

As Memory Fades into History in Rural Guatemala: Creating Space for Reconciliation and Peace Among Ex-Combatants

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Abstract

This work is the continuation of four weeks of original data collection and extensive research on the use of a historical narrative as the vehicle to social action and reconciliation with the past within a small socialist community in northern Guatemala in 2015. The goal of this research is to further expand the author's research with an emphasis on the internal challenges this community faces. These challenges stem from the lack of reconciliation that took place in Guatemala following the 36-year civil war between the Guatemalan government and the guerilla forces of the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG). This research asks, how has this community created space for healing and reconciling with the memory of the conflict as a means to development and continuing the struggle? Through four weeks of ethnographic research in the same community in January 2016 by the author, the question is explored. Reconciliation occurs through the invented means of creative thinking of ex-combatant leaders in the community. Themes of solidarity, sustainability, and continuing the fight, *sin armas* (without arms), are integral to the continued development of the community. This research also explores the conflict among sub-groups based on gender, age, and community status that hinder development and reconciliation processes.

Keywords: Memory, Reconciliation, Finding peace

1. Introduction

With the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996, Guatemala officially ended a 36-year civil war and brought the idea of peace to its citizens. However, most of the country never achieved peace. Due to lack of implementation of peace agreements by the Guatemalan government and resistance by the Army and National Police, many civilians failed to find peace. The country is overwhelmed by violence, which can be linked back to the war and the failures of the peace agreement. Many communities live daily with the reminder of this violence by the land around them, full of memories. The power structure continues as it did prior to the war with the inclusion of corrupt officials and heavy involvement of gangs and drugs. There is little ability among most of the urban and rural poor to rebuild their lives and overcome the memory of the war. Yet, one community persists and continues to overcome the many obstacles of achieving success and prosperity in Guatemala today. Left with nowhere to go following the demobilization process, one hundred and twenty ex-guerillas banded together to return to the land and build Nuevo Horizonte. Unlike many other communities throughout Guatemala, this community successfully created a new kind of resistance, unarmed, based on ideals and lessons from the civil war. The opening quote on their webpage states this clearly, saying "After a long and tough journey we decided to exchange our weapons for the land and livelihood that was taken from us during the civil war. We can now show the world who we really are, how we think, and why we live this model of life."¹ This demonstrates the process of creation of Nuevo Horizonte in terms of continuing the unarmed struggle for progressive change. The lack of necessary developments in the Peace Accords and in the country following the conflict did not

stop this community from making space for reconciling with their own memory. As this collective memory transitions into history, the community assigns their narrative meaning by connecting it to the ideal of a better future.

2. Secondary Literature Review

All the literature agrees Guatemala went through one of the longest and most gruesome internal armed conflicts in Latin America. The most gruesome period occurred during the late-70s and early-80s before as the country had not yet began peace talks or overcame the military to host a democratic presidential election. Policies during the late-70s and early-80s focused on the creation of state-wide terror and the elimination of the Maya population ostensibly as a means to wipe out the guerilla forces. Authors of the conflict labeled these actions as genocidal. For the purpose of this project, the research focuses on the impact of this violence after the signing of the peace accords in 1996 on the country as it attempts to rebuild. Based on the secondary literature, this review is roughly divided into three overlapping categories as a means to understand the impact of history on Guatemala today and the effect it has on the reconstruction of ex-combatant lives post-conflict. These categories include violence, truth, and construction of collective memory.

A consistent theme in the historiography on the civil war is the relation between the history of violence in Guatemala to the current violence that persists throughout society in the twenty-first century. Sanford demonstrates the extreme repression towards Maya communities and people, Guatemala's indigenous population. The author offers an in-depth development of how the Maya population in Guatemala suffered, and its effects on their ability to progress past their history in the present. Sanford demonstrates the impact of not only the army in Maya villages (the mountain), but the impact of the guerillas on the Maya people. According to the United Nations Truth Commission in Guatemala (CEH), the army committed 93% of the human right violations, the guerillas committed 7%. Almost all of these violations (typically massacres of whole villages) targeted Maya communities (83%). This was a commonly accepted fact throughout the research, however Sanford more thoroughly explains the mistreatment by both sides.²

Godoy, Handy, and Steenkamp argue violence during the armed conflict impacts the kind of post-conflict violence in a country. Steenkamp argues though criminal acts and economic or social violence may not seem to directly connect to the peace accords, they are all interconnected. Instead political, social and economic violence can be understood through examining the conflict and the process for achieving peace. Both the conflict and the means in which "peace" is achieved affects the kinds of violence and who is involved post-conflict in this violence. All three authors agree there is a great need to reinvigorate the judicial system in Guatemala to truly obtain peace. Godoy and Handy focus specifically on the current community activities of lynching as a form of collective vigilantism. Each author, through slightly different stories and experiences, demonstrates the impact of violence and army repression during the armed struggle as a root cause of these lynchings. They both agree on the lack of perceived trust by citizens in the current government to deal with violence and crime leads to the lynchings as a means to dealing justice. Godoy describes this as "justicia a mano propia" (justice by one's own hand). The extremes of violence in the civil war, specifically by the army led to social violence that occurred post-conflict.^{3, 4, 5}

This current violence greatly influences the political mobilization in Guatemala. Krause examines the impact of crime news on public opinion of authoritarian crime control. Krause found in Guatemala, the increase in viewing crime news leads to increased individual support of authoritarian measures by the government to stop crime.⁶ Yet, citizens continue to not trust their government figures to control crime, as seen in research on lynchings by Godoy and Handy.^{7, 8} Nevertheless, viewing crime increases support for placing more power in the hands of those citizens find at fault for the corruption.⁹

All of the sources from peace and conflict studies discussed here agree the impact of history in Guatemala continues to weigh down the country due to the lack of truth and reconciliation. Guatemala has yet to reconcile with its violent history. Some have made efforts, but the government, especially the army and police, continue to resist and fail to cooperate with either internal or international efforts. La Rue and Wilson argue it is essential the Truth Commission have access to the names of not only victims, including those killed, disappeared and under forced migration, but also the names of the perpetrators.^{10, 11} Families today are still searching for answers about their loved ones whom disappeared during the conflict. This is one reason the Police Archives, discovered in 2005, is of such importance. Weld argues the National Police (PN) played a much larger role than stated in other sources. Weld attempts to expand on the knowledge about the PN's role in the conflict through its connections to the Army within an urban setting. Weld's work demonstrates benefits of confronting the past with the truth and reconciling with it. The ex-combatants that work in the archives have come much farther in accepting their past and moving forward with agendas for justice than many others, who continue to ignore their history. These ex-combatants from the PN archive are ready to move forward and fight the government to ensure the armed conflict never repeats itself.¹²

Reilly demonstrates the many obstacles clearly, agreeing with Weld, about developing and maintaining peace. Reilly clearly articulates the state of violence that continues in Guatemala and the need for reconciliation between the state and its citizens. However, Reilly also examines the impact of lack of security for citizens. This security never developed nor did concrete plans to ensuring human rights and progress. Reilly demonstrates the role of international agency clearly. He states the lack of improvement within Guatemala exhausts international donors, which leads to these donors slowly reducing aid and support.¹³ This is the fear Vogt demonstrates with Maya political groups. Part of the lack of mobilization is the need to satisfy donors' demands, even if that means putting their own wants second.¹⁴ These ideas are vaguely discussed in several other sources.

Unlike the other sources, Reilly points out the need for the state, market, and civil society to work together in order to obtain peace asking, how does peace-building occur without wealth distribution?¹⁵ The peace accords addressed the need for the government to make changes in taxation and in the percentage of taxes for social programs. Yet, the government never met these at the time of Reilly's work and rural Guatemala of course fared the worst in the country with 72% of the population below the poverty line, and 31% in extreme poverty in 2003. Though rural Guatemala has never been able to compete with the urban centers, the extreme poverty that exists in these areas demonstrates the impact of the armed conflict in rural areas as army destruction was greatest in rural areas. There is a clear link between army destruction, physically and mentally, and the lack of development in rural populations. Like several sources, Reilly points out the extremely high murder rate in present-day Guatemala in comparison to Latin America. Following the armed struggle, violent deaths were almost as high as during the most violent time in the conflict. The lack of a conviction rate only frustrates citizens and international donors more.¹⁶

Overall, these sources give a detailed picture of the brutality that encompassed the 36-year civil war and how the extreme violence has made the transition to peace almost impossible. Violence is an essential part of the history and continues to play a central role in Guatemala today. The research suggests reconciliation with the truth is needed for the country to confront its past and move forward. Names of both victims and aggressors should be available as a way to never let this history repeat itself. Reilly's comparative study of Guatemala and Northern Ireland demonstrates this, as well as Weld's description of the reconciliation process that occurred for ex-combatants while working in the PN archives. Sanford's work demonstrates how important this would be for communities throughout Guatemala, and this research expands on the processes communities go through as they move to reconstruct their civilian lives.

3. Guatemalan History and the Lack of Progress

Guatemala struggled for decades to end the corruption and violence which plagued the country throughout its history. In 1944, Guatemala entered a period commonly referred to as the "Ten Years of Spring," which was the most progressive era the country experienced in the twentieth century. The "Ten Years of Spring" embodied nineteenth century liberalism focusing on workers' rights, indigenous rights and overall internal development. Unintentionally, this development disrupted United States' business interests by reducing the United Fruit Company's (UFCO) holdings on unused lands in Guatemala. Through the Agrarian Reform Law of 1951, President Jacobo Árbenz Guzman reduced large landholdings, including the UFCO's and his own, to redistribute throughout the country. Eventually, these actions caused the U.S. government in 1954 to back a coup which halted the most progressive years Guatemala had ever seen. After six years of abuses and a heightened witch-hunt for communism in the increasingly intense Cold War environment, many Guatemalans had no other option but to fight back against their own government. Thirty-six years later and one of the most gruesome conflicts in Central America, the Guatemalan government and the rebel forces signed the Peace Accords of 1996. Unfortunately, the Accords failed to include the necessary requirements to end corruption and violence within Guatemala in order for the country to move past its history to a more successful future.^{17, 18, 19}

4. The Failure to Achieve Peace through the Peace Accords of 1996

Peace is not achieved by the agreement to end a war between two enemies, but instead occurs when there is freedom from tension between adversaries, and freedom from anxiety over violence. Finding peace begins with recovering the truth. Truth and truth recovery are understood as a concept in which the country and its citizens are made aware of what occurred during the conflict with great detail. The names of those individuals involved and the role they played in different events throughout the conflict must be included. The goal of making information public for the use of individuals and civil institutions is essential. This is the first step to peace and opens the way to justice, the next step

to obtaining peace. Justice is the process of prosecuting for war crimes, and is essential not only for the victims, but also for disrupting the old power structure. With prosecution of war criminals, these individuals that abused positions of power can be removed from their positions. The final step in achieving peace is reconciliation between victims and their aggressors. It is essential for the victims and their families to know their offenders. Reconciliation helps to break silences about the past and opens society up to discussions and conversations about their history. Truth and justice are essential to reconciliation for victims and their families, which makes space for peace. Without achieving these steps, the country cannot obtain peace, which is necessary for progress. Guatemala is in dire need of peace, but must first find means to obtaining truth, justice and reconciliation.

Ideally, after a violent conflict, a country would deconstruct its corrupt civil organizations through a strengthened judicial branch to prosecute war criminals and peace resisters, so as to not hinder the peace process. Physical security for all parties must be guaranteed. Though violence is common following any violent conflict, without ensuring measures to decrease violence, peace will continue to be interrupted. Security is also necessary for increasing political participation, demilitarizing the country, and increasing civil institutions. Essentially, a country must change their internal power structures to make space for reconciliation in order to achieve peace. Guatemala was not capable of doing these things as the Peace Accords failed to give the country the tools it needed to enforce change. The Accords did little to create terms acceptable and positive for a majority of its citizens. They failed to create an environment capable of fostering peace.

The failure of the Accords occurred due to the many compromises and omissions within the peace agreements, they were written in the terms of the URNG's near-defeat. The army took advantage of the precarious position in which the guerilla forces stood.²⁰ At the time of the creation of the peace agreements, the URNG had little left. They were not capable of fighting for much longer. Though the Army would have preferred to wipe out all URNG forces prior to ending the civil war, international pressures forced them into creating the peace agreements. However, the inferior strategic position of the URNG allowed for the army to dominate the peace talks. Not only did the Accords need to win the approval of the army, but the private sector, the government's conservative agenda, and international institutions, such as the banks.²¹ The URNG had little support outside its own forces and a few NGO's determined to end violence and extensive human rights violations. Furthering struggles was the breakdown of civil society. Following the civil war, no civil institutions still existed. The only power was the army. An extremely unbalanced power structure inside of what had become an entirely militarized country, hindered international efforts to encourage the creation of a balanced peace accord. In this context, the Peace Accords were incapable of allowing for truth or justice, so that reconciliation would never occur without a fight, leaving the country without a means to find peace.

The most obvious failure of the Guatemalan Peace Accords was the lack of legal precedence or procedure to name and prosecute the aggressors, causing the lack of ability for the country or international organizations to encourage the process of reconciliation. The Peace Accords stated the Truth Commission (CEH) would have no right to "attribute responsibility" nor would it have "any judicial aim or effect."²² This meant the commission could not include names of perpetrators of war crimes in their report, nor could officials use the report in a court for prosecution purposes. The Accords also constrained CEH activities to look only at events directly "connected to the armed conflict" leaving a lot of atrocities unreported if they could not be directly link to the civil war.²³ These restrictions left few legal grounds for the commission to find truth and achieve justice for the victims of the armed conflict as all aggressors were left nameless. As Susanne Jonas commented, "The daily lives of most Guatemalans will not improve directly as a result of the accords."²⁴ Acknowledging the past is part of moving towards the future without repeating the past.²⁵ Naming perpetrators is therefore essential. "We cannot escape the fact that there are heroes and villains in our history," Frank La Rue, a director of a human rights NGO, commented in 1998. Other truth commissions, such as in South Africa, El Salvador and Chile, included the names of those that committed crimes during their conflicts.²⁶ Unlike peace resisters argued, none of the above examples experienced retaliation against perpetrators named for war crimes. The army forced these restrictions into the Accords as a safe-guard against restructuring the current power structure, in which they benefitted the most.

The lack of information and many restrictions included in the Accords directly contributed to a public silence about the atrocities of the armed conflict which existed decades following the end of the war. In 1997, the government passed the Law of National Reconciliation. This law attempted to grant amnesty to those that committed the worst of human rights violations.²⁷ A New York Times article described the law as "virtually guaranteeing military leadership total immunity."²⁸ These silences were detrimental to reconciliation. Both larger social institutions and smaller rural communities, largely effected by the conflict, attempted to break this silence. Both kinds of efforts experienced attacks by peace resisters. Retaliation for efforts to break public silences throughout Guatemala about the truth of the armed conflict contributed to the lack of implementation of the accords. It was a vicious cycle in which the lack of reconciliation only reinforced the lack of implementation, because there was no ability to find truth and justice. Small rural communities erected monuments with the names of those killed or disappeared, and these were often defaced.²⁹

Other projects to break the silence included the Recovery of Historical Memory project (REMHI), *Nunca Más* (Never Again), by the Catholic Church. The Church was one of the only surviving civil institutions following the conflict. However, following the release of this report in 1998, the Bishop who headed the project, Juan Gerardi was assassinated.

Even a decade following the conflict, resistance to change and persisted through countless threats of violence. In 2005, the recovery of an old police archives revealed millions of old documents about the participation of the National Police in the armed conflict. The Project for the Recovery of the National Police Historical Archives (PRAHPN) had two goals: to save the documents from decay and analyze these documents as a means to persecute war-era officials in the courts.³⁰ These projects threatened the lack of repercussions for inappropriate actions during the conflict for many still in power. Ex-guerillas helping in these efforts continued to feel the backlash of trying to find the truth. The army and other conservative parties used threats of a return to armed conflict, in order to stop the use of the archival information in the courtrooms.³¹ As a means to protecting themselves, army propaganda labeled victims of the conflict as criminals, so as to attack, and remove blame and responsibility from army leadership. This labeling along with retaliation led to silence and fear, decreasing civilian political participation immensely.³²

Kristen Weld, an anthropologist on site during the recovery, worked alongside ex-guerilla fighters and found the importance this information had for so many involved, especially ex-guerillas or family members of the disappeared. The PRAHPN project represented a “democratic opening, historical memory, and the pursuit of justice for war crimes.”³³ All of these actions stressed the importance of naming aggressors as a means to move forward, so that atrocities will not be committed in the future; to end threats of and the use of violence. The victims of the armed conflict continued to suffer because of the lack of truth that existed after a full decade of supposed peace. “The right to truth and the right to justice have to be guaranteed in order to achieve the rule of law and peace.”³⁴ Human rights activists cannot come to criticize, but for the respect of human rights. La Rue argued the recognition of human rights violations leads to demilitarization and the improved role of the police.³⁵ Those that committed the worst of the atrocities continued in power for a lack of responsibility. NGOs hoped the transition to the National Civil Police (PNC) would help with the demilitarization of the police and lessen the impact of the army. However, due to the lack of prosecution and justice of army officials, those that committed the worst of human right violations remained at the core of PNC operations. This explained the lack of trust between citizens and those that are supposed to keep them safe decreasing political participation, which was dismal, while distrust and fear of the army and government by its citizens was high.

The high levels of violence, not uncommon following any violent conflict, only complicated the process of achieving peace in Guatemala, post-1996. Christina Steenkamp, a researcher of peace processes and post-war reconstruction described the complicating factors of post-peace societies, when she stated, “Post-peace accord societies typically engage in a comprehensive, long-term process of reconstruction and peace-building, which includes diverse activities such as reconciliation and truth recovery, security sector reform, economic restructuring, the building of new political institutions and stimulation of social capital.”³⁶ Violence disrupted these processes in Guatemala, but unlike other states that had experienced conflicts, Guatemala was incapable of decreasing violence. This made it impossible for the country to move past the war, create a more democratic state and achieve a higher standard of living for its citizens. The post-peace state of Guatemala kept intact the original power structure with the army and private sector on top. These groups continued to fight any change to this system as they benefitted the most from a lack of change.

The continuation of violence after the Peace Accords demonstrated the lack of existence of a civil society. Non-governmental organizations and leftist groups hoped the political construction of Guatemala would change with the peace agreements, but through the use of political violence those in positions of power remained there. The intense integration of violence in civil society made it so political violence was not the only kind, but economic and social were interrelated. Political violence included measures taken to disrupt government measures to make change, specifically within the judicial system. The judicial system in Guatemala lacked strength to prosecute for any type of crimes, which allowed it to continue and increased social violence, especially through collective community violence. After more than a generation of fighting, violent measures were part of Guatemalan society. The insufficient physical security the country provided and the mistrusted judicial system led to the continuation of violence after the Peace Accords.

Violence was just as much a part of civilian lives post-accords as it was for the military, government, and guerillas. The army forced almost 900,000 civilians to participate in the violent crimes against fellow civilians, which created an environment where violence was the best option for dealing with conflict. Therefore, establishing a culture of violence and making post-war challenges to demilitarize the country that much more difficult.³⁷ The peace agreements failed to state how to achieve human security and made it that much more difficult to overcome the existing structure even a decade following the Accords.³⁸ When things got rough, society still turned to the military, reinforcing their corrupt power.³⁹ Violence was what majority of Guatemalans knew since the time of birth or young childhood as the

conflict lasted longer than a generation. This has led directly to the use of social violence in communities, especially rural, where vigilante justice was common place. Distrust of the criminal justice system and a history of violence meant citizens accepted violence as a part of everyday life.

Lynchings and collective community violence against an individual or small group became common place in Guatemala following the Peace Accords. The history of state terror as it effects the very social institution of a people embedded violence into rural communities which in turn allowed for lynchings to be common place. Godoy argued the social trauma of an event such as the Guatemalan civil war “is more than the sum of the individual traumas suffered.”⁴⁰ This further supports the true need Guatemala had for truth recovery and reconciliation with the event. To discuss the event helped to break the silence, which in turn allowed for change in the social structure. *Justicia a mano propia* (justice by one’s own hand) exhibited the military integration into community life that existed post-peace accords. A perceived lack of justice by the government encouraged these community activities.⁴¹ Forced participation by community leaders and punished for trying to stop this form of collective justice exhibited a distinct issue the Guatemalan government faced in trying to get violence under control following the return to civilian rule. The lack of physical security prior to pushes for peace, especially with premature elections caused issues of poor quality democracies and systems that have yet to shed their old leaders, once perpetrators of violence, led to the lack of ‘deep’ civil democracies.⁴² State involvement in organized crime during the conflict led to individual involvement in the government after the conflict for personal gain. This was an issue in Guatemala and led to state distrust.

This culture of violence that existed in Guatemala following the Peace Accords at the state level and individual level made implementation of the Accords even more difficult. The power structure in Guatemala remained intact through the lack of legal precedent and implementation after the conflict. In part the very landscape of Guatemala hindered this process as these landscapes of villages and small communities in rural Guatemala resemble the time of the civil war.⁴³ Thirty-six years was a long time to endure such hardship and for the Maya people genocidal measurers to exterminate their communities. This environment made it possible to restrict CEH activities, assassinate the bishop after the release of *Nunca Más*, and limit the report from the police archives. It was extremely limiting and made it impossible for the country to move past violence and reorient itself as a civil society. One small socialist community in rural Guatemala attempted to overcome these obstacles by creating their own community with ideals from the civil war and construct a society that resembles the rights and desires of the Left throughout the armed conflict.

5. The Story of Nuevo Horizonte

Following the signing of the Peace Accords, the demobilization process took place for all members of the guerilla forces as the first step to creating a civil society, and reintegrating these individuals back into society. However, most of them had no place to do so. When the war finally came to an end, most of the guerillas lost contact with family members over the years due to taking pseudonyms as a means to protect their families. Because of this, many ex-combatants following the armed conflict did not know where their families were or if they were still alive. This was how the cooperative of Nuevo Horizonte formed. In an attempt to find a physical place to rebuild their lives as civilians, one hundred and twenty members of the Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes (FAR) division of the URNG came together to create a new kind of community, with a non-traditional understanding of how their community would exist. While developing their community, these ex-guerillas rewrote the truth of the conflict from their perspective, due to the lack of truth found through the U.N. Truth Commission or the Guatemalan government. Though this collective memory, the community found justice and reconciliation on their own terms. The community narrative is rooted in nineteenth century liberalism, socialism and ideas from the green movement. Their understanding of equality among ethnicity and gender was extremely sophisticated in comparison with the rest of Guatemalan society. These ideals made it possible for demobilized FAR guerillas to found Nuevo Horizonte following the Peace Accords despite many hardships inflicted by the government, other disapproving parties, and environmental conditions, in hopes to create a home and continue the unfinished fight.

Nuevo Horizonte was a living example of the failure of the peace accords. As international forces, such as the U.N. MINUGUA project (charged with the task of ensuring both sides followed through on agreements) started to exit Guatemala most of the accords and agreements fell to the wayside. Under the direct opposition of the peace agreements, the government immediately following demobilization hindered the ability for these rebels to reconstruct their lives as civilians by obtaining land. The government met the process of obtaining land with resistance and obstacle after obstacle for the ex-combatants. Demobilization included only a tiny amount of money for each decommissioned guerilla fighter and a small bag of emergency supplies, neither of which could sustain an individual. In direct betrayal of the accords, the government objected to every plot of land the cooperative requested until offering a desolate plot filled with horrible memories from the war. The government, then, refused to give up the land without

payment though the accords stated ex-combatants would receive land free of charge. Having no means to pay for the land offered, the government forced the community to obtain a European loan. Negotiations for the price of the land did not include the ex-combatants. During negotiations the government raised the price of the land to higher than it was worth and the bank added a high interest rate to match. Without the consent of the cooperative, the bank settled on this deal. The ex-guerrillas collective combined their small amount of money for tools and food in the first years of the cooperative and the community, but had no means to pay for their land. This was the biggest struggle in the first years of the cooperative.

Following the purchase of the land, the community began to build. Building presented the community with a new kind of challenge. Relying on the lessons from the war of solidarity, the ex-guerrillas, men and women, and their families began to construct their new home. In constructing this home, collective memory began to form for these ex-guerrillas and their families, which established a community narrative among members. This narrative exemplified their values of solidarity, equality among members, the right to live with respect, and the right to education. The cooperative saw these values as inherited from the struggle. The ex-combatants reinterpreted these values during the founding of the community and it will be shown this community projects these values into the future as a means to give meaning to their past. While living in yet another forest, the members of the Nuevo Horizonte worked alongside each other every day to build home by home. Unlike other systems, this cooperative built homes for everyone as a community and assigned homes based on random lottery. Hierarchy did not exist from the conception of this community. During the day, everyone walked a mile to the area of construction, while two women stayed behind to watch all the children swinging in hammocks in the forest where everyone stayed during the night. Ridicule was high from neighbors for their work and attempts at recreating; an ex-guerrilla explained during a tour of the reforestation project, the same area ex-combatants lived during construction of the community.⁴⁴ Women were especially under ridicule for not returning to the traditional gender roles, but instead laboring beside the men.⁴⁵ Following building homes and a few community buildings, the desert like land started to become a community.

Through collective projects, the cooperative of Nuevo Horizonte created a community and provided all of its members in a better way than most of rural Guatemalans. Families received a home with a roof, cement flooring for a living room and bedroom. Each home had running water in a *pila* (kitchen sink) for cleaning and cooking. Space for a large garden was part of each family home, which offered room for a large diversity of plants which helped to diversify the desert like land into a greener space. The community created not only buildings for an elementary school run by the state, but also a middle school run by the cooperative. This secondary school system within the community allowed for members and their children to obtain the education they needed to pursue higher education outside of the community. It also contributed to the passing down of community history and community ideology. This was part of the transition of collective memory among ex-combatants to history for the youth of the community.

The community began creating projects dedicated to creating a better life for all its members. These projects included reforestation, tilapia farming, beef and dairy cow farming, and tourism. The reforestation project at its inception exhausted its members as they needed to plant 145 hectares of land with pino trees. Though international organizations thought these trees to be good for preserving the environment, the community planned after the required amount of time to cut the trees away and sell them. The community did not believe the trees were good for biodiversity. For their labors the community received minimal financial compensation. Unlike their neighbors involved in the project, many of whom are heavily involved in drugs, the community met every requirement. After ten years the community spent less time on reforestation and dedicated more time to other projects. The cooperative focused on creating a business in their *laguna* by farming tilapia. Members in the community have access to this tilapia as well as the eating commons which serves many visitors, and was one of the cooperatives other business initiatives. The tilapia was well known in the area. The community farmed beef cows and worked to breed a good milking cow for the heat of Guatemala. Tourism was extremely important to the security of the community. It was the insurance policy against the government or the army threatening the community for broadcasting their version of history and continued struggle for a better future. Tourism brought individuals and international attention to the community, as the cooperative was a constant reminder of the army's defeat to wipe out the opposition. Any retaliation or measures of destruction of the community would gain international attention. As the community continued to provide more for its members and continue as a success in rural Guatemala, the more frustrated the government and the Right became with Nuevo Horizonte. Tourism therefore became essential to the community's survival.

The cooperative dedicated these projects to improving the standard of living for members and their families, but also as an integral part of their story. The members of Nuevo Horizonte endowed these projects with meaning, by connecting them to their story. These projects are what made it possible for the cooperative to find purpose and reconcile with their past by focusing on creating a better future. The name Nuevo Horizonte was chosen to remind its members of "el objetivo de mantener el sueño de un mejor futuro" (the goal to maintain the dream of a better future).⁴⁶

This was the cooperative's way of finding peace and achieving progress without the encouragement or support of its government.

6. Reconciling on Different Terms

The failed implementation of the Peace Accords and therefore lack of any process or means for victims of the conflict to find peace and justice, made it necessary for individuals to reconcile on their own terms. Unknowingly, the members of Nuevo Horizonte did this with more success than many others by reinterpreting the terms of truth, justice and reconciliation in order to find peace. Though limited, finding truth in their own memories and making space within their community to reflect this past in physical spaces and actions was essential. This led to the creation of collective memory. Through this narrative, the cooperative found justice in naming the perpetrators on the community website, history book and community murals. Though restrained by the current system, through their own ingenuity the community continues the unarmed struggle. By doing this, the community reconciled with their past by giving it significance and a reason to fight for a better future. This research deals greatly with current measures taken by the community to establish a functioning cooperative. However, these processes occurred in terms of memory and how memory is shaped. As memory is how we think about our own history, this paper is essential to the creation of history and its importance in the present. By remembering the past and preserving the memory, the community is reminded to continue the fight *sin armas* (without arms), while looking towards a better future.

The collective memory of the ex-guerillas is the community narrative, which is currently transitioning into history seen in the physical spaces, such as the dedication of the forest, many murals, and the middle school. *El Bosque de la Vida* (the Forest of Life) was a constant reminder of the war, and a permanent part of the cooperative's land. The cooperative preserved the forest as a memory of the years spent there. The statutes of the cooperative have written into cooperative law the preservation of this land by guaranteeing the preservation of 15% of their community for the forest.⁴⁷ It was a reminder of the community's roots, not only what they lost, but also what they gained. After spending years in the forest, life in the jungle taught solidarity among members of the guerilla forces. Though a tough and dangerous life, cooperation between guerillas was essential for survival. Everyone worked together regardless of age, gender, or ethnic background. Women fought beside men, and men cooked alongside women. An ex-guerilla fighter in conversation mentioned he knew how to make tortillas (a staple in the Guatemalan diet), commenting he had learned during the conflict.⁴⁸ The cooperative contribute value formation to the armed conflict: solidarity, equality among combatants, hard work, and perseverance. Following the armed conflict, many Guatemalans tried to move along with their lives by forgetting about the conflict. However, this community did not do so. Instead, Nuevo Horizonte continued in a similar life-style when building their new home. These memories of the war not only made it possible for the community to build, but reconcile with the past. Preserving the forest was a constant reminder of the armed conflict and everything Nuevo Horizonte had to overcome. The forest was the best way to demonstrate to outsiders what the history of the cooperative was and its impact it still has. The tourism office includes in their tour of the community the forest with a history of all the things it provided and taught them.

The Forest of Life was not only a reminder of the past and a means to reconciling with the memory of the conflict, but more importantly the forest became a means of thinking about the future. Though the cooperative and its leaders saw the conflict as the time of their ideology and value formation, the continued expansion of leadership in the youth and development of projects demonstrates the continued development of these values. During a more recent visit, *un joven* (young adult) guided the tour through the forest. He retold the community's narrative through his own eyes. As the community grows older, the young adults need to take over the role of remembering the conflict and continuing the struggle. The forest has provided this opportunity. In respect to the environment, the community thought of the future as a means to preserving green space and not stressing the land. This is a newer development in community values. This is the projection of these values into the future. The preservation of forest land in its natural state was essential to this community and should be to the country as a way to lessen pollution as uninterrupted green space like this continues to decrease across the country.

Physical space was essential to creation of the cooperative's past and future through their dedication of land to certain projects, and through the artwork that covers the walls of almost all of the community buildings. Murals throughout the community have added in breaking public silences and making space to reconcile with their own understanding of their history. There was a clear ideal in painting these murals. Murals of fallen combatants were mixed in. These mural allowed for conversations between ex-guerillas, their children and visitors about the past. The community murals depicted history and enforced community ideals of a continued struggle. One mural depicted a skeleton in a soldier uniform walking through a field planting not seeds, but bombs. The soldier had the United States flag on its arm patch. The flag gave the viewer a clear idea that this soldier was part of the Guatemalan Army and

clearly shows the influence of the U.S. in the conflict. The United States funded the coup that ended the Ten Years of Spring and trained the Guatemalan Army in counterinsurgency measures. The arm patch clearly depicts this relationship. The skeleton dropping bombs in the ground stated that death brings more death. Planting bombs showed the destruction of land and the integration of violence. The role of the U.S. and the Army's extreme measures to destroy the guerillas were covered up for more than a decade after the conflict, but this mural unearthed both of those issues. It was not taboo to discuss the reality of what occurred in the armed conflict. Other murals used the community's collective narrative of the past to hint towards the future. One mural stated above a long line of protestors, "Many small people, in many small places, make many small changes. They change the world" written across one of the elementary school buildings. Within this picture the long march of people held symbols from the armed conflict, but written across the banner at the front of the line had cooperative ideals, "Dignity. Respect. To learn. Equality. To live." The mural encompassed the ideal future, and yet is supported by the historic struggle.

Physical space was not the only development the community created as a means to using their past as motivation and purpose for striving for a better future, but also the structure of community leadership and governance. These structures are unlike any other in Guatemala, where Nuevo Horizonte was a cooperative and a community. The cooperative sustained the community. It was a system in which the ex-guerilla fighters hold a position, socio/a. These individuals were responsible for paying off the community land and the different projects in which they had dedicated their time and energy. With this responsibility came the right to vote on all cooperative decisions. It was the responsibility of these people to carry on the ideals and values of the cooperative, and pass this information onto the next generation. Again their past motivated the construction of their future and a means to sustaining their future.

Nuevo Horizonte is more than just a community, but an example of an alternate path to achieve peace on their own terms due to the lack of support of the Guatemalan government. Through the development of collective memory, the community continues to create a more in-depth narrative, which guides their decisions about the future. These ex-guerillas have come to find truth in this narrative, and through the construction of their cooperative, they found justice in this truth. The forest, murals and governance structures within the community are only a few examples of the many ways the community narrative stands at the heart of this community. This is how the community has made space to reconcile with their past in terms of their future. This research contributes to the understanding of conflict and peace processes through the research of alternative paths through this community. In future research, there should be more attempts made at discovering what other methods people have taken to go through the steps of finding truth and justice, making space to reconcile, and finding peace. Especially as each conflict presents unique terms and consequences to attempting to achieve the above steps. This research will continue to expand on this idea and map the unconscious steps this community takes as the younger generation takes even greater roles in the cooperative of Nuevo Horizonte.

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