

**Indigenous Achí Widows' Experience of Armed Conflict in Rabinal, Guatemala:
Implications for Peace and Development in the Aftermath of *La Violencia*.**

By

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous Achí Widows' Experience of Armed Conflict in Rabinal, Guatemala:
Implications for Peace and Development in the Aftermath of *La Violencia*.

By

Fabienne Doiron

Abstract: This thesis explores how indigenous Achí widows experienced the internal armed conflict in Rabinal, Guatemala (especially during the period of *La Violencia*, 1978-1985) and the implications that this experience has had for peace and development. The fieldwork conducted in rural regions of Rabinal was based on an inductive research design using participant observation and life history interviews as the main methods of data collection. This thesis applies a multidimensional analysis to Achí widows' experience of *La Violencia*, exploring both socio-historical factors as well as more immediate circumstances – including specific types of violence inflicted on women during ethnic conflict as well as widows' struggles to ensure their own and their families' survival after the loss of their husbands. This thesis also analyses Achí widows' activism around issues of truth, justice and reconciliation in the aftermath of the conflict, examining the impacts that this activism has had on widows and their communities. This holistic analysis leads to a discussion of alternative concepts of peace and development.

August 9, 2007

ACRONYMS

ADIVIMA	<i>Asociación para el Desarrollo Integral de las Víctimas de la Violencia en la Verapaces, Maya Achí</i> (Association for the Integral Development of the Victims of the Violence in the Verapaces, Maya Achí)
ASCRA	<i>Asociación Campesina de Río Negro 13 de marzo, Maya Achí</i> (March 13 th Río Negro Small-farmer Association, Maya Achí)
CALDH	<i>Centro para la Acción Legal en Derechos Humanos</i> – Centre for Legal Action in Human Rights
CEH	<i>Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico</i> – Commission for Historical Clarification
CIDH/IACHR	<i>Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos</i> – Inter-American Court for Human Rights
COCODE	<i>Consejo Comunitario de Desarrollo</i> – Community Development Council
CONAVIGUA	<i>Comisión Nacional de Viudas de Guatemala</i> (CONAVIGUA – National Commission of Guatemalan Widows)
CUC	<i>Comité de Unidad Campesina</i> – Committee for Peasant Unity
ECAP	<i>Equipo de Estudios Comunitarios y Acción Psicosocial</i> – Community Studies and Psychosocial Action Team
EGP	<i>Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres</i> – Guerrilla Army of the Poor
FAFG/EAFG	<i>Federación de Antropología Forense de Guatemala</i> –Forensic Anthropology Foundation of Guatemala, formerly <i>Equipo de Antropología Forense de Guatemala (EAFG)</i> – Forensic Anthropology Team of Guatemala
FAR	<i>Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes</i> – Rebel Armed Forces
INDE	<i>Instituto Nacional de Electrificación de Guatemala</i> – National Electrification Institute of Guatemala
MLN	<i>Movimiento de Liberación Nacional</i> – National Liberation Movement
MR-13	<i>Movimiento Revolucionario 13 de Noviembre</i> – November 13 Revolutionary Movement

ORPA	<i>Organización Revolucionaria del Pueblo en Armas</i> – Revolutionary Organisation of the People in Arms
PAC	<i>Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil</i> – Civilian Defence Patrols
PAN	<i>Partido de Avanza National</i> – National Advancement Party
PGT	<i>Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo</i> – Guatemalan Labour Party
PNR	<i>Programa Nacional de Resarcimiento</i> – National Reparations Program
REMHI	<i>Recuperación de la Memoria Historica</i> – Recovery of Historical Memory
UFCo	United Fruit Company
URNG	<i>Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca</i> – National Revolutionary Union of Guatemala

INTRODUCTION

Guatemala was not completely unknown to me when I arrived in November 2005 to begin my fieldwork and research to complete my master's thesis; I had spent a number of months there, taking Spanish classes and travelling through different parts of the country. While travelling through the Western Highlands in 2003, it was impossible to ignore the fact that it was an election year: it seemed that the logos of the country's main political parties had been painted onto every blank electricity pole, boulder and rock face along the main roadways. This was only the second national election since the peace accords had been signed in 1996, and it was apparent through the numerous demonstrations, protests and rallies held by various sectors that social and political tensions were still running high in the country of 12 million. The impression I was left with then was of a country that still bore deep wounds from the recently ended internal armed conflict, and that had yet to resolve the problems that had led to the outbreak of the internal armed conflict in the first place.

Although many of the 'first impressions' I had about the situation in Guatemala were later confirmed during that stay and when I started doing research on the topic, many questions remained unanswered, especially regarding women's experience of the conflict and of its aftermath. More specifically, I wanted to understand how indigenous women had experienced the war and its aftermath. When I came back to Canada to start a master's degree in International Development Studies, this topic became one of my central interests and, eventually, the topic I chose to pursue in my thesis.

Since its inception, one of the aims of my research project has been to gain a more comprehensive understanding of indigenous women's experience of armed conflict.

Consequently, I decided to follow an inductive research design and conduct grounded theory research; I did not set out to conduct fieldwork wanting to test a specific hypothesis or trying to prove or disprove a particular argument or theory. Rather, I wanted to explore a particular experience – the experience that indigenous widows had had of the Guatemalan internal armed conflict and its aftermath. In order to recognise women's agency in understanding and shaping their own history, I have tried to allow this research project to be shaped by what the widows themselves told me about their experiences of the internal armed conflict. Indeed, as Sanford (2003) commented regarding academic work and debates concerning the Guatemalan internal armed conflict:

When anthropologists, sociologists, and historians fail to consider the Maya as actors in their own history, they commit a discursive silencing of human agency. They compound the terror of La Violencia by not taking into account the voices of the survivors – in effect, they silence them. Thus, however unwittingly, they compound the political, social, cultural, physical and material violence with discursive violence. (p.71)

The feeling I had of wanting to let women speak for themselves and let their voices be heard was only intensified after hearing what they had to say and hearing how powerfully and courageously they themselves were speaking out. Indeed, while talking with many of the widows in Rabinal, it became increasingly obvious to me that these women did not need any outsider's help in speaking out about their experiences of *La Violencia*¹ and did not need to be 'given' a voice. However, I also realised that, having heard what they had told me and having 'witnessed' the recounting of their experiences,² I had the responsibility to "give voice to sight" (Gerald Sider, quoted in Green, 1999, p.21); that is to say, I, in turn, had the responsibility to speak out about what they had told me. This is what I have attempted to do with this thesis.

The interest I had in understanding indigenous women's experience of the Guatemalan internal armed conflict was deepened by what I found when I started to conduct more in-depth research on the wide-ranging topic of 'women and war.' While this topic has received increasing attention in recent years, partly as a result of the United Nations Security Council's resolution on Women, Peace and Security (known as resolution 1325) passed in October 2000, much of the development literature concerned with women's situation during armed conflict and in its aftermath lacks a comprehensive gender analysis.

For the purpose of this thesis, I have adopted an approach in which I understand 'gender' as a socio-cultural construction (as opposed to 'sex,' which is biologically determined) that prescribes certain characteristics, including behaviours, attitudes and appearances of "what it means to be a man or a woman" (Pankhurst, 2004, p.25). However, gender does not only apply to individual identity but is also characterised by relations of power that are "produced and reproduced in social process" (Cockburn, 2007, p.6). As such, adopting a gender (or gendered) analysis will reveal the structural power imbalances and gender hierarchy that have permitted the privileging of men over women in most societies throughout history; this system of hierarchical power and domination, which has gender at its core, is referred to by feminist analysts as patriarchy.³

While the various roles and identities women hold in society undeniably influence their experiences of armed conflict, wartime is not devoid of gendered power structures in which women generally hold a subordinate status and position. Indeed, it is suggested in much of the literature on women and armed conflict that, because of their subordinate status in society and because of women's socially prescribed roles as caretakers of their

families and communities, women experience conflict and the suffering it causes in ‘distinct’ ways (Cockburn, 2001; El-Bushra, 2000; El-Jack, 2003; Pankhurst, 2004; UN, 2002). However, many feminist social theorists also suggest that not only is war-time not ‘devoid’ of gendered power relations, but that militarism and militarisation⁴ are dependent upon and serve to produce and reproduce particular gendered power structures. Indeed, Enloe (1983, 2000), Lorentzen and Turpin (1998), Turpin and Lorentzen (1996), Turshen and Twagiramariya (1998), and others point out that the most striking feature of military institutions is that they have historically been almost exclusively male, patriarchal institutions run by and for men, based on masculinity not as a “socio-biological trait but rather as cultural constructions of manliness” (Pankhurst, 2004:30).

Armed conflict is a disturbing daily reality for hundreds of thousands of people in the economic South. From their very nature, armed conflicts – and particularly civil wars – extort an extremely high price from the civilian populations who reside in the conflict-torn areas, making it perhaps one of the most pressing ‘development issues’ today. In the alternative approach to development it proposed in its 1987 publication *Development, Crises and Alternative Visions: Third World Women’s Perspectives* (Sen & Grown), DAWN – a network of feminists from the economic South (*Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era*) – suggested that it is through poor women’s experiences in ensuring their own and their family’s survival that we can best understand the processes of the development project and its impact; I would expand on this approach to propose that it is also applicable in the context of armed conflict and its aftermath.

Taking into account the fact that a higher number of men than women were killed during the armed conflict in Guatemala – leaving a large number of widows – exploring the experience of these women in the aftermath of conflict seems to be even more crucial. I suggest that in order to be able to build a true, lasting peace, in its most positive understanding,⁵ we need to arrive at a more complete and comprehensive understanding of how indigenous women, and particularly widows, have experienced armed conflict and its aftermath. Consequently, this thesis will explore indigenous Achí widows' experience of armed conflict in Rabinal, Guatemala and its implications for peace and development in the aftermath of *La Violencia*. While the Guatemalan internal armed conflict – and Rabinal widows' experience of it – undeniably had their own specificities, I hope that by exploring this specific experience this thesis will contribute to the growing body of knowledge on the more general topic of 'women and war.'

Overview of the Structure of the Thesis

The particular methodological approach I chose to follow in conducting my research and fieldwork exploring indigenous Achí widows' experience of the Guatemalan internal armed conflict has shaped the development of this thesis from its inception. In Chapter One, I will give an overview of this methodological approach, including the specific data collection strategy I adopted. I will also discuss the process involved in selecting a suitable 'site' in which to conduct my fieldwork and research as well as some of the main issues that I faced in conducting research in a cross-cultural setting.

In order to be able to understand a particular experience – that of Achí widows during *La Violencia* – it is necessary to first understand the larger context from which it

originated. As such, Chapter Two will be dedicated to outlining the historical context of the Guatemalan internal armed conflict. I will first examine the origins and causes of the war and how it played out on the national scene before turning to a more regional examination of the armed conflict in Rabinal, Baja Verapaz.

The exploration of Achí widows' experience of violence and militarisation during the Guatemalan internal armed conflict will begin in earnest in Chapter Three, entitled *We became like mother and father to our families*. In this chapter, I will explore how these women experienced violent repression and the various impacts it had on their lives. I will also outline widows' struggles to survive after the loss of their husbands and the resourcefulness and resiliency they showed in these struggles.

Chapter Four, *We were not going to remain voiceless*, outlines how widows mobilised to break the silence and denounce the genocidal violence to which their communities were submitted during the internal armed conflict. In this chapter, I will also explore how organising to elucidate this truth led many widows to occupy new roles and responsibilities, and in the process, gain a new gendered consciousness.

In mobilising to break the silence, widows in Rabinal founded the *Asociación para el Desarrollo Integral de las Víctimas de la Violencia en la Verapaces, Maya Achí* (ADIVIMA – Association for the Integral Development of the Victims of the Violence in the Verapaces, Maya Achí), an association dedicated to seeking truth, justice, *resarcimiento* (reparations or restitution) and the integral development of Rabinal communities affected by the violence of the internal armed conflict. In Chapter Five, *We are not animals, we are people!*, I will examine the various measures of *resarcimiento*

that have been undertaken in Rabinal, the impacts that have resulted from these measures and the visions of peace on which these activities are based.

In Chapter Six, I will attempt to bridge the gap between what has been learned from the inquiry of the previous chapters and larger theoretical frameworks. I will discuss the larger implications that can be drawn out from this research in relation to how we think about women's experiences of armed conflict and its aftermath and comment on the prospects for peace and development in Rabinal in light of this discussion.

CHAPTER ONE - METHODOLOGY

On 4 October 2005, a few days before I was due to leave for Guatemala to begin my thesis research and fieldwork, Hurricane Stan made landfall on the coast of Mexico. The storm brought torrential rains to much of Central America, causing a number of devastating landslides in the Western Highlands of Guatemala. Given the limited and incomplete information that was available in Canada in the first few days following the landslides, it was hard to draw a clear picture of the extent of the damage, so I decided to postpone my departure until I got a better grasp of the situation. When I arrived in Guatemala one month later, it was clear that I had made a sound decision in postponing my travels. The Interamerican Highway, which leads into the Western Highlands from the capital, Guatemala City, was still barely passable in some places and, although the phase of immediate disaster mitigation was coming to an end in most of the country, the longer-term impacts of the disaster were only starting to emerge. Since most of my fieldwork was conducted in an area that was only indirectly affected by the disaster, the landslides did not have such a crucial impact on my research project. However, the situation I faced when trying to decide how to proceed in light of the disaster did teach me an invaluable lesson that was to be useful in conducting the rest of my fieldwork: that of flexibility and openness to change.

Site Selection

After a few days in Guatemala City at the beginning of November 2005, I travelled to Quetzaltenango – known as Xela (a shortened version of the city's Quiché name, *Xelajú*). Xela is the country's second-largest city and the main commercial centre

of the Western Highlands. One of the reasons I chose Xela as my base-camp to start my research is the fact that it is home to several university campuses and many NGOs – both national and international – as well as local community organisations. Furthermore, the city's proximity and accessibility to many parts of the Western Highlands also influenced my choice, since this region is home to the majority of the country's indigenous population. It was also one of the regions most affected by the internal armed conflict.

When I left Canada, I intended to spend a number of weeks in Xela refreshing my knowledge of the Spanish language and establishing contacts with NGOs and community groups in order to find a suitable volunteer placement from which to conduct my fieldwork – preferably in a women's organisation or organisations in which women's issues were not unknown. I had attempted to initiate the process of site-selection prior to my departure for Guatemala, but had met very limited success: I found that most organisations that had contact information available from Canada did not work on the issues that interested me or did so in a very limited way.

While in the process of site-selection, I considered many issues that defined what a suitable research site would look like. First of all, due to the nature of the research project I was undertaking and its potentially sensitive subject matter, it was important for me to be conducting my fieldwork in a community where an active civil society had been established. Indeed, because of the potentially sensitive and divisive issues that could come up when conducting research about violence and armed conflict in a community still recovering from such conflict – and a still largely unacknowledged genocide – it was very important for me to be working in a community where discussion and dialogue around truth and justice issues had already been initiated.

Because of safety concerns related to the nature of my research, I also questioned my decision to work in a rural community since a larger centre could potentially offer a higher degree of anonymity – for participants and for myself. I therefore contemplated the possibility of continuing to live in Xela and to travel daily to work and conduct fieldwork and research in a nearby rural community. However, I was also conscious that it was crucially important for me to be living and working in close proximity to research participants in the community in which I was conducting fieldwork and research. This was especially important in order to gain the intimate knowledge necessary to collect data through participant observation and the trust needed to conduct life-history interviews and collect oral testimonies.

In mid-December, I travelled to Rabinal, Baja Verapaz to meet with one of the co-founders of the *Asociación para el Desarrollo Integral de las Víctimas de la Violencia en la Verapaces, Maya Achi* (ADIVIMA – Association for the Integral Development of the Victims of the Violence in the Verapaces, Maya Achi) to discuss the possibility of conducting research and volunteer work with the association. ADIVIMA is a grassroots organisation that was founded in 1994 by survivors and family members of victims of the armed conflict – the majority of whom are widowed women. As is reflected in the association's name, ADIVIMA works towards achieving an integral development in Rabinal communities and seeks “solutions to social, economic, educational and political problems that widows, orphans, survivors and victims face because of the internal armed conflict of the 1980s” (quoted from ADIVIMA's mission statement).⁶ Indeed, ADIVIMA's mission statement, founding principles and vision for the future reflect ideals of social justice and equity; and its activities and objectives also speak of working

towards truth, reconciliation and peace, the demilitarisation of Rabinal communities, as well as ending impunity and achieving justice.⁷

Rabinal is one of the eight *municipios*⁸ of the department of Baja Verapaz,⁹ in the central region of Guatemala, at the foot of the Western Highlands. The *municipio* of Rabinal includes the town of the same name, 27 *aldeas* (villages) and nearly 50 *caseríos* (settlements) spread over approximately 500 square kilometres in a depression of the Chuacús mountain chain that crosses the department of Baja Verapaz. The majority of the population in these rural villages and settlements are indigenous Achí – a sub-group of the Quiché linguistic division of the Maya ethnic group that constitutes nearly 82% of the *municipio*'s population (Valle Cobar, 2004).¹⁰ The town of Rabinal, which is home to less than a quarter of the *municipio*'s population, serves as the administrative and commercial centre of the *municipio*.¹¹

The department of Baja Verapaz and the *municipio* of Rabinal in particular were among the areas most affected by the counterinsurgency campaigns of *La Violencia*. The *Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico* (Commission for Historical Clarification) (CEH) concluded in its 1999 report, *Guatemala: Memoria del Silencio*, that Rabinal was among the eight Guatemalan regions in which it recorded the most violations of human rights and that the Maya Achí were one of the five ethnic groups against whom acts of genocide had been committed.¹² As we will see in the next chapter, the *municipio* of Rabinal became a target for the Army's counterinsurgency campaigns despite very limited guerrilla activity in the *municipio*. However, the Maya Achí of Rabinal have not been silenced, and the *municipio* has shown significant leadership in the search for

justice, dignity and restitution in the aftermath of the internal armed conflict, on the local, national and international scenes.

After visiting Rabinal and speaking with some of the co-founders of ADIVIMA, I realised that my site selection process had come to an end: I had found a suitable research community and host organisation. Indeed, Rabinal has been one of the most active communities in Guatemala in terms of the search for truth, justice and reparations in the aftermath of the internal armed conflict. Not only has a dialogue around issues of peace and justice been established in Rabinal, women – the widows of ADIVIMA – are at the forefront of this dialogue and of the larger movement searching for truth, justice and reconciliation.

Data Collection Strategy

I conducted my fieldwork and thesis research in Rabinal from January until May 2006, during which time I was also volunteering with ADIVIMA's Community Education, Organisation and Participation program-branch.¹³ My volunteer work with ADIVIMA provided me with an appropriate context in which to conduct my fieldwork. Indeed, as was stated earlier, ADIVIMA is a grassroots organisation that works around issues of truth, justice and reparations in Rabinal and works mostly with women widowed by the armed conflict. While ADIVIMA is not strictly a 'women's organisation,' most of its co-founders are women and, in Rabinal, it is commonly known as a widows' organisation; in fact, many people I met in town would ask me if I worked '*con las viudas*' (with the widows). The research I conducted during my fieldwork in Rabinal

relied heavily on participant observation, informal interviews based on an oral testimony and life history approach as well as secondary source research.

Participant observation

My work with the Community Education, Organisation and Participation program-branch of ADIVIMA allowed me ample opportunities to engage in participant observation. Most of my time at ADIVIMA was spent ‘accompanying’ community visits and activities as well as assisting one of the association’s co-founders in editing a book he wrote about the community’s and the association’s history and experience during the war. I also participated in some workshops, Maya spiritual ceremonies, memorial ceremonies for victims of massacres, as well as exhumations of clandestine graves, all of which allowed me to observe cultural and spiritual traditions as well as to testify to the community’s ongoing fight for dignity and justice.

In North American culture, much of what I did with ADIVIMA could seem like an inefficient use of time. For example, having not only one, but two people make a two or three-hour hike up a mountain simply to inform someone about the following week’s community meeting might not seem like the most efficient method of communication. Yet, in Rabinal, this is one of the only ways to get messages to remote rural areas. It soon became obvious that these visits not only served to inform a single person of a meeting, rather, the person we were visiting in each community was usually a ‘community-leader’ with ADIVIMA who would subsequently inform other widows and survivors in her community of the information we had come to deliver. Visiting community leaders also allows the organisation to monitor what is going on in the communities and to stay informed of any emerging issues that could potentially affect its work. Furthermore, my

‘accompaniment’ of community visits was also understood by widows and staff at ADIVIMA as a show of solidarity and support in the struggle to establish truth, justice and peace in Rabinal. I found that this aspect of my time with ADIVIMA was in many ways the most rewarding to me personally since I truly felt welcomed by participants of ADIVIMA, many of whom thanked me for the interest I lent to their struggle and for wanting to bring their story to places far away.

Even when the main purpose of the visit was to notify the widows of an upcoming event or meeting, it was generally not an ‘in and out’ affair. The woman greeting us would invariably invite us to sit and offer us something to drink. She and my co-worker would then proceed to discuss various topics (mostly in Achí with explanations and translation for my sake), including the status of legal proceedings, exhumation processes, challenges in getting proper documentation from the municipal government, etc... Many times, we would return to the office with a message for the director, one of the lawyers or the human rights teams or with requests for someone to go search the county’s archives to look for birth or death certificates. For research purposes, community visits also proved extremely useful to me since they allowed me to gain access to many women, by many accounts a hard-to-access group: rural indigenous women. I will discuss this in greater detail below. These visits also allowed me to gain insight on rural life in Rabinal, an insight which I would perhaps not have been able to gain by other means, seeing how far removed many of these villages are from the town of Rabinal.

Since I lived in the research community for an extended period of time, the activities of my daily life and interactions with people in the community provided me with rich and varied sources of information on a variety of issues and topics.

Conversations with co-workers at ADIVIMA, regional activists, community members, as well as with local and international staff working with other organisations in Rabinal¹⁴ provided me with additional, often important, information on current events at the local level, cultural traditions, contextual information and additional personal histories. I can not overstate how crucial these activities were in shaping the direction of my research. Indeed, I gathered a significant part of my data through participant observation while supporting ADIVIMA's daily activities, living and observing community dynamics and engaging in informal conversations with various community informants. Furthermore, the background knowledge and insight that informed my future analysis was gained mainly through these processes.

Oral testimony and life history

Since I was conducting qualitative research and following an inductive research design in order to explore widows' experiences of *La Violencia* and its aftermath, I also relied heavily on individual interviews in order to collect my data. In April and May 2006, I conducted 15 semi-structured interviews with women from various villages and communities in the *municipio* of Rabinal. All but one of these women had been widowed during the war and only a few of them had since remarried. These women were between the ages of 43 and 61 years.

The sampling strategy I followed is perhaps best described as a 'purposeful' sampling strategy "in which particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide" (Maxwell, 1998, p.87). Indeed, as is typical in grounded theory research, I was looking to interview a fairly homogenous sample of individuals in order to explore their particular experiences (Creswell, 1998); in

this case, Achí women who had been widowed by the armed conflict. For this reason, I focused on interviewing women who were involved with ADIVIMA, an organisation founded by and mainly composed of indigenous widows. Furthermore, defining my sample on a basis of the women's involvement with ADIVIMA also ensured that I would be interviewing women who had previously been engaged in dialogue around their experience of the armed conflict – which was important because of the potential sensitivity of my research topic.

While their level of involvement varied – a few were co-founders of the association, some had sat on the board of directors, others were community leaders and still others had participated in some of the organisation's projects – all of the women I interviewed had been involved with ADIVIMA in some form. Given my own association with ADIVIMA – as a volunteer intern – and the fact that I met these women through my work with the organisation, it is possible that some of the women I interviewed engaged in some level of self-censorship and avoided critiquing the organisation or its work. However, the aim of my research was not to 'evaluate' the work that ADIVIMA does and direct references to the organisation or its work came out of larger discussions of the widows' experiences of *La Violencia* and its aftermath – an experience which in their case was obviously coloured by their involvement with the association.

Although I only conducted one interview with each of the participants, I had deeper, more lengthy 'relationships' with four of the widows, with whom I also had many informal conversations and discussions which provided me with more contextual information about their lives and helped me gain a better understanding of their experiences. I also conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with three younger

women working at the ADIVIMA office, two of whom were from the *municipio* and the other from a neighbouring *municipio*. These women represented a younger age group (in their twenties). Several brief testimony-type declarations were also collected during a workshop in Cubulco, a neighbouring *municipio*.

I conducted all but three of my interviews with widows during community visits, usually at the woman's house; the other three interviews were conducted at the ADIVIMA office in the town of Rabinal. Interviews generally lasted between 45 minutes and one-and-a-half hour. Most of the interviews were tape-recorded (after obtaining the participating woman's permission); if, when I asked her permission to tape-record the interview, a participant indicated that she preferred that her interview not be recorded, I only took notes by hand (which I also did during tape-recorded interviews).

Given that one of the aims of my research was to allow the widows' voices to be heard, I wanted to keep the interviews as participant-led as I could. Consequently, the approach I used to conduct interviews closely resembles methods used in oral testimony and life history research, focusing more on a series of themes and issues based on memory and life experience than on a set list of questions (El-Bushra, 2004; Kirby & McKenna, 1989).¹⁵ This approach allowed the widows to "identify what is important and true for them in their specific context" (El-Bushra, 2004, p.154). I often started the interviews simply by asking the participant to tell me about her youth, which would almost always lead her to talking about how her life changed when *La Violencia* started. In some interviews, I followed up with questions about themes that I had previously identified or about issues that had emerged from what the participant had shared with me during the interview. Indeed, I found that following a participant-led, openly-structured model of interview

allowed for many themes and experiences to emerge that would otherwise perhaps not have been touched upon.

While some women definitely spoke more freely than others, most women were very responsive and some of them were very animated and seemed to greatly enjoy telling their story, especially when talking about their youth. Moreover, given the potential sensitivity of inquiring about experiences of armed conflict, using the oral testimony and life history approach increased the participants' ability to avoid topics that they were not comfortable discussing. In fact, for this reason, and because of its potential for empowerment, it has been suggested by academics and practitioners alike that oral testimony and life history are appropriate tools for doing research 'from the margins' and particularly in post-conflict contexts (El-Bushra, 2004; Kirby & McKenna, 1989; Sanford, 2001).

Although there are surely many potential challenges in using oral testimonies and life histories as a source of data for qualitative research,¹⁶ I would suggest that it was an appropriate approach to use in my research setting, particularly given the testimonial tradition that has developed in Guatemala related to speaking out about the war.¹⁷ This tradition is especially deeply rooted among indigenous women. Indeed, "testimony has been and continues to be the principle avenue by which semiliterate and nonliterate people can communicate their world to potential supporters of their struggle" (sic, Sanford, 2001, p.31).

Secondary source research

In addition to the information I collected through individual interviews with widows and staff at ADIVIMA, as well as data gathered through participant observation,

I also collected some contextual and historic data through secondary source research. In this respect, the existence of the *Museo Comunitario Rabinal Achí* (Rabinal Achí Community Museum) in the town of Rabinal was invaluable in conducting this aspect of my research. The excellent work that the Rabinal Achí Community Museum has undertaken in documenting the region's history and traditions, as well as the local population's struggle for truth and justice provided me with great secondary research sources. Through the Museum, I was able to consult several locally produced studies and research papers on Rabinal, watch film documentaries on various topics of interest to my research, as well as visit interesting and informative exhibits on the Maya Achí's history and traditions. Information on current events, as well as regional and national socio-political context was also collected from a review of national newspapers and online news on a regular basis. Finally, I also consulted various reports – including the CEH (1999) and REMHI (*Recuperación de la Memoria Historica* – Recovery of Historical Memory) (ODHAG, 1998) reports –, research papers, articles and books written on the armed conflict and the experience of widows and survivors in Rabinal and in Guatemala.

Issues in Cross-Cultural Research

Anyone who has lived, worked or researched in a cross-cultural setting is certainly aware of the multiple and multidimensional issues that can arise when conducting research as an 'outsider.'¹⁸ Indeed, while conducting fieldwork and research in Rabinal, I had to address issues of trust and 'gaining entry,' anonymity and representation in the written thesis, as well as language barriers, translation and interpretation. Each of these issues is discussed below.

Gaining access and trust

As is common in most cross-cultural research – and in any research in which the researcher is identified as an outsider – gaining access to and the trust of potential research participants become critical issues when conducting fieldwork. In order to attempt to gain ‘entry’ or ‘access’ to a potential research community, group or site, anthropologists and ethnographers often seek the assistance of a ‘gatekeeper’ – who is generally someone who “has insider status with a cultural group” (Creswell, 1998, p.117). In my case, I believe that it is largely thanks to my work and association with ADIVIMA that I managed to ‘gain access’ to potential research participants. Furthermore, my placement with ADIVIMA and my ‘accompanying’ of the Community Education and Participation program allowed me to gain the trust of my research participants, most of whom were rural women widowed by the war and who had been long-term participants with ADIVIMA.

When I embarked on my fieldwork, I had expected it to be much more difficult for me to reach (and gain access to) rural indigenous women, especially given the potentially sensitive nature of my research topic. However, once I had started my fieldwork, I found that almost all of the women I approached actually seemed very eager to speak to me. In fact, many women would start to give their testimony and talk about their experiences before I could finish the verbal informed consent procedures, let alone begin to ask questions.¹⁹

While I was initially a little surprised by how willing and interested many widows seemed to be to talk about their experiences of the conflict, in hindsight, I believe this can be attributed to their familiarity with the ‘testimonial’ format that has been used by the

historical clarification projects (CEH and REHMI) as well as in the larger struggle for truth, justice and reparations – a struggle that will be further discussed in Chapters Four and Five. Indeed, when I thanked the widows for having shared their experiences with me, most of them replied by saying that they wanted to ‘make known’²⁰ what had happened in their communities and by thanking me for having taken an interest in their stories. As Doña Maxima expressed it: “I thank you very much for giving a bit of your time to speak about us.”

Furthermore, my status as an ‘outsider’ was not as problematic as I could have expected given the particular context of Rabinal, where many of the foreigners working in the region are involved in solidarity work with victims and survivors of the internal armed conflict, a presence which seems to be welcomed by survivors and victims because of the positive impact they perceive.²¹ This idea was echoed in some of Doña Rosario’s reflections:

And now well, thank God we are living freely again, because now the accompaniers are here and because they started the CALDH²² as well. And now they say that there is a law. They look after us now ... They are saying now that there are human rights and accompaniers come visit here as well, some are from Canada, also some from Spain, and others from other places. They are always here with us, they always come to ask us how we are, to tell how things are in Canada also. There are changes because of that. It is not like before when there was only fear. We were afraid here thinking about what had happened to us.

Consequently, I believe that in the context of Rabinal, my status as a foreigner and outsider combined with my association with a victims’ and widows’ organisation allowed me to gain the trust of many widows much more quickly than I might have in another context or in a region where community dialogues about truth, justice and reparations issues are not as established as in Rabinal and where foreigners are seen to hold a more ambivalent or perhaps outright negative role.

Anonymity and representation

Ethical questions concerning confidentiality of data and anonymity of research participants are issues that have created some contention in social sciences research methods in recent years, particularly when research is conducted in marginalised communities. While I certainly appreciate the importance of creating “safe communication” (Kirby & McKenna, 1989, p.100) and of protecting the safety of research participants, it was also important for me not to create false expectations in research participants. Given that I was conducting research in small rural communities, it was almost impossible for me to guarantee strict anonymity of research participants, since some community members would almost certainly notice who I was speaking with and who was participating in my research. As such, I felt it was inappropriate and unethical to guarantee anonymity to participants when I was fully aware that I might not be able to fulfil this guarantee because of the research setting in which I was working.

Furthermore, I believe that issues of appropriation of knowledge by researchers and recognition of the contribution that individuals have made to their community must also be balanced when considering the ethics of anonymity and confidentiality in research.²³ Consequently, I decided to allow research participants to choose if they wanted to remain anonymous in my study or not. In order to try to ensure that these processes remained ethical and respectful, I explained to potential participants before the interview that I would assume that all information that they shared with me during the interview was to remain anonymous and confidential unless they instructed me otherwise. After the interview, I asked the women participating if they were comfortable with the information they had shared with me and if they wanted to choose a pseudonym. In some

cases, they told me that I could use their name since, as Doña Juana explained, “It is important to share your word ... it is the truth, it’s my life, my youth.” Indeed, as Devereux and Hoddinott (1993b) noted, “people often *want* their stories and living conditions to be publicised, and in such cases doing so becomes part of the fieldworker’s obligations to the community” (p.34, emphasis in original).

However, I do realise that the safety and security of human rights activists and of individuals in organisations involved in the struggle for truth, justice and reparations is by no means guaranteed in Guatemala, or in Rabinal. Therefore, I will only be using women’s first names and will not reveal information that could identify their community of origin. Consequently, in this thesis, some names are pseudonyms chosen by the research participants and others are the participants’ actual first names, depending on if they told me that they wanted their name to appear in my thesis or not. In a few cases, some women share the same first names or pseudonyms, in which case I have identified each of them with a number, given in the order in which I interviewed them. Quotes that I have judged to contain more ‘sensitive’ information – such as information that would identify which village or settlement the women are from – will only be identified by the interview code with which I identified tapes and interview notes rather than by name or pseudonym.

Since their activism on the local and national scene is fairly well known, some of the women who participated in my research will undoubtedly be recognised by people familiar with the research setting; however, I have chosen to honour their choice to be named if they expressed that desire. In doing so, I wish to recognise the incredible courage and strength that all of these women have demonstrated in continuing to push

forward in their struggle to establish truth, justice and peace in their communities. In her article on the dynamics of international human rights and local justice in the trials of Rabinal area massacres, Dill (2005) adopted a similar approach. She stated:

I have dispensed with the tradition of using pseudonyms. The individuals mentioned – community leaders, witnesses for the prosecution, and the accused – are well known locally and some are well known nationally and internationally. Naming the human rights activists here does not put them in any additional danger but does, I believe, honor their work. (p.344-345)

Language, translation and interpretation

While all of the women I interviewed spoke at least a bit of Spanish (they all spoke Achí as a first language), their level of fluency varied greatly. A co-worker at ADIVIMA, who was also the woman whom I accompanied on community visits, acted as my translator. She is a young woman originally from Rabinal and a native Achí speaker who had previously worked as a translator and interpreter for other projects and organisations in the region. She was present with me during all interviews, regardless of if it was conducted in Spanish or Achí, in case of need. Most of the women did their interviews in both Spanish and Achí, switching between the two once in a while, with my translator helping to explain questions they did not understand or explaining to me things they felt they could not fully express in Spanish.

As has been reported by many fieldworkers, the age, gender and insider or outsider status of translators and research assistants in a community can have significant impacts on interview participants' openness and willingness to share certain aspects of their lives (Devereux & Hodinnott, 1993b). Given that I was researching a potentially sensitive topic, I believe that these issues could have been critical barriers to my research had they been handled inappropriately. However, I believe that the fact that my translator

was a young woman who had been working with victims' and widows' organisations for an extended period and thus held a long-standing relationship with many of the interview participants helped to create a climate of trust that may not have been present had I been working with, for example, an older male translator or someone associated with local authorities.

Since the women I interviewed spoke Spanish as a sometimes-distant second language, and, while I do speak Spanish fluently, it is my third language, potential issues in interpretation of meanings and expressions had to be addressed. One such case was the description of health problems or illnesses that the women suffered as a result of the armed conflict. Indeed, women often spoke of illness in very descriptive terms, such as when they spoke of “*problemas de cintura*” (literally translated: problems of the waist).²⁴ While I was unsure at first how to interpret the idea of ‘problems of the waist,’ the meaning was confirmed as ‘gynaecological problems’ when one of the women told me about ‘problems of the waist’ that she has had ever since she was raped during the war.²⁵ As such, in subsequent interviews, when women spoke of having been ‘beat at the waist’ I interpreted it as speaking of an instance of rape or sexual violence.

As I have outlined above, I had a translator present in all of my interviews in order to facilitate understanding and interpretation. I believe that this helped me avoid most problems in interpretation since I had the possibility of asking my translator after an interview if I had doubts about how to interpret something the participant had said. As a method of triangulation, I also often compared the interviews I conducted with each other as well as with other sources²⁶ when I was unsure of how to interpret their content. Furthermore, when I had doubts about how to interpret certain expressions or phrases that

were used locally, I often asked my translator or other co-workers. Once again, I believe the background knowledge and insight I gained through my extended stay in the community and my work with ADIVIMA were crucial in helping me interpret and analyse the data I collected through interviews as well as by other methods such as secondary source research and participant observation.

CHAPTER TWO – FIVE CENTURIES OF GENOCIDE

The Republic of Guatemala, home to approximately 12 million people, borders Mexico to the north and west; Belize, the Caribbean Sea and Honduras to the east; and the Pacific Ocean and El Salvador to the south. Despite being a relatively rich country compared to its other Central American neighbours,²⁷ Guatemala is one of the lowest ranked countries in the Americas in terms of its rank in the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2006).²⁸ Indeed, a closer look at the situation inside Guatemala reveals large inequalities in income distribution as well as rampant poverty rates. According to the UNDP'S Human Development Report for 2006, over 30% of Guatemala's population lives on less than US\$2 a day and 56% lives under the National Poverty Line while the richest 20% of the population earns over 60% of the total national income.²⁹ These inequalities are particularly drastic when observing the situation of the indigenous Maya population – which form the majority of Guatemala's population – and even more striking when looking at the situation and status of indigenous women.

Inequality in Guatemala is deeply influenced by ethnicity, gender as well as location (rural or urban).³⁰ Poverty and extreme poverty rates illustrate these divisions quite well. Indeed, the percentage of people in rural indigenous populations who live in poverty and extreme poverty is much higher than the national average – in 2004, 21.9% of all Guatemalans lived in extreme poverty, compared to 38% of the rural indigenous population (*Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo* [PNUD], 2005).³¹ As was mentioned earlier, gender is also a dimension of inequality. Guatemala's literacy rates illustrate this point well. In 2002 national literacy rates reached 69.1% (of people over 15 years of age), which is considerably higher than the 41.7% literacy rate of

indigenous women of the same age and the 39.5% literacy rate in Achí women over 15 years of age.³² By contrast, over 82% of *ladino* men in Guatemala were literate in 2002 (PNUD, 2005). These trends of inequality and exclusion are also reflected in most human development indices, revealing the fact that rural indigenous women are among the most excluded, marginalised and disenfranchised groups in Guatemalan society. The 36-year internal armed conflict – which ended with the signing of peace accords in 1996 – has only served to exacerbate this situation. Indeed, the internal armed conflict transformed most of the indigenous Maya population into targets for its successive military campaigns, destroying hundreds of rural communities and leaving thousands of widowed women in its wake.

This chapter will serve to outline the general socio-historical context of Guatemala and, more specifically, of Rabinal. I will begin with an overview of the historical context in which the Guatemalan internal armed conflict evolved. First, I will look at the historical and root causes of the conflict before turning to the larger geo-political context and immediate triggers of the outbreak of the war. I will then outline the development of popular mobilisation and guerrilla organisations in the context of increased repression and the generalised, extremely brutal counterinsurgency measures that were subsequently implemented by the state's security forces. Finally, I will briefly explore the circumstances that finally led to peace accords being signed in 1996.

In the second part of this chapter, I will explore more specifically the historical context of Rabinal. First, I will look at the history of Rabinal prior to the Revolution of 1944. Then, I will outline how the processes of social and political mobilisation evolved

on the local scene and how the Guatemalan state subsequently implemented increasingly brutal counterinsurgency campaigns in the 1980s in an attempt to put an end to these processes.

In the third and final part of this chapter, I will examine the dramatic and deadly toll that the internal armed conflict has had in Guatemala and in Rabinal in particular and the conclusions that have been made regarding the patterns of this violence

The Guatemalan Internal Armed Conflict

When discussing war and armed conflict, it is all too common to confuse ‘root causes’ and ‘triggers.’ Indeed, historical roots of conflicts are often found in structural inequalities, or what Pearce (2004) calls “interactions between identities ... and structural socio-economic factors” (p.243). On the other hand, ‘triggers’ are factors that ignite underlying tensions into violent action (Pankhurst, 2004), which are often found in political actions or events, or what – in a ‘negative’ approach to peace – we often incorrectly identify as ‘causes.’ It is useful to remember this distinction between root causes and immediate triggers of armed conflict when studying the Guatemalan internal armed conflict since many analysts suggest that the roots of the conflict can be traced as far back as colonisation (CEH, 1999; MCRA, 2003; ODHAG, 1998). Indeed, according to Preti (2002), causes that led to the outbreak of Guatemala’s internal armed conflict were multidimensional – political, economic and social – and have to be located simultaneously in the geopolitical context of the Cold War as well as in the context of social exclusion, marginalisation and structural violence in which a large portion of the Guatemalan population has lived for centuries.

Legacy of colonisation

The initial impact of colonisation on the indigenous Maya population of Guatemala was quite significant. The bloody conquest coupled with harsh forced labour and outbreaks of various illnesses previously unknown to the continent destroyed a large proportion of the indigenous population. However, geographic patterns of Spanish colonisation in Guatemala also played an important role in determining the continued survival or assimilation of Maya cultures. These patterns were themselves partially determined by economic opportunity: the Spaniards settled in greater concentration on the warm southern coast where cocoa plantations were a profitable enterprise and the eastern plateau, which lent itself to cattle-grazing and indigo farming (Lovell, 2000). In these regions, Maya culture was quickly assimilated with Spaniard and African cultures into a *ladina* culture – a fate very similar to that of Maya populations in neighbouring El Salvador and Honduras. However, the limited expansion of colonial settlement into the resource-scarce Western Highlands of Guatemala allowed for the continued existence of Maya culture and traditions in this region, albeit with certain adaptations (Lovell, 2000).

Thus, while the limited expansion of Hispanic settlement into the highlands in the early years of colonisation allowed the continued existence of some Maya culture and traditions, it forced the Maya people to adopt a “culture of refuge” (Lovell, 2000, p.120). The indigenous population in Guatemala survived within this culture – largely at the margins of the colonial system³³ and of the emerging independent state – well into the 19th century.³⁴ However, the liberal reform announced in 1871 by General Miguel García Granados proposed a national project that would transform Guatemala into a modern capitalist economy with corresponding social institutions (ODHAG, 1998), thus bringing

successive encroachment on indigenous land and labour and pushing Maya assimilation into a modern *ladino* state (Lovell, 2000).

As was mentioned above, one of the common threads throughout Guatemalan history has been the exclusion of the majority of the population, the indigenous and the poor – which are often synonymous in Guatemala – from circles of social, political and economic power. While the basis of this exclusion sometimes differs (race, culture, language, class and gender),³⁵ its results are the same: widespread inequality and the exclusion and marginalisation of a large portion of the population. Indeed, by the time Guatemala gained its independence in 1821, a common attitude towards Maya people had generalised among Spaniards, Creoles and Ladinos alike: the tenet of Maya subordination was not questioned and domination by the racial elite was understood as a “natural right” (Lovell, 2000, p.125).

The history of Guatemala’s internal armed conflict needs to be framed in this context of historical structural inequality, exclusion and marginalisation, as much as in the contemporary geo-political context – that of the Cold War – in which it developed. Indeed, the CEH (1999) concluded that armed conflict had a “profound historic, structural cause linked to the exclusionary, racist, authoritarian and centralist character that the Guatemalan economy, society and state had acquired” (para.11) and that, “in the context of the ‘cold war’ this justification [the anticommunist ideology] served to condemn a broad, diverse and dynamic social movement” (para.13).

The October Revolution

Since gaining its independence in 1821, a long line of right-wing *caudillos* had governed Guatemala on behalf of the small land-owning aristocracy with very few

interruptions; in the Spring of 1944 this was about to change. Schoolteachers, shopkeepers, skilled workers and students demanding freedom to organise spearheaded a series of protests against General Jorge Ubico Castañeda's dictatorship. Ubico had come to power in 1931 and had revived Guatemala's system of forced labour in order to build public infrastructure,³⁶ with deep repercussions on indigenous Maya populations. In order to enforce the vagrancy laws he had enacted, Ubico created and institutionalised *comisionados militares* (military commissioners) in rural communities, thus moulding structures of military control that would play a significant role in the armed conflict (MRCA, 2003).³⁷ Although slavery had ostensibly been abolished in 1824 under Guatemala's first Constitution, the labour patterns present in rural regions in 1945 were barely distinguishable from slavery.³⁸ Indeed, many older Achí men remember Ubico's implementation of forced labour in public works as one of the great injustices to which they were submitted in the eve of the Revolution.³⁹

On 30 June, 1944, a large public demonstration which had assembled in Guatemala City was charged by cavalry troops on Ubico's orders, killing or injuring 200 people and setting off a series of protests and demonstrations against the regime (Schlesinger & Kinzer, 2005). A few days later Ubico was forced to hand over the presidency to General Federico Ponce Vaides. However, this did not put an end to popular discontent,⁴⁰ and, after a mere 108 days of rule, a revolt started in the armed forces on October 20th, forcing him to abandon the presidency (ODHAG, 1998). The military uprising that would come to be known as the October Revolution was led by Major Francisco Arana and Captain Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán, who demanded that a constitutive assembly be created and promised to hold free elections.⁴¹ In December

1944, Juan José Arévalo, a schoolteacher recently returned from 14-years of exile in Argentina, won the presidency with over 85% of the popular vote (Lovell, 2000; Schlesinger & Kinzer, 2005).

“Ten Years of Spring”

Upon assuming office in March 1945, Arévalo became the first popularly elected President of Guatemala, the first ‘President of the Revolution,’ and of what would later be known as the ‘Ten Years of Spring.’ On 13 March 1945, a new constitution was enacted which included a number of articles addressing the situation of women and indigenous peoples: literate women won the right to vote; racial discrimination was made a crime; husbands and wives were declared equal before the law; and, equal pay for men and women in private and public employment was stipulated (Schlesinger & Kinzer, 2005).⁴² Backed by this newly-drafted constitution that marked a dramatic break from the past, Arévalo established his government based on a liberal model of state intervention, defined as *socialismo espiritual* (spiritual socialism) – an appellation which he chose in order to distance himself from the material socialism advocated by Marxism (ODHAG, 1998). The priorities of his government were focused on agrarian reform, protection of labour, improving the country’s education system and consolidating the nascent democracy (Lovell, 2000; Schlesinger & Kinzer, 2005).

After the first ‘Revolutionary Government’ had survived a number of attempted coups, a second democratic election was held in November 1950, in which Captain Jacobo Arbenz was elected with 65% of the popular vote. While many significant advances had been made during Arévalo’s presidency, the central problem of land distribution remained to be acted on. While Arévalo had put into place various measures

aimed at resolving the land question – such as the National Production Institute, the Law of Forced Rentals, as well as implementing the distribution of ‘national farms’ (land confiscated from German and Nazi sympathisers during World War II) – he had not expropriated any new land (Schlesinger & Kinzer, 2005).

Indeed, the land question was as pressing as ever. In the countryside, population growth was putting increasing pressure on what little land was available. A high concentration of land ownership meant that over 70% of Guatemala’s arable land was owned by only 2.2% of the country’s landowners, leaving only 15% of productive agricultural land to be shared by 90% of the population.⁴³ The Agricultural Census of 1950 indicated an equally skewed pattern of distribution amongst those who did own land: over 99.1% of all Guatemalan farms were small farms that shared a total of 14% of the national land while 0.1% of the country’s farms occupied over 41% of the farmland acreage (ODHAG, 1998). Furthermore, of the four million acres of land in the hands of plantation owners, less than one quarter was cultivated at any given time (Lovell, 2000; Schlesinger & Kinzer, 2005). However, in a country where many plantation owners saw land redistribution as a threat to the availability of cheap agricultural labour, land reform was not to be taken lightly.

In June of 1952, slightly over a year after Arbenz had assumed the presidency, his government passed Decree 900, the Agrarian Reform Act. This law applied specific conditions for the expropriation and redistribution of land: only unused portions of large farms could be expropriated and were to be compensated with government bonds, the value of which was to be determined by the land’s declared taxable worth (ODHAG, 1998; Schlesinger & Kinzer, 2005).⁴⁴ The expropriated land would then be divided into

small plots to be redistributed to landless peasants. During the first 18 months of the Agrarian Reform, 1.5 million acres of land were distributed to over 100 000 poor, previously landless, Guatemalan families (Lovell, 2000; ODHAG, 1998; Schlesinger & Kinzer, 2005). President Arbenz himself, as well as several government ministers and many landowners complied with the stipulations of the Agrarian Reform and willingly gave up the unused portions of their land (Lovell, 2000; Schlesinger and Kinzer, 2005). However, not everyone was so willing to accommodate the government's efforts to implement the land reform; these efforts would soon seal the fate of the Arbenz government and with it, of the October Revolution.

United Fruit Company and the 1954 coup⁴⁵

By 1952, when the Arbenz government started to implement the Agrarian Reform, the bulk of the Guatemalan economy had been controlled by United Fruit Company (UFCo) for decades: the UFCo was simultaneously the country's largest employer, landowner and exporter. Furthermore, through its ties to the International Railways of Central America (IRCA), which owned the only port on the Atlantic coast – Puerto Barrios – and virtually all the railways in the country, it “had nearly complete authority over the nation's international commerce” (Schlesinger and Kinzer, 2005, p.70). When Arbenz took power, he was clear in his intentions of challenging foreign monopolies: the construction of a highway to the Atlantic Coast, where he planned to build a publicly owned port, was one of the main items on his agenda (Schlesinger & Kinzer, 2005 p.53). However, it was the Agrarian Reform Law that was seen as a direct affront to UFCo, since 85% of UFCo land was uncultivated in 1953 and thus eligible for expropriation. Between March 1953 and April 1954, nearly 400 000 acres of land were

expropriated from UFCo with the government offering over US\$1.25 million in compensation, based on the company's own declared land valuation (Lovell, 2000; Schlesinger & Kinzer, 2005). However, UFCo had been consistently undervaluing its land for years in order to limit its already minimal tax liability. In response to what it saw as a threat to its holdings in Guatemala, UFCo, armed with its many connections in Washington, numerous lobbyists and publicists, begun its quest to convince the Americans of an imminent communist threat in Guatemala menacing US business and security interests (Lovell, 2000).⁴⁶ In October 1953, the CIA's 'Operation Success' was launched with the aim of overthrowing the Arbenz government (ODHAG, 1998; Schlesinger and Kinzer, 2005).

The extent of communist influence on the Arbenz government has been a subject of many debates among academics.⁴⁷ However, regardless of the seriousness of the 'red menace' in Guatemala at the time, the CIA took advantage of the arrival of a weapons shipment from Czechoslovakia at Puerto Barrios on 15 May 1954 as a pretext to launch an invasion from neighbouring Honduras (Schlesinger & Kinzer, 2005). In June of the same year, the *Movimiento de Liberación Nacional* (MLN – National Liberation Movement)⁴⁸ entered Guatemala, led by Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas.⁴⁹ On June 24th, Castillo Armas' troops, assisted by air strikes and heavy propaganda made possible by support provided by the CIA seized the city of Chiquimula and announced the formation of a provisional government. By July 3rd, Castillo Armas had taken control of the Guatemalan government at the head of a five-member military *junta* and Arbenz had been forced to flee the country, seeking exile in Mexico.

Following Arbenz's overthrow, Castillo Armas' counter-revolutionary regime immediately set out to erase all remnants of the Agrarian Reform, including the emerging popular movement. Indeed, within months of Armas' coup, 12 000 people had been arrested and over 2 000 union and political leaders had been forced to flee the country (ODHAG, 1998). In the increasing repression he had begun to impose against the popular movement, Armas also created the *Comité Nacional de Defensa contra el Comunismo* (National Committee for the Defence against Communism), which was charged with building a registry with the names of any and all people who had participated in 'communist' activities or had criticised or opposed the government in any way. This committee was authorised to order the arrest of any such person. By December 1954, 72 000 names were included in this registry (ODHAG, 1998). This foreshadowed the Guatemalan government's attitude throughout the duration of the internal armed conflict, during which all opposition to the government was immediately labelled as subversive and as being a part of or supporting the communist insurgency. Indeed, the National Security Doctrine of the 1980s would come to have such a broad definition of the 'internal enemy' that it not only included members of the insurgent organisations "but rather included in that category all those citizens, organised or not, who could be considered political opponents" (Swedish, 1999).

After its 'Ten Years of Spring,' Guatemala was beginning to experience the dead of winter. However, despite the Armas regime's best efforts and the intense repression it implemented, political and social mobilisation within the peasant and indigenous populations carried on throughout the country as new movements and organisations

formed, many of them inspired by the Christian Social Justice movement within the Latin American Church (EAFG, 1997).⁵⁰

Outbreak of guerrilla war

The outbreak of the Guatemalan internal armed conflict is generally dated as 1960, when a military uprising began in Guatemala City on November 13th. Discontent had been widespread within the Guatemalan Army in response to President Ygidora's decision to allow the CIA to train Cuban exiles on Guatemalan territory for a planned invasion of Cuba and overthrow of Fidel Castro; a decision that was widely opposed by most of the Army's officers and was largely seen as an affront to Guatemalan sovereignty (ODHAG, 1998; Schlesinger & Kinzer, 2005).⁵¹ The November 13th rebellion quickly spread to Puerto Barrios and to the barracks of Zacapa. However, the revolt was crushed within four days of its outburst with the assistance of US President Eisenhower, who responded to Ygidora's pleas for help by sending several CIA bombers and five US Navy ships to patrol Guatemala's coast.

Most of the surviving officers of the November 13th revolt fled to exile in Honduras, El Salvador and Mexico. However, two of the leaders of the November 13th uprising, Luis Turcios Lima and Marco Aurelio Yon Sosa, returned to Guatemala to establish the country's first guerrilla organisation: the *Movimiento Revolucionario 13 de Noviembre* (MR-13, November 13 Revolutionary Movement). A number of other guerrilla organisations soon followed in the footsteps of the MR-13 and, in December 1962, three of these organisations, including the MR-13, merged to form the *Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes* (FAR, Rebel Armed Forces) (ODHAG, 1998; Schlesinger & Kinzer, 2005). By then, most of the guerrilla leaders had had contact with Guatemala's leftist

parties and many had travelled to Cuba to receive training, thus forming the ideological basis for the movement (ODHAG, 1998).

This first stage of guerrilla insurgency lasted seven years, during which the Guatemalan state, with the financial and tactical assistance of the U.S. government and the CIA, succeeded in suppressing the rebellion. Although the creation of the FAR *de facto* established a rebel army within Guatemalan territory, extension of the guerrilla movement and the military's subsequent deployment of a counterinsurgency campaign in the rural areas of the country would only reach its full expression over a decade later. However, the 1960s were nonetheless marked by intense repression against the labour and popular movements as well as guerrilla organisations, mainly in the capital, Guatemala City, and in other urban centres. The first phase of the counterinsurgency campaigns claimed over 30 000 victims, most of whom were civilian leaders of popular movements (EFAG, 1997).

The second stage of the guerrilla insurgency began in 1972 when a group of *guerrilleros* (guerrilla fighters) crossed the Mexican border to initiate political organisation with indigenous Maya populations in the Ixcán region of the Western Highlands (EFAG, 1997). The formation of two new guerrilla organisations followed: the *Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres* (EGP, Guerrilla Army of the Poor) in 1975 and the *Organización Revolucionaria del Pueblo en Armas* (ORPA, Revolutionary Organisation of the People in Arms) in 1979. The establishment of these more recent guerrilla organisations signalled a new phase in Guatemala's guerrilla movement since both of these organisations centred their discourse on ethnic and *campesino* issues (ODHAG, 1998).

Popular movements of the 1960s and 1970s

Parallel to the growth of the guerrilla movement, Guatemala also saw popular movements expanding and gaining strength throughout the country in the 1960s and 1970s, especially in rural indigenous communities. Starting in 1965, the Latin American Catholic Church had taken on a new direction as a result of the Vatican II Council. The struggle for peace and justice was now seen as an integral part of the Church's work. Consequently, during the 1970s, the Catholic Church initiated a vast program to form and consolidate Christian communities throughout the rural areas. Indeed, as was explained in the ODHAG's *Never Again* report on the Recuperation of Historical Memory Project (1999):

Most of the reflection processes that developed in rural areas in the seventies took place in a religious setting. The church had the most extensive communication network available, which enabled it to reach even the remotest areas, and religion was a central feature in the lives of indigenous people. (p.225)

These communities became spaces for community organisation and consciousness-raising, which in turn helped spread guerrilla support in certain regions of the country (ODHAG, 1998).

In addition to the consciousness-raising promoted through the Catholic Church, popular mobilisation was also shaped by resistance to the national economic development project, which was increasingly encroaching on rural areas of the country. The 1960s and 1970s were decades in which Guatemala, as were many other parts of the world, was undergoing increasingly intense economic development. In Guatemala, development was heavily biased towards agro-export and was thus becoming increasingly dependent on rural areas, indigenous land and labour (EAFG, 1997). One of the popular responses to this was the organisation and expansion of the *Comité de Unidad Campesina* (CUC –

Committee for Peasant Unity) in the late 1970s, whose main struggle was centred on the land question (ODHAG, 1998). It is during this period, and particularly in the aftermath of the 1976 earthquake that the popular movement finally spread to many indigenous communities. The 1976 earthquake, which deeply affected most of the Western Highlands, cut off many communities from the rest of the country, forcing them to find ways to deal with the catastrophe by themselves. This forced communities to organise a new political and social leadership (ODHAG, 1998). Guatemala's indigenous population had joined the popular struggle.

As the guerrilla and popular struggle expanded to take hold across the country, so did repression at the hands of the military governments. As early as 1966, Mendez Montenegro's government had signed a pact with the Army guaranteeing the armed forces' independence in questions of military policy and leadership, effectively creating a "military state within a civilian state" (ODHAG, 1998, p.269).⁵² The same year, the Guatemalan Constitutional Assembly had passed a motion of amnesty for military and police members who had been involved in repression in order to defend the state model established after the 1954 coup. From then on, the clandestine structures which would shape and implement Guatemala's national security policy began to consolidate their powers (ODHAG, 1998).

The counterinsurgency campaigns of *La Violencia*: unprecedented violence

In Guatemala, the period between 1978 and 1985 is known and referred to as *La Violencia* (The Violence), distinguishing itself from the decades of war that preceded and followed it by its unparalleled violence. Indeed, by the end of the 1970s, the Guatemalan Army had succeeded in institutionalising and consolidating its political and economic

power. Repression was no longer ‘selective’ as the military embarked on a national security project that would subject the country’s civilian population to unprecedented violence. As one author remarks, the late 1970s and early 1980s marked the most brutal years of the war, when massive counterinsurgency campaigns were launched following increased social mobilisation and political opposition to the military government’s brutal regime (Colletta & Cullen, 2000).

This new wave of violence was launched soon after General Fernando Romeo Lucas García came to power through fraudulent elections in 1978 declaring that he would lead a “harsh campaign against guerrilla groups” (cited in Schlesinger & Kinzer, 2005, p.249.) Generalised violent repression, political assassination on a mass scale, and the formation of right-wing paramilitary groups had become the government’s preferred counterinsurgency methods, targeted at “anybody tinged with liberalism” (Schlesinger & Kinzer, 2005, p.245). Indeed, any and all economic or social initiatives designed to satisfy the needs of rural or Maya populations were perceived as ‘socialist’ or ‘socialising’ by the conservative sectors who had secured political power as a result of the 1954 coup d’état (EAFG, 1997). As the National Security Doctrine evolved, the definition of this ‘internal enemy’ became increasingly inclusive, eventually conflating ‘Maya’ with ‘subversive’ (Sanford, 2003). Soon after, the country’s rural indigenous population would itself become the target of violent repression at the hands of the Guatemalan Army.

In January 1980, a group of indigenous Maya attempted to bring their plight to the world’s attention by occupying the Spanish Embassy in Guatemala City. The Guatemala Army fire-bombed the Embassy resulting in the deaths of 38 people, including the

indigenous protesters as well as Spanish nationals employed at the embassy (Burgos, 1997; Schlesinger & Kinzer, 2005). The fire-bombing of the Spanish Embassy signalled the length to which the regime was prepared to go in its fight against the insurgency and foreshadowed the increasingly brutal and generalised nature of the violence it would employ in this struggle.

In the spring of 1982, Efraín Ríos Montt, came to power after overthrowing Romeo Lucas García's regime.⁵³ Lovell (2000) has distinguished three stages in Ríos Montt's counterinsurgency campaign. The first stage, which lasted from March to August 1982, was characterised by Montt's "declaration of war on any individual or group suspected of assisting, or even sympathising with, the guerrilla insurgency" (Lovell, 2000, p.56). During this stage, Decree 9-82 was passed, prohibiting the press to divulge information relating to the political violence, and a state of siege was declared, allowing secret tribunals to operate (Lovell, 2000; ODHAG, 1998). These measures served to *de facto* legalise repression at the hands of the state's security forces, which would, from then on, operate with greater freedom. The implementation of the *Plan Nacional de Seguridad y Desarrollo* (National Plan for Security and Development) and the campaign *Victoria 82* (Victory 82) were also part of this first stage of the counterinsurgency campaign. The main strategy of *Victoria 82* was to:

Impede the subversives' access to the population which constituted its base of Political and Social Support; to rescue the members of the Irregular Local Forces (FIL), neutralizing or eliminating those who refuse to return to normal life; annihilate the Local Clandestine Committees (CCL); and eliminate the Permanent Military Units (UPM). (quoted from Guatemalan Army documents in ODHAG, 1999, p.229-230)

Under this phase of Ríos Montt's counterinsurgency campaign, the 'scorched earth' policy took on a new intensity. This policy aimed to take the water from the fish (*quitarle*

el agua al pez), based on Mao Zedong's theories of guerrilla warfare, which posited that the guerrillas (fish) need popular support (water) in order to continue operating and eventually triumph. Thus, if it was impossible for the Army to 'catch' all of the fish, it would have to get rid of them by taking away their water – the rural indigenous communities that formed their support base (Lovell, 2000; MCRA, 2003; ODHAG, 1998).

The implementation of the scorched-earth policy followed a similar pattern in various regions of the highlands and amounted to a systematisation of the massacre of civilian populations that had been initiated by Ríos Montt's predecessor, Luis García. After a certain period of selective violence and repression targeting leaders of a community, the Army – often accompanied by military commissioners, *judiciales*,⁵⁴ Civilian Defense Patrols (PAC) and/or paramilitary squads – would encircle the community at dawn one day and proceed to round-up community members. Following questioning, taunting and torture, including the rape of women and girls, the aggressors would often massacre the entire community with extreme brutality, regardless of age, gender or affiliation with the insurgency.⁵⁵ They would then burn down houses, slash and burn crops, steal the livestock and any other valuables found in the community, and destroy all household utensils and tools; thus destroying all mechanisms used by the Maya people to ensure their survival. Survivors that had managed to escape the massacres were forced to take refuge in the surrounding hills and forests where the Army continued to harass, stalk and pursue displaced communities until they were forced to surrender and were resettled in Army-controlled settlements.⁵⁶ These massacres were “calculated to frighten survivors into shunning all contact with the guerrilla insurgency,

which the government chose to view as an external, not domestic, reaction to decades of neglect and exploitation” (Lovell, 2000, p.52). Rural, mostly Maya areas where the EGP and ORPA were active were especially hard-hit by this stage of the counterinsurgency campaign. While most of the recorded massacres took place in the departments of El Quiché, Alta Verapaz, Huehuetenango, Baja Verapaz, Petén and Chimaltenango, the violence spread through most of the Maya highlands. In fact, Lovell (2005) described the five months after Ríos Montt came to power as “the bloodiest of times the Maya have known” (p.59).

The second stage of Ríos Montt’s counterinsurgency campaign began in the fall of 1982 and was marked by a shift from physical to psychological warfare (Lovell, 2000). After the implementation of the successive counterinsurgency campaigns had forced thousands of indigenous peasants to flee their destroyed communities and a few thousand *guerrilleros* to retreat from the affected areas, the Army proceeded to implement a ‘Plan of Assistance to the Areas of Conflict.’ Through a counterinsurgency campaign dubbed *Fusiles y Frijoles* (Gun and Beans), the army ordered rural populations to form Civilian Defence Patrols (PAC – *Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil*) in return for the provision of food and Army ‘protection’ (Lovell 2000).⁵⁷ Those who resisted were often forced to patrol with the PAC under threat of physical punishment, torture or even assassination. They were to patrol their communities to control comings and goings, watching for ‘suspect’ activities. While they were patrolling, PAC members would often be forced to participate in atrocities committed against their own communities (Valle Cobar, 2004). Indeed, as Lovell (2000) points out, “since it was by now evident ... that alliance with insurgents (real or perceived) spelled death and destruction, Maya communities across

the highlands realised the imperative of co-operating with their aggressors” (p.59).

Through the implementation of the PAC, the Army had effectively transformed the rural population into an accomplice in its counterinsurgency campaign.

In December 1982, Ríos Montt embarked the Army in the third stage of his counterinsurgency campaign: *Techo, Trabajo y Tortilla* (literally translated: Roof, Work and Tortilla). According to U.S. President Ronald Reagan, this stage of the counterinsurgency campaign was meant to ensure “permanent security ... through economic development, social justice and progress” (as cited in Lovell, 2000, p.61). With the *Techo, Trabajo y Tortilla* initiative – which was part of the wider military campaign *Firmeza 83* (Firmness 83) – the number of killings and massacres decreased, but ‘security’ and military actions continued, supposedly to help advance ‘development’ in the countryside (EAFG, 1997).

It is no coincidence that the ‘development poles’ identified by the Army were also strategic areas of military importance. Following the scorched-earth campaigns, displaced populations had been re-grouped into ‘model villages’ that operated under direct Army control, thus allowing the Army to ‘re-educate’ the population and implement what it deemed to be a ‘counter-propaganda’ campaign (ODHAG, 1999). The establishment of model villages also furthered the assimilation of Maya populations, who were not allowed to follow Maya traditions while living under Army watch and control. Model villages also increased the indigenous population’s dependency on the government to provide food and work since they were generally separated from their cultivatable land (Carmack, 1988; PNUD, 2005).

In August 1983, a military coup led by General Oscar Humberto Mejía Víctores ousted Ríos Montt from power. While Mejía Víctores did not put an end to the military campaigns introduced by his forerunners, his implementation of these strategies was slightly less radical (Lovell, 2000; ODHAG, 1998). Rather, his short-lived regime was more focused on restoring internal stability in the aftermath of the counterinsurgency campaigns, which had destroyed rural infrastructure, caused agricultural production to collapse and produced hundreds of thousands of victims who were in need of emergency assistance (ODHAG, 1999).

Transition towards peace

On 8 December 1985, Vinicio Cerezo was elected President. Despite the great hopes for peace that were held by many Guatemalans after the election of the first civilian government since the 1960s, it quickly became clear that the armed forces remained in control and were not ready to relinquish their power. Instead, the military retained an active role in running the country while Cerezo was “allowed to operate within a clearly defined governmental space” (Lovell, 2000, p.70). Despite the fact that the *Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca* (URNG – National Revolutionary Union of Guatemala)⁵⁸ made overtures to the Cerezo government as early as 1986 – suggesting to open up ‘discussions’ – the Army’s refusal to accept negotiations and its continued repression against the insurgency resulted in practically no advances being made towards a resolution of the conflict until the 1990s (ODHAG, 1998).

In March 1990, the Oslo Accords established the groundwork for dialogue between the URNG, the government and representatives from the country’s main social sectors. After stalling for a few years, peace negotiations picked up again in January 1994

when the UN took on the role of mediator of the talks, which resulted in a series of accords being signed over the next three years.⁵⁹ Finally, on 29 December 1996 the *Acuerdo de Paz Firme y Duradera* (Accord for a Firm and Lasting Peace) was signed, ostensibly putting an end to the 36 year internal armed conflict.

Historical Overview of Rabinal, Baja Verapaz

As we saw in the first part of this chapter, a particular set of social, economic and political circumstances – both structural root causes and more immediate triggers – gave rise to the Guatemalan internal armed conflict. In the second part of this chapter, I will explore the historical and socio-political context in which the conflict evolved in the *municipio* of Rabinal, Baja Verapaz.

Colonisation of Baja Verapaz

Many archaeological sites, artefacts and oral histories, such as the pre-Hispanic *Rabinal Achí* and *Popol Vuh*, bear witness to the rich cultural history of the area now known as Rabinal, which is thought to have been inhabited by successive Maya groups since approximately 1600 BC (EAFG, 1997; MCRA, 2003). The Hispanic colonisation of the Verapaces in the XVI century followed a different pattern than other regions of Guatemala. In fact, it is often said that the colonisation of Baja Verapaz was achieved with the Bible rather than by the sword, in reference to the substantial role that was played by the Dominicans, under the leadership of Friar Bartolomé de las Casas, in establishing Spanish presence in the region. By the mid-sixteenth century, the urban centre of Rabinal had been established and the Dominicans were busy attempting to

persuade the indigenous Achi population to abandon their land and ancestral ceremonial centres to settle in the village, which would facilitate control by the colonial regime and religious conversion of the Maya population (EAFG, 1997).⁶⁰ Even though Rabinal was not conquered through military invasion, its Achi population nonetheless suffered the devastating impacts of colonisation. Within the first century after colonisation, exposure to new illnesses and subjection to forced labour had reduced the population by nearly 85% (MCRA, 2003).

After centuries of survival in a ‘culture of refuge,’ the advent of independence in 1821 meant both change and continuity in Guatemala in general and for the Maya Achi of Rabinal in particular. As the Spanish colonial regime was gradually substituted by the local elite, the indigenous population remained excluded from power in a new economic model which increasingly encroached on Maya land and labour. As was outlined above, soon after independence, in the mid-nineteenth century, the ‘liberal’ project of economic development was launched, aiming to modernise and restructure Guatemala’s economic and political system. With it surfaced a will to put an end to the ‘caste society’ that had thus far existed in Guatemala and to integrate the indigenous populations into ‘civilisation,’ modernity and progress – which meant assimilation into *ladina* culture (EAFG, 1997). The structure of Rabinal’s economy was not deeply impacted by these liberal reforms since its land and climate were not suitable for intensive agricultural production. However, as in other parts of the country, the launch of the liberal project and the rise to power of Justo Rufino Barrios in 1871 did signal the exclusion of the indigenous majority from participation or representation in the national project (EAFG, 1997).

Popular movement in Rabinal

In Rabinal, popular organisational processes were initiated in the aftermath of the October Revolution of 1944⁶¹ and by the end of the decade, indigenous peasants of Rabinal had organised in the *Comunidad de Campesinos* (Peasant Community) and the *Sindicato de Obreros* (Workers' Union) under the leadership of Tomás Tecú Chiquito⁶² (MCRA, 2003). When an indigenous mayor was elected in Rabinal in 1951, the opposition, represented by the *Partido de Unificación Anticomunista* (PUA – Anticommunist Unification Party), attempted to prevent the mayor-elect of taking office by having him arrested for possession of *cusha*, a traditional home-made alcoholic beverage produced in indigenous communities that is illegal (MCRA, 2003). This incident made evident the fact that the organisational processes that had begun among the Achí were perceived as a threat by Rabinal's *ladina* minority, testifying to the latent ethnic conflict that has been present in most of Guatemala since colonisation.

The budding popular mobilisation and organisational processes initiated in the 1940s in Rabinal were consolidated during the Arbenz government, largely through its implementation of the Agrarian Reform. Indeed, the support structure for the Agrarian Reform, the *Comités Agrarios Locales* (CAL – Local Agrarian Committees) were being organised in Rabinal despite the limited changes in land tenure in the region (EAFG, 1997). In addition to the CAL, the *Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo* (PGT – Guatemalan Labour Party) was also initiating work with the Achí population in Rabinal. Therefore, when the first stage of guerrilla organisation began in the 1960s, it received widespread support from the Achí population and, in fact, many Achí men from the region became founding members of the FAR, the country's first major guerrilla group

(EAFG, 1997; MCRA, 2003). Many of the Achí leaders involved in this first wave of social mobilisation would later form the basis of the CUC – and, to some extent, of the EGP – in Rabinal.

While the foundations of social mobilisation and consciousness-raising among the Achí population of Rabinal had been laid as early as the October Revolution of 1944, it was during the 1970s that popular organisation processes spread across the *municipio*. Indeed, organisations focusing on issues of rural development and land rights were quite active in training community leaders since the land question was still at the base of socio-economic struggles and organisational processes generated from within – as well as from outside – the country. In Rabinal, the main social actors who participated in consciousness-raising and organisational processes the 1970s were the Catholic Church, the *Huella del Varón Rabinal Achí*,⁶³ the CUC and the EGP. In the following pages, I will discuss the role that each had to play within the popular movement in Rabinal.

With the Second Vatican Council and the subsequent movement of the Catholic Church towards an ‘option for the poor’ and liberation theology throughout Latin America and Guatemala, the Church became involved in organisational processes within Rabinal. This included, among other activities, the establishment of a credit union, a weaving co-operative, a Parish night-school for adults, as well as training individuals (often young men) as *Delegados de la Palabra de Dios* (Delegates of the Word of the Lord) and *catequistas* (catechists). Individuals trained as catechists and delegates of the word worked at promoting the ‘developmental’ and social work of the Church in their own communities.⁶⁴ For many catechists, their involvement in this type of work became a stepping stone towards a more formal inclusion in the popular

movement and sometimes in the armed struggle itself. This transition was especially common after the counterinsurgency campaigns of the late 1970s and 1980s – which systematically targeted catechists and community leaders – left catechists, delegates of the word and other community leaders with no other options but to go into exile or hiding or to join the insurgency (MCRA, 2003).

In the mid-1970s, a grassroots organisation uniting community leaders and representatives of a variety of other organisations took shape in Rabinal: the *Huella del Varón Rabinal Achí*. Its focus was decidedly ethnic and its activities were centred on development in indigenous communities in Rabinal. This organisation is often viewed as the ‘second indigenous movement’ in Rabinal – the first being Tomás Tecú Chiquito’s movement at the onset of the Revolution – and it would eventually play a key role in establishing another *campesino* movement: the CUC (MCRA, 2003, p.77).

Leaders of the *Huella del Varón* and *campesino* leaders from other parts of the country founded the CUC in 1978. The significance of the Achí people’s role in establishing and inspiring the CUC is illustrated by the use of the word ‘Achí’ in the CUC’s logo. While the word ‘Achí’ means ‘man’ in many of Guatemala’s Maya languages, it was included in the CUC’s emblem because “it is the Achí ethnic group that demonstrated and showed its combativeness in the defence of our Committee” (quoted in MCRA, 2003, p.78, author’s translation). Indeed, for many neighbouring indigenous communities, the Achí people of Rabinal became a symbol of dignity and rebellion because of their resistance to the abuses committed against them by the state’s security forces as well as other dominant sectors (EAFG, 1997).⁶⁵

The INDE and the Chixoy dam

Although various organisations, including the CUC and the political wing of the EGP had been carrying out work in Rabinal throughout most of the 1970s, two important events accelerated the process of consciousness-raising and mobilisation in the communities: the earthquake of 1976 and the Pueblo Viejo-Quixal hydroelectric project. As in many other communities around the country, popular mobilisation increased in the aftermath of the 1976 earthquake as people gathered around existing organisations and formed new ones to help rebuild their communities (EAFG, 1997). However, in Rabinal the construction of the Pueblo Viejo-Quixal hydroelectric project also served to mobilise the Achí population in the northern region of the *municipio*.

The Pueblo Viejo-Quixal hydroelectric project – one of the main development projects pushed by the Guatemalan state during the 1970s – was undertaken by the *Instituto Nacional de Electrificación de Guatemala* (INDE – National Electrification Institute of Guatemala) and funded by both the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank. The project was to contribute to Guatemala becoming energetically self-sufficient through the construction of a hydroelectric dam on the Chixoy River, in the northern part of the *municipio* of Rabinal and in the neighbouring *municipio* of Cubulco (MCRA, 2003).

An initial socio-economic study revealed that the project would submerge 23 communities – affecting approximately 500 families (nearly 3 500 people) – and would flood a large portion of some of the best agricultural land in the region for 50 kilometres along the river's banks (EAFG, 1997; MCRA, 2003). The INDE had promised villagers that they would be compensated for lost crops, provided with land for pasture and

agriculture and that new houses would be built for affected families. Additionally, the government agency insisted that the construction of the dam would provide work in the communities nearby to the Chixoy River and thus become an additional source of income for affected families (MCRA, 2003; Tecú Osorio, 2002).

Faced with the prospect of forced displacement and the successive broken promises on the part of the INDE, opposition and unrest began to increase in affected communities, especially in the community of Río Negro.⁶⁶ However, despite this opposition, the INDE continued on with the project while simultaneously putting pressure on inhabitants of Río Negro to agree to give up their land and be relocated. As a response, community members organised through the CUC, the EGP and the *Huella del Varón* to demand their rights (MCRA, 2003). However, as we will see shortly, this increased opposition and mobilisation of community members was met by increasingly intense government repression.

The guerrilla movement in Rabinal

Although popular mobilisation and participation in various forms of social organisation was spreading in Rabinal – including support for the EGP – very few signs of guerrilla operations were present in the *municipio* before the 1980s. Valle Cobar (2004) has indicated that although the formation of a guerrilla column was eventually authorised in Rabinal as a response to increased repression at the hands of the Guatemalan state, it was never supplied with arms and instead participated in political recruitment, logistical support as well as some acts of sabotage. In fact, at no time during the thirty-six year internal armed conflict in Guatemala was the *municipio* of Rabinal the scene of major armed confrontations between the military and guerrilla

forces (MCRA, 2003). However, the region was nevertheless considered to be a region of strategic importance for the guerrilla movement.

Rabinal was strategically important to the insurgency first of all because of the fairly widespread support that the revolutionary movement and its guerrilla factions enjoyed in the region.⁶⁷ Indeed, when the second phase of the guerrilla insurgency broke out in the 1970s, a large portion of the Achí *campesino* population of Rabinal was conscious of the importance of social change and the struggle for their rights and the majority of Rabinal's population was 'organised' in some way (MCRA, 2003). In fact, it is argued that many of the conditions necessary for the incorporation of a significant part of the indigenous population into the armed struggle had been achieved in Rabinal. These included the social and economic exclusion of the Achí people – who were widely marginalised despite forming the majority of Rabinal's population – and the existence of a consciousness within this population of the importance of armed struggle as a means to change these conditions (EAFG, 1997; MCRA, 2003).

In addition to the popular support they enjoyed, the EGP also considered Rabinal as a region of strategic importance because of its location at the junction of four guerrilla fronts: the Marco Antonio Yon Sosa Front to the north-east in Alta Verapaz, the Ho Chi Minh Front to the north-west in Quiché and Alta Verapaz, the Augusto César Sandino Front to the south-west in Chimaltenango, and finally the Otto René Castillo Front in Guatemala City to the south (ODHAG, 1998, p.314). The department of Baja Verapaz – and the *municipio* of Rabinal in particular – thus functioned as a passageway between the various guerrilla fronts as well as an area where guerrilla fighters could rest and collect supplies from the population. Nevertheless, the rather

limited guerrilla activity in the region – there had never been more than 34 armed members in the local guerrilla cell at any one time (MCRA, 2003) – did not shield the *municipio* from violence.⁶⁸ To the contrary, the strategic importance Rabinal held for the EGP made the community a prime target for the government's counterinsurgency campaign. Indeed, in its National Plan for Security and Development, formulated in 1982, the Guatemalan state identified the Verapaces as one of its five most strategically important operational zones – which were also the areas most affected by the extreme social and political violence of the 1980s (CEH, 1999).

La Violencia in Rabinal

In Rabinal, the armed conflict became a brutal reality affecting most of the inhabitants of the *municipio* during the period known as *La Violencia*, between 1978 and 1985.⁶⁹ As in most other parts of the country, political repression started to increase in intensity in Rabinal at the end of 1979, at first taking the shape of 'selective violence' targeting community leaders, *catequistas* and delegates of the word, members of peasant organisations and co-operatives (MCRA, 2003).

This phase of 'selective' violence followed much the same pattern in Rabinal as it did in the rest of the country and served many purposes above and beyond the simple 'physical elimination' of the targeted individuals. In fact, the execution and forced disappearances of individuals also served as a method of intimidating and threatening families, social circles and/or entire communities; instilling fear and terror in their midst in order to, on the one hand, discourage the organisational processes that had taken hold in the region and, on the other, prevent the public denunciation of the crime (MCRA, 2003; ODHAG, 1998). Individuals targeted for disappearance or assassination were

frequently tortured by their captors in an attempt to extract any information they might have concerning the guerrilla and popular movement in the region. The identity of the perpetrators of these assassinations – most often *judiciales* or military commissioners – was often known by the victims' family and they regularly continued to threaten and harass survivors in complete impunity.⁷⁰ Furthermore, given the fact that the mere suspicion of involvement in 'subversive activities' was generally enough to seal an individual's fate, several people took advantage of this situation to 'resolve' personal conflicts or land disputes by reporting their rivals to the local military base, to the *judiciales*, or to Army spies in the communities – known as *orejas* (ears) (MRCA, 2003).⁷¹ In many Rabinal communities, this phase of selective repression was only a prelude to the generalised and extremely brutal phase of violence to which it would be submitted. As the violence intensified in communities, torture, disappearances and extrajudicial assassinations became increasingly common until the violent repression eventually took on a massive, generalised dimension.

The first incident of generalised political violence in the *municipio* took place in the town of Rabinal on Independence Day (September 15th) 1981 when people from surrounding villages had gathered in Rabinal for the day's celebrations.⁷² The Guatemalan Army took advantage of this gathering to retaliate against a failed sabotage attempt that the EGP had undertaken in the region a few days earlier. After having blocked the main exits from the town, the Army, assisted by *judiciales*, opened fire on the crowd assembled in the town square, indiscriminately killing hundreds of people. According to witnesses, the massacre continued most of the afternoon and spilled over into the neighbouring streets. It is estimated that at least 200 – and perhaps as many as

800 – people were killed that day (CEH, 1999; EAFG, 1997; MCRA, 2003; ODHAG, 1998). The September 15th massacre was but an introduction to the dozens of massacres committed against the Achi population of Rabinal throughout the following two years as the Guatemalan Army implemented its scorched earth campaign.⁷³

In order to illustrate how this phase of massive, generalised violence played out in Rabinal, I will give a brief outline of the case of the community of Río Negro, which has been the subject of in-depth investigation and has attracted much national and international attention because of the level of activism that survivors of the Río Negro massacres have undertaken around questions of truth, justice and reparations since the end of the internal armed conflict.⁷⁴

Río Negro massacres

As we saw earlier, popular organisation in the community of Río Negro had followed similar paths to those in the rest of the country before being accelerated in response to the onset of the Pueblo Viejo-Quixal hydroelectric project. The increased mobilisation of Río Negro villagers in various organisations in turn served to attract increasing levels of repression and violence. The first ‘confrontation’ between the Army and the people of Río Negro occurred as early as March 1980 and resulted in the death of seven villagers and one officer of the military police (PMA) (EAFG, 1997; MCRA, 2003). The events surrounding this incident provided the Army and the PAC from the neighbouring village of Xococ with a pretext for the continued harassment of the community.⁷⁵ On 8 July 1980, a few months after property titles had been collected from Río Negro villagers by the INDE, two community members ‘disappeared’ on their way to Guatemala City for a meeting with the INDE. Their bodies were found nine days later

with signs of torture and bullet-wounds. These men had, conveniently, been carrying with them the only copy of the documents in which the INDE stated the compensation they would provide to community members who were being displaced by the hydroelectric project (EAFG, 1997; Tecú Osorio, 2002). Then, on 13 February 1982, 73 men and women, mostly from Río Negro, were assassinated after having been summoned by the military commissioners to appear before them in Xococ (EAFG, 1997; MCRA, 2003; Tecú Osorio, 2002). One month later, the violence inflicted on the community of Río Negro would reach unprecedented proportions.

At six o'clock on the morning of 13 March 1982, soldiers and patrollers from Xococ surrounded the village of Río Negro and proceeded to round up the villagers, going house to house. However, the patrollers found only women and children in the village since most of the men had stopped spending the night in their homes out of fear of an attack by the military and paramilitary in light of recent repression (MCRA, 2003).⁷⁶ The women and children were gathered together and forced to walk up the mountain to a sacred site known as Pak'oxom. Along the way, the soldiers and patrollers insulted, threatened, mistreated, beat and raped most of the women and young girls (Tecú Osorio, 2002).⁷⁷ Once at the Pak'oxom site, the patrollers and soldiers proceeded to brutally murder 77 women and 100 children, killing the women by stabbing, slashing, strangling and shooting them and smashing the children's heads against rocks and tree trunks (EAFG, 1997; MCRA, 2003; Tecú Osorio, 2002). Only a handful of the people who had been in Río Negro that morning survived, including a few women who managed to escape on the way up the mountain and eighteen children who were taken back to Xococ

where they were forced to live with and work for the very people who they had watched brutally murder their families (MCRA, 2003; Tecú Osorio, 2002).⁷⁸

It had by then become very clear to the rest of the population of Río Negro that it was not safe to continue living in the village. Many of the surviving community members therefore took refuge in the surrounding mountains. However, their flight into the mountains did not shield them from further violence at the hands of the military and paramilitary forces, who continued to raid the area periodically to pillage and burn the houses, steal or kill the livestock and animals, destroy the crops and steal any valuable possessions, including tools and cooking utensils, so as to destroy everything that could potentially help the refugees⁷⁹ to survive in the mountains (EAFG, 1997; MCRA, 2003). Refugees endured extremely precarious conditions as they struggled to survive after fleeing their community, and several refugees lost their lives in the mountains as a consequence of hunger, cold and illness, as well as from the continued violence to which they were subjected by the military and paramilitary forces. In fact, the former inhabitants of Río Negro were also targeted by two more massacres in nearby communities where they had attempted to find refuge (EAFG, 2002; MCRA, 2003; Tecú Osorio, 2002).⁸⁰ Finally, “on 25 January 1983, once the survivors of five massacres against the community of Río Negro had fled to the mountains, the INDE began to fill the reservoir” (MRCA, 2003, p.84, author’s translation).⁸¹

The events I have just described in relation to how *La Violencia* played out in the community of Río Negro are by no means an exceptional case. Rather, I use it here as an illustration of the pattern of violence and repression that was unleashed throughout Guatemala during the scorched earth campaign of the early 1980s, a pattern from which

Rabinal, sadly, did not escape. Indeed, a series of collective, generalised massacres took the lives of over 2 000 people in the *municipio* of Rabinal between 1981 and 1983 (MCRA, 2003; Valle Cobar, 2004). The massacres were characterised by their brutality and the systematic way in which civilians – including men, women, children, babies and the elderly – became the targets of violence at the hands of the state’s security apparatus. As was described in the case of the Pak’oxom massacre, countless survivors of these massacres fled their communities to find refuge in the surrounding mountains and in nearby communities, or left the region completely, finding refuge in Guatemala City, the southern coast or the northern department of Petén (MCRA, 2003). Refugees who had fled to the mountains lived in quite extreme conditions, enduring unabated harassment by the military in the form of raids, searches and bombing of areas where refugees were thought to be hiding (MCRA, 2003).

In late 1982, the government of General Efraín Ríos Montt granted ‘amnesty’ to internal refugees who were still living in the mountains. In Rabinal, military helicopters circled the mountainsides dropping leaflets announcing the amnesty measure and encouraging refugees to come down from the mountains and surrender themselves to the Army (MCRA, 2003; Tecú Osorio, 2002). Refugees were understandably apprehensive and distrustful of the government’s and military’s motives; however, given the considerable hardships they had endured in the mountains – sometimes for two or three years – groups of refugees started coming out of hiding and turning themselves in to the *municipio*’s military detachment.⁸² Despite the government’s assurances that the lives of refugees would be respected and that they would not be subjected to mistreatment, many refugees were held at the military base for several days or weeks after ‘surrendering.’

There, they were interrogated and tortured – which, in the case of female refugees, often included sexual violence and rape (MCRA, 2003; Tecú Osorio, 2002).

Even after they were released from the base to reintegrate into their communities, returned refugees were by no means freed from military control. Even though very few model villages were established in Rabinal, several communities were nonetheless submitted to direct control and monitoring by the military and paramilitary.⁸³ The most striking example of this is Pacux, a military established ‘model village’ where survivors of Río Negro were relocated, which was only accessible by a road that passed through the military detachment.⁸⁴ Indeed, even after the war, the population of Rabinal “continued living under the Army’s control and once again became the victim of actions that had no other purpose than to perpetuate terror and avoid all possibility of autonomous community reorganisation” (CEH, 1999, para.1052, author’s translation).

The Aftermath: Recuperation of Historical Memory

The 36 years of internal armed conflict have had a dramatic and deadly toll on the Guatemalan population. According to the CEH (1999), more than 400 villages were completely eradicated, over 200 000 people were killed or ‘disappeared,’⁸⁵ one million people were subjected to internal displacement and an additional 100 000 became refugees in neighbouring countries. At least 626 massacres have been documented by the CEH (1999),⁸⁶ of which over 64% were committed between June 1981 and December 1982. Indeed, the most violent period of the armed conflict is undeniably the period known as *La Violencia* – accounting for 80% of all violations of human rights

documented by the ODHAG's *Guatemala: Nunca Más* report (1998) – and particularly Ríos Montt's reign in power (ODHAG, 1998).

The internal armed conflict also had disastrous impacts on the population of Rabinal: it is estimated that nearly 80% of the population suffered directly or indirectly one of the many forms of repression inflicted on the municipio (Suazo, 2002). As in other parts of the country, the Guatemalan military, the PAC and the paramilitary death-squads known as the *judiciales* were mainly responsible for the massacres, arbitrary executions, disappearances and widespread human rights violations committed in the region⁸⁷ and the victims were overwhelmingly of the Maya Achi ethnic group (MCRA, 2003; ODHAG, 1998).

Both the ODHAG (1998) and the CEH (1999) have concluded that 'acts of genocide' were committed in Guatemala during the armed conflict, based on definitions of genocide in international human rights and humanitarian law. According to the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, genocide is defined as:

Any of the following acts, committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group, as such: a) Killing members of the groups; b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group. (as cited in ODHAG, 1999, p.291)

The ODHAG (1998) concluded that the mass violations of human rights that occurred in Guatemala were not incidental, but rather resulted from a planned counterinsurgency strategy that implemented patterns of violence targeting entire groups. These patterns included, but were not limited to: extra-judicial execution, forced

disappearance, death as a result of persecution, massacre of entire villages, torture and cruel treatment, rape and irregular detention. The victims of violence and human rights violations during the internal armed conflict were overwhelmingly of the indigenous Maya population. In fact, the CEH (1999) found that 83.3% of the victims of the incidents it documented were indigenous and that the Guatemalan state⁸⁸ was responsible for 93% of these violations.⁸⁹ Furthermore, the CEH (1999) maintains that the Guatemalan state's victimisation of Maya communities and the processes, mechanisms and consequences associated to this victimisation amount to a violation of the rights of Indigenous Peoples, including the violation of their collective right to their own cultural life and their right to conserve and develop their own institutions. As we will explore further in the following chapter, Maya women were especially targeted by the political violence, being made victims of rape, torture and arbitrary killings. Some women were targeted because of their political or social participation, while many others were victimised during generalised massacres (Swedish, 1999).

In its analysis of the political violence and massacres committed in Rabinal, the CEH (1999) concluded that acts of genocide were committed against the Maya Achi population of Rabinal, pointing to the fact that the proportion of victims from that group (99.8%) is significantly disproportionate to the ethnic make-up of the *municipio* (82% of the population is Achi) and to patterns of violence that indicate a willingness to eliminate the Maya Achi. In Rabinal, these patterns of violence included sexual violence and rape of women, massacres of entire communities, forced displacement, as well as acts of violence committed against children aimed at "destroying the seed" of the group (MCRA, 2003, p.152).

Many of the patterns of violence that point to the genocidal will with which the Guatemalan state acted during the counterinsurgency campaigns of the 1980s are eerily similar to the tactics first employed by the Spanish during the colonial era: forcing indigenous populations into ‘model’ villages to ease their control, targeting pregnant women, children and babies for violence, destroying traditional practices of community organisation and subsistence.⁹⁰ As was concluded in the project of Recuperation of Historical Memory of Rabinal (MCRA, 2003), “in the course of the last five hundred years, the suffering of the maya-achi people has not changed much” (p.283). Indeed, the violence unleashed on indigenous Maya populations of Guatemala during the internal armed conflict can be seen as an extreme form of the continued structural violence to which they have been subjected since colonisation; in a sense, it was a continuation of five centuries of genocide.

While the impacts of the counterinsurgency campaigns of the 1980s were not quite as dramatic as those of the first years of colonisation, Rabinal’s demographic make-up was nonetheless significantly altered by the political violence and repression that descended on the *municipio*. Indeed, of a pre-war population of 22 733, approximately 20% of the *municipio*’s population was assassinated (between 4 000 and 5 000 people) (MCRA, 2003; ODHAG, 1998). If the population growth rates had followed ‘normal’ trends during this period, it is estimated that Rabinal’s population would have reached 40 931 in 1994. However, a 1994 population census established that only slightly more than 24 000 people lived in the *municipio* (Valle Cobar, 2004). This translates into an annual growth rate that is significantly lower than that of the rest of the department.⁹¹ In addition to having lost nearly 20% of its population directly to

the political violence, many residents were forced to flee to other regions of Guatemala and sometimes to seek refuge outside the country, and still others were forced to migrate in search of work. Indeed, as stated in *Las Masacres en Rabinal* (EAFG, 1997), throughout history, “Rabinal has expelled its inhabitants for political and economic reasons” (p.24, author’s translation).

As a result of these processes, the gender composition of Rabinal’s population is now distorted, with the female population having increased from 50% to 53% during the 1980s (EAFG, 1997; Valle Cobar, 2004). This partially illustrates the fact that the political violence left a large number of widows and orphans with no family, resources or homes after having lost their community either through its physical destruction or because of the destruction of the social fabric caused by the political violence. As we will see in the next chapter, ever since *La Violencia* entered their community, these widows have been “forced to confront multidimensional problems as they struggle to survive” (Green, 1999, p.32).

CHAPTER THREE – WE BECAME LIKE MOTHER AND FATHER OF OUR FAMILIESⁱ

As was outlined in the previous chapter, Rabinal was particularly hard hit by both selective and generalised violent repression during the Guatemalan internal armed conflict, and especially during the period known as *La Violencia*, which was marked by the counterinsurgency campaigns of the early 1980s. In the aftermath of *La Violencia*, survivors of the repression faced a future in which their world had been turned upside down and their survival and subsistence mechanisms had been destroyed.

In communities where violence took the form of generalised massacres, many female survivors lost their husbands as well as other family members, saw their communities completely destroyed and were forced to flee to the mountains where they survived in extremely precarious conditions for months or years at a time. Even in communities where violence was more restrained and ‘selective,’ *La Violencia* left serious and deep impacts, especially on the indigenous women in these communities.

Indeed, the project of recuperation of historical memory of Rabinal (MCRA, 2003) concluded that indigenous women were by far the group most affected by the conflict in Rabinal since they not only witnessed the brutal violence unleashed on their communities, they were also themselves made targets of this violence and survived – often as widows – to face a future in which they faced incredible economic, social, cultural and psychological hardships. For all of these women, providing for themselves and for their children became a daily challenge as they struggled to survive in a universe

ⁱ “Nos quedamos como madre y padre de familia” (Doña Ramon)

now dominated by violence and fear. As we will see, many of the survivors continue to live with the consequences and impacts of *La Violencia* to this day.

In this chapter, I will discuss the various ways in which the violence of the internal armed conflict affected Achí women in the *municipio* of Rabinal. First, I will discuss the specific forms of violence to which indigenous women were subjected during *La Violencia*, before moving to a discussion of the longer-term impacts of this violence on the physical, psychological, social and cultural levels. Then, I will examine the hardships and challenges that widows have had to deal with after the loss of their husbands and the various strategies that they undertook to adapt to the harsh conditions they faced in order to be able to survive and raise their families during *La Violencia* and in its aftermath. Survival in this context of extreme social, cultural, psychological and economic disruption is in itself a powerful display of the resiliency that these women have shown.

***Solo las mujeres se quedaron, los hombres se murieron todos:*ⁱⁱ Women's Experiences of Violence**

The war in Guatemala was gendered not only in the sense that a higher proportion of the dead and disappeared were men,⁹² but also in the sense that men and women were submitted to different forms of violence. For instance, many indigenous men experienced violence and brutalisation through their forced recruitment in the Army, forced participation in the PAC and consequent involvement in acts of violence, often under threat of violence or death; Doña Teresa reflected on this:

ⁱⁱ Only the women were left, the men all died (Doña Maria[4])

In the past, when they patrolled, the people from this village patrolled in town, the men patrolled in town. The people were forced to join the reserves. My brother was forced to do reserves; they mistreated them, they hit them, all of that ... they would even throw smoke bombs, there are some that are like smoke grenades, they sting, that's what they would throw in the middle of the field when they were gathered there.

The stories that indigenous widows in Rabinal told about their own experiences of violence also speak of being submitted to intense forms of violence experienced as witnesses and survivors, as well as direct victims. Indeed, their experiences testify to the targeting of indigenous women for specific types of violence, as well as to the devastating impacts that this violence has had on women and on their communities. To those of us who have not experienced this violence, the sheer brutality and magnitude of these testimonies are hard to grasp.

The brutal violence inflicted on the civilian population of Guatemala during *La Violencia* almost invariably included systematic sexual violence and rape of women and girls.⁹³ While the use of rape as a method of war during the internal armed conflict has been confirmed by various sources,⁹⁴ only a few of the women I interviewed spoke directly about rape. Those who did mostly spoke about the general fact that 'women had been raped' and not necessarily about their own experience of sexual violence or rape.⁹⁵ This is perhaps not surprising given that rape is often under-reported because of the stigma and shame attached to the violation (Pankhurst, 2004).⁹⁶ However, in Rabinal, as in most of the rest of the country, indigenous women were systematically targeted for sexual violence and rape.

In Río Negro, survivors of the Pak'oxom massacre on 13 March 1982 have recounted how, when the soldiers and patrollers first rounded up the women and children

in the village, young girls were separated from the group and brought into the woods where they were raped by patrollers. Jesús Tecú Osorio (2002) recounts:

After the interrogation, they started to rape the young girls who were fourteen or fifteen years old. They brought them to the mountain and then laughed at them because they had raped them. I saw when the patroller Ambrosio Perez Lajuj, from Xococ, brought Justa Osorio Sic to the mountain. She came back frightened. He was shouting vulgarities at her. He was telling her she was no longer virgin, that her body was loose now. (p.90, author's translation)

Other survivors of this massacre recounted that, by the time the group had reached the top of the mountain, almost all of the women and girls were naked and had been raped:⁹⁷

They rounded up the women. They put marimba and forced them to dance... they accused them of dancing with the *guerrilleros* at night. They brought the young women aside and raped them. Later, they forced them to walk... up the mountain... they hit the women a lot, told them they were cows, treated them as if they were cows that had to be urged on... The majority of the women were naked, had been raped, there were women who were only a few days away from giving birth and these children were born of the sheer blows. (quoted in MCRA, 2003, p.152, author's translation)

As is made evident in both of these recollections of the Pak'oxom massacre, rape was used against indigenous women as a way of attacking their dignity and of dishonouring them.⁹⁸ The fact that the young girls were separated from the rest of the group before being taken into the woods to be raped also indicates the planned and systematic use of sexual violence.⁹⁹

The use of rape as a weapon of war was particularly widespread during the brutal massacres of entire villages executed as part of the attack on indigenous Maya communities during the scorched earth campaigns of *La Violencia*;¹⁰⁰ however, the use of rape and sexual violence against women was not restricted to this context. Rather, the use of rape as a method of physical and psychological torture was widespread. Soldiers and paramilitaries often raped women in front of their family members in an attempt to

extract information from their husbands or parents, and obviously as a form of psychological torture and humiliation for both the women who were raped and those forced to watch the abuse (Green, 1999; MCRA, 2003).¹⁰¹ In many cases, women who were detained at the military base suffered prolonged interrogation and torture, including repetitive and brutal rapes. Doña Ramon recalled her own experience:

I spent eight days at the army base. That is when they hit me in the stomach with the butt of their guns, and beat my waist until they made me ill, I was bleeding for 15 days, excreting blood. They beat me very badly, they did so many things to me.¹⁰²

Many survivors of *La Violencia*, and many of the widows I interviewed, recounted how pregnant women were not spared the violence inflicted on other women. To the contrary, a woman's motherhood was often used against her as a method of psychological torture. In fact, the ODHAG (1999) stated that "one of the most powerful ways of pressuring women was to use their children to control, dominate, or crush the psyches of their mothers" and that "the torture or death of family members and manipulation of emotions were tools used to torture women psychologically" (p.74). This use of a woman's motherhood as a method of torture is illustrated in Doña Trinidad's story. She was three months pregnant when her husband was killed; five days after she gave birth to her son, soldiers came to her house and took her baby from her, putting him on the ground outside her house, threatening her:

A soldier came inside with me, "That child, that kid isn't from good people, he's a son of the *guerrilleros*," that's what he told me.... I was crying.... They could have killed my son, you never know.

A particularly horrific form of psychological torture targeting women as mothers was inflicted when pregnant women and their unborn children were targeted for violence, including rape and sexual violence:

When the second [massacre] happened here in the Clinic, I was five months pregnant and despite this, they raped me. Because of the rapes my baby was born all deformed. He died when he was three and a half years old, his head was all deformed because they raped me so much. It was my little boy; he would be turning 25 this year, but because of the violence of the rapes my son didn't survive. (B-01)

Testimonies from the Rabinal region also include accounts of how some pregnant women's abdomens were opened and the foetuses taken out in order to kill the unborn children before their mothers were murdered.¹⁰³

During the internal armed conflict there were several massacres and the way in which the people were assassinated, one by one. There were pregnant women, they took the baby out of the abdomen and left it there. Or they grabbed innocent children and, against a tree, against a rock and killed them. (Elba)

The fact that violence was inflicted on pregnant women, children and babies, and the brutal way in which they were murdered, still shocked many people in Rabinal. Women who live in communities where violence was more selective often mentioned that it is only thanks to 'God's will' that their own life was spared, unlike those of so many other women in the region. In fact, many of the widows that I interviewed seemed to make a link between the deliberate targeting of women, elderly people and children and the genocidal nature of the repression:

Because we are indigenous, they killed us all. Oh! Thank God that they did not kill the women here! In some place they killed the women: the women of Río Negro, they killed them, poor them! In Chichupac, in Agua Fría, in Plan de Sánchez, but thank God not here! (Doña Maria[3])

They said that first they would finish off all of the men, and then the women. That's what they said. Thank God that He didn't want this to happen to us, that they kill us all, because we are not animals, we are human beings! Like we heard from Río Negro, they killed pregnant women, children. It isn't the children's fault! And perhaps there was only one person involved in what they call *guerrilleros*. (Doña Teresa)

As we saw in the previous chapter, the Guatemalan state's scorched earth campaign of the early 1980s included the pillaging and physical destruction of entire communities: houses and crops were burned down and any possessions, including livestock, agricultural tools and food stocks were either destroyed or stolen. Survivors of these massacres were often forced to flee into the mountains where they were left to contend with a future in which their very means of subsistence had been destroyed.

For newly widowed women, leaving their community was obviously not a decision that was taken lightly since it generally meant exposing themselves and their children to extremely difficult living conditions, including hunger, illness and death. However, as Doña Rosario explained, many women simply did not see any other choice:

We couldn't live here anymore!... When I was about three months pregnant we left. I left with my children, I had 4 children in addition to the other. They got sick because we were in the mountain so much, with so much cold.... we couldn't be in our house anymore.

Refugees often spent months, if not years, in the mountains living in near-starvation, exposed to the elements, with serious illnesses and almost constantly on the move in order to avoid being captured by the Army. This is what Doña Ramon and her children lived through:

So I went to the mountain, we went to find refuge with all of my children. My babies were small, one was one and a half years old, the other was two years old, another one was three, the others were four, five and eight years-old. We managed to save our lives, but we survived two-and-a-half years in the mountain, with nothing to eat, with no clothes, nothing. We were left with no house. But we went down there. In the mountains we endured the rains that are coming now, we endured everything in the mountain.

As we saw earlier, the Army, paramilitaries and patrollers also continued to pursue, harass and attack individuals and communities that had sought refuge in the mountains; as for other forms of violence, women were not immune. In fact, Paz (2006)

reports that during the Guatemalan internal armed conflict, the majority of victims of death resulting from displacement were women. This may reflect the fact that more women than men were displaced; however, it could also be attributed to the fact that once in the mountains, women's mobility was more limited than men's because they were carrying children or caring for the elderly. Indeed, when recounting their experiences in the mountains, many returned refugees tell of trying to muffle their children's cries in order not to be discovered by soldiers or patrollers.¹⁰⁴

Despues de eso quedamos todo asustado:*ⁱⁱⁱ Psychosocial and Cultural Impacts of *La Violencia

It would be a considerable understatement to assert that the violence inflicted on the population of Rabinal during the early 1980s has had deep impacts on those who have survived. As we saw earlier, women were by no means spared violence because of their status as 'non-combatants.' On the contrary, given the genocidal nature of *La Violencia*, indigenous Achí women of Rabinal were often deliberately targeted by the state's security forces and their accomplices to receive extremely brutal forms of violence – including torture, extra-judicial assassination as well as sexual violence and rape. As a result of these forms of violence inflicted on indigenous Achí women and their communities, widows endured the serious physical, psychological, social and cultural impacts for years after they experienced *La Violencia*.

In Guatemala, the trauma left over by the internal armed conflict is often referred to as '*susto*'¹⁰⁵ (fright): "The young people when *La Violencia* came, some of them didn't

ⁱⁱⁱ After that we remained very frightened (Doña Maria[2])

go to school and some got sick, they lost their mind because of so much *susto*” (Doña Maxima). As Doña Maxima explained, many of the widows in Rabinal still suffer from the ‘fright’ they experienced during the conflict: “The women who were widowed have remained, illness is still affecting them badly, it is affecting them badly because they continue to be frightened.” Furthermore, as Doña Teresa maintained, this fright continues to cause physical and psychological health problems:¹⁰⁶

La Violencia left us so many problems and so many illnesses. Yes, so many illnesses. Because, for example, the orphans, when they were still little, when they were still two or three months old, they caught all of the sadness, and they almost lost their mind a bit. And us as well, it has hurt us, it has given us a lot of headaches, heartache. Why? For worrying so much.

These physical and psychosocial illnesses have also affected widows’ ability to provide for their families:

After *La Violencia* we lacked many things. Especially because my mother, she suffers from an illness, from epilepsy. But that was only after the armed conflict, because of everything she saw and everything that happened. In one way it’s affecting her and she suffers from this illness. (Elba)

But I’m not that well, because when *La Violencia* came it left me some illnesses, and since then I am ill. I can’t go out to the field anymore because it makes me ill. The illness I have now, I have an illness of, how do you call it? Of the nerves. I can’t go out because of my nerves, because I’m ill. (Doña Juliana)

Consequently, life since the internal armed conflict has simply not been the same for most of the widows as they continue to suffer the effects of *La Violencia* in their daily lives, including in almost all dimensions of community life. Indeed, when I asked women how their lives had changed since *La Violencia*, they almost invariably started their explanation by stating that ‘it is not the same as before *La Violencia*’ regardless of which aspect of their lives I was asking them about.¹⁰⁷

As we saw above, countless women suffered the physical and psychological trauma, abuse and humiliation of rape, as well as the physical repercussions of these violations, which include unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases and other gynaecological problems. The physical, emotional, psychological and social impacts of rape are indeed extremely serious and long lasting, all the more so considering that many of the victims of rape during the conflict were quite young at the time. Doña Maxima explained how women in Rabinal are still suffering the impacts of the rapes:

The young women too, they were affected because they received a lot of violence when they went to the mountain. They were left with problems of the waist, of the stomach. Our children are worse-off now, it is hard with so much pain because their waist was so badly beaten, their bodies. Now these women are badly affected with all of this pain because of the violence they received in the past, and because of the fear.

It is almost impossible to know how many of these war-time rapes resulted in illness or unwanted pregnancies because of the silence that continues to surround the issue and the fact that the use of rape and sexual violence was not systematically investigated in either the CEH or REMHI reports (Paz, 2006). What is known, however, is that many women continue to suffer the consequences of the violence they were submitted to during the war: “I remain slightly injured, every once in a while I get an illness of the waist and pain in my heart. I’ll be making tortillas, talking, and all of a sudden, I get a headache” (Doña Maxima).

The social stigmatisation, humiliation, shame and anguish suffered by victims of sexual violence and rape may cause them to avoid medical treatment even when it is made available to them (El-Jack, 2003; McKay, 1998; Pankhurst, 2004). However, rural Guatemalan women had very limited, if any, access to reproductive health services during the Armed conflict – a situation which is still mostly unchanged today – leaving

most of these problems largely unresolved.¹⁰⁸ While many women continue to live with the physical consequences of rape and sexual violence to this day, *La Violencia* did not only leave physical scars but also inflicted deep social and psychological trauma. The fact that rape was also used as a method to mock indigenous women's dignity and of attacking an entire community speaks to the serious social and cultural disruptions that ensue when rape is used as a weapon of war.¹⁰⁹

As we saw earlier, during massacres of indigenous communities, the Army, paramilitary and PAC pillaged entire communities, burning down houses, uprooting crops and stealing or destroying any and all valuable possessions, including livestock, agricultural tools and food stocks. Even in communities that were not physically annihilated and where the violent repression was more 'selective,' many widows also lost their homes, animals, crops and material possessions to pillaging and destruction by the Army, paramilitary and/or patrollers. Doña Juliana told of how patrollers stole all of her belongings shortly after her husband's disappearance:

I went out to harvest the corn, once I finished harvesting, at about this time of day, I was walking back with my beasts. Ten patrollers arrived, they met me there in the path, what did they do to me? At once they took my beasts. Here, there was nothing, they destroyed my house. They took all of my things, everything, my animals: my cows, my oxen, my mules, everything! I found my mules over there on the hill where I had harvested. They pulled out all of my corn. I had nothing left! Nothing, nothing, nothing! At once they left me with nothing. This house isn't my house. My house was up there, there's nothing there anymore, it doesn't have [roof] tiles anymore; they left it with nothing. The tiles were brought over there in the community; they took them as if my house no longer had an owner. And my poor children were left there, with nothing. That is what I suffered that day.

In instances when their husbands were taken from their houses, widows tell of how soldiers, patrollers or *judiciales* also pillaged their homes and stole their valuables and livestock. This is what happened to Doña Teresa, among others:

When they went to take him outside one grabbed him on this side, the other one grabbed him on the other side. They took him outside and one of them stayed inside searching the house and if he found money, he took it, whatever valuable things he found, they took. They leave you with nothing.

Many other women also recounted how they lost ‘everything’ during *La Violencia*: their wedding necklaces, clothes, dishes, agricultural tools, maize, grains and other food stocks, livestock, construction materials, as well as any money they may have had. As we will see later, the theft, pillaging and physical destruction of food stocks, crops, agricultural tools and livestock undeniably had a significant impact on widows’ and survivors’ ability to subsist in the aftermath of *La Violencia*; however, it also held important social and cultural implications. Indeed, because of their cultural significance and the crucial role they play in both physical and cultural reproduction of the group, the systematic destruction of such things as *huipiles* (women’s traditional blouses), agricultural tools and *milpas* (cornfields) must also be understood as part of the genocide the Guatemalan state was committing against the indigenous Maya population. Indeed, as Sanford (2003) stated, “the Guatemalan Army’s destruction of maize was a recurring ritual destruction of the Maya both physically and spiritually” (p.178).¹¹⁰

The increased militarisation and presence of PAC in the communities also had a significant impact on indigenous communities in the aftermath of *La Violencia*. Doña Maria[2] explained how it has impacted widows’ lives:

Life changed because, with the period of *La Violencia*, we could no longer talk to people. We could no longer stop in the road to talk to another woman, the patrollers were watching us.

The presence of patrollers and army collaborators in the community – along with the violence and fear that their presence sustained – also affected widows' ability to work and made the provision of even the most basic daily necessities a dangerous and almost impossible task for many survivors:

There were four massacres here, and we were left with fear because we could no longer do our household chores, we could not leave the house after five o'clock in the evening, we stopped doing everything. And after that, we were left all frightened, because we could not eat, the children would be crying, we could not go buy food in the village, we could not go to the village anymore, we could only stay in the house. We only had plain water, no coffee, no sugar, this is what we went through. (Doña Maria[2])

In those conditions there is no longer a good life, we could not even go out; we could not go gather firewood because if you went out to gather firewood, they would kill you up in the hills. We could not live anymore. (Doña Teresa)

During *La Violencia*, gatherings of as little as two people were seen as suspicious by the Army and the simple fact of being gathered was often enough to provoke violent action on the part of soldiers, paramilitaries and PAC.¹¹¹ As a result, fear and suspicion marred community life and pushed many people to abandon the collective and cooperative aspects of their daily lives:

Even religious processions or the village fiesta, people didn't celebrate it anymore because they couldn't. They couldn't celebrate anymore because if we were together, if there were two or three people walking around together, they would be watching us, asking us what we were doing, keeping an eye on us. If we were carrying a basket, they would ask us what was in the basket, always watching us, always asking us what we were buying, what we were bringing to our homes, what we were doing. They said that we were feeding the *guerrilleros*, but we didn't even know the *guerrilleros*, because everyone here works, they have their hoes, their axes, all of those tools. (Doña Teresa)

During the war we could no longer go visit our neighbours, we couldn't give them anything, because they would say that we were accomplices of the guerrilla if we

were sharing with those who have nothing. And they were forbidding us to gather together, they were prohibiting us to share with others. They left us locked up because we couldn't leave our homes, much less could we go carry out our Maya ceremonies, never! Organising an activity in your community could get you killed. That's how life changed so much. (Doña Pedrina[1])

As was alluded to in Doña Pedrina[1]'s account, the fact that the national security doctrine equated being 'Maya' to being 'subversive' or '*guerrillero*' – and thus an enemy of the regime – forced many Achi people to distance themselves from their Maya identity. Combined with the suspicion that surrounded any type of gathering, this pushed many Achi people to abandon certain traditions and customs, including Maya spiritual ceremonies and ways of grieving for the deceased:

If someone passed away, they couldn't hold a wake for them, even in hiding, even in the dark. We couldn't hold wakes because they would have killed us: What are you doing? Why are you gathered together? That is what we went through. (Doña Teresa)

As was concluded in the ODHAG's *Nunca Más* [Never Again] report in 1998, the obstacles posed to conducting burials and grieving rituals – including explicit orders given by the Army forbidding the burial of victims – combined with the brutality, senselessness and enormity of the violence has altered grieving processes in many Maya communities. In Rabinal, this process of suspended or 'frustrated' mourning has contributed to the creation of a subculture of 'socio-political disaster' which is characterised by the expression of a feeling of collective failure, fear and distrust, a rise in domestic and social violence, as well as a crisis in indigenous communities' sense of values (Suazo, 2002).¹¹²

Despite the fact that *La Violencia* happened over two decades ago, fear that the violence may return is still very present in many Rabinal communities: "But always, when there is noise, we are frightened that it is coming again" (Doña Maria[1]). As Doña

Ramon explained, the memory of how people were not safe even in their own houses continues to haunt and frighten many:

Even now people are frightened, even now they have fear, they can't sleep calmly in their house. This is what *La Violencia* left us, we can't sleep anymore, if we hear a commotion (*bullá*), oh God! Our heart goes like this. We can't sleep calmly, we hardly sleep. That is different from before, when even if it was under a tree, we would be able to sleep, but not anymore, even in their houses they can go get people.

Furthermore, widows continued to live in deeply militarised communities for several years following their initial experiences of violence, since military and paramilitary forces upheld a constant presence; indeed, PAC were maintained in some Rabinal communities until the late 1980s (Sanford, 2003; Valle Cobar, 2004).¹¹³ The power that patrollers and military commissioners derived from their close links to the Army allowed them to continue harassing, threatening and abusing victims and survivors of the internal armed conflict for years following *La Violencia*.¹¹⁴ Indeed, many individuals, including former patrollers and military commissioners, took advantage of their position of power in the community and of the social chaos created by the armed conflict to 'resolve' personal grievances, land disputes or simply to enrich themselves.¹¹⁵ In the communities of Rabinal, there seems to be common knowledge of which individuals gained what during the conflict and how they did it.¹¹⁶ It was definitely the case for Doña Trinidad:

They even took my salt, the patrollers over there in the path. I know the man, he lives over there.... I do know the man who took all of my things. Just down there where the slope of the riverbank is, he was standing there with all of the patrollers.

Since many of the massacres, assassinations and human rights violations were committed by local civil patrollers who continue to live in those communities, many

widows still live side-by-side with their aggressors to this day, which only serves to prolong their experience of violence and fear, with deep psychosocial effects.¹¹⁷

***Buscamos la vida, para dar de comer a los niños:*^{iv} Becoming Heads of Households**

As we have just seen, Achí women in Rabinal suffered multiple and various forms of violence during the armed conflict and many continue to live with the physical, psychological, social and cultural consequences of these violations. However, for survivors who were widowed by the conflict, all of these impacts were intensified by the loss of their husbands, their partners in life and work, as Doña Maria [4] told me:

They all died and we, the women, were left. Yes, only the women were left, the men all died. So, the women were left with sadness, because they no longer have anywhere to go. There were no men left, women raised their children. So there is no more, the women no longer have a good life, no, because of the violence that the community endured.

For these women, the ‘disappearance,’ kidnapping or assassination of their husband meant, first and foremost, a loss of companionship. Doña Trinidad explained how her daily struggle to survive changed after the loss of her husband:

It isn’t the same as when my husband was alive, because we worked together, we didn’t endure any hardships.... It isn’t the same as when our partners were alive, because we always talked together, we’d find a way get through hardships.

Almost invariably, when speaking of how their lives changed during *La Violencia*, one of the first things the widows mentioned was how many children they were left with and had to support after the death of their husband. Indeed, widowed women had to struggle not only to ensure their own survival, but also the survival of their children. Since a large proportion of the indigenous population in Rabinal already lived in

^{iv} We sought out a living in order to feed the children (Doña Maria[2])

precarious conditions before the onset of the war and indigenous women in Guatemala have, on average, at least six children, this was no easy feat:¹¹⁸

La Violencia changed [women's lives] a lot. When their husbands were killed it's like they cut off one of their arms and they were left with only one hand. And that hand had to work hard because they were left as both mother and father to their children. (Doña Pedrina[1])

Indeed, the already challenging task of providing enough food for the family became even more difficult for the newly widowed women, as Doña Ramon expressed:

I have suffered, because it isn't the same now as when my husband was here because he helped us, he brought food for the family. But now I've become like the family's mother and father.

As if the loss of their husband and the destruction of their community weren't enough for widows to deal with, their struggle to survive was also exacerbated by the ongoing armed conflict and the increased hardships it brought. As we have seen, *La Violencia* had multiple serious impacts on the women who lost their husbands to the violent repression. In addition to the social, cultural, physical and psychological harm they suffered, many widows also endured deep economic hardship as a result of the combination of these impacts, the destruction or loss of physical and material possessions and of their husbands' labour.

The Maya Achi people of Rabinal, like most of Guatemala's indigenous populations, had historically and traditionally ensured their subsistence through small-scale agriculture and animal husbandry. Therefore, while their life before *La Violencia* was generally not one of great wealth,¹¹⁹ subsistence livelihood combined with periodic migration to work as seasonal labourers on plantations made it possible for households to sustain themselves. Given this dependence on the land for their subsistence, the

destruction of food stocks, crops, and agricultural tools and the theft of livestock that was described above particularly affected survivors' ability to subsist. Several women expressed this clearly:

At least back then [before *La Violencia*] we lacked almost nothing; at least we had food, we had resources; it was possible to survive.... My father had his livestock, he had his land, he had his house. But at the time of *La Violencia* the houses were burned, the land was abandoned and all of that; and the animals were the first to disappear. They leave you with almost nothing; they almost left us out on the street. (Elba)

They took all our animals. We had two milking cows, beef cows, they took them, three mules, they took them, pigs, hens, turkeys, they took all of those animals, these people! We could no longer do anything! (Doña Ramon)

In some cases, the widows' houses, crops, land, animals and possessions were not looted during the conflict. However, they still had to try to 'carry on' without their husbands. This was a significant challenge for many women given the traditional and historical reliance on small-scale agriculture and animal husbandry for subsistence and considering that, according to the traditional gendered division of labour, this type of work was generally done by men, while women worked primarily in the home.¹²⁰ Doña Maria[4] recalled the kind of work she used to do:

In the past, when I was a young girl, there weren't these things there are today, because we couldn't go out, we were in the house, we were working. I was always in the house, I didn't go out anywhere, my mother didn't allow me to go out anywhere.... I was always doing things in the house, I was always making tortillas, going to bring the lunch, to bring *atol*.¹²¹ That was my work, there in the house. That's how it was before, when I grew up.

After the death of their husbands, widows had to take over their husbands' work in the field in addition to their own responsibilities. Doña Juliana explained: "When I was left with my children, I became like two, a man and a woman, by myself, just a woman, but I worked there in the field and I worked here in my house." Indeed, it was the only

way many widows could ensure their own survival and sustain their family: “We had to find a way to make a living, to feed the children, we weren’t going to be able to raise our families. So after we had to work in the house and in the fields” (Doña Maria[2]).

Despite their efforts, it was very difficult for many widows to maintain their subsistence livelihood, especially when they did not have access to enough land, as Doña Trinidad explained: “I had nothing! My husband didn’t leave enough land to raise all the little ones that I was left with. And so, we struggled until they had grown up.” Other widows simply could not do all the work by themselves and could not afford to pay someone else to help them cultivate and harvest the fields: “If we want to hire a worker, how are we going to pay them?” (Doña Maria[3]).¹²² Since harvesting corn is quite labour-intensive, many widows were forced to abandon their subsistence livelihood and look for other ways of sustaining their families, including taking on paid domestic work (such as washing clothes for their neighbours) and selling tortillas, food or other goods at the market. Some widows were even forced to give up growing corn altogether.

While the destruction of corn and/or the inability to continue cultivating it represented an important challenge to widows on the economic front, it was also a cultural affront since the *milpa* (the cornfields that surround the house of most rural Mayas) is an important part of Maya culture and cosmology. In fact, Green (1999) explains that “corn is identity, a site of not only material but also cultural production and Mayan agency”(p.18). This idea was strongly expressed in the way and the frequency with which many women spoke of corn and of their *milpas*.¹²³

Many of the widows in Rabinal also made reference to having become increasingly dependent on the cash-economy,¹²⁴ as was alluded to by Doña Teresa: “It

isn't the same as in the villages because we didn't have to buy anything there. Here on the other hand, we buy everything." The fact that many survivors of *La Violencia* lost most of their possessions during the armed conflict has only exacerbated the hardships that were brought on by this increased dependency on the market economy. Indeed, the women who lost everything during the conflict – including their houses, land, crops and livestock – have since lived in an extremely precarious economic situation:

Above all, if we talk of before *La Violencia*, we were better off, because we had our things, we had hens, we had cows, we weren't buying things like we are now. In the past, when I got married, we had corn, we had something to work with.
(Doña Maxima)

Indeed, as Doña Maria[1] explained, the need to depend on the cash-economy even for their staple food brought much difficulty to the household since it had also lost its main cash-earner:¹²⁵

I left for two or three months, when I came back, my cornfield had been destroyed. What were we going to eat? Now, we have to buy, but there's no money, or anyone who earns it.

In addition to this increased dependence on the cash-economy, many of the widows I interviewed in Rabinal also expressed that the cost of even the most basic necessities has increased significantly since *La Violencia*. Indeed, Doña Maria[3] explained that: "Now everything is so expensive: soap is expensive, sugar, beans, squash, everything!" Doña Teresa also explained the impact that this inflation has had on her life:

Everything has changed now. Times have changed because things got more expensive. Now we only earn enough to barely survive. Even just to dress yourself or to buy clothes you need to go out to the plantations, where you don't earn very much either, just a little: one cent per *quintal*¹²⁶ of cotton – that's quite a lot of cotton! So that's how we suffer through life.

Much research into the impact of armed conflict on a country or a region's economy has concluded that armed conflict brings increased economic difficulty for most

of the civilian population. While the ‘inflation’ to which these women refer may not be only attributable to the economic impacts of the internal armed conflict,¹²⁷ it has nonetheless had a deep impact on survivors who, over two decades later, are still struggling to recover from the violence that marred their community. This is echoed in many widows’ comments, including those of Doña Ramon, who stated that “in the past things were cheaper, now it is very expensive!”

Widows who had lost their land or fled their community during the war also felt the burden of having to rely on the cash-economy to survive, especially given the aforementioned inflation. One of the widows, whose village was completely destroyed during the war, and who now lives in the urban area of Rabinal speaks of some of the deep changes that this brought in her way of life:

It isn’t the same here as it was in the past, because here we have to buy everything. Over there, in the *aldea*, we didn’t buy anything because we had all of our things. Now, we have to buy everything here: we buy wood for the fire, we buy corn, we buy everything. In the past we didn’t buy corn, because we cultivated it over there. (M-01)

Indigenous widows in Rabinal took on many survival strategies in order to sustain their families after the death or disappearance of their husbands, including taking on their husband’s share of work in the fields and/or paid domestic work. Some women chose to find work in neighbouring communities, as did Doña Rosario: “I left with my children, to another community, there, I started to make tortillas, to sell tortillas to help with feeding my children. That’s why I went. But I still suffered quite a lot.” Doña Maria[3] also recalled how she had to leave her home to find domestic work in a neighbouring village: “I went to work for the *ladinos* over there for seven years. Over there in [neighbouring

community], the house with the hammock, that's where I raised my children." She continued, explaining how the widows' plight differs from that of women who didn't lose their husbands during the war:

This is women's lives now. If there is work we are going to work because there are no men anymore, they don't have their husbands anymore. On the other hand, the ones who have a husband, only the men go out to work, the women are working in the kitchen, making *atol*, cooking, going to bring the food [to the men in the fields]. On the other hand, we who are widows, we have to go out to work. (Doña Maria[3])

However, no matter how hard they worked, and given the context of the ongoing internal armed conflict, many women simply could not make a living in Rabinal and were forced to leave to search for work in other parts of the country. Indeed, as was discussed earlier, the scorched earth campaign forced many people to flee their communities in the face of massive destruction and death. But even in communities that were not completely destroyed, many women were impelled to migrate to other regions because of the violent repression and threats to their safety as well as for economic reasons. Some women left to go to the South Coast to work on plantations while others migrated to the country's capital, Guatemala City, and to other urban areas to look for work. Doña Pedrina[1] explained the situation she faced:

We had to flee the community because the Army and the Civil Patrollers were persecuting us. We had to go to the South Coast to be able to survive. There, on the South Coast, we worked for a boss who treated us like slaves. They only paid us with food, they didn't give us money but only some food, that's all! So we got sick and we didn't have any money to get well because we weren't earning any money. But we resigned ourselves in order to survive. I spent eight years on the South Coast and five years in the capital working in a house where they paid me 20 *quetzals* per month.¹²⁸ That's how I raised my two children.... But I suffered a lot because what I earned wasn't enough to pay for medicine for my children; and let's not even talk about buying clothes or buying something else! It was barely enough to survive.

Like Doña Pedrina[1], many widows migrated to the South Coast with their children in tow to work on plantations where working conditions are very harsh, where women generally earn a lower wage than men and where countless children die of malnutrition and disease.¹²⁹ Many widows nonetheless travelled to the plantations to find work and dealt with these conditions as best they could in order to support their families. Doña Trinidad travelled to the Coast because, as she explained, she didn't see any other way of feeding her children:

I was three months pregnant when my husband passed away. Once my baby was born, when he was six months old, we went to the Coast and I started working again, to support all of the children. What could I do?

Doña Juliana echoed this sentiment in her own words:

When I was left alone, when they killed my husband, I left. I left to travel to the Coast to raise my children. I was left with three boys, three little boys. What was I going to live off of? Nothing if I didn't go to the Coast to earn some money. Who was going to take care of my children? No one!

As Doña Juliana expressed about her own life, widows were often left in precarious economic situations – especially if their crops had been stolen or destroyed during military or paramilitary raids – and going to the South Coast to work was one of the ways they could adapt to this situation:

So I'd better go to the Coast to earn my money, to earn money to buy corn. And why was I buying corn if there is corn here? They had taken it away, they took it all away. So I had to start buying corn. So then, I was going to the Coast to buy clothes for my children, all of the clothes for my children, all of the things I needed.

Doña Francisca also chose to migrate to the plantations to find work in order to be able to survive and support her children: “When my husband died, when they killed my husband, I was left with seven children. And with those seven children, I had no way of surviving, so I went back to the Coast.”

According to traditional economic migration patterns, indigenous people in Rabinal were more likely to migrate to the plantations while *ladinos* migrated to Guatemala City. However, during the internal armed conflict, many Achí people also fled to the capital where they found refuge in the anonymity the big city offered them: “We were living in the capital at that time, but not because we were really living there, but rather we were refugees there, we were hiding in the capital.” (Elba). As Doña Pedrina[1]’s testimony on pages 88 illustrates, some widows also earned a living in the capital by working as domestics. Others found work in the factories of the capital’s garment industry in order to support their children and be able to send them to school:

You could say that I got all the support from my mother, she is the only person who supported us so we could succeed. She had to work in *maquilas*,¹³⁰ in factories in the capital to be able to get ahead. (Elba)

However, migrating to other regions of the country to find work was in itself a significant challenge given the level of militarisation of the region and the consequent suspicion and control over people’s movements. The experience recounted by Doña Maxima illustrates this well:

At the end of 1983, we left here. Since I didn’t have my papers, I was scared.... I only went into El Chol to get my papers in order.... When they ask us now why we didn’t go down to Rabinal to get our papers, we couldn’t anymore! My baby was born here without a name, I didn’t go register his name in the municipality, because I couldn’t go!

Regardless of the kinds of changes the widows made in their lives, one thing that stands out from all of their testimonies is the degree of hardship that they underwent in order to survive and, above all, so that their children could survive. Indeed, many widows told me that they had to keep going for the sake of their children and so, as Doña Maria[2] stated, they had no other choice than to keep working: “I was left with five

children and after the violence we kept on working because if we didn't work, we didn't eat."

Many widows expressed happiness and pride at having managed to support their children, most of whom are now adults: "Thank God that I didn't abandon my children. They grew up here and they are working here now" (Doña Juliana). Many women are also proud that, despite all the obstacles, they have managed to put their children 'on the right path.' Doña Francisca and Doña Maria[3] explained:

They are grown up now, they are working in the capital and the children are helping me now, because I brought them up and they are working so they are helping their mother. My family grew up, without problems because I struggled for them so now they are on the right path. (Doña Francisca)

We endured hardship, we endured a lot with the children. I did not send them to school. My son who is inside over there, he was a year and a half [when they killed his father], he did not see who is his father, he did not know his father. But thank God that I managed to support my children, out of sheer struggle (*a la pura lucha*) with my family. (Doña Maria[3])

As is reflected in Doña Maria[3]'s testimony, many widows now express regrets of not having been able to send their children to school. However, many simply did not have the means to be able to send their children to school, as was the case for Doña Juliana:

The thing is that since I was so poor, we did not have money, so he only got to sixth grade.... So the children are telling us, the three boys, that they are not worth anything because they did not go to school. Because if they had gone to school maybe that because of their education they would have a job. Maybe teachers, or nurses, or lawyers, or whatever. They did not go to school or anything.

and for Doña Maria[3]:

What we did the most with our children is we endured hardship. There was no school because we did not have the funds to send them to buy notebooks, to get their pictures, to buy their shoes. Oh no! It's better not to, because they ask for fifty *quetzals*!¹³¹ And where am I going to go get that? Only the food, only the corn, salt, sugar is already expensive. And thank God that they are grown up

already and one by one they went to look for work. One by one they went to work because if they didn't go work there wasn't any food, because everything is so expensive now. Soap is expensive, sugar, beans, squash, everything! My children haven't gone to school, but this is because I didn't have enough to pay for it all.

***Es igual que crecer de nuevo, cuesta recuperarse:*^v Widows' Continued Struggle**

Despite the fact that these women have displayed remarkable resiliency by surviving and adapting to the extreme social, cultural, psychological and economic disruptions that they faced as a result of *La Violencia*, daily life continues to be one of struggle for most of the widows. This was reflected in many of their testimonies. Indeed, many widows continue to live a precarious existence, earning just enough money to cover their immediate expenses. As Doña Pedrina[1] explained, many widows are finding it difficult to earn a living as they get older, but they generally don't have anything to fall back on:

Well, perhaps it's a little hard for them to change their lives because the widows, as they are now, they are still suffering. Because they have raised their children, but without education, and they only live in a house that they are renting, so maybe they haven't changed their lives back to how they were when their husbands were alive.

The biggest problem for women is that, since, like they are now, there are women who are old now and they can't work anymore. So, where does our daily bread come from for these people? or their blessed tortilla? They don't have work and their children didn't go to school, they need someone to support them. This is the great problem for the women, because they can't go out and work. Since some of them are elderly now, they won't give them work anymore, they are turned down.

This concern was echoed by Doña Maria[3], who explained that their limited schooling and literacy makes finding work very hard for many widows:

If there is a job, I'm going to go out, I'm going to work.... But this is our problem: we don't have work because I don't know how to read or write. Since someone who knows how to read and write can go out to look for a job, but they

^v It's the same as having to grow up again, it's hard for us to recover. (Doña Teresa)

won't give us a job because we don't know how to read. Yes, that's the problem we have in the community. Because in all the community, women who are of an elderly age don't know how to read or write, elderly men neither.

Illiteracy is not the only problem for many older women; rather, speaking Spanish is also a challenge, as Doña Maria[4] explained:

For the women as well, there are few who know how to read or write, they don't even know how to speak Spanish and they don't know what they're going to do with their children.

Most widows I interviewed only learned to speak Spanish during *La Violencia*, when they were left to fend for themselves after the loss of their husbands, as was the case for Doña Maria[3]:

Oh, I barely [learned Spanish], barely! When my poor husband [passed away] ... I went [to work] with the *ladinos* over there for seven years. That's where I raised my children. I spent seven years there with the lady and the gentleman. And so she taught me a little bit of Spanish, that's it, and I learned a little bit, because otherwise I would not have learned any.

Often, the women learned Spanish when they fled to other parts of the country where their native language wasn't understood, or when they became involved in community groups, development projects or the like:

When I got married I couldn't speak any Spanish at all, and when *La Violencia* came we had to leave here, I left with my husband. I went all the way over there to the Petén to learn a bit of Spanish! Just a little bit, not so much because *ladinos* would be talking to me and I couldn't answer, my husband answered, I was just listening. So I was asking my husband: "What are they saying? What are they saying?" Because I couldn't, that's how I learned, and I had learned a bit when I came back. And now with the work we did, all of that, I am learning and I'm not as nervous, not as scared to speak. (Doña Maxima)

As we will see in the next chapter, with their participation in various community organisations, including the grassroots organisations leading the search for justice, some widows have started to learn to read or write, although, as Doña Maria[3] explained, it is not an easy task:

I went to the training there and I didn't learn anything! Yes! I came back and I had homework, but I can't do it because I can't see anymore! I would like to learn, but since there isn't enough time. If I have the time I go, since I go there to write my letters, but since I have work to do here in the home, if I go it's only because I feel like it! (*solo por gusto voy!*) Yes, this is the real problem. And now it's not like writing isn't useful for anything, yes, now I am thinking that writing is useful.

However, the widows who have learned to read and write, even just to write their own names, feel very proud to have learned at least the little they have, as Doña Teresa told me with pride: "I learned to read a bit, not so badly, but I did learn to sign my name, I learned, but just a bit."

In recent years, the appearance of development schemes has also helped some of the women access a more decent means of survival, often through agriculture-related projects. Indeed, some of the women mentioned horticulture projects and chicken-raising projects,¹³² while other spoke more generally of 'projects,'¹³³ referring to a wide range of development and productive projects that have been established in the region. However, for many women, the organisations that are arriving in their communities today are not necessarily addressing their most pressing needs:

Yesterday an institution came, they come to tell us that they are going to give us something, they're going to give us hens, a few chickens, cows.... The man only came to train us with a diagram of a vegetable garden, again! And in the meantime, its supertime and we're still there ... The man was talking to us only with a diagram! A diagram! We only have to go buy a bag of seeds here in the village and we'll see the diagram! (Doña Maxima)

The biggest problem for the women is that they haven't obtained a project. Well, they have obtained small projects, but they haven't obtained the big projects they want. For example, over there in the community, they want a dressmaking project, but they haven't obtained it, they don't take their application into account. And also, a problem they have as women is the water, because without water they can't do anything. (Delfina)

As we can see, indigenous widows in Rabinal are still enduring the impacts of the extreme forms of social and political violence they experienced during *La Violencia*. After the loss of their husbands, they were left to face an uncertain future marred by continued violence, militarisation and fear. The indigenous Achí people of Rabinal were also left to survive in a context of extreme social and cultural disruption, a product of the genocidal nature of *La Violencia*. Indigenous widows' ability to survival in this context is in itself a powerful display of their resiliency. Indeed, these women have shown exceptional resourcefulness by adapting their survival strategies and taking on new roles and responsibilities in order to ensure their own and their children's survival. As will be explored further in the next chapter, while they struggled to ensure their families' daily economic and physical subsistence, widows also started to break the silence and speak out about the violence to which their communities had been subjected by the Guatemalan state's security forces.

CHAPTER FOUR – WE WERE NOT GOING TO REMAIN VOICELESS^{vi}

As we have just seen, the armed conflict and the intense violence of the 1980s has had deep impacts on the Achí people of Rabinal and on women in particular. Indeed, women who lost their husbands to the violence have endured incredible hardship. These women have showed extraordinary resiliency in the face of enormous obstacles and have managed to raise their families, albeit often in poverty and with great sacrifices on their part. Despite the fact that many women are still living with the consequences of *La Violencia* nearly a quarter of a century later, they have been at the forefront of the struggle for truth, peace and reparations.

In the aftermath of *La Violencia*, women all over Guatemala were among the first to organise around questions of truth, justice and peace; often while the war was still raging on. In urban areas, women joined forces in their search for disappeared relatives, establishing the *Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo* (GAM – Mutual Support Group) in 1984. In rural areas, indigenous widows formed the *Comisión Nacional de Viudas de Guatemala* (CONAVIGUA – National Commission of Guatemalan Widows) in 1988 to voice their opposition to the forced recruitment of their sons and the militarisation of their communities.¹³⁴ In refugee camps, women formed organisations to voice their concerns and demands, as well as to organise for their eventual return. Moreover, women also mobilised around the budding peace process in the late 1980s and early 1990s, both in explicitly feminist or women-centred organisations and in victims' organisations – most of which are mainly composed of women (Paz, 2006). This experience was also reflected in Rabinal, where women still form the backbone of victims' organisations and

^{vi} No íbamos a quedar mudas (Doña Maria[3])

movements making demands for peace and justice. In this chapter, I will explore how widows in Rabinal started to organise around issues of truth, justice and reconciliation in the aftermath of *La Violencia*, the motivations behind this mobilisation and the impacts that it has had on their lives.

***Nos han callado la voz con las armas:*^{vii} Widows Breaking the Silence**

Many indigenous widows in Rabinal started to organise around issues of peace, justice, *dignificación*¹³⁵ and restitution even before the peace accords were signed in 1996. Indeed, like countless other women all over Guatemala, they first mobilised in order to ‘break the silence’ and speak out about what had happened in their communities.

Doña Pedrina[1] explained:

While I was in the capital, I thought a lot about what happened in my village. It was a war that was so unjust. They murdered my family. And I heard, from other people, on the radio or in the media, that they were talking about everything that happened over there in Rabinal, that no one had mobilised to make known what we had lived through. So I thought about coming back to Rabinal, but with the condition of perhaps looking for support to do something for the people. So, when I came back, I met don Carlos, he was also interested in starting to work with our people. So I started to work with him.... I gave him my testimony – the testimony for the CEH – that is when I started working here in Rabinal. It all started with the CEH.

Indeed, as Doña Maria[3] explained, widows and survivors in her community also started to organise for similar reasons:

Fourteen years ago ... we had a meeting to see what we were going to do. Because we weren't just going to stay like that, we weren't going to stay speechless or to leave things as they were.

^{vii} They have silenced our voice with their weapons (Doña Pedrina[1])

In many cases, the first opportunity widows and survivors got to speak about their experiences of *La Violencia* was when they gave their testimonies for the REMHI and CEH projects. Doña Teresa recalled giving her testimony:

When we met with don Carlos, they asked us for our testimonies of what happened during *La Violencia*, what they did to the deceased, if they killed him with a machete, if they killed him with a bullet, with a knife. We gave our testimony with them.

For many of the women, this was the first time they spoke about what had happened to their loved ones during the internal armed conflict, and it was, understandably, quite hard to do at first. Doña Maxima remembered how it was to give her testimony for the first time:

Like we are talking here with you now, that's how it was. I'm thankful that I understand a bit now, that I can reply. But when I started, first I cried, first the sadness would come, I couldn't give my testimony.... I would start a little bit of my testimony and the sadness would come in my heart. But now I thank the organisations, they have given me so much strength.

Despite the sadness and pain that came with remembering and recounting the brutal violence that they had witnessed and suffered during the 1980s, many widows shared their testimony since they thought it was important to 'make known' what had happened in their community.¹³⁶ Doña Teresa explained: "I know how I suffered, as the *compañeras* say, we endured *La Violencia* to make known in other places. We are still here, we are here, but it does not just end here."

The act of sharing their testimony in a supportive environment gave the women a chance to share their stories and reflect on the injustices that had been perpetuated against them, their families and communities. Furthermore, the fact that they had been sought out as victims and survivors of the violence validated their experiences, which have been – and still are, to a certain extent – refuted in the 'official' history of the conflict. The

importance of this – of having their experiences as victims, survivors and women recognised and ‘made known’ – is reflected in the comments Doña Pedrina[1] made when she thanked me for having worked with ADIVIMA:

I thank you very much for being with us as victims, to be sharing your work, your ideas. You sought us out as ADIVIMA, you have confidence in the work we are doing, and I want to thank you. And I hope that you carry on and speak for us as women. Yes, it is time for the voice of women to be higher and not underneath a table because it isn't possible to work like that.

As was mentioned above, women in Rabinal and in many other regions of the country started mobilising around peace and justice issues well before the signing of the peace accords in 1996. As Doña Maria[3] explained, these women took on great personal risk in doing so since the countryside was still deeply militarised:

We were afraid because there were men, we were afraid because there were commissioners from other villages.... We were afraid of the commissioners because some of them, because there are people who say, oh who are they who are going to have a meeting now? We had to fight, we had to try again. Little by little with the people, the work of ADIVIMA started with the people. We did some work to fight for the women, to start the organisation that is ADIVIMA. This is the real work we did with ADIVIMA.

In this militarised context, the male co-founder of ADIVIMA could not travel into the villages, leaving Doña Pedrina[1] to organise the widows living in the rural areas of Rabinal:

He could not go into the communities at that time. It made me afraid a bit, because I myself experienced (*vivi en carne propia*) all that we went through, but that didn't stop me. I started travelling to the communities, but in hiding, to go talk to the women about everything we went through. And I'd always tell them to talk about it, not to leave it under the table because it can affect our children if we don't talk about what happened. But this was all in hiding. I was scared because the patrollers were still very strong. I went to a community and when they asked me what I was doing there, well, I told them that I was looking for work to survive. But that wasn't what I was doing, I was organising the women in the communities. But in a concealed way, because I was afraid.

It was hard, because they didn't want to talk because of the fear. Because those who were stronger were the patrollers, the men, they had the power, they had silenced our voices with their weapons.

As we can see, the culture of fear and violence and the political repression that still reigned in the communities was obviously a great challenge to women's mobilisation around issues of peace and justice. In fact, the widows who had started mobilising became the targets of various threats and violent actions:

When I was organising the communities, I remember over here, in my community, I was holding a meeting with the community when ex-soldiers arrived and told me I was a *guerrillera*. And they were telling me that they were going to kill me because I was badly behaved. So I told the two youth, "Kill me then, but I am not doing anything harmful to my community, I am doing something so that everything that happened doesn't ever happen again, because it's a pity for the children." So, what did the two ex-soldiers do? They tried to abduct me in front of the group. But thank God that the group in my community didn't leave me, they freed me from the hands of those two men. And we came to the tribunals to make a complaint. Those two men went to jail and that is when I gained strength because my fellow women had supported me. (Doña Pedrina[1])

However, solidarity among the widows and their will to push forward even in the face of this violence gave them energy to continue with the struggle, until finally, the organisation was formed:

That is when ADIVIMA began as an organisation, in 1994, on April 24th, when we started the organisation. But the interviews and the work in the communities, that was in 1993. That is why we were working underground because we were afraid, with the patrollers, the Army and the commissioners. We finally succeed, but we had to do so much work, it's been hard on us. (Doña Pedrina[1])

***Ya tenemos derechos nosotras las mujeres:*^{viii} Increased Gender Consciousness**

To say that the lives of women widowed by the Guatemalan internal armed conflict have been deeply altered by the political violence of the 1980s is obviously a

^{viii} Now we have rights, us women (Doña Trinidad)

drastic understatement. However, one of the aspects of these changes that is often overlooked is the impact that their participation in the struggle for truth, justice and *resarcimiento* has had on the widows themselves. Indeed, several of the widows mentioned that their participation in this struggle has helped them surmount the fear that was left after the conflict, and, in a way, has helped them heal. Doña Juliana explained:

Well, the ones that have changed are the ones who go out, the ones who attend the meetings. Yes it [women's life] has changed. The ones who haven't come to a meeting are the ones who haven't changed because they don't go out. But the women who endured all of the suffering, it has changed.... It has changed because we are looking in what path, where they are going to help me to start to heal a bit.

Several of the women indicated that the role women play in their communities started to change when they mobilised around issues of truth and justice, and more specifically, when they first broke the silence to speak about their experiences:¹³⁷

In my way of thinking, it's after *La Violencia* [that women started participating] because they were left only women. And that's when they started saying, talking, recounting what happened and that is when the women started being active. (Doña Pedrina[1])

In the case of the victims, I think [the change in women's role] started when they broke the silence. Yes, it started from that moment because when they started to talk about their own experiences, to give their testimony and all of that. They let go of everything they had kept inside. So then it's like they felt a moment of release. And that moment of release permitted them to learn new things. Then these things they learned, well, some of them put them in practice and others have kept it in there. I don't know what they are going to do with it, perhaps they will transmit it to their children, or maybe they will apply it soon. I don't know. But it's from that moment on [that their role changed]. (Elba)

Furthermore, *La Violencia* also had an impact on women's participation in various aspects of community because women often had to take over some of their husbands' roles when they were widowed and became head of their households. This included participation in organisations, community meetings, and the like. Doña Trinidad explained:

When our husbands were alive, we didn't go to the meetings because they had put us down, only the men had rights. Not like it is now because when that sickness passed [*La Violencia*], well, we had to learn almost everything. If there is a leadership training, we have to go. But we don't all go, maybe only about half.

When speaking about their lives since *La Violencia*, most of the widows spoke of a change in the role that women play in their community, almost invariably relating it to women's participation in various committees and organisations that formed in the aftermath of *La Violencia*. Doña Ramon and Doña Maria[4] explained:

About 13 years ago, this situation started to change, that we didn't have the right to go listen [at a meeting]. I was in a committee here, yes, I was part of the office, because we worked, we searched, we went out in a mere pilgrimage to demand from the government that it give us, or from the institutions, that they give us a meeting for the women. What we were looking for was to know how we could start an office, with all the paperwork, and then with the act, we asked for what we wanted. That is when it changed, that is when we got the right to hear things, to seek out a living, as is our right. But in the past there were no rights for us. We were only in the house to take care of our children and that was all, that's what we did. (Doña Ramon)

That is how life is now. There are some women now who participate in the meetings a lot. In the past, women wouldn't meet because the men never gave us permission to go to meetings. But now there are women in each committee, all are participating, if there is a meeting, they go.... Yes, they always participate, so it has changed. Their lives have changed, because they always participate, always. They don't do like they did in the past, because in the past the women would not go out. But now they do, almost the majority of the women participate all the time. (Doña Maria[4])

Indeed, women now participate in many different committees and organisations and occupy a variety of roles in their communities:

Now almost the majority of the women are on committees, they are *Madre Guías*,¹³⁸ they are promoters, all of that. (Delfina)

Now they have taken us into account in the COCODE¹³⁹ committees ... all of the committees, it's no longer only men, women participate as well. Because in the past, they didn't take us into account, they didn't want to participate or form a committee, the men would be the ones to form a committee. But now, well, thank God that this is changing now, that women can also participate in committees and in groups. (Doña Teresa)

Because in the past there were committees, of men. But now, after *La Violencia*, there are women, committees of women. (Doña Maxima)

As is evident from the statements made by these women, there has been a change in the gender composition of committees and organisations in the community, in that 'going to meetings' is no longer strictly a male domain. In fact, according to Doña Pedrina[1], women make up the majority of participants in many community organisations, namely ADIVIMA: "When there's a meeting there are more women than men who come. I don't know if you noticed with your activities in the community. There are more women than men." When I asked her why she thought that women participated more than men, Doña Pedrina[1] alluded to men and women's distinct set of priorities and the fact that women may be more willing to sacrifice their time for the good of the community:

Because we women, we are more, we give more of our time for what we need. And the men, they don't want to waste time. But according to me, it's better if we are the ones who participate so that we can hold our own activities.

However, as is reflected in her testimony, the fact that some organisations or activities are almost only attended by women is not necessarily a drawback since the women can focus those committees' attention on their own needs and interests.

It seems that through their participation in organisations such as ADIVIMA and, more generally, in the struggle for peace and justice, many of the widows in Rabinal have gained a heightened consciousness of women's rights: "It has changed a bit because the women participate a bit as widows. They have also become familiar with their rights as women" (Doña Francisca). Indeed, Doña Maxima made a direct link between the work of

community organisations and women's raised consciousness about their rights and their ability to exercise them:

This is why I am thanking the institution, or, many institutions: some of us now are more worthy, women and men. And now all of us have men's worth because they are valuing women's rights a lot.

Doña Ramon agreed:

Yes, it is good [that women's role has changed] because we all have rights. It isn't only the men who have the right to be trained at a meeting, the women also have to go to listen at a meeting, and even the children too. They have a right to go listen as well, they have studied, they have more training, they understand what the letters say, but we only partly know what the letters say.

As is evident in many of the testimonies I have included in this chapter, the idea that participating in organisations and meetings is somehow linked to education or training is widespread among the widows in Rabinal. However, this is not restricted to thinking that women need to have a certain level of education in order to participate, but also reflects the fact that their involvement in community organisations has provided widows with opportunities to gain skills, training and education:

I am seeing that the women have more experience now, because they are participating without fear. There in the community, there are women who participate in everything: they go to meetings, they go to get trained, then they come to meet with the women again to explain what they learned in the training. (Delfina)

Indeed, as was outlined in the previous chapter, it was through their participation in the struggle for peace and justice that many widows first learned how to speak Spanish. This was the case for Doña Maria[2]:

When we started participating, we couldn't speak [Spanish], I could understand, but I couldn't reply, but now I can. I thank God for my work, of participating with the organisations, that's where I was left. No one has taught me to learn, I learned by myself.

Because of their involvement in the struggle to bring justice and ‘make known’ what has happened in their communities, they have not only had to learn to speak Spanish, but they have also had to familiarise themselves with the legal and administrative systems on which they rely to make these demands. Doña Ramon explained:¹⁴⁰

In the past – it was better that way – we didn’t know what an office was, we didn’t know what a tribunal was, we didn’t know. But today we need to know what all of that is, because of the work we’re involved in.

Many women also indicated that, since women now had the opportunity and the ‘right’ to participate in meetings and organisations, this had opened up new opportunities to receive training and be informed on many topics that, in the past, had essentially been male domains:

The men in the past could go to a workshop, but women, much less. But now, now they can. We all need to become informed, to know about a training, to know about a lecture. So now we all have the right to listen, unlike it was in the past. Because that was discrimination that men committed against us, to not let us go listen to what is happening at a meeting. If they didn’t tell us what they heard at a meeting, only they knew what the meeting was about, what was talked about at the meeting. But now we all have the right to go listen, to get training, to get informed about everything. (Doña Ramon)

This change in attitude towards women’s participation and training has also translated into increased opportunities for young girls to attend school:¹⁴¹ “It has changed because now many families have gone to school, women and boys are studying, before it wasn’t like that” (Dona Maria[2]). As Doña Pedrina[1] explained, this testifies to the initiation of a larger change in attitude in regards to women’s equality:

Well, today, thank God that women are, they are more active, with a voice, with activities in their communities. And their children, well, they have changed a lot because now, they don’t only send the boys to school, but they also send the women, the girls, and some of them have graduated. This is the product of their mothers’ struggle, who came to the workshops where they heard that women don’t always only have to stay in the house, but that they also have the right to study. And that is what has been achieved by organisations like ADIVIMA. Yes,

they have given many workshops in the communities and women's ideology has changed a lot, they no longer think that women should not be sent to school and be left to do housework. Rather, now equality is advancing. We can not say that it's completely done, it's starting to advance, but we can achieve something, as women.

At the end of the previous statement, Doña Pedrina[1] alluded to the fact that there is still progress to be made in order for women to achieve equality in Rabinal, an opinion that was shared by the younger women who work at ADIVIMA. In assessing the status of women's equality in Guatemala, Magdalena alludes to the fact that there are still very few women in positions of political power:

There has been a bit of change but women are still excluded, men are always first. Because the ones who went to a meeting were the men, and if a woman went, what was she doing there? Because she couldn't, the ones that went were the men. On the other hand, now, yes women do participate. If you noticed the other day, the meeting we had here, there were more women than men. And women are waking up to the fact that they have the right to participate, not only men, that we all have the same rights. And there has been a bit of change, but not completely. Because the President is a man, not a woman, and who knows when we'll have a woman President here in Guatemala! Yes, there is participation, but not 100% but at least you can see that women are being taken into account a bit.

Indeed, some of the widows also recognised limits to women's participation and to the changes that they themselves had identified in the roles that women play in their communities. Among these boundaries, Doña Francisca and Doña Maria[3] both acknowledged that the extent of involvement that the widows show in their communities is not necessarily paralleled by other women's participation:

The widows gather together, but the ones who still have their husbands don't participate, only the widows because they did suffer and organisations come to give a talk and they participate to be able to pull through and be able to learn something of what they have to teach them. And the women always like to participate. When they go, they come to give notice and they go, and yes, they like to participate. (Doña Francisca)

And now we inform our neighbours about what we are going to do tomorrow, what we are going to do this week, but only the widows. On the other hand, the ones who have husbands, we don't communicate this to them, because if they have a husband they are not suffering any hardships. Yes, that is what has changed now, something has changed but only the widows. (Doña Maria[3]).

Both of these women seem to attribute the limited involvement of women who were not widowed to the fact that they are not 'suffering' or 'enduring hardship,' implying once again that the widows started participating out of necessity after the death of their husbands.

Although most of the widows insisted that women's role in their communities had changed and that they loved to participate in the new spaces they occupy, some of the younger women at ADIVIMA indicated that while it is true that there has been an increase in women's participation within their own organisations, there are still many barriers to women's participation in other spaces:

Women's lives in Rabinal now is, little by little they have started to emerge. For example, in the case of the victims, in the past they didn't want to speak, they said it they were afraid to speak. But now they are, it's like they have woken up, they have the right to be organised, to be informed and, above all, to participate; but in the same domain where they participate. In other words, if we tell them they have to participate at ADIVIMA, they participate. But if we say that they have to go participate in a meeting at the municipality, there they are much quieter because it's much harder in those public spaces. But on the other hand, if we are talking about here at ADIVIMA, it is much easier for them. Firstly because they have been supported from the start. I think that with the process that ADIVIMA has initiated, the fear has been leaving them little by little. So that is why they participate here. If we speak about participation, the women participate, but in their own spaces, not in public spaces, those are the most difficult space for them to be able to participate in. (Elba)

Indeed, since women, and widows in particular, engage more willingly in spaces where they are among their own, public spaces are not the most conducive spaces for their participation.¹⁴²

To have a mixed [gender] space or to have *ladino* people in that space is a problem for women to be able to participate. But if there are only women, and especially with other victims who they know, then they spend the time speaking and conversing and everything. But if it is another space where there are men, *ladinos*, mayors or other authorities, then it makes it hard for them to participate in those spaces.... The ones who have the possibility and the space to speak, above all are the men, and among those men, they are *ladinos*. So then, that is where there is a limit, because of the language, the vocabulary and the use of language. It is as if those things within those spaces make women embarrassed to express themselves in their own languages, and if they do it in Spanish they are scared that they don't say it well. That fear exists. (Elba)

While there has been some progress towards eliminating these barriers, racial and sexual discrimination are still rampant in most sectors of Guatemalan society and present a significant challenge to indigenous women's equality.

Well, this started to change when, when the peace was signed. Because there, in one of the accords, it talked about the respect of the rights of indigenous people. So there, from that date on, indigenous women have been taken into account. For example, now there are indigenous people who have studied more than a *ladina* person. And they have been taken into account because now in the Congress, there in the capital, there are women who are indigenous who hold a seat. Like Rosalina Tuyuc or Rigoberta Menchu. And they have a post where they, for example, value women's rights. Yes, I think it has been since the signing of the peace [that it has changed] because before that there was a lot of machismo, where the man was the one who had the keys and did nothing but give orders. Then now I think that we, the women, don't want to stay in this. Yes there has been some change since that date, but not 100% as I tell you, maybe just half, not more; from there to achieving everything, that men do the same as women, I don't think... (Magdalena)

As we have just seen, as widows in Rabinal took on new responsibilities and roles, and as they broke the silence about what had happened in their communities, they started to mobilise around issues of truth, justice and *resarcimiento*. Furthermore, through their mobilisation around these issues, widows gained a new consciousness of themselves and of their rights. As we will see in the following chapter, in the aftermath of *La*

Violencia, the widows seized the new political space they created by ‘breaking the silence’ to continue their quest for true reconciliation and peace.

CHAPTER FIVE – WE ARE NOT ANIMALS, WE ARE PEOPLE!^{ix}

In the previous chapters of this thesis, I explored indigenous Achí widows' experience of *La Violencia* and its aftermath in Rabinal, Baja Verapaz. These women's particular experience of the internal armed conflict and its aftermath has been shaped by their distinctive experiences of violence as well as by their struggle to ensure their family's survival after the loss of their husbands. As was outlined in Chapter Four, their experiences of violence has also led many widows to 'break the silence' and mobilise around questions of truth, justice and peace. Indeed, many widows have embarked on a struggle to bring healing, reconciliation and restitution to their communities – this is largely channelled through the work of ADIVIMA.

As is reflected in ADIVIMA's mission statement and stated vision, this struggle is multifaceted, reflecting a holistic approach to peace, reconciliation and healing. Similarly to other organisations founded by victims and survivors of the internal armed conflict in Guatemala, ADIVIMA's multifaceted understanding of how this is to be achieved incorporates various dimensions of *resarcimiento*.¹⁴³ Among these are: the *dignificación*¹⁴⁴ of victims and their memory; material, economic, psychosocial, spiritual and cultural restitution; and bringing perpetrators of the assassinations and/or massacres and intellectual authors of the genocide to justice.¹⁴⁵ All of these facets of *resarcimiento* are intertwined and interact on both individual and collective levels (group of individuals, community or series of communities).¹⁴⁶ The measures that have been undertaken on the regional and national level in order to 'achieve' these various dimensions of *resarcimiento* are also largely interdependent.

^{ix} No somos animalitos sino que ¡somos personas! (Doña Teresa)

The use of the term *resarcimiento* implies ‘restitution,’ ‘reparation’ and ‘compensation’ by the Guatemalan state to victims and survivors of the internal armed conflict for the violence and violations of human rights that they suffered during the war. However, organisations such as ADIVIMA, in keeping with their mission of helping survivors and communities towards healing, recovery and reconciliation, conduct activities which are quite comparable in aim and have similar results.¹⁴⁷

Among the main processes that have been initiated in Rabinal are: the *dignificación* of victims of the conflict through the exhumation of clandestine cemeteries and proper reburial of victims; ‘making known’ and validating victims and survivors’ experiences, through building monuments to their memory as well as through the diffusion of REMHI and CEH reports; and the commemoration of victims, particularly through holding Maya Achi spiritual ceremonies to honour their memory.¹⁴⁸ The Achi people of Rabinal, widows and survivors, as well as ADIVIMA, have also shown considerable leadership in the search for justice both in the national court system as well as on the national level.

In this chapter, I will first explore these various processes and activities before exploring how these are contributing to the achievement of the measures of *resarcimiento* which were discussed above. Subsequently, I will comment on the (limited) measures of economic restitution which have thus far been implemented by the Guatemalan state through the *Programa Nacional de Resarcimiento* (PNR – National Reparations Program).¹⁴⁹ Finally, I will briefly discuss the continued contention over ADIVIMA’s work and challenges to reconciliation on a local level.

***Que nuestras generaciones conozcan la verdad:*^x Measures of Resarcimiento**

Exhumation and reburial

Amid the brutal violence unleashed on rural Maya populations during the armed conflict, victims' bodies were rarely respected, but rather, were often simply left exposed to the elements where the crime had occurred. If buried at all, they were buried in mass graves. Doña Ramon described finding the bodies of some of the men who were killed during the massacre of her village:

They had already been beaten-up, tortured when they brought them to a hill ... that's where they went to kill them with garrotes, like this, with ropes around the neck. And they killed them over there, just like that! Poor them! Three days later, I went to find them there. Poor them! They were still there, some of them had been buried, others were just thrown on top.

Experiences similar to this one were common in the aftermath of massacres where victims' bodies were piled up in a hastily dug hole or thrown into a ditch, where animals often came to eat at the remains. Indeed, family members were rarely able to give a proper burial to their loved ones given the ongoing war and repression and the fact that the Army often gave explicit orders to survivors not to bury the victims of massacres and extra-judicial assassinations (ODHAG, 1998). In some cases, neighbours or family members would hurriedly bury the victims where they found them, marking the clandestine graves by sowing a particular kind of plant, but still without being able to conduct proper mourning or burial rituals.

Given the large number of clandestine cemeteries that were left behind in Rabinal as a result of *La Violencia*¹⁵⁰ and the importance attached to exhumation and reburial

^x That our generations may know the truth. (inscription on a monument to the victims of the Agua Fría massacre in the Pacux cemetery in Rabinal)

(which will be discussed in more detail shortly), exhumation processes have occupied a significant place in ADIVIMA's work over the years.¹⁵¹ In fact, ADIVIMA, through its Human Rights program-branch, works to support the various processes involved in carrying out exhumations.¹⁵²

Among the exhumation processes in which ADIVIMA provides support to widows, victims and survivors, is the preparation of a formal complaint to the Public Defender's Office¹⁵³ of the existence of a clandestine grave and the request for exhumation.¹⁵⁴ In Guatemala, only a private individual can place a formal complaint regarding the existence of a clandestine cemetery. It has been observed throughout the country that most of these complaints are placed by women, mainly widows, who are searching for their disappeared or deceased loved ones' remains (CONAVIGUA, 2005). ADIVIMA also supports the exhumation process by providing transport to exhumation sites for family and community members; providing food to feed everyone involved in the process on the days of the exhumation; and co-ordinating the proceedings with the *Federación de Antropología Forense de Guatemala* (FAFG – Federation of Forensic Anthropology of Guatemala),¹⁵⁵ who conduct the actual exhumation. ADIVIMA staff – as well as staff and members of other organisations, namely the *Equipo de Estudios Comunitarios y Acción Psicosocial* (ECAP, Community Studies and Psychosocial Action Team)¹⁵⁶ – also attend the exhumation as a form of 'psychosocial' support and in solidarity with the family members of the victims.

Through interviews done by social anthropologists before the exhumation, various data about the conditions of the disappearance or death, as well as any data that could help in the identification of the remains is collected. The physical exhumation of the

graves can only begin once the courts issue the exhumation order. Since exhumations of clandestine graves are essentially legal processes,¹⁵⁷ the anthropologists who conduct the physical exhumation carefully document all of the proceedings and the evidence collected is catalogued. Most of this evidence consists of bones, clothes and other items found in the grave that could potentially help elucidate the circumstances of the death (bullets, ropes, shrapnel). Post-exhumation, anthropologists from the FAFG conduct laboratory study of this evidence in an attempt to determine the identity of the victim and collect any evidence that may indicate the cause of death. These findings are then combined with the evidence gathered prior to and during the proceedings in a written report which, if applicable, can serve as an expert witness report during juridical proceedings (CONAVIGUA, 2005).

Many organisations and institutions working on exhumations in Guatemala have identified the *dignificación* of victims and survivors, the elucidation of the truth and the investigation and collection of evidence about the crimes as the main outcomes of exhumations and incentives for carrying them out.¹⁵⁸ As we will see further in this chapter, these are similar to the reasons that widows in Rabinal have identified for wanting exhumations to be carried out.

‘Making known’

As was mentioned above, the recognition of victims’ and survivors’ experiences is an integral part of *resarcimiento*, especially by its contribution to *dignificación*. Indeed, as we have seen, many widows insist on the importance of ‘making known’ what happened in their community during *La Violencia*. One of the main ways in which

ADIVIMA attempts to make this known is by building monuments in memory of the victims of *La Violencia*.

In Rabinal, a number of monuments have been erected in the Pacux cemetery, where the victims of several Rabinal-area massacres have been reburied. Monuments, crosses and plaques have also been constructed in other Rabinal communities at the site of massacres and of former clandestine cemeteries – notably, the chapel built on the site of the new cemetery in Plan de Sánchez also stands as a monument honouring the victims of that massacre. These monuments are generally inscribed with the names and ages of the victims and are often decorated with paintings depicting the brutality of the massacres as well as written accounts denouncing those responsible for the massacres. As the survivors see it, these monuments expose the truth about what happened to their husbands and communities. This is clearly expressed in the inscription on the monument built to commemorate the victims of the Agua Fría massacre, which reads *Que nuestras generaciones conozcan la verdad* – ‘That our generations may know the truth.’ The monuments are also inscribed with messages exposing political responsibility for the genocide and demanding that those responsible be brought to justice. Again, the Agua Fría monument reads: *Exigimos juicio y castigo para los asesinos intelectuales Lucas Garcia y Rios Montt* – ‘We demand trial and punishment for the intellectual assassins, Lucas Garcia and Rios Montt.’

Some of the other ways through which ADIVIMA endeavours to ‘make known’ the truth about *La Violencia* are by disseminating of the findings of the CEH and REMHI as well as through its support and participation in the establishment of a community museum in Rabinal: the *Museo Comunitario Rabinal Achí*. One of the three rooms in the

MCRA is dedicated to the Rabinal-area victims of the internal armed conflict. Pictures of the victims are exhibited in this room, along with descriptions of the massacres committed in the area and various texts explaining how the internal armed conflict played out in the region. The MCRA has published a local version of the ‘truth commission’ under the title *Oj K’aslik: Estamos Vivos, Recuperación de la memoria histórica de Rabinal (1944-1996)* (We are alive: Recuperation of the historical memory of Rabinal) (MCRA, 2003), which examines the circumstances and events of the war in Rabinal. The Museum has also published other books and videos on the history of the region as well as on the culture, heritage and traditions of the Achí people.¹⁵⁹ Similar to the aim of other measures that ‘make known’ the truth about the counterinsurgency campaign of the 1980s, the mission and objectives of the *Museo Comunitario Rabinal Achí* is to:

... contribute to the recuperation of the historical memory in order to promote local and national reconciliation so that the future generations be conscious of not repeating the violence of the past, it is also a way to ‘dignify’ surviving victims ... (author’s translation from ADIVIMA and Museum documents)

Indeed, as is also stated in the inscription on the monument to the Panacal massacre, these measures are undertaken in the hopes that knowing, acknowledging and remembering the truth about *La Violencia* will help prevent its reoccurrence: *Nunca más este salvagismo* – ‘Never again this savagery.’

Commemoration of victims and their memory

The commemoration of victims of *La Violencia* is another way that survivors employ to ‘dignify’ family and community members who lost their lives during the conflict and to recognise, acknowledge and remember their experience. In Rabinal, victims are often commemorated through traditional spiritual ceremonies held in their

honour, particularly on the anniversary of massacres and on the *Día de Dignificación de las Víctimas del Conflicto Armado* (Day of *Dignificación* of the Victims of the Armed Conflict) which is celebrated February 25th each year.

While in Rabinal, I had the privilege of observing and participating in several ceremonies held in honour of victims of *La Violencia*. The first such occasion was on 19 February 2006, when a ceremony was held in Kajyub', an archaeological site just outside the town of Rabinal – a site that is considered to be sacred by the local Achí population. When addressing the few dozen people gathered for the ceremony, Rosalina Tuyuc, the president of the PNR, explained that the ceremony was being held first of all in order to ask the ancestors for their permission and support to embark in the new dimensions that were developing in the process of *resarcimiento*. Additionally, she explained that through the ceremony, they would also be asking the relatives and *compañeros* whose remains were still in clandestine cemeteries to lend us their strength so that they could be found and properly laid to rest.

The second occasion on which I got to observe a ceremony held in honour of victims of *La Violencia* was on 28 February 2006, when workshops and ceremonies were held to mark the Day of *Dignificación* of the Victims of the Armed Conflict. On that day, the Maya spiritual ceremony was performed in such a manner as to call attention to the recent start of the Maya New Year through the priests' explanation of the Maya calendar and the meaning of each of its configurations. The ceremony was also followed by a workshop on traditional medicine and mental health, which was focused on practices that had been lost or abandoned during the armed conflict and stressed their value and continued usefulness, especially in terms of helping to heal the wounds left by the war.

On 13 March 2006, I joined a pilgrimage of sorts to the site of the Pak'oxom massacre near Río Negro where a ceremony was to be held in order to commemorate the anniversary of the massacre of the 100 children and 77 women who were brutally murdered there. The walk to the site took us about five-and-a-half hours and across almost the entire northern half of the *municipio*. At the top of the first mountain we climbed that morning the two Maya priests went to place some lit candles and conduct a brief ceremony at a site that is considered sacred by the Maya. As we descended from the mountain, we crossed a valley where many Río Negro survivors had come to seek refuge after fleeing their community following the massacres; another short ceremony was conducted in a nearby field where seven or eight people had been killed by the Army during *La Violencia*. Finally, at sunset, after having spent part of the afternoon at the Pak'oxom site recovering from the hike, a Maya spiritual ceremony began which lasted through a good part of the night.¹⁶⁰ The ceremonial fire was lit in a ravine where the bodies of many of the victims were found during the exhumation of the site and the names of the victims were recited during the ceremony. Prayers were also held according to Christian traditions, in addition to the ceremony conducted in accordance with Maya spirituality.

Traditional spiritual ceremonies are held as a way to honour the deceased but also help community members heal and familiarise them with traditions and customs that were lost or abandoned during the armed conflict. Indeed, through the type of event I described above, we can see how processes meant to commemorate victims also contribute to cultural and spiritual restitution when they are conducted in accordance with Achí culture and traditions.

Searching for justice and ending impunity

As has just been outlined, the Maya Achi people of Rabinal have been among the most active in the country in terms of the search for truth, peace and *resarcimiento*. One of the aspects of peace and reconciliation towards which ADIVIMA is working is that of achieving justice and ending impunity for the human rights violations and violence committed during the counterinsurgency campaign of the 1980s. Indeed, the Maya Achi people of Rabinal have spearheaded and supported legal action against the perpetrators of this violence on the local, national and international levels. Many of the widows and survivors who participate with ADIVIMA have been fairly active in these legal cases, both through ADIVIMA's work and through the work of other organisations in Rabinal.

The trials held in connection with the Pak'oxom massacre are one of the few examples of local-level justice undertaken against perpetrators of *La Violencia* in Guatemala. In October 1999, these trials resulted in the conviction of three former patrollers to 30 years in prison for the murder of two women at Pak'oxom.¹⁶¹ The leadership, members and supporters of ADIVIMA were instrumental in supporting this trial from its inception through to its conclusion by mobilising the Maya Achi population and raising awareness on the local, national and international levels around the issues at stake in the case (Dill, 2005).¹⁶²

The Maya Achi people of Rabinal – victims, survivors and witnesses – and their organisation, ADIVIMA, as well as its supporters have also been involved in the national level cases being brought forth against the intellectual authors of *La Violencia*. This support has mostly focused on helping to secure testimonies and provide the local-level evidence needed for these national trials to go ahead.

On the international level,¹⁶³ Rabinal and the Maya Achi people once again stand out for their remarkable leadership in propelling the search for justice. This time, it was the people of Plan de Sánchez who, supported by the *Centro para la Acción Legal en Derechos Humanos* (CALDH – Centre for Legal Action in Human Rights), had brought a complaint against the Guatemalan state for the massacre of over 200 unarmed civilians on 18 July 1982.¹⁶⁴ The case presented to the Inter-American Court for Human Rights (IACHR) – a branch of the Organization of American States (OAS) – was a civil, and not a criminal, matter the community was seeking compensation for the damages sustained by victims and survivors of the massacre. However, in its 2004 ruling (*Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos [CIDH], 2004, November 19*), the IACHR ordered the Guatemalan state to conduct a full investigation into the events in order to identify, judge and convict the perpetrators and intellectual authors of the Plan de Sánchez massacre. The Guatemalan state was also ordered to undertake a series of measures of reparation and restitution on both the individual and collective levels. These include measures for the *dignificación* of victims and survivors, the economic and material restitution of survivors as well as the psychosocial and cultural rehabilitation of victims, thus feeding into the larger process of *resarcimiento* demanded by the victims of *La Violencia* – albeit restricted to the local level, to the village of Plan de Sánchez in this case.¹⁶⁵

On 18 July 2005, the 23rd anniversary of the massacre, the first of the measures of reparation ordered by the IACHR was completed when Vice-President, Eduardo Stein travelled to Plan de Sánchez to deliver an official apology and make a public recognition of the Guatemalan state's responsibility in the massacre (Seijo, 2005, July 18). In April

2006, while I was in Rabinal, the Guatemalan state finally began paying the reparations ordered by the IACHR to the survivors of the Plan de Sánchez massacre, but was lagging behind in abiding by the other conditions of the ruling.¹⁶⁶

The Achí people of Rabinal have also started to pursue legal avenues to demand reparations and restitution for the harm they suffered during the armed conflict from international actors who implicitly and explicitly supported the counterinsurgency campaigns of the 1980s. In 2006, the *Asociación Campesina de Río Negro 13 de marzo, Maya Achí* (ASCRA – 13th of March Río Negro Small-farmer Association, Maya Achí) launched an action against the states that had been members of the board of directors of the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank at the time of the Chixoy River hydroelectric project (Ordoñez, 2006, May 27).

Yo necesito que me devuelvan todo lo que he perdido:*^{xi} **Implementation of Resarcimiento*

‘Dignifying’ victims and survivors

The question of *dignificación* of victims and survivors of the armed conflict is one of the central demands made by widows and their organisation and, because of its overlap with many other facets of *resarcimiento*, it is perhaps the best starting point in terms of looking at the impacts of measures taken to implement *resarcimiento*. For survivors of the violence and the widows of ADIVIMA, *dignificación* implies not only the vindication of the deceased family member, but also the recognition of victims’ and survivors’

^{xi} I need them to give me back all that I have lost (Doña Juliana)

experiences, the validation of their testimony and experiences as ‘truth,’ as well as the victims’ proper re-burial, thus recognising their human dignity.

Given that Guatemala’s national security doctrine during *La Violencia* conflated being ‘Maya’ with being ‘*guerrillero*’ – which, in the Army’s logic, was enough to justify the brutal massacre of an entire community –, the clarification of the conditions surrounding the death of family members and the vindication of their names is of utmost importance to many survivors. In many cases, the deceased and survivors of the armed conflict were and continue to be labelled as *guerrilleros*, especially by former soldiers or patrollers: “They say the word *guerrillero* but there are no *guerrilleros* here, because here we are all workers, families” (Doña Maria[2]).

Many widows explained to me how their deceased husbands, and often they themselves, had been labelled ‘guerrilla fighters’ but that they had never known any *guerrilleros*, thus proclaiming the innocence of the victims of *La Violencia* and denouncing the injustice of the violence perpetrated against them. Doña Teresa explained: “So, about *La Violencia*, well, no one really knows how it started because they said that we were *guerrilleros* but the deceased were not *guerrilleros*, they worked. My husband, he was a tile-maker.” This sentiment is echoed by Doña Trinidad, who also insisted on the innocence of her deceased husband: “Why did they kill him? He hadn’t committed any offences, he worked well, he worked...” Doña Juliana elaborated, pointing to the fact that her family did not own any weapons during the conflict to exonerate them of the accusation of being *guerrilleros*:

When things changed [with *La Violencia*], they didn’t change normally. The people were always angry because, regrettably we were *guerrilleros*, that is why the people don’t want us, don’t want to see our faces because we are “remainders of the *guerrilleros*”.... They left me with nothing. Still today they don’t want to

see, they are saying “those people are remainders of the *guerrilleros*” that’s what they say, but that isn’t true.... If I were a *guerrillero* maybe my house would be full of weapons. I would have weapons, but I don’t. The weapons I had – the brooms – they stole them. That was the armament I had; I don’t know anything about that armament. I’m seeing police officers carrying weapons, but we don’t.

Most widows insist vehemently on the innocence of their deceased husbands and other family members and work hard to vindicate their names. One of the ways in which they see that this can be achieved is through the exhumation of clandestine cemeteries. Indeed, exhumations play a key role in the process of *dignificación* by allowing their proper re-burial and by helping to elucidate the circumstances of the victims’ deaths. This allows survivors to vindicate their relatives’ names by countering the claims that they were ‘*guerrilleros*’ while it also allows forensic anthropologists to collect evidence that could be used in the judicial processes to bring the perpetrators to justice. Indeed, the processes of exhumation and re-burial go hand in hand with the legal and judicial processes to bring the material and intellectual authors of *La Violencia* – and of genocide – to justice, all contributing to the *dignificación* of victims, as is made evident in the following reflections:

When they carry out the exhumations, it makes us very sad to see what happened to our deceased. But it’s good to know how they killed them. And also, they accused them of being *guerrilleros*, but that isn’t true. How can it be? Are they going to find weapons with them when they do the exhumations? If nothing appears, well, then they can prosecute the ones responsible. (Chen, forthcoming, author’s translation)

We achieved all of that, the objective that we want [to achieve] is the exhumation and, well, let’s say, that the incidents be, to achieve justice for the incidents that happened. And we are going to achieve it against the perpetrators. (Doña Teresa)

For the Achí people, the funeral procession is an important show of solidarity, support and respect for the deceased – especially when the deceased was assassinated –

because of the traditional practice of having family members, friends and neighbours accompany the deceased through the village on their way to the cemetery (Suazo, 2002). Furthermore, given the central role that ancestors play in Maya spirituality and cosmovision, and the ongoing reciprocal relationship that is maintained with family members after they pass away, it is extremely important for survivors to have a physical place where they can visit deceased family members.¹⁶⁷ This is expressed in the following testimony from another survivor of the Plan de Sánchez massacre:

But where are they going to bury them? We have to go see them because these are our brothers and sisters. We know that their spirit has gone with God, only the bones and their bodies were left here, but we still come put our candles here. (Chen, forthcoming)

Consequently, the exhumation of clandestine graves and the subsequent reburial in legal cemeteries with respect to cultural and spiritual traditions plays an important part in the process of *dignificación* of victims. Indeed, carrying out a proper burial for victims of the political violence of the internal armed conflict, in a legal cemetery, is seen as a recognition of their ‘human dignity’ and of the wrongs committed against them; a survivor from the Plan de Sánchez massacre explains:

The community asked that they be buried in the same place, that it become a legal cemetery because that’s where their blood was spilled. Perhaps we won’t recognise any [of the bodies] but the remains should stay together, that way we can remember them each year, because they are human beings, they were not animals! (Chen, forthcoming)¹⁶⁸

Widows and survivors also see the establishment of various monuments to commemorate the victims of the massacres in the Rabinal area as playing an important part in honouring the memory of the victims of the political violence of the 1980s and of vindicating their names. A widow from Río Negro explains:

We achieved the exhumation of our brothers and sisters. The monument was a great achievement and to demonstrate to the people that we were not *guerrilleros*.... People now say that the people that the Army killed were *campesinos*; but when it happened they were saying they were *guerrilleros*, but those were lies. Now with the monument, the truth is there. (Chen, forthcoming)

The commemoration of the victims is indeed a crucial part of their *dignificación*, as is expressed by Doña Juana: “Yes, ADIVIMA’s work is important because it is through them that we remember all of the victims. Everyone has forgotten, but they are still working with them.”

Psychosocial and spiritual healing and recovery

Like many other indigenous victims’ organisations throughout the country, ADIVIMA is working towards achieving psychosocial reparation and rehabilitation in a way that is congruent with Maya Achí traditions and customs, particularly when holding ceremonies in preparation for exhumations and in commemoration of victims. As is explained by Elba, responsible for the Community Education, Participation and Organisation program-branch at ADIVIMA, the association’s approach has had positive results with women who were widowed by the conflict:

I think that the conflict that happened, or rather *La Violencia*, I think it harmed women a lot. It was very difficult to overcome, it is still very hard to overcome. And that is why psychosocial accompaniment exists, but that is like occidental ideology. So this, instead of making you forget your troubles and the problems that you’ve endured, it’s like you relive what happened again. So this still is not healing, but it’s reliving again. And that’s also why we see that there is another process lacking to accompany [victims] in this. Here with ADIVIMA, we practice what is spiritual accompaniment. So that there is not so much harm caused to the victims, rather, that they are prepared prior to the exhumation, so that nothing happens. Because, I think that in each exhumation I think they go through, I mean, for the family, there is pain, there is something. So before this happens, we have a preparation and they hold a ceremony to seek spiritual strength for the family. (Elba)

Indeed, as Doña Teresa expressed, holding ceremonies according to Maya tradition is a great source of strength for the widows and helps them to carry on in their struggle for peace, justice and *resarcimiento*:

That is how it got to be known, more and more, it gave us more strength, we were removing the fear with ceremonies. That's how we were getting even just a bit of support, by holding ceremonies.

Furthermore, by adopting traditional spiritual practices when they hold ceremonies to commemorate victims, ADIVIMA works towards cultural and spiritual restitution at the same time as they work towards *dignificación*, healing and rehabilitation.

While the widows and survivors still carry the wounds of *La Violencia*, the work that ADIVIMA has done with the communities and the widows' own participation in the struggle to 'make known' what happened in their communities and help ensure that it never happens again has helped them heal these wounds. Doña Teresa and Doña Maxima explained:

We are fighting so hard, and let's hope that it never goes back to what happened in the past, because it has been very hard for us. It's the same as having to grow up again, it is hard for us to recover. (Doña Teresa)

We carry so much pain from this, we will never lose it, we aren't calm (*tranquilo*) because of all the pain we carry. And now we face a struggle, but I hope to God that we succeed when we get there. And we are with ADIVIMA in that struggle. Because ADIVIMA has worked so much here with us. ADIVIMA supported us in the exhumations. They supported us, we went to the *Ministerio Publico*;¹⁶⁹ we achieved the exhumation thanks to ADIVIMA who gave us courage here in the community. (Doña Maxima)

Furthermore, several of the widows spoke of how their struggle for peace and justice has in itself helped them in their recovery, helped them surmount their fear. Doña Teresa explained:

People were getting motivated, little by little they got motivated to do the exhumations. They placed their denunciations, but still with a bit of fear, but yes

it was achieved, it's being achieved what they wanted. So now, the fear has almost left us a little.

Economic and material restitution

Economic restitution is only one facet of the integral *resarcimiento* that is being demanded by widows and victims' organisations, and is only one of the many measures of reparations contemplated by the National Reparations Program (PNR). However, at the time of writing, it was virtually the only aspect of *resarcimiento* that the Guatemalan government had actually started to address, albeit in a very limited form.¹⁷⁰ The creation of the PRN and the implementation of an integral approach to *resarcimiento* was recommended in the CEH's 1999 report *Memoria del Silencio* [Memory of Silence] and steps towards its creation were undertaken by the Guatemala government as early as 2001 (Paz, 2006). However, the first measures of *resarcimiento* fulfilled by the Guatemalan state were only implemented in early 2006, in the form of payments of economic restitution to victims and survivors.¹⁷¹ In this process, ADIVIMA acts as an intermediary between the PNR and widows, documenting cases and helping widows to access information about the PNR. Therefore, even though ADIVIMA does not have an official role in funding or implementing economic restitution measures,¹⁷² it is an issue of concern to the organisation and, evidently, to many widows.

Indeed, as we saw in the previous chapter, many widows continue to live in very precarious conditions to this day. Furthermore, given their advanced age, the fact that the limited measures put forward by the PNR have taken so long to materialise in actual benefits to the victims and survivors themselves is an issue of immediate interest to them.

In fact, many widows are left to wonder if they will ever get their payments, Doña Juliana explained:

Some women have already received the *resarcimiento* and the others, are we going to obtain it or not? That is what the women who haven't received the *resarcimiento* yet say. They are always asking me. Here there are only a few women who have received from the program [PNR] and there are some who haven't received.

Some widows also alluded to the fact that economic restitution was not enough: "I need them to return all that I have lost, all, everything they robbed from us. That is what I want" (Doña Juliana). This is especially true for survivors of the Río Negro massacre who are engaged in an ongoing struggle for the government to comply with the terms that had been agreed to for their re-settlement to Pacux.¹⁷³

The issues and challenges surrounding the implementation of the PNR and, more specifically, the economic restitution being offered to the victims and survivors of the armed conflict are numerous and complex.¹⁷⁴ However, one of the main concerns for many of the survivors, widows and other relatives of the victims, is the fact that, while the restitution and reparations to victims and survivors has only been implemented in a very limited fashion, the Guatemalan government's program of restitution and payments to former civil patrollers (ex-PAC) has advanced at a much faster pace.¹⁷⁵ In fact, even the notion that the former patrollers are to be 'compensated' for the 'services they rendered to the state' during the armed conflict is quite controversial, especially among widows and survivors:

Some people have a problem with, for example now they are paying the ex-PAC and the *Programa Nacional de Resarcimiento* is paying the victims. So between them there is a division. Yes there is division, because for example they are saying "Why are they paying the ex-PAC if they are the ones who killed?" And yes,

there is a lot of conflict because among them there are people who did kill and there are others who did not, some were forced to do that work and if they didn't do it, well they had to go into hiding. So yes, there are a lot of divisions between them. It's mostly because of the money that people fight and all of that. Yes, there is conflict between victims and victimisers. (Magdalena)

***Dicen que somos restos de los guerrilleros:*^{xii} Continued Community Divisions**

Organising to make demands for justice has not been void of challenges for the widows, especially considering that they started organising while the armed conflict was still ongoing, in a climate of extreme fear, repression and violence. However, as Doña Maria[2] explained, these processes and their end results are so important to the widows that they have continued to push forward despite significant obstacles, fear and threats:

And we continued having meetings, we continued, and five years later, a lawyer came to work with us and that's when we completed the exhumation, but with fear because there was still violence at the time. People were still keeping watch, controlling people.

Among these challenges was the difficulty of dealing with a judicial bureaucracy whose processes were unfamiliar and that functioned in a language which was foreign to them:

About five years into the meetings we arrived at the *Ministerio Publico* in Salamá but since we couldn't speak Spanish, we spoke Achí, we didn't understand the person at the *Ministerio Publico*'s office. And it was hard for us because we couldn't speak Spanish and they wouldn't let us go in two at a time, only one at a time! Yes, that's what we went through, it was hard. That's what we went through with the death of our relatives. (Doña Maria[2])

Furthermore, as Doña Maxima indicated, ADIVIMA's support in these processes has been essential in the widows' continued struggle for peace, justice and *resarcimiento*:

ADIVIMA has supported us in the exhumations, supported us when we went to the *Ministerio Publico*, we obtained the exhumation thanks to ADIVIMA, who gave us courage here in the community. If ADIVIMA, if that office had not

^{xii} They say we are remnants guerrilla fighters (Doña Juliana)

supported us, perhaps we would not have achieved anything, but thanks to ADIVIMA who has supported us and who is still supporting us.

For many of the widows, it is important to continue the struggle for peace, justice and *resarcimiento*, to continue to 'make known' what occurred during the armed conflict and to fight for the recognition of the wrongs committed against the Maya Achí people of Rabinal and the indigenous people of all of Guatemala, so that it may never happen again. However, there are still many challenges to face before ADIVIMA's mission of building true peace, justice and reconciliation in Rabinal is realised. One of the challenges that can not be overlooked is the contention that exists over ADIVIMA's work. Indeed, as ADIVIMA emerged as an organisation founded by victims' families and survivors of *La Violencia*, the stigma attached to being labelled a '*guerrillero*' has been transferred to the organisation and their activities. Doña Teresa reflected on this:

And when we formed the board of directors, they even said to us: "The *guerrilleros* have started to organise" and I don't know what, I don't know how many things the *ladinos* call us. "Oh those people are *guerrilleros*!" they say about us.

By extension, this label and stigma is also attached to the women who participate in ADIVIMA, extending community divisions and conflict into the present. Doña Francisca explained:

The man from the drinking water [committee], he is scolding the widows because they participate. If there is a meeting, they are there, but the men don't like it because they say that we are leftover *guerrilleros*.

As Doña Pedrina[1] explained, the widows' efforts to bring the perpetrators of *La Violencia* to justice are at the root of this contention over ADIVIMA's work:

It isn't accepted by everyone because, as I said, in each community, there are still assassins; they don't like our work, because they don't want people to know what they did. But the relatives of those affected, they accept ADIVIMA's work and they value it.

The extreme socio-political violence to which the Maya Achi population of Rabinal was submitted during *La Violencia* also deepened the historical ethnic conflict that has been present since colonisation (MRCA, 2003). While this historical conflict often takes the form of a latent social tension that is felt more than it is stated, it is also expressed through real community divisions and distrust that are only intensified and prolonged by the fact that victims and perpetrators continue to live side by side in the communities (Suazo, 2002). Indeed, when I asked Doña Pedrina[1] if *La Violencia* created divisions or conflict in Rabinal, she explained that:

[The divisions of the war] are still present, because the assassins of the war are still living and are in our villages. We are still with them, they live in our communities. This affects the women quite a lot because if the women say that they are going to court, then they threaten them or they kill them, that is the biggest problem, they don't let us work now in the legal process.... Threats are still made against women. Because if they are – like at the moment the work ADIVIMA is doing, they are carrying out legal processes against those responsible [for the massacres and genocide] – that is where the threats against the women are coming from. Because the men don't want all that they have done to be known, so they are threatening the women so that they don't pursue their struggle.

However, she also explains that, despite the threats she has received because of the work she is involved with at ADIVIMA, she is not going to give up this work:

I've received various threats, they have tried to kidnap me in my house, they shot at one of my children ... but that didn't keep me locked up in my house. They were intimidating me because they wanted me to stop the work I was doing. I've had phone calls telling me to stop working in human rights because they are going to kill me. But thank God I am still here. I don't want to give up because if I do, then it doesn't do any good for the organisation, and then I would have to stay home. I like being with the women. I don't know, I share a sensibility with my fellow women, because I have felt all the suffering I went through, and that is what they feel as well, so they do need someone to be with them. This is what I believe and I hope God gives me the strength and the energy I need to be able to keep going. (Doña Pedrina[1])

Indeed, as was reflected in much of the testimony that I have included in this chapter, for most of the widows, the work that ADIVIMA does – and their participation in it – is too important for them to abandon, particularly because of the role it has played in continuing to ‘break the silence’ about *La Violencia*:

There are people who value the work that ADIVIMA does. Yes... It’s important because that’s how we shed light on what happened in the past because if not, everything stays there hidden and no one says the truth about what happened. (Magdalena)

***Las viudas viven la paz, somos hermanas, compartimos:*^{xiii} Widows’ Visions of Peace**

As we have seen in this chapter, ADIVIMA, as a grassroots organisation founded by victims and survivors of *La Violencia*, has adopted a holistic and multidimensional vision of reconciliation and healing. This holistic vision is also reflected in many of the widows’ visions of peace. On the one hand, some women simply told me that there was no peace in their community, since there was still violence and crime:

Well, peace, I don’t think that, like Rabinal is now, it isn’t peace because everyday there’s delinquency, there’s death, there’s theft, kidnapping; so no, there is not peace. (Doña Pedrina[1])

Peace has not been realised, because if it had been realised, we would not hear about so much violence anymore. (Doña Teresa)

However, other women relayed ideas that reflect a vision of peace that goes beyond the simple ‘absence of war.’ Indeed, some women alluded to community unity:¹⁷⁶ “There is peace because, as I was saying, we are united” (Doña Maxima). Doña Francisca also linked community divisions and conflicts with the absence of peace:

We don’t live in peace here because amongst the men, they have different committees ... and when they meet, there are always problems! The committees

^{xiii} The widows live in peace, we are sisters, we share. (Doña Vincenta)

fight between themselves, they don't want to do anything, they fight when there is a project.

However, she continued to explain that these divisions are more common amongst the men, thus relating an idea that peace is more common among women in her community:

So then, it is more amongst the men that peace doesn't exist. But with the women it does. Yes, because they communicate with each other, they let each other know when there is a meeting. They always participate and voice their opinions. But what the women say is that men don't like it because they are participating and they don't like what they are saying, so we don't live in peace here. (Doña Francisca)

Indeed, many women expressed the idea that peace exists among the widows, as was articulated by Doña Vincenta: "Yes, the widows in the group live in peace between them, we are sisters, we share." The idea that there is peace 'among the widows' more than in the community at large was also echoed in many interviews.¹⁷⁷

Other women went deeper in their definition of peace. Doña Maria[4] made a link between peace and discrimination: "Perhaps we live in peace but maybe between some of the communities, because discrimination is still alive in the [other] communities," while Doña Ramon made a direct link between the absence of peace, continued violence in the community and the militarisation of the state:

Oh no! There is no [peace], because there is so much violence. Yes, a lot of violence. Because let's hope that when there is peace, there is no more violence, that the violence calms. But oh God! We hear this morning that there is a dead, tomorrow there is another dead, the next day another dead. This is not peace. It's more like the war has come back again and is starting in our midst. We hear that there's been a gunfight over there, that is not peace. I say that we need to demand that this thing not come back. That we ask the government that there be no more violence and that they stop making more weapons! Because they are the ones who make the weapons. And that there be no more soldiers, because they say that they are here to protect us, but they are the ones who kill us! The police who protect us, they are the ones who do the dirty work. That is what I say and I apologise, but that is my word.

CHAPTER SIX – DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As we have seen in the previous chapters, widows in Rabinal not only witnessed the violence imposed on their husbands and communities during *La Violencia*, but were also made targets of particular forms of violence. In the aftermath, they showed great resiliency and resourcefulness as they were left to deal with the physical and psychological consequences of this violence at the same time as they took on new roles and responsibilities in their households and communities. However, as they began to mobilise and talk about what had happened during *La Violencia*, many of them began to gain a new consciousness of themselves and of their rights as indigenous women and to organise around a new struggle: that of establishing truth, justice and *resarcimiento*.

In this chapter, I will discuss the larger implications that can be drawn out from this research in relation to how we think about women's experiences of armed conflict and its aftermath before exploring what can be concluded as to the prospects for development and peace in Rabinal and in Guatemala more generally.

Women's Experiences of Violence and Militarisation

The integrative feminist understanding of gender applied in this thesis simultaneously recognises women's diversity as well as their commonality (in terms of a shared subordination) (Miles, 1996). Speaking of women's 'commonality' of experience of militarisation and armed conflict does not eclipse the fact that the various power relations that exist in society during times of peace are generally maintained and often exacerbated in times of war. Thus, my analysis has included gendered power relations as well as those power relations based on age, class, race, ethnicity, religion, as well as those

of conquered and victor, which Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen (2002b), Pankhurst (2004) and Young (1997) consider particularly important in the context of armed conflict. Indeed, the group of women whose experience I have explored in this research project not only shared a commonality of experience as women, but also as poor, indigenous Achi widows.

Feminist analysts have long established the connections between masculinities, militarisation and armed conflict and the fact that women are generally absent from the circles of power in which decisions are taken about starting and ending wars. Lorentzen and Turpin (1998), Turpin and Lorentzen (1996), Turshen and Twagiramariya (1998) and Enloe (1983, 2000) all insist that the most striking feature of military institutions is that they have historically been almost exclusively male, patriarchal institutions run by and for men and based on masculinity not as a “socio-biological trait but rather as cultural constructions of manliness” (Pankhurst, 2004, p.30).¹⁷⁸ Indeed, Enloe (1983; 2000) has also argued that in order to propagate and sustain itself, the militaristic patriarchal system relies on manipulated meanings of both masculinity and femininity and on the entrenchment of traditional gender norms which keep women in a subordinate position relative to that of men, resulting in the further “privileging of men as a group and of masculinity as an idea” (2000, p.144).

Therefore, even though the term ‘women’ does not refer to a homogenous group, it can be argued that women share a commonality of experience because of their subordinate and marginalised positions in a militarised patriarchal society. As was briefly discussed at the outset of this thesis, as a result of this subordinate status and of women’s socially prescribed roles as caretakers of their families and communities, many authors

have suggested that women experience armed conflict and the suffering it causes in ‘distinct’ ways (Cockburn, 2001; El-Bushra, 2000; El-Jack, 2003; Pankhurst, 2004; Turpin and Lorentzen, 1996; UN, 2002). Indeed, while it has been well documented that among the civilian population, women disproportionately suffer the economic, social and ecological consequences of war,¹⁷⁹ there are also many ways in which militarisation and organised violence inflict specific forms of violence on women, especially when the conflict has an ethnic dimension or motivation.

One of the most pervasive forms of violence to which women are subjected during armed conflict is that of sexual violence.¹⁸⁰ Indeed, it is now widely recognised that sexual and gender-based violence is used during armed conflict as an extension of the battlefield and as a deliberate weapon of war in order to torture and terrorise individuals, communities and populations; to humiliate them and weaken their morale; and sometimes to force entire ethnic groups to flee (Enloe, 2000; Kumar, 2001; McKay, 1998; Skjelsbaek and Smith, 2001). Many authors have also suggested that the threat of sexual violence is often used during times of armed conflict as a method of ‘controlling’ a population by instilling fear and that the ‘threat’ of rape is carried out when women show signs of ‘dissidence’ – such as organising to bring help to victims of the conflict – or diverge from their expected social roles (El-Jack, 2003; Enloe, 2000).

As we saw in the previous chapters, this type of violence was commonly used in Guatemala, and in Rabinal, as a weapon of war during the internal armed conflict in order to torture female prisoners, terrorise communities and instil fear in civilian populations. Indeed, rape was used by soldiers, *judiciales*, military commissioners and patrollers as a

way to control the population: women were to stay in their houses, or else risk becoming a target for sexual violence (CEH, 1999). However, women and girls were also systematically raped during massacres of indigenous communities; and pregnant women and their unborn babies were subjected to particularly brutal forms of torture and violence. The widows themselves established a link between the violence to which women and children were submitted and the genocidal nature of *La Violencia*, explaining that the Army had wanted to ‘finish them off.’

Indeed, in the context of ethnic conflict and genocide, rape and sexual violence is used not only as an attack on individual women, but also as an assault on families, communities and on the larger social system. As such, rape can be understood as a “discrete event ... fundamentally linked to the process of social destruction” (Sideris, 2002b, p.148). Indeed, Nordstrom has suggested that when rape is used during wartime “it is an attack directed equally against personal identity and cultural integrity” (quoted in Sideris, 2002b, p.147). As such, one of the factors that can help explain why rape is used as a weapon of war during ethnic conflict is the fact that in many cultures, women are seen as symbols of the family, pillars of the community and ‘cultural backbones’ of the ‘enemy’ society (Enloe, 2000; Kumar, 2001; Sorensen, 1999). Enloe (2000) also suggests that rape is more likely to be used as a military strategy if women are primarily defined as breeders; if they are thought of as men’s property and as the symbol of their honour;¹⁸¹ and if it is believed that the survival of the enemy community is dependent on women’s work. Furthermore, Turpin (1998), among others, proposed that the use of rape as a weapon of ethnic cleansing is based on patriarchal definitions of ethnicity, which see ethnic identity as derived from the father. According to these patriarchal definitions of

ethnicity and race, by raping women of the ‘enemy’ ethnic or racial group and potentially impregnating them, soldiers, paramilitaries and militiamen are forcing women to give birth to “enemy sons” (Enloe, 2000, p.142) who are of mixed ethnic background.

As we can see, the use of rape as a weapon of war and as a tool for ethnic cleansing and genocide stems from a patriarchal understanding of women’s roles, responsibilities and status in a society or community. The association of women with roles and responsibilities in the reproductive sphere can therefore introduce a specific dimension to violence against women in the context of ethnic conflict or genocide. Indeed, the CEH (1999) concluded that in the case of Rabinal, the systematic use of sexual violence against Maya Achi women was not only an attack on individual women but was also a symbolic assault on the entire group because of women’s traditional responsibility for the social and physical reproduction of the group and because of the values that women are believed to embody. Furthermore, Green (1999) suggested that the rape of Maya women during the counterinsurgency war of the 1980s was used as a “mechanism for inscribing the societal violence on individual women’s bodies and memories” (p.32), which testifies to the cultural and social damage that the state’s security forces intended to inflict on Maya communities.¹⁸² This will to ‘inscribe’ violence on women’s bodies and memories also attests to the lasting and ongoing psychosocial impacts *La Violencia* has had on Maya women and their communities.

Women Breaking the Silence

As we saw earlier, women all over Guatemala, and in Rabinal in particular, mobilised to denounce the violence to which they, their families and their communities

were being subjected at the hands of the state's security forces. They demanded an end to the forced-recruitment of their sons and made strong demands for truth and justice, years before the peace accords were contemplated. This experience reflects that of women in many other war-torn countries. Indeed, women all over the world have organised in times of war in an attempt to hold their governments and its military leadership accountable for human rights violations, to resist forced conscription and denounce escalations in violence (Sen and Grown, 1987; Sorensen, 1999; Turpin, 1998). Groups such as the Women in Black networks, as well as the various Latin American groups of mothers and widows of the 'disappeared' – including GAM and CONAVIGUA in Guatemala – have organised around these issues.¹⁸³

It has been suggested by some authors that women's position 'outside the clan' in many traditional societies and the perceived 'neutrality' and apolitical character that this position entails enables women to take on peace-building roles while war still rages on (Anderson, 2000; L'Homme, 1999). Indeed, in the case of Guatemala, it has been suggested that, in contrast to other sectors of the population, Guatemalan women were able to mobilise and form political organisations in the midst of intense political repression while the war still raged on by taking advantage of the fact that women were generally seen as "passive and apolitical" (Blacklock & Crosby, 2004, p.55). This could help explain why, as Doña Pedrina[1] recounted, she was able to travel into various rural communities in Rabinal where she organised groups of widows while another, male, co-founder of the organisation could not do so.

When the extreme violence the widows experienced during *La Violencia* is understood in the context of the systemic, historical and ongoing violence in which

indigenous women in Guatemala have existed since colonisation,¹⁸⁴ Achí widows' activism around issues of truth, justice and recognition is even more significant and consequential. Indeed, by speaking out about their experiences and testimonies, survivors of *La Violencia* are contesting the version of history promoted by the state's security forces that asserts that they were fighting 'communists' and 'subversives' during the internal armed conflict (Green, 1999; ODHAG, 1998; Sanford, 2003). The act of contesting this 'official' interpretation of the war was "particularly significant for rural Maya (and especially rural Maya women) who are seldom, if ever, asked to reconstruct national history because they are seen as apart from history, not representative agents of it" (Sanford, 2003, p.50).¹⁸⁵

It is significant that the widows themselves link the start of their organisational activities and mobilisation around issues of truth, justice and *resarcimiento* with giving their testimonies since Achí widows were exercising their agency by denouncing the responsibility carried by the Guatemalan state and demanding that something be done to 'repair' the negative impacts of this violence (Schirmer, 1993). Furthermore, Sanford (2001) has suggested that the act of victims, witnesses and survivors speaking out and 'testifying' not only represents an expansion of their agency, it also creates "new political space for local community action" (p.46). Dill (2005) sees a similar impact as a result of prosecuting and sentencing material perpetrators of the Río Negro massacre in local-level trials. Indeed, she argues that the 'shift' in power relations produced by the trial opened up space for the community to pursue their post-war social project. In Rabinal, widows and survivors of *La Violencia*, especially through ADIVIMA, have seized this new

political space in order to continue breaking the silence and to organise to demand – and implement – a *resarcimiento* that is holistic and multidimensional.

Empowerment from Occupying New Roles and Responsibilities?

Women's experience of conflict are shaped and influenced by various facets of their identities, conditions and positions in society. However, as I have just outlined, despite the diversity that exists among women, their experience of armed conflict is strongly influenced by their shared subordination and marginalisation. Indeed, as Paz (2006) explains, the extreme vulnerability in which Maya widows were left after the assassination or disappearance of their husbands “must be placed in the context of existing gender relations before the internal armed conflict” (p.100).

This thesis has explored the experience of a fairly homogenous group of women in terms of gender, ethnicity, age as well as geographical and historical conditions – that of widows' experiences of armed conflict in Rabinal. Indeed, these women's experience of the internal armed conflict was shaped by similar conditions: that of being rural indigenous women who had been widowed by the armed conflict. However, as we saw, these widows' experience of the internal armed conflict was also shaped by their experience as mothers who became head of their households in a context of extreme poverty in which their husbands had been the main source of income and labour for the family. After having lost their husbands, widows had to take on new roles and responsibilities and demonstrate remarkable resiliency and resourcefulness in their struggle to survive.

Indeed, as has been observed elsewhere, women have shown exceptional resiliency and resourcefulness when their own survival, and that of their families and communities, is threatened (McKay, 1998). In Rabinal, they have adapted their survival strategies and taken on a myriad of new roles and responsibilities, including roles that were formerly a 'male' domain. Furthermore, in their struggle to elucidate the truth about the violence to which their communities were subjected during the war and to demand reparations for the harm that was caused to them, they also entered more public spaces which had been, until then, the almost exclusive domain of *ladino* men.

As we saw, many widows seem to have gained a new consciousness of themselves as indigenous women through the new roles and responsibilities that they have come to occupy and through their participation in the grassroots movement to demand truth, justice and *resarcimiento*. Indeed, Green (1999) suggested that, largely through their participation in widows' organisations, rural Maya women had, for the first time, developed a consciousness of themselves as women, wives and widows that "extended beyond the borders of their households and communities" (p.107). This has also been described by Schirmer (1993), who concluded that widows' experiences of the extreme violence and political repression of *La Violencia* pushed them to make a link between their demands for respect of their human rights with their rights as women. She also suggests that, as in many other parts of Latin America, this experience created "a particular kind of gendered consciousness in which claimers of truth are challenged by a significant number of human rights groups led by women" (Schirmer, 1993, p.63) and that this new consciousness was then transmitted to their daughters. According to Blacklock and Crosby (2004), this shift in consciousness must be understood in the

context of the social disintegration and destabilisation caused by the internal armed conflict which “severely disrupted [women’s] gendered work and the ongoing social construction of their identity as caretakers of social relationships” (p.53).

Similar ‘shifts’ in women’s consciousness as a result of their experiences of armed conflict have been observed in many other cases,¹⁸⁶ including the case of Mozambican women explored by Sideris (2002a). She explains that as a result of their experiences during the armed conflict in their country, Mozambican women developed a consciousness that was no longer limited to being caretakers but that they also began to think of themselves as providers for their families; a consciousness which included a new-found perception of their own “strength and capacity” (p.50).

The fact that women often seem to develop a new gender consciousness through their experience of armed conflict certainly seems to suggest that, as a certain portion of the ‘women and armed conflict’ literature does, war can “open up intended and unintended spaces for empowering women, effecting structural social transformation and producing new social, economic and political realities that redefine gender ... hierarchies” (Meintjes, Pillay & Turshen, 2002b, p.7).¹⁸⁷ However, as we have seen in the case of Rabinal, widows themselves, and the younger women who work with them, have identified significant limits to their participation and have noted that the ‘new roles’ they occupy tend to have a restricted scope. Indeed, widows’ participation is still mostly limited to their own circles of indigenous women, and even only to circles where indigenous widows and survivors of the war form the majority.

These observations correspond to those made by other theorists that despite the spaces for social change that seem to open up during armed conflict, the processes which

accompany war seem to reinforce patriarchal ideologies and relations in the longer term rather than fundamentally alter them (El-Bushra, 2004). When speaking of the potential ‘gains’ women make during wartime, Manchanda (2002) has suggested that wartime gains that are generated from trauma and loss are particularly ambivalent, such as when women take on roles and responsibilities that had formerly been ensured by their disappeared or deceased husbands. Furthermore, many authors have observed a ‘backlash’ of masculinity through which men attempt to reassert their authority and force women to return to their pre-war roles when women had come to occupy new social, economic and/or political roles in post-conflict societies (Afshar, 2004; El-Bushra, 2004; El-Jack, 2003; Kumar, 2001; Manchanda, 2002; Meintjes, 2002; Pankhurst, 2004; Sideris, 2002b).

Some suggest that “the challenge posed to traditional gender relations during times of war becomes too great for patriarchal societies to accept in times of peace” (Pankhurst, 2004:19) while others refer to a sense of impotence and frustration experienced by men if armed conflict has inhibited their ability to provide for and protect their family (Meintjes, 2002). These frustrations may lead to depression, alcoholism and increased domestic violence as well as violent public protests against women who are economically independent or who occupy typically ‘male’ roles (El-Jack, 2003; Pankhurst, 2004). Furthermore, the type of masculinity that accompanies the militarisation of society is more likely to lead to violence and aggression, thus increasing the likelihood that discontent will be translated into violent behaviour (Pankhurst, 2004).

Although the specific issue of domestic violence in the aftermath of the conflict was not discussed at length by the widows I interviewed,¹⁸⁸ Doña Rosario did make reference to problems with domestic violence in her community:

The problem is liquor. It is a problem because some men drink a lot of booze and then they go hit their wife, they scare their children, and this is a problem. It makes me sad because it causes so many problems

However, several women in Rabinal did speak of how violence had been expressed against women in the public sphere. As we saw above, widows indicated that they had faced repression and threats when they started to organise – especially given the fact that their communities were still heavily militarised – and that this resistance to their mobilisation and action still continues today. Indeed, as Paz (2006) suggested, “politically active women were doubly punished” (p.97) in Guatemala; on the one hand because of their ‘subversive’ behaviour in mobilising around issues of truth and justice, and on the other because their political action had broken gender norms by intervening in a traditionally male domain. However, as many of the widows mentioned, this resistance and contention over their work is also linked to the fact that they are mobilising to demand justice for the human rights violations committed against them, their families and communities and that the perpetrators of this violence are still present in the communities.¹⁸⁹

Healing, Reconciliation and the Search for Truth, Justice and *Resarcimiento*

The counterinsurgency campaigns of the early 1980s left deep scars on the Maya Achi population of Rabinal. As I outlined in this thesis, the women who survived as widows were particularly affected since they experienced the internal armed conflict not

only as first-hand witnesses of the brutal violence that was imposed on their families and communities, but also as targets for specific kinds of violence. Many survived only to face a future imbued with fear in which they faced incredible challenges and demonstrated great resiliency and resourcefulness in raising their families as head of their households.

While many individuals still carry the physical and psychological scars of *La Violencia*, the all-encompassing, generalised, and enduring nature of its extreme political violence has resulted in trauma and injury on both social and individual levels, a condition described by Suazo (2002) as a ‘subculture of socio-political calamity.’¹⁹⁰ Indeed, Sideris (2002a) has suggested that in situations of armed conflict and repression, extreme individual and social traumatisation results “not only from discrete acts of repression ... coupled with social and cultural destruction, but also from the disruption of social arrangements, activities and institutions that give people meaning” (p.57).

If approaches to reconciliation and healing are to be effective in this type of context, they must be multifaceted, culturally appropriate and work on both individual and social levels (McKay, 2000; Sideris, 2002a). Furthermore, Sideris (2002a) suggests that, in many cases, grassroots initiatives are more effective in promoting conditions for healing than larger national processes, on one hand because community reconciliation and reconstruction are essential antecedents to both individual and social healing and, on the other, because these types of initiatives are more likely to be aimed at supporting people in their healing processes. Indeed, McKay (2000) also suggests that, in many cases, “psychosocial healing occurs within communities or other support networks through story telling, community recognition of harm done and support for the healing

process” (p.569). This also corresponds to Green’s (1999) suggestion that widows’ organisations in Guatemala have allowed their participants to re-create support networks after the traditional kin-based networks on which they relied for support were destroyed or collapsed as a result of *La Violencia*. Speaking of CONAVIGUA, Green (1999) also suggested that “membership in this larger imagined community of indigenous women lessened their sense of isolation and alienation” (p.106), thus helping them to heal. This idea is reflected in the connection that widows in Rabinal have expressed between the fact that the widows are ‘united’ as ‘sisters’ and that peace exists among them. Given the fact that one of the aims of the genocidal violence that was unleashed on Rabinal communities during *La Violencia* was to dissolve community ties and disrupt the social fabric of Achí society, the accomplishment of this form of solidarity between widows is a remarkable achievement.

As was mentioned above, widows in Rabinal, through the organisation they founded, ADIVIMA, have mobilised around the search for truth, justice and *resarcimiento* and have articulated fairly holistic visions of healing, reconciliation and peace that include political, economic and social dimensions. In fact, many of the measures that widows and survivors demand for the fulfilment of *resarcimiento* are thought to be essential in helping individuals move towards healing and communities move towards reconciliation. These include the acknowledgement of victims’ suffering, the reconstruction of memory through testimony, supporting culturally appropriate healing mechanisms, collective mourning, holding religious ceremonies and establishing compensation for victims of violations (Sideris, 2002a). Commenting on the case of

Rabinal, Suazo (2002) also insisted that reparations, restitution and justice are all necessary steps in order for true reconciliation and peace to be realised in Rabinal.

Although the use of the term *resarcimiento* implies a commitment by the Guatemalan state to repair the harms caused by the internal armed conflict, the state-led process of *resarcimiento*, implemented through the PNR has been extremely slow and has made very little progress at the time of writing. At the same time, organisations such as ADIVIMA, in keeping with their mission of helping victims and survivors towards healing, recovery and reconciliation, have begun to conduct activities which are quite similar in aim and have similar results than those contemplated by the PNR. Indeed, ADIVIMA's support for exhumation measures is particularly important both to achieve the *dignificación* of victims and survivors, but also for the larger social goal of reconciliation:

The exhumation first, followed by burial give the relatives the certainty of the place where their dead are buried, and enables the celebration of funerals, according to their religious traditions. This is a specially important step for the indigenous culture, and [becomes] essential in order to know the truth of what happened and move forward to the next stage: reconciliation. (Excerpt of a *Secretaría de Paz* [Secretariat of Peace] report, quoted in Forced Migration, 2005)

However, as we saw, the legal and administrative processes involved in carrying out exhumations are numerous and can be quite complicated. Furthermore, exhumation processes are far from being a priority in the national judicial system since judges are more interested in prosecuting 'high impact' crimes (CONAVIGUA, 2005). If we also consider the time-consuming process of conducting a thorough investigation and examination of the evidence collected during exhumations, the whole process from exhumation to re-burial can be quite lengthy. As is reflected in Doña Maria[3]'s comments, this can be a challenge to achieving true closure and healing:

This, this is the work we did. Yes, well, we were pleased but not completely satisfied because, now my [husband's remains] haven't come back yet. We did the exhumation two years ago, it's almost three years and he hasn't come back.¹⁹¹

As we saw in Chapter Five, the legal processes to bring those responsible for the massacres and genocide to justice are deeply linked to the *dignificación* and *resarcimiento* that the widows and their association, ADIVIMA, have been demanding from the Guatemalan state. On one hand, decisions rendered by supra-national bodies have pushed the government to act on providing *resarcimiento* which has otherwise been an extremely slow process – such was the case with the IACHR's decision in the Plan de Sánchez trial.¹⁹² On the other, trials such as those held in connection to the Pak'oxom massacre have provided the opportunity to put an end to local-level impunity by bringing material perpetrators of the violence to justice.¹⁹³ Such advances are important given the limited progress that has been made in terms of bringing the intellectual authors of *La Violencia* to justice, which is a significant barrier to healing and reconciliation. Indeed, as was suggested by Suazo (2002), the continued presence of perpetrators in the community and the impunity that is prevalent at all levels only serves to prolong suffering and negative feelings of victims and survivors.

As was mentioned above, at the time of writing, one of the only aspects of *resarcimiento* that the Guatemala government had begun to deal with – and in a very limited manner at that – was the issue of economic reparations, leaving community organisations such as ADIVIMA as *de facto* implementers of *resarcimiento*. However, the fact that some local grassroots organisations have mobilised to attempt to bridge this gap does not absolve the government from keeping its commitments and dealing with

resarcimiento in an integral and comprehensive way. Indeed, this is perhaps the only way in which some of the issues that have been brought up here can be dealt with in an effective manner – especially in terms of ending impunity and bringing material perpetrators as well as intellectual authors of *La Violencia* to justice, to which there are still enormous political barriers in Guatemala.¹⁹⁴

Women's Approaches to Peace-Building

As we have seen throughout this thesis, women are often made targets for specific types of violence and experience armed conflict in distinct ways. While it may be that neither men nor women are inherently peaceful or violent, women's socially prescribed roles – as well as the knowledge and experience they gain from these roles and the subordinate position they generally hold in social power structures – contribute to how they experience armed conflict. It has been suggested by some authors that women develop distinct visions of peace and contributions to peace-building rooted in this 'collective sensibility' and commonality of experience (Afshar, 2004; Bop, 2002; Turpin, 1998).

Peace-building follows two parallel paths: the formal peace negotiations and the wide range of informal activities that precede and often outlive the formal negotiations. While the formal peace negotiations mostly involve national political leaders – which are most often male – and consist of high-level activities in which women are under-represented, women generally form the majority of people involved in grassroots, informal peace-building activities (McKay, 1998; Sideris, 2002a; Sorensen, 1998).¹⁹⁵ To describe women as essentially 'passive-victims' of armed conflict – an approach still too

commonly adopted in development and humanitarian responses to armed conflict – not only denies women agency, but it also impedes the recognition of the roles they play in peace-building, reconciliation and reconstruction (Eade, 2004; Moser & Clark, 2001a, 2001b). Indeed, as El-Bushra and Mukarubuga (1995) stated, “although women are not only peace-makers, it is often they who build the peace, often in private and from the bottom-up, unacknowledged and unsupported” (p.20). Too often, however, women’s peace-building activities are labelled ‘volunteer,’ ‘charitable’ or ‘social’ and are thus unrecognised, devalued and excluded from the male defined ‘political’ sphere despite their critical social and political impact (McKay, 1998; Sorensen, 1998).

While the lack of recognition for women’s peace-building initiative is in itself an important issue to consider when thinking about gender equity and social justice issues in the post-conflict period, it also poses a more direct challenge to building a lasting, sustainable and ‘positive’ peace since it “impede[s] the recognition of the endogenous solutions that women propose” (Bop, 2002, p.19). Indeed, many authors have suggested that, in order to build a more sustainable peace in the aftermath of war, it is crucial to learn from the experiences of those who have experienced the conflict (Pankhurst, 2004; Pearce, 2004). This approach to peace-building, which requires significant involvement and commitment from various sectors, may be much more time-consuming than traditional approaches, however, it is nonetheless a more sustainable path than politically driven processes of peace-making and rebuilding which generally only serve to restore pre-war institutions along with their inherent inequalities and inequities. Indeed, until we achieve a comprehensive understanding of the underlying gendered power structures and the dynamics of social change involved in militarisation and armed conflict, as well as

the myriad of ways in which this impacts women and other marginalised groups, our approaches to peace-building will be largely ineffectual (Afshar, 2004).

Prospects for Peace and Development

Feminist approaches to development include the achievement of peaceful societies as an essential element of development. The principles on which this alternative vision of development is based are clearly stated in DAWN's publication *Development, Crises and Alternative Visions* (Sen and Grown, 1987):

We are committed to developing alternative frameworks and methods to attain the goals of economic and social justice, peace, and development free of all forms of oppression by gender, class, race, and nation. (p.9)

Indeed, DAWN insists that peace, as well as equality, must be included in an alternative vision of development, since the conditions that “breed violence, war, and inequality are themselves often the results of development strategies harmful or irrelevant to the poor and to women” (p.74). Clearly, taking this type of approach to development involves defining development on the basis of ideals of social inclusion and equity for all, and not solely in terms of economic growth. Indeed, the idea of a ‘positive peace’¹⁹⁶ postulates that structural violence¹⁹⁷ and social inequities must be dealt with and minimised, if not eliminated, before real peace can exist (Pankhurst, 2004; Preti, 2002). A similar assessment was made in Nairobi in 1985 when the Forward-looking Strategies were adopted at the end of the UN's Decade for Women:

Peace includes not only the absence of war, violence and hostilities at the national and international levels, but also the enjoyment of economic and social justice, equality and the entire range of human rights and fundamental freedoms within society ... Peace and development are inter-related and mutually reinforcing. (Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies, Para.13, quoted in Vickers, 1993, p.133)

The Guatemalan peace process has produced a situation that is considerably distant from this notion of 'positive peace' in which structural inequities and social exclusion are minimised. In fact, not only is structural violence still existent, but direct, physical violence is still, sadly, an overwhelming daily reality in most of the country. However, perhaps this is not surprising given the terms on which the peace accords were negotiated. Indeed, according to Green (1999), the 1996 accords:

... defined peace and security in its narrowest terms, equating peace with the absence of war and security with the absence of military threat. These restricted definitions both overlook the multifaceted problems that circumscribe Guatemalan society – economic, ecological, demographic, narcotic, and gender issues – and discount their importance in constructing lasting peace and justice in Guatemala. (p.51)

This definition of peace stands in stark contrast to the holistic and multifaceted understandings of peace expressed by widows and their organisation, which include ideas of community unity and co-operation amongst neighbours as well as the absence of racial and gender discrimination and the demilitarisation of their communities and of the state.

When the Guatemalan peace accords were signed in the 1990s – culminating with the 1996 signing of the Accord for a Firm and Lasting Peace – they were heralded as the most progressive and participatory of the Central American peace accords¹⁹⁸ because of the wide-ranging themes they tackled – including gender equality, indigenous people's rights and the de-militarisation of the state – as well as the participation in the peace process of a broad cross-section of Guatemalan civil society. However, as Holiday (2000) asserted, "the breadth and scope of the Guatemalan peace accords ... derive more from this weakness [of the PAN¹⁹⁹ and URNG] than from any inherent strengths" (p.78). Instead, the URNG was too weak as a social actor to force any significant concessions

from the military. In fact, it has been suggested that the country's private sector and economic elite were the only 'winners' to come out of the peace negotiations.²⁰⁰

Even the limited potential for progress that could have resulted from the accords in terms of advancing gender equality, indigenous rights and demilitarisation have essentially been annulled since the accords quickly came to be understood as an agreement strictly between the URNG and the PAN. The successive governments that have come to power in Guatemala since 1996 have not even bothered to enact the peace accords,²⁰¹ much less implement them in their integrity (Blacklock & Crosby, 2004).²⁰² Furthermore, the peace accords did not address questions of economic and land rights in a comprehensive manner. Indeed, the Accord on the Socio-economic Aspect and the Agrarian Situation does not contemplate land reform, but rather provides for the Guatemalan economy to be restructured through the implementation of fiscal austerity measures and the expansion of free trade zones and contract farming for export (Green, 1999). Instead of resolving the economic exclusion in which the rural Maya population lived, the conditions of the accords pushed them into increasingly precarious economic conditions (Blacklock & Crosby, 2004; Green, 1999). Thus militarisation and capitalism continue their twofold encroachment on Maya communities.²⁰³ As always, in Guatemala "the struggle for justice ... is inseparable from the struggle for land" (Lovell, 2000, p.139).

The realities I came to know through my fieldwork and research in Rabinal, Guatemala and the theoretical discussions and deliberations with which I have engaged in writing this thesis have led me to reflect on many issues that lie above and beyond the

initial topic of inquiry on which I initially set out. It is on the basis of these issues that I propose the following areas for further research.

Human rights and women's organisations in Guatemala have adopted the term 'femicide' to describe the phenomenon now being observed in the country of a dramatic increase of various forms of violence against women committed in total impunity and with tolerance from the state – the most brutal expression of which is the murder of over 3 000 women in Guatemala between 2000 and 2005 (CALDH, 2005; Munzaiz, 2006, March 2; N.A., 2006, March 3).²⁰⁴ Many of these women are being killed because they are women; their bodies are found daily on the sides of highways, in landfills and in urban neighbourhoods, often mutilated and tortured – many with signs of rape and sexual abuse. Some of the women I interviewed in Rabinal identified this phenomenon as a sign of the enormous amount of progress that is still needed for women to achieve equality in Guatemala:

There are many things left to do for Guatemala to change, so that there is no more discrimination against women. I imagine that all of the assassinations of women that are happening right now are not a good thing, it isn't okay that they always assassinate women so brutally and all of that. There has to be a change. We have to fight so that a lot changes. (Q-01)

As was touched on briefly in this chapter, processes of militarisation have been observed to reinforce and promote patriarchal structures, values, attitudes and behaviours – including aggressiveness and violence as ideals of masculinity. Furthermore, women became specific targets for violence during the Guatemalan internal armed conflict given the genocidal nature of the conflict and women's role in the physical and social reproduction of the targeted groups – according to military doctrine, indigenous women “gave birth to guerrilleros.”²⁰⁵ I am therefore left wondering about the links that may

exist between the continued militarisation of the Guatemalan state and society and what is now being described as a phenomenon of ‘femicide’ in the country. Is the continued, renewed and intensified violence against women witnessed in Guatemala today linked to values, attitudes and behaviours learned and promoted during the armed conflict? Could it be a brutal expression of patriarchal backlash against women because of the (slightly) increased public spaces they have come to occupy since the internal armed conflict? Or is it more simply part and parcel of the larger cycle of social violence that is continually fed by impunity and lack of justice?

Given the recent upsurge of resistance to mining activities and other ‘mega-project’ development schemes in indigenous communities in Guatemala and the violent repression with which this resistance has often been met, I am also left to ponder the links between the ‘development project’ as it stands in the country and larger questions of social justice and equity. Are the communities that are resisting mining proposing or implementing any alternative frameworks based on deeper social transformation? Has the experience of the armed conflict pushed any groups to propose alternative approaches to development, based on marginalised populations’ needs and visions? If so, do these approaches contribute to the building of a culture of peace in which the needs of women, children and communities are given a priority?

While the peace accords may not have – as had been hoped – ushered in peace or deep social change in Guatemalan society, the mobilisation of women and indigenous peoples – especially indigenous widows – around issues of truth, justice, peace and reconciliation represents a significant first step in the ‘right’ direction. Indeed, through

their mobilisation and activism, indigenous women in Rabinal have created new political spaces in which to continue their struggle. With a new consciousness of their rights, they have seized this space in order to voice their demands for greater social justice. While this struggle has, as we have seen, had important impacts on the women who have participated in it, it has also been the source of significant changes in Rabinal. Indeed, Sanford (2003) suggested that Rabinal has achieved a higher level of reconciliation than communities in which the silence surrounding the events of *La Violencia* has not been broken to the same extent.

The distinct ways in which indigenous widows in Rabinal experienced *La Violencia* have been shaped both by the specific forms of violence that were inflicted on them, their families and communities as well as by their subsequent struggle to ensure their family's survival after the loss of their husbands. The visions of peace and reconciliation that the widows have articulated –which are at the basis of ADIVIMA's activism – are rooted in their experience of suffering, survival and resiliency and on the 'conscientisation' they underwent. For widows and their organisation – the Association for the Integral Development of the Victims of the Violence (ADIVIMA) – peace, truth, justice, reconciliation and the various dimensions of *resarcimiento* are all part of the same picture: the 'integral' development to which they aspire for their communities.

While I was listening to the women in Rabinal, and upon reflecting and writing about what they have shared with me, it has become clear to me that while they do not need 'us' – academics, Northerners – to speak for them, 'we' do need to hear and listen to what these women have to say and heed their advice if we want to work towards building a more peaceful and equitable world.

ENDNOTES

¹ As will be examined more in-depth in the historical review of Chapter Two, the expression '*La Violencia*' – 'The Violence' – is used by most Guatemalans to refer the late 1970s and early 1980s, by far the most brutal and intense period of the internal armed conflict. As Sanford (2001, 2003) explains, the period of time understood as and referred to as *La Violencia* differs slightly between rural and urban areas. In urban areas, *La Violencia* is generally understood as a period of time spanning from 1978-1983, a period during which Generals Romeo Lucas García and Ríos Montt implemented the state's counterinsurgency campaigns with unprecedented force and brutality. In rural areas, the appellation *La Violencia* is generally used to refer to the period in which their community suffered the impacts of these counterinsurgency campaigns, which generally include the previously mentioned period, but often also extends to 1985 (when the first civilian elections were held), 1990 (when the bombing of the Ixil mountains stopped) or 1996 (when the peace accords were signed) (Sanford, 2001, p.23). However, "for rural Maya survivors, victims, and victimizers as well, *La Violencia* represents more than a historical marker of a period of extreme state violence. It represents not only the actual violent events ... but also the effects of the violence, which included their silencing through near total closing of opportunities for social and political participation, which in turn further curtailed whatever freedom of speech they may have had" (*ibid.*).

² See Sanford (2001, 2003) concerning the act of 'witnessing' a testimony: "Both the testimony of the witness as well as the involvement of whoever listens to the testimony and produces it in written form are also part of that real and continuing history in the making" (2001, p.41). "In the process of giving and witnessing testimony, survivors create new public spaces for discourse and practice – the essence of human agency" (2003, p.208-209).

³ While the patriarchal system does entail the privileging of 'men as a group' over 'women as a group,' not all men are equally privileged and many are also damaged by and subordinated in this gender order (Cockburn, 2007). This is especially true for men who do not espouse the values, attitudes and conduct sanctioned by the dominant or hegemonic masculinity. (See Cockburn, 2004, and Nagel, 1998, for more on the idea of dominant or hegemonic masculinities, especially as related to armed conflict and militarisation.)

⁴ Here, I borrow Cockburn's (2007) definitions of militarism which she explains is "used to describe not just a body of ideas but the practical influence military organization and values have on social structure and national policies" (p.237).

⁵ The term 'positive' used to define peace served to distinguish it from an idea of peace that is defined strictly by what it is not (war). As such, to the contrary of this 'negative' definition of peace, the idea of a 'positive peace' postulates that structural violence and social inequities must also be dealt with and minimised, if not eliminated, before real peace can exist (Pankhurst, 2004; Preti, 2002).

⁶ ADIVIMA's mission statement reads as follows: "The Association is specifically intended to: seek solutions to social, economic, educational and political problems that widows, orphans, survivors, and victims face because of the internal armed conflict of the 1980s; help ensure that the peace accords signed by the Guatemalan government and the National Revolutionary Union of Guatemala are carried out and the reports by the Commission of Historical Clarification and REMHI (Recuperation of Historical Memory) are respected; construct monuments in honour of the 49 massacres in different communities in Baja Verapaz; facilitate the process of reflection and healing; empower the communities so that they can be influential in governmental and social affairs and in finding solutions to their own needs" (author's translation from ADIVIMA documents).

⁷ Indeed, in the introduction to the association's strategic plans, it states that ADIVIMA is engaged "in the search for the path that will bring us to the construction of peace with social justice." ADIVIMA's vision statement also states that the association works to: "Restore the social fabric based on a true reconciliation, achieving, through the establishment of memory, truth, justice and material and economic reparation, the emotional and mental condition of all of those affected by the internal armed conflict of the 1980s." (author's translation from ADIVIMA documents)

⁸ The English translation of the word *municipio* is 'municipality.' In terms of administrative divisions, the closest Canadian equivalent would be 'county.' In Guatemala, *municipios* are administrative divisions that can be fairly large geographically and usually include one *casco urbano* (urban centre) or *pueblo* (small town) as well as the surrounding towns and villages. Many *municipios* share their name with this main town or city. *Aldea* can be translated as village and are usually rural villages in a *municipio*. Finally, *caseríos* are hamlets or settlements, they are smaller, more remote villages.

⁹ The Republic of Guatemala is divided into 22 'departments,' which, in terms of administrative divisions are comparable to Canadian provinces. Baja Verapaz is one of these departments.

¹⁰ The Achí people inhabit five *municipios* in Baja Verapaz: Cubulco, Rabinal, San Miguel Chicaj, Salamá and San Jerónimo.

¹¹ In 2000, the municipio of Rabinal was home to approximately 39,500 people, of which it is estimated 8,000 to 9,000 inhabit the urban centre. Not only do indigenous Achí people form the majority of the municipio's population as a whole, they also form the overwhelming majority of the population on the village level: most of the ladino population is concentrated in the urban centre and in five of the 77 other villages and settlements (Valle Cobar, 2004).

In Guatemala, people of mixed and/or non-indigenous heritage are generally called *ladinos*. Maya individuals who abandon their language, customs, dress, and no longer identify as 'indigenous' or 'Maya' are often also included in this group.

¹² The CEH (1999) concentrated its study on the four regions where violence and human rights violations were most concentrated and in which it concluded that the Guatemalan state committed acts of genocide against the ethnic groups that inhabit the respective regions: the Maya Achí in Rabinal, Baja Verapaz; the Maya Ixil and Maya K'iché in the department of Quiché; the Maya Q'anjob'al and Maya Chuj in the department of Huettenango.

¹³ The three program-branches at ADIVIMA are (1) Human Rights; (2) Socio-economic; and (3) Community Education, Organisation and Participation. The activities carried out by each of these branches are, respectively: "1- Reporting clandestine cemeteries; exhumations; inhumations; construction of monuments in memory of the victims; commemorations; legal proceedings against those responsible for of the human rights violations; legal recognition of the property rights (*patrimonio*) of survivors; personal documentation of those affected; search and localisation of the disappeared. 2 – Sustainable productive projects for widowed women and orphans; rotating credit; housing projects; and land acquisition. 3 – Training, awareness-raising and diffusion of the provisions of the peace accords and the CEH and REMHI reports with those affected in relation to their rights and obligations, in order to be able to hold influence on the state's decision making bodies."

¹⁴ Rabinal has a relatively small community of 'expatriates' compared to other places in Guatemala, however, some international volunteers are working there, a number of whom are involved in solidarity networks and international accompaniment projects.

¹⁵ For more on the use of oral testimonies in post-conflict contexts, see El-Bushra (2004), Green (1999), Jordan (2004) and Sanford (2001;2003), among others.

¹⁶ Among the potential issues in using oral testimony as a source of data for research, El-Bushra (2004) mentions that the material can be "unpredictable, broad ranging, and susceptible to many different interpretations" (p.154). For more on the potential issues in using a 'life history' approach to interviewing, see Francis (1993).

¹⁷ For a more in-depth look at the testimonial tradition that has developed as a way of recounting marginalised women's experiences in Latin America, see Marín (1991).

¹⁸ See Devereux and Hoddinott (1993) for a collection of articles that look into many of these challenges.

¹⁹ One particular example of this is a set of short testimonies I unexpectedly collected in Cubulco after a workshop that the Community Education, Organisation and Participation branch of ADIVIMA was conducting there in May 2006. During a break in the workshop, when we were waiting for lunch to arrive, the co-ordinator of the Community Education, Organisation and Participation program introduced me to the

group who was participating in the workshop, which was mostly composed of widows, and asked me if I wanted to talk a bit about what I was doing with ADIVIMA. I explained that I was doing volunteer work while I conducted my fieldwork and thesis research, which was about Achí women's experiences of the internal armed conflict. I suggested that if anyone was interested in sharing their experience with me, that they could either come to talk to me after the workshop or another day at the office in Rabinal. Two or three women started talking at the same time. Finally, seven women lined-up to share their experiences with me, telling me about when they had lost their husband and/or other family members.

²⁰ To 'make known' or '*dar a conocer*' is an expression that was often used by widows as an explanation of why they wanted (and sometimes 'needed') to participate in my research project. They explained that it was important for them to 'make the facts known' so that people from other parts of the world would learn what had happened in Guatemala and so that it would never occur again.

²¹ See Blacklock and Crosby (2004) for a discussion of the implications of the varying status of 'insider' and 'outsider' of researchers in Guatemala and the particular perception of foreigners involved in solidarity work and in human rights accompaniment.

²² *Centro para la Acción Legal en Derechos Humanos* – Centre for Legal Action in Human Rights

²³ Again, Giles and Hyndman (2004) provide an interesting discussion about 'silencing' and 'appropriation of voice' by First World scholars and academics conducting research in the economic South.

²⁴ I will discuss the physical and psychosocial problems and illnesses that were left as a result of the internal armed conflict in more detail in Chapter Three.

²⁵ In this case, the woman I was interviewing used the word '*violación*' (rape) and 'beating at the waist' seemingly interchangeably (B-01).

²⁶ This included testimonies compiled in various other sources including those included in the book written by one of the co-founders of ADIVIMA that I was helping to edit.

²⁷ In 2004, it had the highest Gross National Product of all the Central American countries at US\$27.5 billion (UNDP, 2006).

²⁸ In fact, Haiti was the only country in the Americas to rank lower than Guatemala on the HDI in 2006 (UNDP, 2006).

²⁹ Guatemala's Gini index rating of 55.1 (UNDP, 2006) in terms of income distribution also reveals significant economic inequality in the country. The Gini coefficient measures concentration of resources with 0 being perfect equality and 100 perfect inequality. Guatemala has also long had one of the most unequal distribution in land ownership. Green (1999) reported that in 1979, Guatemala's Gini coefficient in terms of concentration of land ownership was 85 (surpassed at the time only by Peru and Colombia). Today, the *Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala* (NISGUA) reports that Guatemala has the distinction of having the most unequal land ownership in the Western Hemisphere (www.nisgua.org): 70% of the agricultural land is in the hands of a mere 2% of the population (Viscidi, 2004).

³⁰ See PNUD (2005) for a more in-depth look at how those factors influence inequality in terms of human development indicators.

³¹ In Rabinal, in 2004, 31.5% of the population lived in extreme poverty and 78.6% in poverty (PNUD, 2005).

³² Only 34.1% of indigenous women in Baja Verapaz are literate, compared with a 56.2% overall literacy rate in people over 15 years of age (PNUD, 2005).

³³ See Lutz and Lovell (1994) for an in-depth look at how Maya region of Guatemala developed in the 'periphery' of the colonial scheme.

³⁴ Following independence in 1821, Guatemala's political arena became the scene of a power struggle between Liberals and Conservatives who had opposite 'projects' for the emerging nation. The Conservatives' project largely consisted of maintaining the social status quo along with the institutions

inherited from the Spanish rule, which signified a continued existence of the Maya population 'outside' the political and economic life of the country (CEH, 1999; Lovell, 2000; ODHAG, 1998).

³⁵ See *Guatemalan Indians and the State: 1540-1988*, edited by Carol A. Smith (1994), for a comprehensive look at how intersecting factors and ideologies (race, class, culture, language) have interacted to shape the changing systems of social classification through Guatemalan history.

³⁶ The laws established by Barrios included the *Reglamento de Jornaleros* (regulation of day labourers), passed in 1877, and the *Ley contra la Vagancia* (vagrancy law) passed the following year. The latter compelled indigenous peasants to supply between 100 and 150 days of labour per year in the coffee plantations.

³⁷ These *comisionados* served as local representatives of the Army and 'agents of military authority' in the community. One of their responsibilities was to verify the labour cards that indigenous men were obliged to carry to prove they had completed the number of days of labour required of them (MCRA, 2003).

³⁸ While contributing labour to the country's public works was technically applicable to all male citizens, indigenous peasants and poor *ladinos* were particularly affected since the rich would pay someone else to complete their days of labour. Also, indigenous men from Rabinal have reported that the free labour they provided not only contributed to public works but also sometimes benefited their rich neighbours who asked the mayor and *comisionados* to send them labourers when they needed to build a new addition to their house or harvest their cornfields (MCRA, 2003).

³⁹ See MCRA (2003, pp.42-45) for testimonies from Rabinal to that effect.

⁴⁰ It is said that Ponce, yet another addition the line of conservative strongmen who governed Guatemala since independence, misinterpreted the popular unrest as an expression of discontent with Ubico personally, and did not expect his rule to suffer a similar fate (Schlesinger & Kinzer, 2005).

⁴¹ The October Revolution, as the movement was baptised after the armed forces revolt in October of the same year, has to be placed in the international context of World War II with all its talk of democracy and freedom, which made a generation of Guatemalans aware of the inequities existing in their own country. The ideas of the Revolution are said to have been profoundly inspired by Roosevelt's New Deal. (Schlesinger & Kinzer, 2005)

⁴² For more in-depth discussion of the content of the new constitution see Schlesinger and Kinzer (2005, pp. 29-33).

⁴³ When we consider that a large portion of the population ensure their subsistence mainly through small-scale farming, we can see that land distribution is a truly critical issue in Guatemala.

⁴⁴ Decree 900 stipulated that farms under 223 acres were not to be subject to any expropriation, nor would farms between 223 and 670 acres that were at least 2/3 cultivated. Farms any size that were fully cultivated were not to be expropriated at all (Schlesinger & Kinzer, 2005, pp.54-56).

⁴⁵ In *Bitter Fruit*, Schlesinger and Kinzer (2005) make an extensive overview and analysis of the US Administration's, the CIA's and the UFCo's respective roles in the preparation and execution of the 1954 coup that overthrew the Arbenz government.

⁴⁶ In his introduction to *Bitter Fruit* (Schlesinger & Kinzer, 2005), Coastworth argues, as do Schlesinger and Kinzer themselves, that among the factors that facilitated US involvement in the 1954 coup were the ample access that UFCo had to US government officials and decision makers. Indeed, among the American policymakers involved in planning the overthrow of the Arbenz government, only President Eisenhower himself had no direct family or business connections to UFCo (Coastworth, 2005).

⁴⁷ According to many analysts and historians, "what was at stake in Guatemala ... was less the imagined Soviet threat to the security of the United States than the historic U.S. threat to the sovereignty of Guatemala" (Coastworth, p. xiv).

⁴⁸ Translations of names of political parties, popular movements and groups, and guerrilla factions have been taken from the English language version of *Guatemala: Never Again* (ODHAG, 1999).

⁴⁹ Schlesinger and Kinzer (2005) asserted that Castillo Armas had been chosen by the CIA to lead the MLN in order to lend credibility to the American 'version' of events which fronted *Operation Success* as a domestic uprising (Schlesinger & Kinzer, 2005).

⁵⁰ Some of the movements which formed in the aftermath of the 1954 coup are *Acción Católica* (AC – Catholic Action), *Democracia Cristiana* (DC – Christian Democracy) and the *Ligas Campesinas* (LC – Peasant Leagues).

⁵¹ Indeed, many historians point out the fact that Guatemala's first guerrilla movement was devoid of ideology, especially a socialist or communist ideology, but was more an expression of discontent by an "extremely diverse group of disgruntled officers" (ODHAG, 1999, p.191).

⁵² See ODHAG (1998, p.269) for a more detailed look on the conditions included in this pact.

⁵³ Ríos Montt had been a presidential candidate in the 1974 elections in which he apparently won most votes. However, the Guatemalan Army's leadership considered that Montt – backed mostly by political moderates – was not the most suitable candidate and thus prevented him from taking power. In his place, Kjell Eugenio Laugerud García took the Presidency, and Ríos Montt was sent to Spain as an attaché of the Guatemalan government. (Schlesinger & Kinzer, 2005).

⁵⁴ The *judiciales* were civilians who supported the structures of military intelligence. In Rabinal, the people known as *judiciales* – described by Valle Cobar (2004) as "groups of thugs dressed in civilian clothes" (p.95) – were members of the death squads that terrorised much of the region during the internal armed conflict.

⁵⁵ See ODHAG (1998) and CEH (1999) for testimonies and analysis.

⁵⁶ For a more detailed analysis of the scorched-earth policy and other counter-insurgency methods implemented by the Army, see Chapter 8 – *Targeting the People* and Chapter 9 – *The Methodology of Horror* in ODHAG (1999, p.115-174). For testimonies from Rabinal to this effect, see MCRA (2003).

⁵⁷ Although the PAC were first established under Lucas García's rule, they were legalised through Ríos Montt's National Plan for Security and Development in 1982. All men between the ages of 19 and 60 were required to patrol in the PAC. The PAC proved to be an effective and cost-efficient method to control rural communities since the government did not provide patrollers with arms or compensate them in any way for their services (Valle Cobar, 2004). However, in 2002, former patrollers started to mobilise into a movement known as the 'ex-PAC' in order to demand compensation for the 'services they learnt to the state.'

⁵⁸ The URNG was created in 1982 in order to facilitate co-ordination of the four guerrilla organisations that still operated in Guatemala – the EGP, FAR, ORPA, and PGT (ODHAG, 1998). With the signing of the peace accords in 1996, the URNG became a legal political party upon demobilising. It continues to exist and will compete in national elections in 2007.

⁵⁹ From January 1994 to December 1996, several agreements were signed between the URNG and the government of Guatemala, among these were: the Comprehensive Accord on Human Rights (29 March 1994) and the Agreement on Resettlement of the Population Groups Uprooted by the Armed Conflict (17 July 1994); the Agreement on Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples was signed on 31 March 1995; and, finally, the Agreement on a Firm and Lasting Peace was signed on 29 December 1996. For a more detailed account of the peace process, see CEH (1999) and ODHAG (1998, 1999).

⁶⁰ As in other parts of the country, the policy of *congregación* applied by the Colonial regime was aimed at gathering the Maya population into *pueblos de indios* ("Indian villages") to replace traditional Maya settlement patterns which found people dispersed in mountainous, rural regions with very few urban areas (Lovell, 2000). The policy of *congregación* served a double-purpose for the Spanish authority: it was easier to control and rule over congregated populations, whose grouping in more centralised villages also favoured efforts to evangelise the Maya population. However, the Maya people expressed resistance to leaving the land where their ancestors had lived, where they could grow their traditional crops and where they seemed to be less affected by the various epidemics of illness that spread quickly through more urbanised populations. In fact, in many regions, 'congregated' populations kept returning to the mountains

to resettle the isolated areas they had previously occupied (Lovell, 2000). Despite the limited success in the implementation of *congregación*, its legacy lives on today as many of the *pueblos de indios* established in the early years of colonisation persist today as the *municipios* that divide the country's Highland departments.

⁶¹ The October Revolution of 1944 had a deep impact on popular mobilisation throughout Guatemala. The social mobilisation and associated processes that were initiated in the aftermath of the October Revolution were rooted in the secular exclusion and profound poverty endured by indigenous and peasant populations, which had largely been a result of abuses and mistreatments imposed on indigenous populations by the colonial regime as well as the ruling oligarchies of the 19th and 20th centuries (EAFG, 1997). Indeed, it was only with the rise to power of Arévalo's government that indigenous people throughout the country were finally liberated from forced labour.

⁶² Tomás Tecú Chiquito quickly became somewhat of a local legend because of his leadership in the peasant movement. Indeed, people in Rabinal still refer to Tomás Tecú Chiquito when speaking of the legacy of social mobilisation in Rabinal (see MCRA, 2003).

⁶³ The *Huella del Varón Rabinal Achí* can be translated to the "footstep of the gentleman Rabinal Achí," in reference to the folkloric character of the *Rabinal Achí*.

⁶⁴ They received a variety of training and courses on such topics as literacy, farming, detecting underground water sources and were expected to subsequently reproduce and transfer this training and knowledge in their own communities (Valle Cobar, 2004).

⁶⁵ As we will see in Chapter Four and Chapter Five, the Achí people's leadership role in the struggle for truth, justice and reparations of the harms caused by the war would continue to be an inspiration for indigenous communities across the country.

⁶⁶ For an in-depth look at the story of Río Negro during the 1970s and 1980s, see Tecú Osorio's (2002) book: *Memoria de las Massacres de Río Negro*.

⁶⁷ As we saw above, Achí men had been founding members of the FAR (EAFG, 1997; MCRA, 2003). Furthermore, according to several testimonies recollected by Valle Cobar (2004), the FAR had also enjoyed quite widespread support in Rabinal's Achí population during the 1960s. When members of the emerging guerrilla groups visited the region, groups of people would often gather to hear what they had to say.

⁶⁸ The presence and activities of various movements and organisations, especially the CUC and the EGP, also caused friction and conflict within Rabinal communities between community members who did or didn't support a particular organisation and/or its objectives and tactics. See Tecú Osorio (2002) for an overview of how this played out in Río Negro for example.

⁶⁹ See EAFG (1997), MCRA (2003), Tecú Osorio (2002) and Valle Cobar (2004) for a more complete exploration of the way political repression and violence played out in Rabinal in particular. See CEH (1999) and ODHAG (1998, 1999) for a more in-depth look at how these patterns of violence unfolded in the country as a whole.

⁷⁰ In one case outlined in *Oj K'aslik* (MCRA, 2003), a survivor explains how, after having assassinated her mother and father, her neighbour continued threatening her, even attending her parents' wake.

⁷¹ When speaking of this type of situation, people in Rabinal often affirm that the person was killed '*por envidia*' (because of jealousy or envy).

⁷² The EAFG (1997) and the MCRA (2003) mention a handful of massacres before this date, however, the Independence Day massacre is the incident most commonly cited when speaking of the beginning of the phase of 'massive repression' in Rabinal (CEH, 1999; ODHAG, 1998; Valle Cobar, 2004).

⁷³ It is difficult to establish a comprehensive list of massacres committed in the Rabinal region because of variations in how different studies classify and label which incidents consist of 'massacres.' For example, the MCRA (2003) considers that the assassination of five or more people at the same time and in the same place is a 'massacre' while incidents in which three or more people lost their life were classified as such in the REMHI project (ODHAG, 1998). Consequently, while Valle Cobar (2004) has listed 20 massacres

which occurred in Rabinal between August 1981 and March 1983, the MCRA (2003) lists 29 between March 1980 and September 1982. The minimum number of massacred cited anywhere is 16 (this figure was taken from a table in ODHAG [1999, p.142-143], which is specified as being incomplete). However, a survey of various sources (CEH, 1999; EAFG 1997; MCRA, 2003; OADHAG, 1998; Valle Cobar, 2004) reveals that over 30 different massacres have been documented in Rabinal between March of 1980 and April of 1983.

⁷⁴ As will be outlined in Chapter Five, the Maya Achí people of Rabinal have been among the most active in the search for truth and justice in Guatemala. Indeed, the determination and courage with which Jesús Tecú Osorio and other activists from Río Negro and Rabinal pushed for the trial of local patrollers involved in the massacre of their community was recognised with the Reebok International Human Rights Prize, awarded to Tecú in 1996. The subsequent publication of his book as well as speaking tours by him and other Río Negro activists in the United States, Canada and Europe has also brought international attention on the case of Río Negro.

⁷⁵ On the morning of 4 March 1980, two soldiers and an officer of the military police (PMA) arrived in the village to investigate the theft of food from the construction site of the Chixoy dam. Villagers of Río Negro who were present that day explained that drunken men from the neighbouring community of Cancún arrived and started to threaten the PMA, at which point he opened fire on people who had gathered in the church. The PMA officer and one of the soldiers managed to escape, but a group of men caught up to the PMA officer in the river and beat him to death. The other soldier, who had not managed to escape the church was later released. However, the soldiers' and PMA officer's weapons were never recovered, which provided the Army with the pretence for its future continued harassment of Río Negro villagers (EAFG, 1997; MCRA, 2003).

⁷⁶ Since the political repression and violence had until then been mainly targeted at men, the community had falsely assumed that it was safe for the women to stay in the community (Sanford, 2003).

⁷⁷ The use of rape and sexual violence during *La Violencia* in Rabinal will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

⁷⁸ It is mainly due to the survival of these 18 children that the events of 13 March 1982 have been so well documented. Indeed, some of these children – including Tecú – were the main material witnesses in the trial of three patrollers convicted for their role in the massacre, which resulted in their conviction in 1999. This case will also be touched upon briefly in Chapter Five.

⁷⁹ When speaking in terms of Rabinal, I use the word refugee as equivalent to 'internal refugee' or 'internally displaced' seeing as very few people from the *municipio* sought refuge internationally given the distance of the Mexican border – which was the main destination of international refugees from other regions of the country, namely from northern Quiché and the Ixil region.

⁸⁰ The villagers of Río Negro were the targets and the main victims in the 15 May 1982 massacre of Los Encuentros – which claimed between 85 and 95 lives – and the 14 September 1982 massacre of Agua Fria – in which at least 92 people were killed (EAFG, 1997; MCRA, 2003; Tecú Osorio, 2002).

⁸¹ A more detailed account of military repression undertaken against the population of Río Negro and of the rest of Rabinal will be undertaken later in this chapter.

⁸² While most refugees came down from the mountains within two to three years of having fled their communities (between 1983 and 1985), a few smaller groups of refugees who had fled to the mountains surrounding the reservoir of the Chixoy dam stayed in the mountains for up to five years (until 1987) (MCRA, 2003).

⁸³ Unlike many other parts of Guatemala, most internal refugees in Rabinal returned to their community of origin and not to model villages. However, two model villages had been settled in Rabinal: San Pablo and Pacux (where former inhabitants of Río Negro were resettled after their community was flooded by the hydroelectric project on the Chixoy River) (CEH, 1999) and other communities were 'modified' to ease military control, as was the case for the community of Chichupac, for example.

⁸⁴ Indeed, the first time I visited Pacux, I was struck by how different the settlement appeared from other villages in the area. Pacux, with its houses neatly aligned on small, parallel plots of land divided by grids of wide dirt roads resonates with military logic. It stands in stark contrast with typical rural villages, where scattered houses surrounded by their *milpa* (cornfield) are linked by various winding footpaths. The military detachment located at the entrance to Pacux was only decommissioned in 2003 after villagers from Pacux denounced being subjected to threats, harassment and abuses by soldiers stationed at the detachment (Rodríguez, 2003, March 9; Ixmatul, 2003, March 9).

⁸⁵ Guatemala has the regrettable distinction of being the first place where the expression 'to be disappeared' was used to describe a political condition: that of having been kidnapped by the state's security forces, which was usually followed by torture, assassination and burial in a clandestine grave (Green, 1999; Sanford, 2003).

⁸⁶ This is a figure given by the CEH in its *Guatemala Memoria del Silencio* report (1999), in its *Guatemala: Nunca Más* report, the ODHAG (1998) reports 422 documented massacres, admitting that that number is probably incomplete.

⁸⁷ Only one of the approximately two dozen massacres committed in Rabinal has been attributed to a guerrilla group (the EGP): the 4 February 1982 massacre in Xococ in which 5 people were killed (MCRA, 2003).

⁸⁸ In this case, the CEH (1999) defines the Guatemalan state as including the National Army, the PAC, the military commissioners, other security forces of the state, as well as paramilitary death squads.

⁸⁹ The ODHAG (1998) comes to similar conclusions in terms of responsibility for the violence and repression of the internal armed conflict, placing responsibility for 94% of the massacres it documented in the hands of the Army and paramilitaries. Furthermore, among the incidents documented of which responsibility is attributed, 90% is attributed to the Army and paramilitaries. In terms of numbers of victims of these incidents, only 0.07% can be attributed to guerrilla actions (ODHAG, 1999).

⁹⁰ See MCRA (2003) for a comparison between the testimony of Jesús Tecú Osorio, survivor of the Pak'oxom massacre and a description of the colonial-era violence inflicted on indigenous women and children related by Friar Bartolomé de Las Casas. Also see Lovell (1989), quoted in MCRA (2003).

⁹¹ Rabinal - 0.44%, Baja Verapaz - 2.5% (EAFG, 1997).

⁹² Paz (2006) has compiled the percentage of victims of the various human rights violations committed during the internal armed conflict according to their gender based on the CEH's *Memoria del Silencio* report. Men made up the majority of the victims of extrajudicial executions (77%), torture (77%), deprivation of freedom (79%) and forced disappearance (78%), while women suffered more deaths due to displacement (51%) and rape (99%). However, Paz (2006) also points out that, while investigating violations committed during the war, the CEH made no attempt to quantify the other specific forms of violence and violations which were mainly inflicted on women (forced union, sexual slavery, forced labour, and prostitution) – which speaks to how the concept of 'human rights' is perceived and defined.

⁹³ See MCRA (2003) for an account and analysis of sexual violence committed against women in Rabinal.

⁹⁴ See, for example: CEH (1999), EAFG (1997), Hastings (2002), MCRA (2003), ODHAG, 1998.

⁹⁵ Two of the women I interviewed told me they had been raped during the armed conflict. These two women as well as several others mentioned the fact that many women and girls had been raped by soldiers during massacres and while in refuge in the mountains. Green (1999) also mentions that none of the widows she worked with in the Chimaltenango region in the late 1980s spoke of experiencing rape, but did mention the rape of other women.

⁹⁶ Hastings (2002) challenges the notion that rape has been under-reported in Guatemala's armed conflict strictly because of a 'cultural stigma' attached to rape. Rather, she suggests that the fact that rape and sexual violence are absent in public testimonies about *La Violencia* is attributable to the 'de-politicisation' of rape by state authorities and to the nature of testimony in which "Women as a category emerge ... only as gendered victims rather than as political ones" (Hastings, 2002, p.1175).

⁹⁷ Because of the number of fractured pelvises that were found upon exhumation of the site of the Pak'oxom massacre, the forensic investigators concluded that most of the women had received extreme blows to the genital area; most of the women and girls were also found to have been buried naked from the waist down (Sanford, 2003).

⁹⁸ Also see Chapter IV in *Oj K'aslik* (MCRA, 2003), and especially the sub-section entitled "*Violencia Sexual Contra las Mujeres: Burlandose de su dignidad*" (Sexual Violence Against Women: Mocking their dignity)(pp.148-152).

⁹⁹ The CEH (1999) determined that "separating the victims by their gender, before committing the massacres, is an indication of the premeditation with which they proceeded, and it shows how, before the events, the destiny of the victims had been established by choosing the type of abuse to be performed according to their gender. Both men and women were executed extrajudicially; however, women were first subject to sexual violence" (p.30, quoted in Paz, 2006, p.127).

¹⁰⁰ During the massacre of Plan de Sánchez, on 18 July 1982, which claimed over 200 lives (the number of victims cited in different sources range between 226 (MCRA, 2003) and 268 (EAFG, 1997), women and girls were victims of systematic rape and sexual violence at the hands of their assailants before they were murdered: "First they took the young women out and locked them in a house. After, they threw grenades and machine-gunned the rest and once they were all dead, they took the young women out again and brought them to an edge up from the house and there, they raped, tortured and killed them. The ones who did this massacre are the judiciales and the army" (quoted in MCRA, 2003, p.240). One of the women I interviewed also spoke about what happened in Plan de Sánchez that day: "What they did then ... the young girls, well they say that they put them in a house and they raped them there. And after they put the young boys in a house as well, they separated the boys from the girls" (N-01).

¹⁰¹ Enloe (2000) has also described the use of rape as a form of torturing female prisoners in several countries.

¹⁰² See MCRA (2003, pp. 148-152) for other testimonies relating to the use of rape as a method of torture in Rabinal.

¹⁰³ Also see CEH (1999), MCRA (2003) and ODHAG (1998).

¹⁰⁴ See MCRA (2003) and ODHAG (1998, 1999) for testimonies that speak to this and more generally to the extreme conditions in which refugees lived in the mountains.

¹⁰⁵ In Guatemala, *susto* is understood as "the loss of the essential life force as a result of fright" and is associated to such symptoms as "depression; weakness; loss of appetite; restlessness; lack of interest in work, duties and personal hygiene; disturbing dreams; fatigue; diarrhea; and vomiting. If left untreated, the victim literally (though often slowly) wastes away." (Green, 1999, p.120-121).

¹⁰⁶ In Chapter 5 "The embodiment of violence: lived lives and social suffering" of *Fear as a Way of Life* (Green, 1999, pp.111-124), Green explores the various health problems, illnesses and 'folk illnesses' that have affected widows' lives since *La Violencia*, what she describes as: "the body bear[ing] witness to the violence perpetrated against not only individual women but the Mayan people, as their memories are sedimented into their bodies" (p.113).

¹⁰⁷ (A-01, B-01, C-01, H-01, J-01, K-01, L-01, M-01, O-01, R-01)

¹⁰⁸ See Paz y Paz Bailey (2006) for a more in-depth discussion of the few projects that have been initiated in Guatemala in an attempt to deal with the psychosocial and physical wellbeing of victims of war-time rape and sexual violence.

¹⁰⁹ I will further discuss the use of rape as a weapon of war in the context of ethnic conflict and genocide in Chapter Six.

¹¹⁰ For more on how the Guatemalan state included the systematic destruction of culturally significant artefacts, places and symbols in its campaign to eradicate the 'internal enemy' also see ODHAG (1998) Part 1, Chapter 3 "*La Agresión a la Comunidad*" (The Assault on Community) (pp.71-83).

¹¹¹ In fact, meetings of 2 or more people were made illegal by the Guatemalan government in 1983 (Green, 1999).

¹¹² Other manifestations of this subculture of socio-political disaster are the rise in fundamentalist religious groups, expressions of political desperation and social inhibition and individualization of survival strategies (Suazo, 2002).

¹¹³ While the PAC in some Rabinal communities were largely inoperative after 1984, in other communities, many returned refugees continued to be forced to patrol until the late 1980s. The PAC were only formally disbanded after the 1996 peace accords were signed. However, in June 2002, thousands of former patrollers mobilised in the state of Petén to demand compensation from the government for the 'services they rendered to the state during the armed conflict,' they have since been known as the 'ex-PAC' (Menocal, 2006).

¹¹⁴ As I will explore in Chapter Five, former patrollers, soldiers and paramilitaries have been behind many of the attacks and attempts to intimidate widows, survivors and victims who are involved in the search for truth, justice and *resarcimiento*.

¹¹⁵ In its study of massacres in the Rabinal area, the EAFG (1997) revealed that military commissioners in the area often raped women under threat of denouncing them as *guerrilleras* if they refused or denounced them. Also see MCRA (2003) and Valle Cobar (2004) for a historical look at military and paramilitary's power within Rabinal communities.

¹¹⁶ For instance, while in Rabinal, I was told of how some people in the community had enriched themselves by selling meat from animals that had been stolen during massacre in surrounding villages. Testimony to this effect also appears in Sanford (2003, p.246).

¹¹⁷ See Esparza (2005) and Suazo (2002), among others, for more on the psychological and social impacts of the continued militarisation of Maya communities.

¹¹⁸ APROFAM's 1978 survey establishes a fertility rate of 6.7 for indigenous women in Guatemala (Centro Centroamericano de Población, n.d.). In 1987, indigenous women in Guatemala had, on average, 6.8 children, by 2002, the fertility rate in indigenous women had gone down to 6.1 children. (PNUD, 2005, p.375).

¹¹⁹ The relative 'wealth' or 'poverty' of the widows I interviewed and their households before *La Violencia* obviously varies, some being more 'well-off' than others; however, it was beyond the scope of this thesis to attempt to quantify the comparative economic means of households before and after the internal armed conflict.

¹²⁰ Indeed, Green (1999) explains that even though there is no explicit cultural prohibition against women working in the fields, their domestic responsibilities, on which the rural subsistence livelihood is also dependent, are many: gathering firewood and fetching water, preparing food (tortillas), childcare, weaving, raising small animals, collecting plants, herbs and fruits. As a result of these many responsibilities, women have generally only worked the cornfields 'out of necessity' (p.16).

¹²¹ In many parts of rural Guatemala, women prepare food and *atol* (a staple beverage made from corn) to bring out to the men who are working in the fields, where they all eat together.

¹²² Green (1999) calculated that, in 1989, it would have cost widows between US\$10 to US\$15 in labour costs to hire men to plant enough maize for their families' subsistence (p.175). In comparison, a widow's average weekly income at the time was between US\$3 to US\$5.

¹²³ Doña Pedrina[1], among others, made reference to the 'sacred tortilla.' When speaking of having little or no food to give their children, many women would insist on the fact that they didn't even have 'a tortilla' to give them.

¹²⁴ Green (1999) explains that, as a result of an intensifying agrarian crisis starting in the 1950s, rural Maya households became increasingly reliant on cash and wage labour to maintain subsistence. The roots of this agrarian crisis can be found in the highly skewed pattern of land distribution and concentration, which,

combined with population growth, means that most campesino households do not have access to enough land to ensure their subsistence (Green, 1999).

¹²⁵ As Green (1999) notes: “wage labor, like subsistence labor, was also gendered. Men most often garnered cash from work on fincas or through commercial trade” (p.95). (*Fincas* – plantations)

¹²⁶ A *quintal* is equivalent to 100 pounds.

¹²⁷ Until 1987, the Guatemalan currency – the *quetzal* – was pegged to the U.S. dollar. Furthermore, a dramatic drop in export earnings was experienced in 1999 in Guatemala as a result of a decline in coffee and sugar prices – the country’s main exports – leading to currency devaluation (Holiday, 2000). Several other factors could have contributed to a perceived ‘inflation’ in prices at the local level, however, any further analysis of the economic and financial processes at play in this situation are beyond the scope of this thesis.

¹²⁸ At the 1989 exchanger rate (US\$1 to 3Q [Green, 1999]), 20Q would be worth approximately US\$6.66.

¹²⁹ For more in-depth descriptions of women’s life on a *finca* (plantation) see Burgos (1997) and Smith-Ayala (1991).

¹³⁰ *Maquilas* or *maquiladoras* are assembly plants that produce garments and other consumer goods destined for foreign markets (in Guatemala, generally the North American market).

¹³¹ In May 2007, one Canadian dollar was worth 7.14 Guatemala quetzals; at this exchange rate, 50Q would be worth approximately CAN\$7.

¹³² (A-01, B-01)

¹³³ (D-01, E-01, I-01, K-01)

¹³⁴ For more on women’s participation and mobilisation in GAM, CONAVIGUA and other victims’ and widows’ organisations, see Giles & Hyndman (2004), Paz (2006) and Schirmer (1993), among others.

¹³⁵ In Chapter Five, I will explore the multidimensionality of *resarcimiento* as it is used by organisation such as ADIVIMA. As we will see, *resarcimiento* includes notions of *dignificación* (return of dignity) of victims and survivors as well as material, economic, psychosocial, spiritual and cultural restitution.

¹³⁶ Many women repeated this at the end of the interview when I thanked them for having participated in my research project, explaining that they hoped that people ‘far away’ would now learn a bit more about what transpired in their community during *La Violencia*.

¹³⁷ See for example, Chapter 5 “From Violence to the Affirmation of Women” in Part One of *Guatemala: Nunca Más* (ODHAG, 1998).

¹³⁸ Literally translated, *Madre Guia* means ‘guide mother.’ The term refers to village women responsible for giving advice to mothers and families on topics ranging from health, first-aid, sanitation, nutrition and child-development. http://www.pubpol.duke.edu/centers/hlp/programs/fellows/emenotti/letters_home.html

¹³⁹ COCODE stands for *Consejo Comunitario de Desarrollo* (Community Development Council).

¹⁴⁰ This is similar to Schirmer’s (1993) findings in her research concerning the National Coordination of Widows of Guatemala (CONAVIGUA).

¹⁴¹ In her study of CONAVIGUA in Guatemala and CoMadres in El Salvador, Schirmer (1993) found that the new-found gender consciousness that women had gained through their mobilisation in victims’ and widows’ organisations had also translated to their daughters.

¹⁴² The experiences I witnessed in meetings at various levels in Rabinal, including municipal meetings at the ADIVIMA office, community meetings in other surrounding villages and a monthly meeting of the *Consejo Municipal de Desarrollo* (COMUDE – Municipal Development Council) would tend to confirm the limited participation of women in spaces that are more public or formal. Meetings at ADIVIMA were attended mainly by women and women seemed to participate and express themselves relatively freely, with little or no fear. However, at a COMUDE meeting in the town of Rabinal in May 2006, there were only

about ten women among the fifty people present. Although these meetings are supposed to serve for the public to voice their concerns and discuss community development issues, it did not seem like a very 'open' atmosphere. All presenters at the meeting were men (representatives of various organisations) and only two women in the whole meeting got up to ask a question or make a comment – incidentally when the representative of the Human Rights Solicitor was discussing municipal policies in relation to family and children's issues. The proceedings at the municipal meeting were conducted only in Spanish, to the difference of community meetings and ADIVIMA activities, which are generally conducted mostly in Achi or at least with translation.

¹⁴³ I use the Spanish word *resarcimiento* for lack of an appropriate translation in English. It nears the meaning of 'reparation,' 'restitution' and/or 'compensation.' However, in the Guatemalan context, in terms of the demands that victims and survivors are making on the state, *resarcimiento* is, as we will see in this chapter, much more comprehensive.

¹⁴⁴ I use the Spanish term *dignificación* here since there is no suitable equivalent in the English language. While one of the dimensions of *dignificación* is the 'return of dignity' to victims and their memory, it also includes the recognition of victims' and survivors' experiences and, by extension, the vindication of their names.

¹⁴⁵ Except for the last measure, these are the main measures of reparation that are contemplated by the PNR as a means of 'repairing' or 'compensating' for the damages caused to victims and survivors by the violence and human rights violations perpetrated during the internal armed conflict. However, despite its commitment and obligation to attend to all facets of *resarcimiento*, the Guatemalan state has so far only attended to economic restitution and only in a very limited manner. As I just mentioned, the PNR does not specifically include bringing perpetrators to justice as one of the measures of *resarcimiento* that it contemplates. However, this was one of the recommendations of both the CEH and the REMHI and it is thus central to the demands that are being made by widows' organisations (as well as various other victims'/survivors' and human rights organisations) throughout the country.

¹⁴⁶ In terms of the implementation of measures of restitution, the PNR (National Reparation Program) has defined the following levels for each reparation measure (i.e.- individual, collective and mixed [both individual and collective]): "Material restitution (mixed character); Economic indemnification (individual character); Psychosocial reparation and rehabilitation (mixed character); Dignifying of victims (mixed character); Cultural reparations (collective)" (Paz, 2006, pp.109-110).

¹⁴⁷ However, as will be further discussed in the following chapter, this does not absolve the Guatemalan state from keeping its commitments or from dealing with *resarcimiento* in an integral and comprehensive way on the national level.

¹⁴⁸ I gathered this from studying the Strategic Plans and Mission Statements of ADIVIMA, as well as through individual conversations and observation of activities at the office. The measures being advocated by ADIVIMA in order to achieve *resarcimiento* are also similar to the measures contemplated by the government's National Reparation Programme (PNR). These include material restitution (land and housing restitution, productive projects, etc.); economic indemnification; psychosocial reparation and rehabilitation (rehabilitation of people with disabilities, cultural recuperation, education, assistance to women victims of sexual violence, attention to disappeared youth, attention to seniors); *dignificación* (exemption from military service, day of dignity, diffusion and promotion of the CEH's report and recommendations, building museums and monuments, strengthening a culture of peace, proceeding with exhumations). See CONAVIGUA (2005) and Paz (2006).

¹⁴⁹ Even though I do not believe 'reparations' translates exactly the sense of *resarcimiento*, I am using this translation for the PNR as it is how Paz (2006) has translated the term in her study about the process of *resarcimiento* in Guatemala.

¹⁵⁰ Some of these clandestine cemeteries were 'mass' graves containing the bodies of dozens (sometimes hundreds) of massacre victims, while others are clandestine graves where one or a few individual victims were buried. As mentioned above, in the case where family, neighbours or other community members buried victims when (and often where) they found them, the location of the graves is often known because

they were marked with plants or features in the landscape. (This was explained to me by anthropologists and by ADIVIMA staff when I was present at some exhumations in March and April of 2006).

¹⁵¹ Emphasising the importance of exhumations and re-burials in their work, ADIVIMA was officially founded as an organisation on April 24, 1994, during the reburial of the 177 victims of the Río Negro massacre, despite the fact that many of its founding-members had been working as an 'association' for over a year.

¹⁵² The description of the proceedings of exhumations that I give here is based on information I gathered through various facets of my volunteer work with ADIVIMA. Through my work with ADIVIMA, I came to attend – or as the *compañeras* at ADIVIMA would have said, 'accompany' – the exhumation of three clandestine cemeteries / graves. I became familiar with many of the other steps in preparing for exhumations through conversations with widows and staff, but also through my own participation in these processes. Additional information pertaining to these processes – especially information related the legal and procedural details – has also been taken from secondary sources, namely from CONAVIGUA's (2005) publication on the topic: *Informe de Sistematización del Procesos Comunitario y Legal de las Exhumaciones*.

¹⁵³ The *Ministerio Público* is more or less the equivalent of the Public Prosecutor's Office in the Canadian legal system.

¹⁵⁴ This process includes: the recollection of testimonies from family members of the deceased and disappeared; gathering accompanying documents (birth certificates, certificates of residency, etc...) that attest to the existence of the person; securing the authorisation of the exhumation from the owners of the land where the grave is located (CONAVIGUA, 2005).

There have been significant issues in getting access to many of the documents mentioned here since many people lost all of their belongings during the war; especially in the case of people who were forcibly displaced or people whose houses were looted and/or burned down. Many children were also born without being registered in any government registry because of the ongoing conflict. In response to this issue, the Guatemalan government passed a law in April 2006 that would allow for these people to re-register and receive new documents, which are required in order to be eligible for *resarcimiento*. In order to disseminate information in relation to this new law, ADIVIMA held a series of workshops in Rabinal and the neighbouring *municipio* in May 2006, some of which I attended.

¹⁵⁵ See www.fafg.org/quees.php for more info on the FAFG.

¹⁵⁶ ECAP is an organisation that was founded in 1996 by psychologists to support psychosocial healing in the aftermath of political violence. It started as a pilot program in Rabinal before expanding to other regions affected by the internal armed conflict. Since 1997 it began collaborating with the FAFG in order to incorporate psychosocial healing and reparation into the exhumation process (Forced Migration, 2005).

¹⁵⁷ See CONAVIGUA (2005) for a more in-depth description of the legal and administrative processes of exhumations.

¹⁵⁸ These results and purposes of exhumations have been identified by REMHI, MINUGA, ECAP and the CEH, among others (see Forced Migration, 2005).

¹⁵⁹ The MCRA held its first temporary exhibit in a hall at the town Parish in February and March of 1999. Since 2001, it has been housed in a building of its own and has three permanent exhibits. The first exhibit is focused on Achí culture, traditions and the arts and crafts of the region. The second exhibit is about the internal armed conflict and includes pictures of victims from the Rabinal region, historical documents and explanatory panels. The third room holds an exhibit exploring rural indigenous women's daily lives based on pictures taken by girls in Rabinal's rural high schools. The Museum also houses a library and 'technological' centre with a collection of books, reports, articles and other resources on the history, culture and tradition of Rabinal and the Achí people, Internet and other computer-based resources which can be accessed by the community. An on-site screening room is also made available to community members and visitors to the Museum who wish to watch documentaries and videos on a variety of topics of regional and national interest.

¹⁶⁰ Approximately fifty people gathered in Pacux, a few kilometres outside of Rabinal, (where the Río Negro survivors were re-settled after their community was flooded as a result of the Chixoy hydroelectric project) at 5am to board the two pick-up trucks and two minibuses that were to take us about 45 minutes north of Rabinal where our walk began. Around 6:30am, we started to climb up the first of two mountains we would have to cross that morning. Around noon, five and a half hours later, we arrived at the site known as Pak'oxom.

Pak'oxom sits in the "V" between two mountaintops, about two-thirds of the way up the slope. It overlooks the former settlement of Río Negro (which now sits mostly underwater) as well as the new village, where 11 families have since resettled (approximately 250-300 other families, formerly of Río Negro, now live in Pacux).

Crosses paying homage to the victims placed by survivors shortly after the massacre still mark the location of the massacre and serve as a reminder of the horrible violence that was committed there. Plaques bearing the names of victims, candles, flowers and pine needles filled the site of the former clandestine cemetery. At sunset, a Maya spiritual ceremony began, with incense and candles. A ceremonial fire was lit, in which many offerings were made while the victims' names were recited. The ceremony kept on throughout most of the night, with people drifting in and out; and, at 3:30am, shortly after the various ceremonies were concluded, everyone had packed up their blankets, bottles of water and food and we were heading back up the mountain.

¹⁶¹ Since the cases were being processed at the local level – the crime of 'massacre' is not typified in Guatemalan law – the patrollers had been charged with the 'murder' of the only two victims whose remains had been positively identified upon exhumation. The guilty verdict and death sentence brought against the three patrollers in the first trial were subsequently overturned in an appeal due to "omissions, incongruencies, and contradictions" [sic] (Dill, 2005, p.330) in the written decision, which Dill (2005) attributes to the president of the first tribunal as having been "either incompetent or simply want[ing] to stay alive" (p.330).

¹⁶² For more details on the legal proceedings of the Pak'oxom case, as well as ADIVIMA's participation in it, see Dill (2005).

¹⁶³ Another international-level case that is presently in process is the case brought against Lucas Garcia and Ríos Montt for crimes against humanity and genocide in the Spanish penal system.

¹⁶⁴ The MCRA (2003) counts 226 victims of the Plan de Sánchez massacre while the EAFG (1997) affirms that there were 268 victims. For more on the Plan de Sánchez massacre, see pp.239-243 of MCRA (2003) and pp.180-204 of EAFG (1997).

¹⁶⁵ Despite the fact that the case brought before the IACHR only dealt with the Plan de Sánchez massacre and that the IACHR does not have jurisdiction to hear a case of genocide, in the ruling delivered on April 29, 2004, the presiding judges in the case never the less recognised that the Plan de Sánchez massacre was one of at least 626 massacres committed in the country and that this pattern of violence corresponds to acts of genocide committed against indigenous populations in Guatemala (CIDH, 2004, April 29).

¹⁶⁶ The Guatemalan state was ordered to pay US\$8 million in compensation for material and immaterial harms caused to surviving victims of the massacre. It was also ordered to carry out a public recognition of responsibility and formal apology; to conduct a full investigation into the events in order to identify, judge and convict the material and intellectual authors of the Plan de Sánchez massacre; publicly honour the memory of the victims; to ensure the upkeep of the chapel built in memory of the victims; to provide free access to the medical, psychological and psychiatric care needed for the rehabilitation of survivors; and to provide adequate housing to survivors living in Plan de Sánchez. The Guatemalan state is to provide for – in addition to regular government spending – the study and promotion of the Maya Achí culture in affected communities, providing qualified bilingual teachers, maintaining and improving transportation and water infrastructure, and set up a health centre in Plan de Sánchez. Furthermore, the IACHR ordered the Guatemalan state to publish, in both Spanish and Achí, the key sections of the American Convention on Human Rights, as well as the sentence emitted in the case, in the government's official bulletin and in at least one major national newspaper and to ensure their dissemination in the *municipio* of Rabinal. See Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos (2004, November 19) and Seijo (2005, July 18).

¹⁶⁷ See Suazo (2002).

¹⁶⁸ Since the Maya believe that the spirit of the dead occupies the place where their blood was spilled, people in Plan de Sánchez campaigned hard to have the site of the clandestine cemetery declared a legal cemetery where their loved ones could then be properly laid to rest (Sanford, 2003). Their demands were finally met and now a chapel stands at the site of the massacre honouring the memory of the victims.

¹⁶⁹ Public Defender's Office.

¹⁷⁰ See Paz (2006).

¹⁷¹ In Rabinal, the first payment made by the PNR to victims and survivors of the armed conflict was received 25 February 2006. Payments were made to 206 people at a ceremony marking the day of '*dignificación*' of the victims of the conflict, bringing the number of people having received economic reparations to 400 (in all of Guatemala) (González & Grave, 2006, February 26). In December 2004, the number of victims that over 250 000 people would qualify to receive *resarcimiento* (N.A., 2004, December 22).

¹⁷² ADIVIMA has however started some small-scale productive projects with widows through its Socio-economic program-branch.

¹⁷³ See Johnston (2005) for more information on the history of the Chixoy hydroelectric project, the impacts and damages caused to surrounding communities and the reparation measures that have been recommended by the Centre for Political Ecology in a study commissioned by the Río Negro Small-farmer Association, ASCRA.

¹⁷⁴ The creation and functioning of the PNR and its executive body, the *Comisión Nacional de Resarcimiento* (CNR – National Commission for Reparations) has been plagued with problems, including perceived political manipulation, ongoing restructuring, under-funding and complaints over the length of time it is taking for victims to actually receive payments (see Paz, 2006).

¹⁷⁵ In contrast with the slow progress being made in terms of payment of reparations to victims of the armed conflict, payment to the ex-PAC seems to be moving along quite quickly. For example, on 6 March, 2006, *Prensa Libre*, a national newspaper, reported that at least 106 200 ex-PAC had received the first instalment of their payment from the Guatemalan state, compared to only 400 victims and survivors less than two weeks prior (González, & Grave, 2006, February 26; González, 2006, March 6).

¹⁷⁶ (B-01, F-01, I-01, O-01)

¹⁷⁷ (F-01, G-01, I-01, K-01, R-01)

¹⁷⁸ Jacobs, Jacobson and Marchbank (2000) as well as Cockburn and Zarkov (2002) also refer to the 'masculinities' involved in armed conflict. They note, however, that pointing out the masculine nature of violent conflict does not imply that men are inherently violent. Rather, these characteristics of 'masculine expectations' are imposed by societies and reinforced by states that manipulate these expectations for their own political ends (El-Jack, 2003). While there can be a variety of definitions and characteristics of masculinity or, in fact, 'masculinities,' Cockburn (2004) and Nagel (1998) argue that at any time and place, there is an identifiable 'normative' or 'hegemonic' masculinity that sets the standard with which other masculinities compete or define themselves. In times of armed conflict and in the context of militarisation, this ideal and hegemonic masculinity is more likely to be aggressive and promote the use of violence (Cockburn, 2004; Nagel, 1998; Pankhurst, 2004; Skjelsbaek and Smith, 2001).

¹⁷⁹ See, among other, Turpin and Lorentzen (1996).

¹⁸⁰ El-Jack (2003) defines gender-based violence as "violence, sexual or otherwise, which plays on gender norms and gender exclusions to break people down both physically and psychologically" (p.16). While men are sometimes victims of this type of violence, women are overwhelmingly targeted. This violence can be translated into many expressions, including forced prostitution and sex work, increased trafficking of women (for prostitution or other types of slavery), and rape (El-Jack, 2003). Sexual and gender-based violence in all its forms – especially domestic violence – is not restricted to times of armed conflict, but is, in fact, common in most societies during peacetime. (See Sideris [2002b] an

interesting discussion concerning the links that can be made between wartime and peacetime rape and sexual violence.) However, it has time and again been observed that sexual violence in all its forms increases during wartime, which suggests a link between gender violence at the micro and macro levels (Turpin, 1998). Indeed, the fact that UN peacekeepers – who are trained to protect the rights of civilian populations – have been known to commit rape suggests for Turpin (1998) that sexual violence, including rape, is endemic to military culture.

¹⁸¹ When women and their bodies are understood as the ‘property’ of men and a symbol of their honour, the rape of women by enemy forces is also often manipulated for nationalist purposes in order to justify a further escalation of the conflict as a means to protect and/or defend ‘their’ women and to avenge the attack against their honour (Enloe, 2000).

¹⁸² As was mentioned above, Green (1999) explores the various health problems and ‘folk illnesses’ that have affected widows’ lives since *La Violencia*, in what she describes as: “the body bear[ing] witness to the violence perpetrated against not only individual women but the Mayan people, as their memories are sedimented into their bodies” (p.113). Green (1999) also argues that “illness related to political violence represents a refusal to break ties with the person who was killed or disappeared” which effectively “circumvents the goal of the disappearance or death” (p.117).

¹⁸³ See Cockburn (2007) for an analysis of women’s activism against war and militarism in several regions of the world, especially as it pertains to the Women in Black networks.

¹⁸⁴ See MCRA (2003) for a discussion of the historic structural violence that has been exerted against the Achí people at the Rabinal level.

¹⁸⁵ For a further discussion of the tradition of testimony in Latin American women’s movements, see Marín (1991).

¹⁸⁶ See also Bop (2002).

¹⁸⁷ On this topic, also see Bop (2002), Manchanda (2002).

¹⁸⁸ This is perhaps because only a few of the women I interviewed had remarried after having lost their husband during the war. Domestic violence was therefore not necessarily an issue of immediate impact for most of these women.

¹⁸⁹ Green (1999) also points out that the fact that, in the immediate aftermath of the Civil war, a large portion of the aid that came into many rural communities was directed at widows, thus creating yet another sources of conflict, resentment and divisions within communities, generally within widows and individuals and groups who were not direct victims of the internal armed conflict.

¹⁹⁰ See Suazo (2002) pp.62-67.

¹⁹¹ I do not know the exact circumstances of this case, however, this does seem like an exceptionally long time and could potentially warrant further investigation.

¹⁹² However, it is important to note that the IACHR does not possess any means to force the Guatemalan state to comply with the recommendations it makes in its rulings.

¹⁹³ See Dill (2005) for an in-depth analysis of the dynamics of international rights and local justice as it relates to the Pak’oxom trials.

¹⁹⁴ For a more detailed gendered analysis of the *resarcimiento* process in Guatemala, including an analysis of how women’s interests, issues and needs have or have not been taking into account in the process, see Paz (2006). Also see Pankhurst (2004) for a look at how the increased participation of women’s organisations in the peace process could help solve these problems (such as a lack of attention to women’s needs and a marginalisation of gender analysis, for example).

¹⁹⁵ Even though an official invitation to participate in the peace processes is sometimes extended to women’s organisations (as was the case in Somalia for example), cultural and social structures often effectively preclude women’s participation (Sorensen, 1998). Indeed, many theorists point out that women’s ability to participate in formal peace processes is impeded by traditional gender roles since

women are generally denied a public voice (Moser and Clark, 2001; Sorensen, 1999). However, when women are sufficiently mobilized during the struggle, they may demand (and receive) a seat at the negotiating table, as was the case in Guatemala (Luciak, 2001). However, while women's inclusion in official peace negotiations is a crucial first step, it is questionable that their superficial inclusion at the negotiating table is sufficient or will lead to real change, as is evident in critiques of the Guatemala peace process.

¹⁹⁶ The term 'positive peace' is in opposition to a definition of peace in negative terms, by what it is not, or by the simple absence of war.

¹⁹⁷ Structural violence: "violence exists whenever the potential development of an individual or group is held back by the conditions of a relationship, and in particular by the uneven distribution of power" (as defined by John Galtung, explained by Cockburn, 2001, p.17)

¹⁹⁸ See, among others, UNIFEM (2005), Luciak (2001) and Holiday (2000).

¹⁹⁹ The PAN (*Partido de Avanza Nacional* – National Advancement Party) was the ruling party at the time the peace accords were signed.

²⁰⁰ Indeed, Ross (2004) cites a former member of the 'opposition' as affirming that "What we negotiated was a cease-fire, rather than a peace ... the private sector won the war ... [It] will benefit from all of this foreign money as well as from the fact that they don't have to pay the military anymore" (p.76).

²⁰¹ Indeed, the 1999 referendum on a package of reforms necessary for the ratification and implementation of the peace accords did not manage to garner enough support to pass (Holiday, 2000).

²⁰² See Holiday (2000) for a more in-depth look at how other political entities were excluded from the negotiations between the URNG and PAN.

²⁰³ See Green (1999) Chapter 2 – The Altiplano: A History of Violence and Survival (pp.25-52) for an analysis of the impact that the internal armed conflict and capitalist development have had on Maya communities "as refuges from the outside world" (p.52).

²⁰⁴ Femicide is understood as the combination of "repeated and systematic violations to women's human rights and a state of misogynist violence against them, leading to aggressions, attacks, battering and hurt that culminate, in some cases, in cruel murders of women" (CALDH, 2005, p.11). This concept is based on, and contains the notions included in the more limited concept of femicide, which is understood as an "extreme expression of gender violence exercised by men against women and girls, naturalised in culture and tolerated by the State and society" (CALDH, 2005, p.10).

²⁰⁵ Norma Cruz (founder of *Fundación Sobrevivientes* a Guatemalan NGO that works on issues of violence against women), interviewed in *Killer's Paradise* (Portenier, 2006).

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Saint Mary's University

Certificate of Ethical Acceptability of Research Involving Human Subjects

This is to certify that the Research Ethics Board has examined the research proposal or other type of study submitted by:

Principal Investigator: DOIRON, Fabienne

Name of Research Project: Women's experience of armed civil conflict and its aftermath:
gender equity, development and peace in Guatemala's Western
Highlands

REB File Number: 05-082

and concludes that in all respects the proposed project meets appropriate standards of ethical acceptability and is in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement on the Conduct of Research Involving Humans.

Please note that for "ongoing research", approval is only effective for one year from the date approved. If your research project takes longer than one year to complete, submit Form #3 (Annual Report) to the REB at the end of the year and request an extension. You are also required to submit Form #5 (Completion of Research) upon completion of your research.

Date:

12 October 2005

Signature of REB Chair:

Dr. John Young