I consider the primary motivations of each memorial, and where they could potentially address both. I also consider and how these spaces respond to the needs of the communities they are situated in, and help to provide a place for cultural healing.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to students who study human rights and, in that process, confront trauma
in themselves.

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I would like to thank Dr. DiGeorgio-Lutz for showing me the artistry in research, for teaching me how to advocate for myself, how to confront suffering with humility, how to speak out about injustice, and act with understanding and balance. I would like to thank her for never letting me be anything but the woman I am, and for the necessary kick in the pants whenever I needed it.

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INTRODUCTION

Material culture and historic landscapes play a significant—yet often overlooked—role in conflict, particularly ethnic-driven conflict. Beyond the cultural implications of the “scorched earth” eradication of ancestral homelands of a cultural group, material culture and cultural heritage help determine the resiliency of a population post conflict. This is particularly important as it concerns restoring control over cultural narrative, processing trauma, healing, reconstructing, and restoring dignity.

Regaining access to built and natural elements of the cultural landscape as well as creating symbolic spaces for commemoration, recollection, education, and memorialization are integral to post-conflict peacebuilding and restoring cultural identity for sustained recovery and redevelopment. Memorial expression in post-conflict societies acts as a facilitator of transitional justice and an agent of reconstructive processes such as cultural and personal healing.

In post-conflict Guatemala, memorialization of the human rights abuses and genocide against the Maya is diverse as a result of the varied experiences of the different groups of Maya, and also as a result of Maya religious syncretism, varying levels of resource accessibility, and influences of modernity across the country. Memorialization in indigenous cultures that practice religious syncretism incorporates strong ties to the natural world and is influenced by colonial religious beliefs about mourning and commemoration. Memorial expression occurs in Catholic churches and graveyards, Mayan informal and spontaneous shrines (Santino 2006), museums, schools, and other civic and cultural institutions. These sites vary in their agency based on whether they are authentic or symbolic sites, and perform their roles differently depending on their goals—private/reflective and/or public/educative (Shaheed 2014; Bickford 2014). Furthermore, the memory landscape is difficult to access and navigate, and monuments and memorials are

unassuming in form and structure. They are also often transient, as graffiti, spontaneous shrines, and clandestine gravesites are sometimes hastily removed, erased, or allowed to fade into the landscape. Memorials are not just dedicated monuments, but also commemorative practices, museums, public art, spontaneous shrines, street names, performance art, and even dedicated days (Young 1994).

The location is a critical part of the narrative, especially when taken in the context of Maya ontology. The Maya's view of natural cycles of time and healing distinctly root their memorials in the natural world as an extension of both their built environment and the natural landscape, not protecting them from elements and natural earth processes, but including the structures in the Maya experience of the living landscape.

Memory and narrative is expressed through graffiti, exhibition, commemoration, memory activism, and murals in public spaces. Louis Bickford (2014, 499) calls attention to these places as spaces where history is negotiated, and power-structures are challenged, observing that “public memorials are increasingly being used by nonpowerful groups to wrestle their way into the national memory.” As the murals I visited in my fieldwork were public/educative and authentic sites, I chose to analyze them in Chapters I and II as an expression of identity that subverts the historical narrative, and interpret them using Foucaultian theory as cultural theorists apply it to museum spaces. This theory argues for an understanding of history that goes “against a traditional notion of linear, progressive, and teleological history” and instead emphasizes “what he calls ‘effective history,’ which draws attention to discontinuities, breaks, ruptures, and non-linearity” (Mason 2006, 23). Public memorials are a place for this theory to be put into practice.

In Comalapa, I take an intersectional approach to marginalized narratives and look at women's articulation and expression of their experiences in the mural created in 2006. Mayan

women have begun to come forward about their experiences and tell their stories in these public memory spaces. Chapter I analyzes gendered identity in this space because the juxtaposition of the earlier mural created in 2002 with the alleged exclusion of women in the planning process, with the mural created in 2006 in a community atmosphere more inclusive of women, makes it easy to see the result of an inclusive culture that encourages women to have input into the portrayal of their experiences.

In Chapter II, I analyze the mural in Nebaj as a part of a memorial complex and authentic site with both public/educative and private/reflective intentions dictated by the location, and look at the articulation of Ixil experience of the conflict with consideration to their extreme experience of violence. I evaluate the articulation of cultural narrative beyond the caricature identities “resistance” or “subaltern” to understand the movement of the Ixil in the area to reclaim their narrative, cultural identity, and lifeways, and the necessity of challenging national memory for cultural and personal healing.

Chapter III focuses on a symbolic site, Casa de la Memoria, and contemplates how symbolic sites accomplish similar goals as authentic sites. I read the space from a spatial experience of the museum that transcends language and proxemics, assessing how it communicates narrative by exhibition and architectural design cues. I also evaluate how a community museum facilitates cultural healing by examining analyzing the administrative structure of the museum.

I interpret the “intent” of three memorials across the country based on their narrative, and the way I interpret these narratives is through methodologies I selected based on their classification as authentic/symbolic, the content of the memorial, and the type of memorial expression: museum or mural. This is also influenced by various factors such as accessibility, creation, participation, and location within the community.

CHAPTER I

COMALAPA

Memorial Expression and Comalapa

San Juan Comalapa, Guatemala, is an important tourist destination, not far from the capital, Guatemala City, and fairly accessible; boasting small museums, artist residencies, a beautiful market, a bucolic setting of rolling mountains, and cobbled streets. It is a very accessible way for tourists to experience Mayan culture outside of the coffee shops and *mercadores* of Antigua. The landscape offers a very idyllic view of what the state and Western tourism project as “Mayan,” an identity both reinforced and challenged by the famous murals on either side of the road that bisects the city’s main entrance.

The mural on the cemetery side of the street is known as the longest mural in Guatemala, and gives an overview of the Comalapan experience of the time before conquest, as well as the periods during the Spanish Invasion, the colonial era, and modern history, including the earthquake that decimated the city in 1976 and the 36-year internal armed conflict. The 2006 mural—which is the focus of my analysis—along the walls of the middle school details more thoroughly the experience of Comalapa during the internal armed conflict, particularly the genocidal period from 1981-1983.

The very creation of these murals demonstrates resistance identity characteristic of Comalapan art, and their position at the entrance to the town is no accident. The first mural was completed in 2002 as one of the earliest responses to the CEH’s recommendations for the remembrance of the victims that included public memorialization in coordination with civil society organizations after the United Nations (UN) mediated peace accords were signed in 1996 (Carey and Little 2010, 6). Expression of Mayan experience of the internal armed conflict ten years prior

would have not been possible. I consider the location of the 2006 mural—on the street side of the wall of the school that used to be the military barrack—to be a critical part of the narrative as it has authentic agency in the town’s history.

In Comalapa, this highly public place has served as a location for the expression of historical memory to challenge the state’s narrative of repression and forgetting. It has also served as a location for memory to be negotiated, and more groups—such as Mayan women—to articulate their narratives. Foucaultian theory as cultural theorists apply it to museum spaces, argues for an understanding of history that goes “against a traditional notion of linear, progressive, and teleological history” and instead emphasizes “what he calls ‘effective history,’ which draws attention to discontinuities, breaks, ruptures, and non-linearity” (Mason 2006, 23).

Mayan women have begun to come forward about their experiences and challenge the “highly gendered memoryscape,” and tell their stories in these public memory spaces (Bickford 2014, 499). Women are able to actively interpret their experiences through artistic representation, commemorative practice, and ritual in ways that access psychosomatic and emotional experience in a more personal and processual way. In Guatemala, *testimonios* by women such as Nobel Prize Winner Rigoberta Menchu have been a powerful tool to mourn and articulate the experience of the collective Maya both living and dead as a part of their historical memory (Menchu, Burgos-Debray, and Wright 1993).

Bickford (2014, 499) also observes that “memorials tend, in many societies, to focus on men, male stories, or male imagery.” Feminist theorists arrived into the museum and memory scene in the late twentieth century to contest the highly gendered nature of history. Gabby Porter applies a feminist perspective to reading museums and historical sites. Her visual methodology draws from structuralist and poststructuralist theories, particularly Jacques Derrida’s theory of

creating meaning through difference and deferral, presence and absence. She looks at the inclusion and exclusion of elements of women's experiences in museum spaces, arguing that through this process of negotiation "'woman' becomes the background against which 'man' acts" (Porter 2012, 64). In the mural painted in 2002 on the side of the cemetery, men are seen in the roles that dictate and guide the narrative, while women punctuate and accentuate their experiences.

Guatemala has one of the highest rates of femicide in the world and is consistently a very dangerous place for women (Paz and Bailey 2006; Sanford 2008a). However, before colonization and conquest, the Maya did not recognize only two genders, and saw the male/female binary as more variable and ambiguous (Joyce 2011, 26). Archaeologist Rosemary Joyce (2011, 27) notes that Conquest and Christianization have contributed to the way in which gender in Maya culture is performed and interpreted today, but even in classic Maya artistic renderings, women are placed in positions of submission, and often their gaze points upward at men in seated or standing positions, suggesting that this role of submission is a classic Maya armature of identity. Joyce argues that the Maya learned gender roles from their material heritage and culture, and the legacies of the many conquests have perpetuated and exaggerated this performance. The expression of women's experience has long been manipulated by these various institutional identities.

When women are able represent themselves, and represent other women, we understand war and peace more fully and dynamically. As women are also often the progenitors of culture, their voices are significant in the preservation and restoration of cultural and ethnic identity, particularly in the case of the Maya, whose framework of belief and ethnic identity has survived many conquest campaigns over the centuries. Women's voices are transnational, and speak to the experiences of other marginalized victims, and as Samantha Lakin (2016) contends within the context of Burundi "women have an argument that no man has: they're the ones who give birth to

the soldiers, rebels, dictators, they're the ones who get raped, bury their loved ones.” Dialogues on post-conflict reconstruction also echo that when women are part of the peacebuilding process—that includes memorialization—the resolution is more holistic and sustainable.

I chose to deconstruct the mural on the walls of the school using Derrida’s approach prescribed by Porter in the context of ethnography of women’s experiences during the period of the internal armed conflict. I pay particular attention to the position of women in guiding the narrative in this second mural. I interpret the school mural as a possible rebuttal to the first mural on the walls of the cemetery, where the panels on the time during the internal armed conflict lack in depth, and where women’s participation in the creation of the mural was limited (Carey and Little 2010, 21). The school mural is expression of Maya resistance identity from its creation, and prominently features women in a variety of roles as it follows a female protagonist on her journey through Comalapa’s history. I also consider self-representation and location as an important part of narrative construction in the ephemeral healing component of post-conflict reconstruction when situated within the Maya ontology.

The Kaqchikel Maya and the Importance of Place

Comalapa identifies heavily with the Kaqchikel Maya, and they “live in a world in which daily activities often carry a heavy spiritual imprint, and even spiritual risk” (Hinojosa 2015, 23). They are situated within a living landscape with a focus on holistic world renewal, as can be seen in the panels on the murals at the entrance to the city. There is a cyclical motion in the mural: scenes of mourning, burying, and despair, building and rebirth, punctuated by destruction.

Maya identity is tied to its ancestral local, and within the Maya worldview “earth lords” and the sacred landscape are distinct actors with their own narratives and cosmic identities. The Maya view the relief of the landscape—the hills, caves, gorges, earth, trees, and shrines—as alive

and part of the give and take of everyday life (Gossen 1974; Vogt 1969; as quoted in Hinojosa 2015, 52). The landscape is alive and connected to them; it gives sustenance and “awakens people to sacred vocations” (Hinojosa 2015, 52). This connection to the landscape makes the displacement signature of the internal armed conflict all the more powerful. The people can lose access to their earth lords, regenerative rituals are compromised, and the crisis of displacement is worsened (Hinojosa 2015, 52).

This also makes healing very site specific. The fact that the murals are on an authentic site—in the town’s own space and on the walls of the military barracks and the cemetery in which victims of the genocide and forced disappearances throughout the conflict—is essential, considering the significance of grounding the spirit within the ancestral local. The repurposing of these walls and these buildings is also a testament to the importance of renewal: that nothing is gone, only replaced. The Maya sense of time is cyclical, less a cycle of chronology than one of rebirth, renewal, and (re)generation, believing not only that incidences replace each other, but also viewing people as a “replacement” for the previous generation (Hinojosa 2015, 50).

The Maya relationship with the built world is important. Sacred Maya architecture is known throughout the world, and the Mayan built environment is known as a place that separates the inner-life from the outer. It negotiates the space between the people and their personal cosmic significance and that of the space they occupy. The built world facilitates sacred inner work. Building in Maya culture is seen as cyclical worship and ritual and action, the act being a sacred and performative ritual (McAnany 1998, 271). The mural is a memorial expression within the built environment as opposed to the natural landscape. It is also on the exterior of the wall, making the expression more performative and public/educative than private/reflective, which would be more prevalent would be if the mural was on the interior of the walls or within a church or shrine.

However, the fact that the murals are situated across from the cemetery does give it a distinct reflective nature.

Painters in Comalapa

Painting has such a significance in Comalapan cultural history that Servando Hinojosa (2015, 71) in his ethnographic survey of healers and sacred practitioners in Comalapa conjectures that painters, like weavers and bonesetters, trace a divine capability to their hands. Painting in Comalapa is a ritual and healing practice. Comalapa has a long and significant history with painting, Andrés Curruchiche Cúmez (1891-1969) brought international recognition to the village through his paintings, which caught the attention of an international audience at the Guatemalan National Fair in the 1930s and the attention of international art promoters in the 1950s. His work can also be found on the walls in the local catholic church (Carey and Little 2010, 7).

While his work is now considered part of the *primitivista* style, to accept his work as naïve or simple is to misunderstand his context, and the tenacity of representing the Maya in this way at the time he did. Curruchiche's paintings challenged traditional *indigenista* style's portrayal of a simplified, passive native experience (Carey and Little 2010, 7). His work was the earliest example of Kaqchikel Mayan self-representation recognized by a national and international audience. His interpretation of the people came from his own lived experience with his rich cultural history and daily life in mind. Each one of his paintings highlighted a different element of Kaqchikel experience, and avoided the repetition and predictability of non-native painters of this movement in Europe. He was "simultaneously ethnographic, reflexive, and critical" (Carey and Little 2010, 7). His work set a precedent in Comalapa in its representation of a non-idealized Maya experience to the non-Maya Guatemalans and the rest of the world.

Women and the Creation of the Mural

The creation of the mural in 2002 was not a portrait of total community cooperation. The local youth group who painted the mural met in the evening with their elders to listen to testimonies and learn about the history of their city, but the sessions ended late, and the twenty young women involved in the project had to drop out of the project because their parents would not let them be away from home that late at night (Carey and Little 2010, 21). Whether this was strategic or not is unclear, but Guatemala remains known in the international system persistently as one of the most unfriendly states for women. Further, its legacies of colonialism and evangelicalism as well as conditions of poverty and illiteracy give Guatemala the highest fertility rate in Latin America with some of the least access to basic contraception and healthcare (Sanford 2008a).

The second mural could have been produced to address this gap in the narrative. Female artist and activist María Elena Curruchiche was active in the area at this time. In 2005, her film *Del azul al cielo* aired, showing a woman struggling to pursue her artistic career as a painter, commenting on racism and sexism in Comalapa. Maria Elena was also active in Comalapa in the 1980s, leading a group of female Mayan artists to challenge the political and social narrative of women at the time (Carey and Little 2010, 8). While her direct connections to the second mural are ambivalent, the culture she encouraged created a space for these women to express their stories and voice their opinions on how their local narrative was presented. The second mural displays women in a number of different roles than in the first mural, which women are seen predominantly in positions of universal tropes from a distinctly “male gaze” of women in times of conflict.

Mayan women navigate a variety of patriarchal institutions and legacies on the way to articulating their stories. Conquest, colonialization, Christianization, westernization, and then systematic extermination have subjugated women, and denied them the ability to pursue justice

and healing. Of salience is the inaccessibility of language for Maya women to articulate their experience. In some dialects of Maya, there is not even a word for rape, using instead phrases such as “he put evil inside me” and so on (Asociación Política de Mujeres Mayas et al 2008). This could also be a rejection of colonial labels of their experiences. Nevertheless, older Mayan women have the highest rate of monolingualism in Guatemala (Hinojosa 2015, 36). Further, the 1970’s government estimate of the population was that 54% of the population were monolingual Kaqchikel speakers, and majority of this number were women (Farber 1978, 33; quoted in Hinojosa 2015, 36). Mural painting is a way for women articulate their experiences to the broader audience both domestically, internationally, and interculturally.

The Mural

The mural on the wall surrounding the school has much longer panels, and the story is told in more of a pictorial narrative than a strict chronology. There is one pre-Colombian panel immediately before the gate that leads into the school. Mayan cosmic figures dance in the colors of the cardinal Mayan directions and hold a golden vine over two Mayan women in a seated position. The mural’s flow is rather comically interrupted at this point with a painting of popular children’s figures from *Winnie the Pooh*. The other side of the gate features the name of the school held aloft by two Smurfs. The school is named for the very famous Comalapan musician, Rafael Alvarex Ovalle Jornada Matuina. It is unclear whether these panels or the mural came first.

The next panel is highlighted by an ornate white church and a cross-wielding figure in brown robes. There are two women in this panel, and they beat instruments and are dressed in conservative European garb. A Mayan man with a bird mask dances between the church and a fire, shaking instruments at them, as other individuals in traditional Mayan dress dance jubilantly in front of a fire. The two scenes are separate, but the man in the middle serves as a connector between

these two different scenes. The business of this is sharply contrasted by the next scene: a clear-cut forest and a European stone fountain. A man in priestly robes with a covered head strikes a cowering Mayan man with a whip. A tree stands before him, separating him from the gorge where two more still figures chop away at the trees. The concluding scene of this sequence is a man lying dead on bare dirt. The next panels feature Matuina, singing groups of Mayans, and Curruchiche painting in his studio during the artistic renaissance of the area that has garnered it the heavily debated nickname “the Florence of Guatemala.”

The rest of the mural focuses on the time of the internal armed conflict, but to understand it as a gendered narrative that inverts tropes beyond those typical of memorials at this time, it is best read backwards. I start my analysis with the young woman in blue and white giving an invocation to a weeping old woman in the moon. She is gazing back at her history, through which she has just traveled and learned. When read with the idea that the viewer learns the story as this woman does, another layer of meaning can be understood, and if you are searching for her figure in various postures and sizes throughout the narrative, you can find her.



Figure 1: The Final Panel

Notable in this panel are the woman's clothing, which is much less traditional than the women in the cemetery mural, who all wear the traditional weave of the Kaqchikel. This speaks to the idea that her experience is what is important rather than her role in Mayan society, and possibly also speaking to a more pan-Mayan experience. Also of note is the inclusion of the female moon goddess, Ix Chel, and her age, which is relative to context in the Maya cosmology. She is considered by many to be the wife, mother, or grandmother of the Sun. The Moon goddess is the patroness of weaving, medicine, procreation, birth, pregnancy, and art (Thompson 1950, 230). She was more often regarded as a wild woman, having fled her husband the Sun at the dawn of time when he played a trick on her, and finding love and comfort with his enemy: the King Vulture. The Sun defeats the King Vulture and "reclaims" his wife, who returns with him reluctantly. The Sun plucks one of her eyes out to dim her brightness as she shines in the night sky (Thompson 1950, 230). A symbol of protection for women and for art, her inclusion in this final panel of the mural is significant, and sets an important precedent and perhaps an important symbol of women's resistance identity in her celebration. Between the moon and the protagonist is a supplication:

I have finished my prayer with corn accounts. Thank you, Grandmother Moon. Thanks souls and spirits; because your invisible presence has given solemnity to my prayers. Before lifting my knees from the ground, I pick a fist of dirt with my hands and I spread them on my chest, so that my heart mixes them between their systole and diastole ... because I love you immensely San Juan Comalapa!!

The protagonist is first seen in the background of the first part of the internal armed conflict panel. In the foreground, men in military gear load men into a school bus. She is lying on the ground wrapped in music notes. She holds a guitar in her right hand. Papers of the revolution—symbols of the leftist groups with whom the Maya were accused of sympathizing with to warrant their extermination by the military—spiral around her figure, and she is unacknowledged by the rest of the figures in the scene.



Figure 2: The Protagonist Sleeps

In the next panel, among scenes of death at the hands of the soldiers, the desexualized figure of a woman hangs from a tree. Her garb is also nondescript and makes no claim at any specific cultural identity. In the following scene, a woman in the uniform of the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) peeks out from behind a tree in an encampment, her eyes gaze outward and lock with the viewer while her male counterparts focus on something unseen. She engages with the audience, but not with the men in the scene. Her eyes are also more layered, and her foot is painted on top of the fire. Inclusion of guerrillas in Comalapan memorials is not entirely unique, however, guerrillas are not included in “Red Zones” where guerrilla activity was concentrated, as they perpetrated significant violence on the indigenous population in these areas, either intentionally, or by consequence of their presence in these areas when the Guatemalan military arrived (Brett 2016).



Figure 3: A Female Guerrilla

The next scene is chaotic. A burning village and a hooded figure are situated above a house full of people surrounded by military men and dead bodies of villagers. The scene is divided by a woman laying on a bed, and the hooded figure and the burning village seem are connected to her in a dream bubble-like confine. The protagonist is directly above her, but far off in the distance, looking out at the scene, surrounded by skeletons. She appears again in the mid-range of the panel, looking back toward her figure as it is surrounded by bones. To the right of the women lying in the bed is a woman holding a child, a universal trope of women's experience also found in the first mural. She is looking out at the viewer and standing further forward than the man behind her, who looks into a mass grave of bones. A glowing male figure stands at the top of the grave, perhaps as the spirit of an ancestor.

This scene transitions to the post-conflict era. A woman in the background weeps over a different mass grave, a group of Maya men and women mourn over photos and candles. Other figures in the background dig and rebury bones. Notable in this scene is women in traditional Maya weaving, a practice that was not used during the genocide as it was a blatant indicator of Maya identity. The woman dressed in the Mayan weaving kneels on skulls. At her knees, her legs become

roots. The roots are intermingled with bones and continue through the rest of the mural. The skulls culminate in a pile and the protagonist dances on them. She walks on the roots with a casket lifted over her head. The scene culminates in the portrait of the Moon goddess and the girl looking back over her shoulder. The final two panels of the mural include a Mayan cosmic figure with an instrument, and the acknowledgments of the UN and the international NGOs that sponsored the creation of the mural.



Figure 4: Women Rising Rooted

CHAPTER II

NEBAJ

El Quiché and the Ixil Triangle

The Ixil region is located in the Northwestern highlands of the country, in the northernmost corner of the El Quiché department, a populous and predominantly indigenous area. El Quiché is known throughout history for its inaccessibility and seclusion. The Ixcán municipality in particular is known for its remoteness; before the Plan for the Northern Territory Transversal Strip Road (FTN) was enacted in the 1970s to facilitate movement in the northern part of the country, there were no roads into the region (Brett 2016, 92, 94). The Ixil triangle spans three municipalities, is made up of twenty-one towns, and is so named for the three main towns that are interconnected in a triangle shape when viewed on a map: Santa María Nebaj, San Gaspar Chajul, San Juan Cotzal (Brett 2016, 96). Most of the indigenous in this area are Ixil, belonging to the linguistic group ixil-awkateko-mam-tektiteko (Brett 2016, 96). It is known throughout history for its remoteness, the Maya Ixil were known by Spanish colonists to be “one of the bravest and most impermeable in Mesoamerica” (Volpe 2015, 24).

The impenetrability and seclusion of the landscape not only nourished the character of the indigenous ancestors of the land, but in the 1980s it attracted members of the guerrilla insurgency, particularly the EGP, who sought to install popular rule in Guatemala. The strategies of the EGP were cultivated with consideration of the failures of Che Guevara’s *foquismo* that were adapted from his original movement to be applied by groups as the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR) and the Guatemalan Party of Labor (PGT) to Guatemalan guerrilla operations of the 1960s. The EGP particularly disputed previous operations’ disregard for the indigenous and their preoccupation with class; they instead adopted a Maoist notion of ‘Prolonged Popular War’ (Brett 2016, 100-

101). Indigenous support was essential to the longevity and success of the revolution, making the western highlands a logical base for their operations. This region was optimal; it was mostly indigenous, and often forgotten by the rest of the country (Brett 2016, 101). They visited villages in the area that were tactically advantageous and sought to forge relationships with the indigenous populations in those areas by buying supplies from them. Sometimes the indigenous populations collaborated, and other times they would not. The guerrilla was better received in San Juan Cotzal than in Chajul, and the Guatemalan military told the indigenous to not associate with the Guerrillas because “they were communists” many indigenous, however, did not have any understanding of what either of these concepts meant. One campesino even recalled “‘They have bad ideas’, they told us. But, as they arrived, we gradually realized that they weren’t bad ideas, in fact, they were defending our rights’” (Brett 2016, 103).

The indigenous population served as a human landscape upon which the conflict between the guerrillas and the government unfolded. The casualties were high, and they were exploited, manipulated, and abused by members of both sides of the conflict. In Nebaj, the guerrillas would hold weekly education meetings against the peoples’ will, and the residents of the area were forced to attend. Many indigenous chose not to attend, some were forced, others found collaboration “obligatory” (Brett 2016, 106). Nevertheless, by the end of the 1970s, “40-50% of the civilian population in the Ixil and Ixcán areas had collaborated with the guerrilla” (Brett 2016, 111-112).

The US backed General Rios Montt seized power in a military coup, and sent troops into the area to “drain the fish from the sea” and drive out the guerrillas by “attacking their presumed civilian base of support” (Volpe 2015, 12). The violence was unprecedented; a declassified CIA document from 1982 details how the Guatemalan Army launched “a sweep operation in the Ixil Triangle. The commanding officers of the units involved have been instructed to destroy all towns

and villages” cooperating with the EGP and extinguish any “sources of resistance” (Sanford 2008b). A note to the memo originally claims that cooperative civilians would not be harmed, but a comment revealed “When an army patrol meets resistance and takes fire from a town or village it is assumed that the entire town is hostile and is subsequently destroyed... An empty village is assumed to have been supporting the EGP, and it is destroyed” (Sanford 2008b, 499).

The scars of Rios Montt’s scorched earth campaign are still palpable in the region. According to CEH findings, 14.5 % of the entire Ixil Maya population was killed during La Violencia (Sanford 2008b). Between 70 and 90% of villages were burned to the ground. In 1984, “model villages” were introduced to replace the villages decimated by the army. They were created by the Guatemalan Army Corps of Engineers and heavily patrolled. “Re-education” meetings were led by army officers twice weekly, and Rios Montt—an evangelical pastor who is described as ruling with “a bible in one hand and a machine gun in the other” (Volpe 2015, 12)—requested that American missionaries provide “spiritual guidance”, medicine, and food (Stoll 1990, 201-202; quoted in Philpot Munson 200, 45).

The Cultural Identity of the Ixil

The cultural identity of the Ixil triangle is more intricate than areas such as Comalapa, which retained much of its material culture and cultural lifeways and maintained a sense of identity tied to their ancestors and earth lords. The mass exodus of refugees to the Oxacaca mountains, the concentration of the remaining Maya in reeducation camps, the criminalization of Maya identity and culture, the inundation of these areas with foreign aid, and the return of many of these refugees to their homelands to find their extended family disappeared, have made for a complex story, competing narratives, and uncertainty in how to tell these stories. Furthermore, modern Ixil identity was mobile even before the genocide. Many of the families in the area had settled there as

late as the nineteenth century from departments such as Tonicapán and Uspantán looking for work or fleeing the dictatorship of Jorge Ubico (1931-44) (Brett 2016, 96). Privatized land dominates the area, making even subsistence farming difficult to impossible for the majority of the campesinos (Brett 2016, 96). Between the 1930s and 1960s, the Ixil were subject to forced labor by the *patrones* of the large estates, subsequent land reform was unsuccessful, and violent repression characterized the region. Rody Brett calls the poverty in the Ixil area “extreme and systematic” (Brett 2016, 108).

Nevertheless, certain traditions of Ixil Maya run deep. Prior to conquest and colonization, the Ixil have thrived in seclusion for centuries, insulated by the Cuchumatanes mountains and the Sierra de Chamá in the north of the el Quiché area. Their rich and extraordinary weaving tradition flourished in this isolation. The women of the area have traveled the long distances to Antigua or Chichicastenango to sell their unique textiles for centuries, and the men would undertake long distance travel to work in the plantations of the volcanic coast (Volpe 2015). Weaving and women empowerment are also an important part of post-conflict reconstruction in this area. A mural near the entrance of Nebaj associated with NGOs the National Coordinator of Widows of Guatemala (CONAVIGUA) and WE Effect, the international NGO focusing on supporting farmer organizations and gender equality in cooperatives (weeffect.org), reads “Ixil women weave our future and the seed of the solidarity economy.”



Figure 5: CONAVIGUA Mural

Nebaj

“After Sacapulas, the road starts to climb a steep mountain whose extremely sharp turns over endless precipices bring Macchu Picchu to mind. Wrapped in fog, the trees that flank the path, curved mysteriously by the winds, looked like delicate Chinese ink figures traced on the gray air. Passing the junction on the road, the car emerged suddenly from the milky sea of fog. To the right and downhill was the Quiché town of Cunén, and to the left and uphill, Nebaj and Ixil country. The crescent moon, very thin and glowing, appeared in a crystalline sky cut across by the zig zagging profile of the mountains. Far away, in the bottom of a valley populated by large trees, was the town of Nebaj” (Volpe 2015).

The trek to Nebaj is eight hours from the capital, and painful whether undertaken with a consciousness of the geography’s history or without. Previously a largely inaccessible area, the rolling green and gold of the mountains has begun to attract trekkers and tourists from around the world. Small high-profile vans offer intrepid travelers an alternative to the wildly painted “Chicken Buses” vaulting over *tumulos* as they speed down steep mountain switchbacks, and there are many backpacker hostels and even hotels in the center of the city. And while the UN emblem and various murals by NGOs decorate the city streets, the uneasiness of the area is still palpable. In Santa Cruz del Quiche, people crowd the streets in oversized t-shirts emblazoned with familiar labels of North

Face and Adidas, others with commemorative emblems with the names of summer camps and churches thousands of miles away, the textiles of Western paternalism replacing Mayan weavings. English music blares over loudspeakers.

J. Jailey Philpot-Munson observes that “Nebajenses take sides” and remain divided along line of mistrust (2009). Many assign blame to the guerrillas for their suffering, and do not approach anything that could be perceived as “leftist,” putting them significantly behind in post-conflict peacebuilding, land reform, and memorialization (Philpot-Munson 2009). Former members of the Civil Defense Patrols (PAC), the civilian militias organized by the Guatemalan army to root out counterinsurgents still live in the area, and the Guatemalan people live side by side with perpetrators.

Memorialization and Nebaj

Michael Steinberg and Matthew Taylor (2002) point out that in Ixil, the landscape is a memorial in itself, the razed villages, the structures that once formed refugee camps and model villages were built over massacre sites, and like Maria Tumarkin (2005) notes in her seminal work *Traumascapes*, these landscapes act as memorials in and of themselves, invisible to the outside eye, but evident to survivors.

The Church

In the Catholic Church on the square, there is an alcove on the left-hand side behind the pews covered in crosses with names of the victims of the genocide and the year they died. The alcove prominently features a large glossy plastic crucifixion figure mounted against a woven mantel with white embroidery of birds, flowers, and weavings. The mantel’s primary color is black, which when used in Mayan weaving, indicates mourning (Conte 1984). The mantel could have been given to the church as an offering by a member of the congregation.

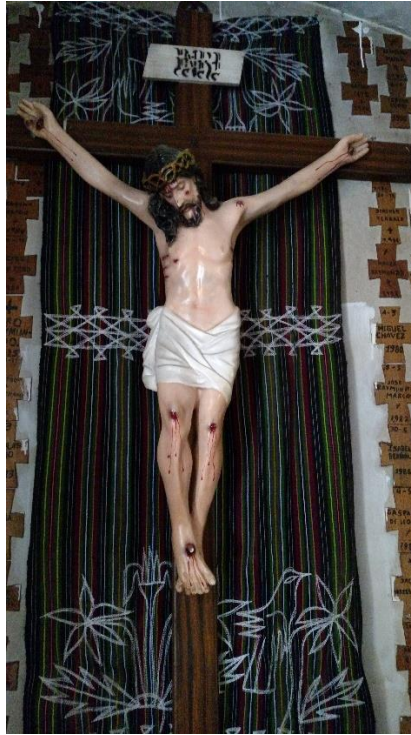


Figure 6: Weaving in Alcove

Photos of the alcove found online make it look deceptively large. It is situated in the back of the church, unlit behind iron bars, making photographing it nearly impossible. Many of the wooden crosses have fallen from the walls and lie on the floor; some even lie facedown. The spaces where the crosses have fallen off the walls are blaringly white in contrast with the pre-exposed areas that are considerably darker. Some crosses are splattered with white paint used that has dripped down from the ceiling of the alcove.



Figure 7: Crosses Commemorating the Victims of the IAC

The church in Nebaj is an authentic memorial site that was significant during the conflict. It was used for military purposes, housing a paratrooper unit that the government had long denied the existence of (Manz 2013). In addition to multiple bases and garrisons in municipalities, churches and monasteries were used as jails, torture and interrogation centers, and clandestine cemeteries (Sanford 2008b, 544). Bishop Juan Gerardi closed the diocese of El Quiché in 1980, as the violence grew more pervasive, and the number of nuns, health and education promoters, catechists, and priests who had been murdered or assaulted. This was the first time since their

arrival during the Spanish conquest that the Catholic Church had left a region due to violence (Manz 2013).

The Square

The church is situated on a square, which also includes a public park. In 2004-2008, the park was constructed by the municipal administration of Nebaj in dedication to the “noble and prosperous” city of Nebaj, the future generations, and to honor those who were victims of the armed conflict. A cast brass plaque commemorates this:



Figure 8: Plaque in the Square

The square in itself constitutes somewhat of a memorial complex. Most of the memorials in the town—excluding spontaneous shrines and the graveyard, which were not considered in my analysis of the memorial landscape but are necessary to be mentioned—are situated on the perimeter of the square. This could be attributed to the fact that the square is an authentic site that served an important role in the armed conflict, but it is also the center of the city. Nebaj’s square served as a platform for executions as soon as the military inundated the area, Victoria Perera (1993) recalls:

A company of one hundred soldiers from Santa Cruz del Quiché moved into Nebaj the next day and installed a detachment of military police. Within days, leading citizens of the towns began to disappear. Later their bodies were found mutilated and strung up on posts in the town square (71).

In 1980 after several massacres had already occurred, Nebajense men who traveled to collect their required military identification cards or complete other tasks in the town were publicly executed in the main square or “disappeared by the army” as they were accused of being guerrillas (Brett 2016, 111).

The Monument

There is also a monument in the square erected in December 1996, the year the UN mediated Peace Accords were signed, also by the Municipality of Nebaj. This memorial was photographed in 2002 by geographer Michael Steinberg as part of his analysis of state monuments in Guatemala. In his photograph, there is a dove on top of the monument and it is surrounded by barbed wire. Perhaps during the construction of the memorial park, the barbed wire was removed, and landscaping was added around the monument. The dove was missing when we visited. Steinberg notes that the dove was “seemingly unstable” (Steinberg and Taylor 2002, 460).



Figure 9: Monument

“Tribute. In honor of the brothers fallen because of the armed conflict, hoping that this will never happen again, the Nebajense people and their municipality offer this monument as a symbol of democratic coexistence and a culture of firm and lasting peace.”

The inscription at the bottom reads “a new peace in Guatemala...”

For the purpose of my analysis, I chose to focus on a more recent element of the square’s memorial landscape: the mural on the wall of the Catholic church. The mural is a single panel, and a more interpretive approach to the history of Nebaj than ethnographic. It was constructed in 2015 by art students from the university of San Carlos of Guatemala in cooperation with the local municipality and the Catholic church (Figuroa 2015). The mural is difficult to miss, but less expansive than the multipaneled murals in San Juan Comalapa. It unfolds in a tapestry-like

manner, favoring the early Northern Mesoamerican *lienzo* style of historical painting than Curruchiche's ethnographic method seen in Comalapa. I consider this mural with a different application of Derridian deconstructuralism and Foucaultian power structures that looks at a power narrative rather than a gendered one, as well as what narratives are present.

The Mural

The mural was constructed in early 2015 and built on an idea proposed by Carlos Fernando Afre Arévalo. The work was completed by students of the University Center of San Carlos of Guatemala in tandem with the Council of Nebaj and the local Catholic Church (Figueroa 2015).



Figure 10: Nebaj Mural

At the top center of the mural is a woman in a huipil weaving, with “NEBAJ” emblazoned on her chest. Her collarbone is defined and her outward gaze intense. She holds water in one hand and an ear of corn in the other, referencing the etymological origin of Nebaj in the Ixil language: Na ‘Baj, “place of water births,” or the place where the water is born—the natural source of water

(Figueroa 2015). A red and gold Mayan sun stands behind her. The carved stone heads of goddess Ixchel and Yum Kaax are on either side of the woman, and the rest of the scene sweeps up towards her. The selection of Ixchel and Yum Kaax for the mural is significant because they are seen as the Mayan gods who watch over the passage of time. Also, the choice of Mayan stone sentinels as opposed to a more modern representation is significant, and shows continuation. Down the midline even with a fence lining are two girls reading from a book that is arguably the source of the scene, again echoing the sentiment that remembering and progenerating the culture is the responsibility of the women. The beginning of the book's inscription is translated as follows:

The painful part of this journey (which should not be repeated) will be the foundation for a new dawn. Mayan prophets shout: Quetzales will not die, freedom will come! The blood of the loyal ones has saved the inheritance.

Three women are located below her with long, dark, sweeping hair. The name of the city that each represents can be found in each respective figure's hair. The woman symbolizing the town of Chajul's hair forms an arc, under which a haloed figure with downcast eyes holds her hands out to a child and a woman, symbolizing the victims of the genocide. Her hair sweeps over the head of the haloed figure, and it brightens as it intermingles with the veil of the haloed figure. The hair disperses as it becomes a road-like surface. In the bottom left corner, a man in traditional Ixil dress holding the hand of a child walk off the panel—the displaced and the refugees of the conflict—the old generation and the new one holding hands. Another figure is farther back walking as well. Just to the right a woman carries two children, she is facing outward, but not straight on. A little girl in Ixil dress clasps her hands in prayer. A distraught priest faces towards the heavens and gestures to a dove wrapped in barbed wire.

Situated above these figures is a scene of Spanish conquest. Five horses with spears between them and armored heads look down on the scene. Three men in Spanish armor approach three men in Maya ceremonial dress before a large white pyramid. This scene interrupts the mural

as more of a memory than a part of the narrative. Closer to the center, a figure in a white robe with blue jeans and sneakers carries a smoking censer. He runs straight through the scene of conquest, perhaps interceding in the memory, or perhaps running through it as a statement that those legacies are still present today. Other running figures in this scene include men in modern dress carrying a basket, and three men carrying some sort of altar run behind him.

These figures that appear between the depictions of colonialism and the genocide are an interesting bridge. They wear Mayan dress, but they are imbued with Christian symbolism. Also, that the stories of conflict and conquest are told on the same side of the panel is a powerful statement on the continued subjugation of the Ixil by institutions put in place by colonial occupation.

On the opposite side of the panel is a scene of peace, and shows the separation between the painful past and new dawn described in the books' description. The figures on the right side of the panel look over almost as observers toward the side of the panel where the genocide and colonialism unfold and are remembered. A woman frees a dove into the air, a quetzal flies freely on an orange sunset sky, a jaguar crouches beneath a tree. Old traditions of the Ixil are resurrected: a woman weaves, a woman gathers maize, a man and a girl farm in the fields. A man stands with palms outstretched toward a water fall, and a family of a man, woman, and female child in traditional Ixil dress—that can be seen in the region today—look toward the center of the mural. The woman holds her hand to her heart.

CHAPTER III

CASA DE LA MEMORIA

Casa de la Memoria

Located in Zone 1 of the Guatemalan capital city, Guatemala City, Casa de la Memoria, or Kaji Tulam, is found on a quiet street lined with houses and restaurants and small shops. Across the street is a small museum, where art installations dealing with the Jewish holocaust by local university students are displayed in open-air rooms with black and white checkered floors. The street itself flows directly into the town center, and is relatively quiet for all the foot traffic its location warrants. It is lined with gently swaying trees, benches, and men in military dress wielding semi-automatic weapons.

Casa de la Memoria is one of few sites in Guatemala considered to be a part of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC), however, most of the other sites in the country considered by the ICSC are also in the capital. The museum's overall narrative and exhibition design was done by the NGO, *Centro Para la Accion Legal en Derechos Humanos* (CALDH, Centre for Human Rights Legal Action), headquartered in Guatemala City. This organization unofficially began in the 1980s to fight for human rights and peace during the internal armed conflict, and was legitimized after the UN mediated peace accords were signed in 1996. Since then, historical memory and clarification has become one of their foundational pursuits, and their four major programs focus on Justice and Reconciliation, Women's Rights, Indigenous Town's Rights, and Youth Rights (peaceinsight n.d.).

The museum itself is open to visitors throughout the week, behind the heavy wooden doors of the entrance, there is a gated entry and a desk. Admission is free or by donation. By the appearance of the individuals in and around the area, as well as the signatures in the public

guestbook, the visitor demographic of the museum seems to be largely students, whether international or local, but visitors from all around Guatemala are represented, particularly those from the indigenous populations near the capital. This is appropriate considering the mission statement:

The Casa de la Memoria ‘Kaji Tulam’ is a permanent space, open to the public, with special emphasis on youth, which communicates and exhibits for purposes of study, deconstruction, and analysis the history of Guatemala. In particular, it examines the country’s history of oppression, structural problems, and also the resistance of those who lived in the past and those who inhabit these territories today, in order to rebuild the collective memory, give new meaning to history, regain a sense of personal and collective identity, highlight the human rights violations and resistance of peoples, all in support of the non-repetition of the serious violations in Guatemala (sitesofconscience.org, n.d.).

The mission statement also supports the goals of its mother organization, CALDH, particularly in examining and clarifying the history of human rights violations in the country and rebuilding identity through education and collaboration to prevent future human rights violations. Nevertheless, the location of the museum makes it slightly exclusive in its audience. Indigenous individuals from around the country bear witness to genocide must travel incredible distances to reach the capital, and many would not ever undertake the journey.

Furthermore, the panels around the museum are all in Spanish, making visitor participation and interaction with the text exclusive to those who also speak Spanish. This alienates the many indigenous in Guatemala who exclusively speak a Maya dialect. Nevertheless, the site is extremely immersive, the displays tactile and interactive, and the symbols used throughout the exhibitions draw on symbols of shared experience across the country and can be understood from a visual-contextual standpoint.

Interpreting Space

We visited the museum two separate times occasions. On the second visit, it was on the annual day of Commemoration, which was one of the recommendations by the CEH for Clarification of Historical memory in the wake of the conflict. On that day, the atrium of the museum was used as a location for commemoration and ritual.



Figure 11: Atrium on Commemoration Day

Casa de la Memoria could be classified as a “community museum” because of the way it pursues its mission statement with direct involvement from members of the community and local NGOs. They host a variety of commemorative workshops, from acting and poetry readings, to educational workshops, to vigil and commemorative ritual. Though symbolic as opposed to authentic, this site is important in Guatemala City, particularly for those who still have not been

able to locate the people in their lives who remain “disappeared.” This is common throughout the country, but particularly in Guatemala City, where many of the “disappeared” were kidnapped as they carried out their daily lives. Casa De La Memoria creates and supports community, provides a place of commemoration for their loved ones where no actual gravesite or site of their disappearance exists.

Community museums arose with postmodern new museology that recognized museums had an important and unique capability to help areas develop disadvantaged or devastated communities (Davis 2008, 399). The framework for community museums prescribed by UNESCO in 1973, was first applied in Latin America, and contextualizes museums within the traditions, culture, heritage, and needs of the community with the aim of sustaining and developing the community around memory, culture, and education. This framework also promotes use of heritage resources, and grassroots involvement in the inception of and creation of local museums (Davis 2008, 399). Architects have utilized the emphasis of grassroots involvement in the inception and creation of memorial museums to involve architecture in the narrative (Murphy 2016). This varies in definition, from utilizing local materials and people in construction to relying on the designs and ideas of local artists. This also involves incorporating architecture into the narrative, and utilizing local artistic tradition, pieces, and attention to space to aid in telling the story (Tardits 2003). For this reason, these museums are active and reactive players in the post-conflict peacebuilding process through their creation, existence, outreach, and programming.

Memorial museums are where the coexistence of private/reflective and public/educative are the most palpable. Memorial museums use exhibition and architectural design techniques that create this feeling of chaos, immersion, and education, in balance with spaces for reflection and discussion, that might be difficult to create a space for in authentic sites, particularly if they are

part of the landscape. A dedicated space to contemplation and commemoration is more easily created in these spaces. The site becomes part of the narrative in the poetics and politics of the display and the space. In an authentic site, both of these concepts are easily derived, but in a symbolic space, these can be created with sculpture and architecture. In a community museum, involving the community in the creation of the facilities or the objects can infuse private reflective with public educative display creation.

Memorial museums cater to unique audiences. While some might interpret them as being specifically geared toward outsiders, or victims and their families, recent scholarship has called for a paradigm shift away from polarized distinction between victims and perpetrators, specifically in the context of civilian violence (Frankel et al, 2016). Bryan Stevenson adamantly asserts that “public acknowledgement of mass violence is essential not only for victims and survivors, but also for perpetrators and bystanders who suffer from trauma and damage related to their participation in systematic violence and dehumanization” (EJI n.d.). Silke Arnold de Simine (2013) also identifies that outsider visitor participation is important as a tool for building empathy, and supporting the museum in its role as a place for recollection over collection.

I read the narrative space predominantly with the idea that the construction of a memorial museum, the way it communicates and utilizes space, design, and local involvement are critical to understanding the narrative, and are important to communicating across barriers of culture and language. I focus on representational elements and their balance with textual information, and their efforts to include and support the diversity of narrative represented.

The Exhibition Space

The museum is a converted home in the Spanish colonial architectural style, and the galleries are in rooms that center around an open atrium with a skylight. With the exception of a

few rooms that are dark to support the exhibit narrative, each gallery has a window that opens into the atrium.

Not including the atrium, there are ten rooms used as exhibition spaces. They follow a chronological flow, and the visitor enters the room closest to the front desk of the museum to begin their journey through the exhibit. Lining the opposite side of the atrium are the classroom, restrooms, and another gallery used to display a community art installation and also to house various books and other information repositories on Guatemala's history of human rights abuses.

Each exhibit integrates art and textual information into the gallery. There are text panels on the walls that are enhanced by sculptural and one-dimensional pieces, including artist renderings of individuals, symbols, and objects, as well as textiles, found objects, sculptures, and multi-media installations. Notable in the museum is the lack of technological enhancement and digital interactives, the museum on the whole successfully utilizes tactile and sculptural interactivity, as well as visitor engagement with writing and reflecting, without the use of digital tools beyond lighting, projections, and simple mechanization of installations.

Also notable throughout the museum is a particular focus on women and women's experiences. There are a number of Spanish books published by local NGOs in the learning space on women, and each historical exhibit features a small round "tent" in the corner or a door that can be entered or moved to learn more about women or a particular woman during the time period on display. These spaces are designated by a weaving symbol from the weaving tradition in Tactic, Alta Verapaz, which indicates a butterfly, and also the freedom of the weaver to choose the path they wish (CasadelAlgon n.d.).



Figure 12: Butterfly Symbol

The first exhibit features the codices of the Maya, the Mayan Nahuals, and also mentions the Popol Vuh. This exhibit displays the richness of Mayan culture before Spanish conquest, and features a linear rendering of an unfolded Mayan codex. The codex of the Maya wraps around the door, into the next gallery—which I will colloquially refer to as “Spanish Invasion”—and stops at a painting of fire, symbolizing the destruction of the Mayan codices.

This exhibit focuses on Spanish invasion; nooses and swords hanging from the ceiling, a contorted face and a black hooded figure create chaos in the space. The muted colors as well as the face’s upward gaze give the room a contemplative feel, and the visitor is invited to walk further into the hall and investigate the lithograph prints of the Spanish violently subduing the Maya people and their land. A narrative text panel explains these images as well as the reasons behind the Spanish invasion from the perspective of indigenous Guatemala.



Figure 13: Spanish Invasion and Conquest

The pivotal piece in the following gallery is a scene of two rows of darker wood carrying heavy loads under the supervision of two lighter wooden figures. This piece is surrounded by text panels that further explain the Colonial oppression. Other panels in the room describe the sexual, material, financial, and physical exploitation of the Maya. Sculptures made of textiles, scissors, metal scales, and Mayan dolls illustrate this.

The following room is a transition into the more Modern history of the Maya, and shows restoration of Mayan agency in their struggle for human rights as well as the position of Guatemala in the international system at that time. An enlarged print of Diego Rivera's *Gloriosa Victoria* illustrates Guatemala during the mid-1900s as world powers and military dictators played out their pursuits with a disregard for the land and population. Multicolored silhouettes of men, women, girls, and boys, stand beneath a tapestry listing the impunity the people of Guatemala suffered at this time stands in the middle. The figures face outward, and the base stand of the installation is a

list of rights they seek: right to education, land, healthcare, etc. This gallery also incorporates issues such as the dialogue on Guatemala, Multinational Corporations, and “banana republics.”

The next three galleries are substantially darker, and interpret the period of *La Violencia*. The first room specifically interprets the genocide and scorched earth campaign. It is illuminated only by a lightbulb hanging from the center, and candles on the wall. It is a diorama of an indigenous Mayan home that has been ransacked: overturned cots, chairs, tables, spilled maize, hats, smashed dishes, smoke on the walls. On the wall behind are the silhouettes of a Mayan family: a man, woman, three children, and a baby.



Figure 14: *La Violencia*

The next room is much larger and covers the breadth of the conflict and diversity of experiences within. In the center, a sculptural piece spans from floor to ceiling composed of ripped textiles over a wire armature, spinning slowly and illuminated from within. The walls are the same green as the room of the genocide, and silhouettes of perpetrators, military members, *kaibiles*, are

shown chasing or shooting at silhouettes of women, children, and men. Groups of people run holding hands. These figures are contextualized by panels featuring quotations from *testimonios* from the CEH report. A hall that transitions into the next gallery is lined, floor to ceiling, with white text on black wall, with the names of those who died or disappeared during the later half of the 20th century in Guatemala.

The next room is painted white and the only thing in it is a hand illuminated by a spotlight. The high ceiling allowing for decompression from the chaos of the proceeding rooms. The museum deviates in this space slightly from public/educative to private reflective.



Figure 15: Final Message

The following gallery focuses on modern Maya activists and their contributions to post-conflict peacebuilding, and a final “reflection room” with dry-erase walls allows visitors to write and reflect on their experience, allowing their experience to become a part of the memorial.

CONCLUSION

The type and intent of these sites is a highly relative concept, and something that might always be in flux as the various communities in Guatemala continue to heal, restore the fabric of their communities, fight for their place in historical memory, and respond to the needs of the community as these needs change over time.

The meaning I interpret from these sites is very specific to how they stood during my visits, and if something had been slightly altered, the meaning of the space could change entirely. For example, if the mural in Comalapa were inside of the walls of the cemetery as opposed to across from it, or inside the walls of the school complex instead of outside, the type of site could shift from public/educative to private/reflective or even private/educative. The symbolism could also change the perceived mission of these sites.

Similarly, further research about Casa de la Memoria could reveal more about the physical location and any significance it had in the conflict. Future research should include interviews with those involved in its inception to further interpret the purpose of the museum, and observing the activities that go on in the space could also give a deeper meaning to the site's intention.

Looking at three sites in highly different parts of the country illuminates the unique needs of each of the communities in post-conflict reconstruction. The mural in Nebaj meets the specific needs of that community, and is carefully composed with consideration of their experiences of the conflict. Particularly absent in this panel are the guerrillas that are found in the mural in Comalapa, considering the atrocities suffered by the public by or because of the guerrillas. The images represented in Nebaj are more influenced by their artistic tradition and indigenous character than the mural in Comalapa, which is highly influenced by the defiant nature of the artistic community in that area.

Analysis of these sites also reveals varying levels of post-conflict reconstruction. The conflict only ended twenty years ago with the signing of the Peace Accords, and memorialization in Guatemala is still maturing. There is a prevalent sense that danger, fear, and suspicion still pervade, which is even seen in these sites. In Nebaj, the murals are defaced, and the complex well-used for many activities other than commemoration. Casa de la Memoria has constant security, and a relative control over those who go in and out of the museum. In Comalapa, the murals are contextualized in the artistic tradition of the city and therefore displayed more boldly.

Memorial expression is highly influenced by the location and type of site, but also depends greatly on the participant and viewer who interprets these sites. I approach these sites as an outsider, and therefore my knowledge of the sites themselves and how they are experienced is highly influenced by my removal from the experience of these spaces of survivors, perpetrators, or bystanders. As this project is the result of non-participant ethnographic research, I only know what I could derive from the literature and these spaces themselves. Further research and participant ethnography could produce a more nuanced understanding of these spaces and how they function and serve the community.

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