

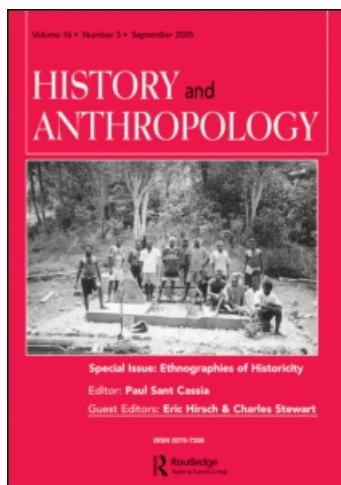
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# Mayan Cognition, Memory and Trauma

J. P. Linstroth\*

*The argument of this article is organized around the following general themes: understanding representational “exaggeration” for signifying indigenous others; assessing the differences for the social agency of recollection, especially in relation to lawyer-oriented depositions and researcher-oriented interviews; analysing the cognitive aspects of surviving the Guatemalan genocide and examining the cognition of discrimination among Mayan-immigrants in South Florida. Empirical data for this essay is based upon oral histories of three Mayan-immigrants currently living in Palm Beach County, Florida, and archival data from legal depositions in the 1980s and 1990s of five Mayan-immigrants in Martin County, Florida. Important aspects of this paper analyse the historical consequences of the Guatemalan Civil War during the 1980s and the role of social memory, episodic trauma, semantic trauma and the ontological effects of violence. In addition, notions of differing forms of time in relation to trauma are introduced as “synchronic trauma” and “diachronic trauma”.*

**Keywords:** *Mayan-Immigrants; Cognition; Genocide; Discrimination; Memory*

Crisanto Gómez had a house on the banks of the Xalbal River. He did not want to leave for the jungle—he wanted to stay home. When the soldiers came upon a camp of people in Xalbal, the people fled exactly in the direction of his house. But he did not flee. The soldiers went in pursuit of the people.

Seven people were killed in Kaibil: Crisanto, about thirty years old; his wife; his son Manuel, who was about twenty; Manuel’s wife and their baby; and two more of Crisanto’s children.

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He had a lime oven. They burned two people in it as it blazed; his daughter-in-law had her eight-day-old baby. They placed it on stones where the flames came out of the oven. The baby melted like oil on the stones. (Mayan eye witness account, massacre in Kaibil, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1982 cited Falla 1992: 135)

They wanted to exhume the dead. They wanted to locate and disinter those buried in mass graves by the army. Why? Because the victims had been “buried with their eyes wide open”. And neither they nor their kin would know peace until they were buried properly. “So that their eyes may close,” explained Miguel. (Farmer 2005: 4)

It is said that the bones of the dead tell no lies. In many cases, they speak on their own behalf, telling stories of pain, violence, and abuse. In Guatemala, every clandestine cemetery that is found, every bone that is recovered from Mother Earth speaks of the people who were annihilated, of the homes burned, of the indiscriminate massacres. In short, they speak of the crimes against humanity, of the genocide committed by the army against the indigenous population. (Menchú Tum 2004: 7)

## Introduction

At the outset, I should state I have been thinking about different aspects of this paper since 1991. In my pre-anthropology days, as a volunteer at a Mayan Service-centre in South Florida, mostly acting as a Spanish–English interpreter, I interviewed numerous Guatemalan–Maya refugees seeking political asylum in the United States. In addition I helped many Mayas with different activities, like acquiring social security cards or attending a health clinic. During this period, and volunteering for the centre, I spent several days translating depositions from Spanish into English in order for Mayan asylum-seekers to obtain permanent resident cards. Such translations were done on the spot as I listened for reasons why the United States Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) should grant particular Mayas asylum.<sup>1</sup> Once a deposition was finished from translation it was then sent on to an immigration lawyer who would process the claim for asylum with the INS in Miami, Florida. From these very personal accounts, I heard and can testify to numerous horrific tales of Guatemalan army patrols destroying villages, assassinating Maya villagers, torturing Maya men and women, and the army making people disappear during the night. Likewise there were stories of guerrilla atrocities—conducting raids, killing and torturing Mayas, recruiting Maya villagers, and conscripting Maya men to the guerrilla cause.

I heard tales of men and women who travelled on foot to seek refuge in the United States, or *El Norte*.<sup>2</sup> They sojourned from Guatemala through Mexico, and somehow crossed the border to the United States, some experiencing atrocities from *coyotes* or “border guides”, or from others in the border areas. In a seemingly miraculous feat, many of them made their way to Indiantown, Florida, because they heard it was a place for Indians (a namesake after the Seminole Indians who had moved away from the township long ago). Today, there are approximately 29,000 to 60,000 Guatemalan–Mayas living in Florida, a differential variation in demographic scale and size because of counting or miscounting Mayas as Hispanics (see Burns 2001; US Census Bureau 2000; Hiller *et al.* in press). (Even these numbers may be deceiving, as there may be as many as 100,000 or more Mayas in Florida.) Of these Maya populations who initially

moved to Indiantown in Martin County, Florida, the Mayas as a whole are more scattered in the area, and now are living and settling in many other areas nearby, especially in the cities of Jupiter, West Palm Beach and Lake Worth of Palm Beach County. Of the general *Guatemalteco* population living in the United States, it has also been estimated “more than 2.5 billion dollars” are being sent back annually to Guatemalan kin in Guatemala (Kahn 2006: 168). These are just some of the transnational dynamics of the Mayan Diaspora and as a result of the Guatemalan Civil War, especially during the 1980s (see Hiller in press for other dynamics).

The stories as sojourns of escape from the Guatemalan civil war in the 1980s still haunt me today. Unfortunately, I do not have these recorded documents, my own translated depositions from 1991, to review and discuss here. Even so, the testimonial accounts of depositions described below, excerpted from transcripts, and the memories excerpted from research interviews are similar to the very same stories I heard so long ago, and parallel my own work in 1991. What is more important is knowing most of these Maya asylum-seekers of 1991 successfully obtained their permanent residency to stay in the United States as told to me by the former director of the Mayan service-centre.

Why I begin with this anecdote is not simply to acknowledge my own sense of social justice. Rather, providing this background is meant to help contextualize a particular remark told to me by one of centre’s organizers, herself of Mayan origin and a political refugee. One day she said to me in between translating depositions for Mayan-refugees, and I will never forget this: “You know some of these stories are exaggerated ... They simply want to stay here in the United States”. At the time, I really did not know what to make of such a remark in any academic sense. I was aware that even if the stories “were somewhat exaggerated”, they were certainly very vivid and shocking, which mimicked other genocidal terror elsewhere. In fact, it was difficult for me to believe in 1991 “any” of the horrendous stories I was told could be exaggerated at all. They all seemed so real to me. Moreover, and most importantly, even if those stories were even partially true, the “truth” of genocide in Guatemala was overwhelming and beyond-beyond words.

How does one as a researcher come to terms with the idea of exaggeration in relation to testimonies, witness accounts and memory? To get to the nuances of these ideas, I take the notion of exaggeration as my point of departure for my discussion and analysis in this paper. What needs to be realized about Mayan asylum-seekers in the late 1980s and the early 1990s was the explicit denial of genocide happening in Guatemala at government levels. For example, the official line of the United States Department of State at that time was to downplay such narratives and testimonies of genocidal survival as mere “rumour”.<sup>3</sup> It may be the Mayan social worker at the Mayan service centre was mimicking the “official line” to ensure legitimacy to the process of Mayan asylum-seekers. Or we may recognize such discursive strategies as further repression, part of the strategies of structural violence adding to the horror of genocidal trauma for vulnerable populations such as the Mayas, and as part of what Paul Ricœur termed a “hermeneutics of suspicion” (cited Kearney 2004).<sup>4</sup> Or, perhaps and possibly more apt, she had no way of explaining indigenous collective memory forms. Perhaps too some

of the Maya peoples of various ethnic groups who came to the service-centre had not directly experienced violence. Yet their supposed fictional stories, which in my view were very real and genuine, cannot be discounted either—if only partially true or if embodying a partial truth, as mentioned above, this makes such accounts no less horrible. From my perspective, genuineness and truthfulness are not at issue compared to understanding how indigenous sorts of memories are distinct from Western ones, and also, importantly, coming to terms with the Mayan genocide and Mayan trauma.

It is only now, some seventeen years later, I think I can address this notion of “exaggeration” or even narrative “veracity” with more certainty and try to relate to what all of this means in a nuanced context from my own anthropological perspective. Aside from this, perhaps it was the Mayas themselves who understood their own stories and narratives in different ways than our own occidental perspective. To this extent, a so-called Mayan “exaggerated consciousness” of witness and stories from the Guatemalan Civil War, and there probably is no such thing, most likely is something else entirely.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, these are not only questions of remembering but are also ones of knowing and being or ontological associations.

For this reason, one impetus of this paper is a broader understanding of representational “exaggeration” in relation to the cognition of memory by examining different memory forms among Maya immigrants in South Florida. My approach will be to analyse the narratives of genocide-survival from Mayas taken during legal depositions in the 1980s, and the biographical-narratives of Mayas who were children during the genocide and escaped with their parents. In order to protect my Maya informants and the depositions of Mayas, I have purposely not discussed their particular ethnicity, township or region.<sup>6</sup> There is still fear of reprisal by civil-patrol vigilantism in Guatemala, and I do not want any linkages to these stories and these survivors. Of the legal depositions, I have chosen the narratives of three men and two women as the most apropos here, and interviews of two women and one man, altogether eight narratives. The latter narratives of these Maya biographers will also help to explain differing aspects of structural violence through discrimination.

Moreover, it must be firmly noted, it is my unassailable position not to deny any of the claims, testimonies and memories of these Mayas who gave their testimonies to seek asylum, or who related their memories to myself and my students about surviving genocide and experiencing racism. My problematizing of the idea of “exaggeration” is to formulate how to relate to different sorts of memories of violence and to make some distinctions between Western memory forms and non-Western ones.

I begin this paper in a general manner by addressing this notion of an exaggerated consciousness, especially in relation to indigenous peoples. Further, I will say something about how anthropology makes its object, which may be viewed as reflexivity of narrative analysis, as well as a post-positivistic consideration of biographical research, or what I call “methodological consciousness”. Such methodology questions lead me to other ones regarding cognition and memory in relation to trauma, and to some larger issues of cognition and structural violence in association with the immigrant experience, but particularly for political refugees like the Guatemalan-Mayas. Lastly, I wish to speak about the issue of cognition and time related to narrative studies and

these immigrant perspectives. In all, I try to develop some new ideas with regard to analysing and placing narratives of political refugees through multiple perspectives, especially how subjects may be misrepresented, and also how best to formulate a cognitive understanding of immigrant trauma. In historical terms, the legal depositions of five Mayas represent narratives taken in the 1980s and 1990s about the genocidal atrocities committed during *La Violencia* in Guatemala. The interviews are childhood memories of three Mayas, and are oral histories portraying remembered family histories of survival.

What should be clear about my own analytical perspective is its distinctiveness for examining Mayan cognition from linguistic perspectives of such well-known Mayanists as Eve Danziger (1996), among the Mopan, and John Watanabe (1983) among the Mam, for example. Furthermore, my approach here is distinctive from Wendy James (1997), who applies a subtle linguistic interpretation of fear among the Uduk refugees of African Sudan. Rather, and as I will discuss more fully below, mine is to dismantle the mentality of trauma of Mayan refugees through examining the cognition of memory from oral histories through depositions and interviews.<sup>7</sup> My views are likewise separate from those held by Norman Denzin (1989) of “interpretive biography”, wherein I allow for a cognitive representation of lives and memory. Furthermore, this article distinguishes itself from the scholarship of James Sexton’s (2001) *Joseño*—an edited account of a Mayan Indian’s diary, akin to other experimental ethnographic biographies—and Alan Burns’s (1993) *Maya in Exile*—a straightforward ethnography about the Mayas of Indiantown, Florida.

Whilst research gathering for this study derives in part from a methodological stance of open-ended interviewing, alongside ethnography, my interpretations of the empirical data is attempting to contextualize prisms of indigeneity from Mayan perspectives. Anthropological interpretations, more often than not, are Western representations of non-Western hermeneutics, but try to be as proximal to the latter as possible.<sup>8</sup> Thus, it is an anthropological awareness of the “other” which demarcates an anthropological biography more than a mere Western interpretative biographical account and those from other disciplinary perspectives. I therefore agree with Luisa Passerini’s (2001: 226) questioning proposition, when she declares: “In which ways do narratives contribute to or derive from conceptions of the continuity and discontinuity of history—not only the narratives by the interviewees, but our own narratives as researchers?” This essay is my attempt is to try to answer Passerini’s question, and equally to address the concerns of Maurice Bloch (1998: 3) by “re-examining” the role of memory in relation to differing forms of trauma, genocide and discrimination, and through an assessment of the more recent cognitive-theories of the anthropology of religion as appropriate to more secular conceptualizations.

### **Mayan Eyewitness Testimonies: Historically Contextualizing the Guatemalan Genocide**

*La Violencia* or the period of “Maya genocide” may be characterized as one of the worst in the twentieth century—where whole Mayan villages were burned and destroyed,

men, women and children massacred, and women viciously raped, and so many tales of untold atrocities. As a result, Mayan individuals and families began emigrating *en masse* from these war zones.<sup>9</sup> Most often those indigenous communities from the northwestern and northern parts of the country were caught in the middle between guerrilla paramilitaries and the Guatemalan army. And even more importantly, it is clear from the legal depositions below from the 1980s that both the guerrilla effort and the Guatemalan army were responsible for the genocide. While it is also true to state most of the extreme violence during the civil conflict in Guatemala in the 1980s was due to the military's punitive and indiscriminating acts, the guerrillas cannot be counted as blameless.<sup>10</sup>

Here are the stark numbers of *La Violencia* in Guatemala from the "Report of the Commission for Historical Clarification" (*Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico*, CEH, 1999).<sup>11</sup> According to CEH, there were at least 200,000 victims of political violence in Guatemala, either "killed" or "disappeared", the majority of whom were indigenous Mayas. Moreover, "state forces and related paramilitary groups were responsible for 93% of the violations" with the genocidal violence especially intense between 1978 and 1985 (CEH 1999).<sup>12</sup> The "Report of the Commission for Historical Clarification" also explains how at least "626 massacres" of Mayan villages may be attributed to the state forces of Guatemala.<sup>13</sup> The Guatemalan paramilitaries, those responsible for the majority of violence during the period of heightened genocide (1978–1985), carried out military operations by terrorizing and annihilating entire Mayan villages in the departments of Quiché, Huehuetenango, Chimaltenango, Alta and Baja Verapaz of rural Guatemala (CEH 1999).<sup>14</sup> To be more specific, it is important also to know which ethnic Mayan groups within these departments and regions in Guatemala were directly affected by *La Violencia*. For example, CEH was able to confirm indigenous peoples were tortured, killed and disappeared between 1978 and 1985 among the Kanjobal and Chuj Indians of the northern Huehuetenango department, the Ixil and K'iche' Indians in the Quiché department, and the Achi Indians in the Baja Verapaz department, and were viewed by the Guatemalan army as an "internal enemy" and as supporting the guerrillas and so-called insurgency.<sup>15</sup> While the CEH interviewed particular ethnic groups of Indians as noted above, other indigenous Mayas like the Mam and Q'eqchi' are known to have suffered horrendously as well in these campaigns of genocide and terror by the Guatemalan military. Moreover, and importantly, it should also be pointed out most indigenous peoples were affected by these military strategies, especially those indigenous groups living in the highland areas.

As Grandin (2004: 188–189) forcefully elucidates:

In Guatemala, the 1981–1982 genocide was surgically precise. Military analysts marked communities and regions according to colors. White spared those thought to have no rebel influence. Pink identified areas in which the insurgency had limited presence; suspected guerrillas and their supporters were to be killed but the communities left standing. Red gave no quarter; all were to be executed and villages razed.

As another author put it, the "devastation" "was massive" and "it went far beyond physical destruction and murder", whereby the Guatemalan state's objective was to obliterate the indigenous populations in the highland areas (Green 1999: 9). The

purpose of these “extensive massacres” was to completely decimate the Mayan populations in highland Guatemala under “scorched earth programs” of the army, one of the best trained at that time in Central America, with violence in disturbing and unprecedented proportions under the respective Guatemalan military regimes of General Fernando Romeo Lucas García (1978–1982) and General Efraín Ríos Montt (1982–1983), and continuing similar policies against the Mayas through the 1983–1986 regime of Óscar Humberto Mejía Victores (Loucky & Moors 2000: 3; Davis 1988: 6).

The result of the Guatemalan military’s scorched earth policy was mass exodus of Mayas from the country. On the CEH website, they explain the Mayan Diaspora as follows:

Estimates of the number of displaced persons vary from 500,000 to a million and a half people in the most intense period from 1981 to 1983, including those who were displaced internally and those who were obliged to seek refuge abroad. The variation in these figures reflects the changing nature of this displacement. About 150,000 people sought safety in Mexico. Almost a third of these settled in camps and were given refugee status by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (cited <http://shr.aaas.org/guatemala/ceh/report/english/conc1.html>)

Yet these are numbers and statistics; the testimonies below in my view make these tragic statistics very real and personal, as they are eyewitness accounts of genocide survival in Guatemala during the 1980s. They are representative legal depositions from those Mayan Indians who had arrived in South Florida in the mid-1980s and early 1990s and sought political asylum. In effect the following depositions may be considered to be historical documentation for witnessing genocide and the violence carried out both by the Guatemalan military and the guerrilla groups operating in Guatemala of that time. To protect their identities, the pseudonyms of Carlos, Victor, Ines, Felipe and Miriam are employed for this study. Their narratives were recorded in order to help these Guatemalan migrants in their asylum claims to stay in the United States and seek refuge from the civil war. Their accounts are different than those of Maria, Lorena and Sergio, the narrative biographies of interviewed informants, who were little children when their parents decided to flee Guatemala.

Specifically, the following five eyewitness accounts include those of two men who at the time of their witnessing events were in their mid-twenties to late-thirties. A third man’s eyewitness statement is derived from memories when he was a child at the time of his experiencing violence. There are also the depositions of two women, one of whom at the time of her ordeal was in her early teens, and the other at the time of hers in her late teens during the 1980s. All of their tales of remembering the civil war and experiencing the extreme and brutal carnage and mayhem may be seen as being representative of countless other Mayan eyewitness accounts of the Guatemalan genocide against the indigenous population, the primary target of both guerrillas and the Guatemalan military.

For all these reasons, we may begin to understand the problematics for what I call the “social agency for recollection” between lawyer-oriented depositions and researcher-oriented interviews. By “social agency”, I mean how lawyers and researchers in this case initiate “causal sequences of a particular type, that is, events caused by acts

of mind or will or intention rather than the mere concatenation of physical events” (Gell 1998: 16). What I mean to suggest are the different ways researchers and lawyers may be causative agents in forcing mnemonic processes of recollection in different ways. Both create different spaces for allowing memories to happen, to evoke trauma, whether the purpose is to capture testimony for legal asylum or whether to capture the biographical-narratives of refugees for the purpose of research.

As such, we may begin by asking the following questions: what types of memories are being produced here from the social agency of recollection? What effects do such recollection processes have upon the social agent (lawyer or researcher) as opposed to the interviewee (asylum seeker or subject), and in either case would it be necessary to exaggerate trauma? If such memories are really collective-indigenous memories, are these types of memory processes other than individualistically and Western-oriented ontologies? Do such memories of trauma have to be experienced individually to make them more real, or may stories of collective-trauma, that is, from surviving genocide as a group, make such memories and narratives just as poignant?

My attempt to answer these questions through the following analyses will be to assess the memories of Maya immigrant-survivors of *La Violencia* and then discuss the differentiation of everyday memories of discrimination. These are in essence different types of oral histories. It is, I hope, a useful interpretation, and will complement the evocative works of well-known researchers and a growing body of literature for describing these Maya-memories of violence and the history of the Guatemalan genocide. In particular, I am referring to the excellent works of Robert Carmack (1988), Victor Perera (1993), Ricardo Falla (1992), Elizabeth Oglesby (1995), Jennifer Schirmer (1998), Victor Montejo (1999), Linda Green (1999), Kay Warren (2000), James Sexton (2001), Charles Thompson (2001), Beatriz Manz (2002, 2004), Victoria Sanford (2003), Greg Grandin (2004), Daniel Wilkinson (2004) and Kristi Anne Stølen (2007). There are of course many others.

It is through excerpting the witness accounts of genocide we come to terms with the horrific aspects of Maya suffering from the voices of the Mayas themselves, whose narratives would otherwise be lost to history. To me, at least, the subsequent testimonies of these five Maya individuals speak for themselves. They are relived moments of horror and terror, and exemplar of archived testimonies, which were used for legal purposes of political asylum. More so, such oral histories exemplify *La Violencia* in the Guatemalan western-highlands of the 1980s and embody experiences of Mayas forced in exile. These are stories retold and far removed from their origins of happening. Such narratives therefore suggest how alternative forms of mnemonic recollection may happen and what social agencies are involved in their remembrance.

The following narratives are not presented in any chronological order or categorized according to ethnic grouping. The accounts have been excerpted, as partial oral histories from much longer testimonies, in order to provide a sample, however random, of historical survival from the *La Violencia* in Guatemala of the 1980s. All identifying information has also been excised from these oral histories, in the form of legal depositions, to ensure the anonymity of these survivors:

### Deposition: Carlos

I saw my mother and sisters and I think they all kept screaming. The women were only there for a short time, then they were sent back to \_\_\_\_\_. As they were sent back, my mother tried to come to me but the soldiers wouldn't let her. They hit her with their rifle butts and kicked her and she was forced to keep going...

Then they took us in front of the juzgado [military judge] and we saw what the other groups had already seen. I saw a lot of men from \_\_\_\_\_ and a few women, about sixty in all, who had all been tied up. Their hands were tied between their back and their feet were tied as well. They were all lying stomach down on the ground. Some were dead. Some were alive. I saw other men from \_\_\_\_\_ who were killing some of the group. They were hacking at their bodies with machetes. They were hitting them on the neck and the head. The blood was running everywhere like water. About half seemed to be dead. All of these people were surrounded by soldiers who were ordering other people from \_\_\_\_\_ to do the killing... I knew the faces of all of those who were killed, some of them were my father's relatives ... After three days the [Guatemalan military] soldiers left for \_\_\_\_\_. They [Guatemalan military] killed everybody there. They [Guatemalan military] gathered all the women and children together in a house and burnt them and the house down to the ground ...

### Deposition: Victor

But around 1980, everything changed. My uncle, \_\_\_\_\_, lived in \_\_\_\_\_. One night in 1980, armed men [guerrillas] came to his door and commanded them that he give them food. Then stores began to be robbed at night and those people went to more houses at night. We called these people the "men who came at night". They told everybody the same thing. They said they were too poor, that they were guerrillas who would take care of the soldiers ... things got worse with the guerrillas. They would come at night and go house to house in all the nearby villages— \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and others farther away—trying to persuade people to join them. They came to my house in \_\_\_\_\_, but I would see them or hear them at night because our house was located very near the main road going from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ and other villages and towns to the east in the Department of \_\_\_\_\_. Around that time I heard that some guerrillas had come to \_\_\_\_\_ at night and carried off three men I knew: \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_. When they did not come back that night, their families went looking for them the next morning. Eventually their bodies were located and two had been killed by machete. \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_'s arms were chopped off and they had been struck so hard in the neck that their heads were barely attached to their necks and body. I know because I went to their wakes that were held that night after they had been found ... When the soldiers [Guatemalan military] came to our area it was around 4:00 in the morning. I was sleeping but was awakened by loud, powerful sounds I had not heard before. I went outside and saw the soldiers passing by in trucks. A jeep carrying a big machine gun went by first, followed by five trucks and another jeep. It was easy to tell the difference between the soldiers and guerrillas because the soldiers wore camouflage uniforms and wore better boots and had Galil rifles... About a half hour later I began to hear gunfire. The shooting went on for a long time. We heard shots fired and people screaming ... There were men and women and children who had been killed, I knew them all. There were people dead in their doorways, bleeding. There were people who lay dead in their houses and in their fields. Three of my cousins had been killed ... The next day many of us began to dig graves. We dug holes all day on the land of the various family members who died. There was no celebration or service because everyone was too afraid. This happened in 1981, but I can't remember which month ...

**Deposition: Ines**

About four months later it happened to me ... I was out beyond the fields gathering food. I was bending over to pick up a bush when I was grabbed from behind by someone. Before I could do anything I had been pushed down on my back. I started to scream and a man put his hand on my mouth. I could barely breathe because he was so strong. He stuffed a scarf in my mouth so I couldn't scream any more. I saw there was more than one man. One of them grabbed my hands and another one tried to grab my head. The man who had grabbed me started to take his belt off. Then he undid pants and pushed them down and his shirt was loose. The man holding my arms was laughing. I was trying to scream but the man behind me was holding my head and keeping the scarf in my mouth and all along he was laughing. I saw that they were three soldiers. They were dressed in army uniforms that were camouflage; they all had guns; they had rifles and pistols. They looked like they were Spanish (Ladinos) men. They were talking to me but I didn't understand what they were saying. Two of them had moustaches and heavy sideburns.

While the first soldier was taking down his pants, the other soldier was yanking off my clothes. He put his hand inside my dress and grabbed my underwear and tore them off. The other soldier grabbed my wrapped skirt. He pulled off the tie and it the skirt fell underneath me. Then the first soldier raped me. He had a moustache and sideburns. While the first soldier was raping me they all were laughing. When the first soldier finished, the second soldier who had been holding my arms climbed on top of me. He didn't have as much facial hair as the first. The first soldier went and held down my arms. When they had me there on the ground I was shaking so much that they must have thought I was resisting them. They laughed at me. I did try to push them away but I realized there was nothing I could do because when they were on top of me they were so heavy ...

**Deposition: Felipe**

About the third or fourth month of the guerrilla's occupation, my father was still afraid even though he began to spend more time at home at night ... around that time the guerrillas must have decided to kill my father ... I was asleep one night when the door was broken down and many guerrillas burst into the house. I started to cry but couldn't do anything but stay in my bed, which was in the middle of a long room. My parents slept on one side of the room and my grandparents on the other side. When the guerrillas burst in it was hard to see since it was so dark and the only light came from flashlights they carried. It was so dark that I couldn't tell if they wore masks or not. They went over to my father's bed and started to beat him. I couldn't see it but I could hear them hitting him with their fists and I heard him crying ... I heard the guerrilla who was in charge telling the others to go get rope to tie us up ... they used one long rope to tie us all up so it took them a long time. I could see the light behind me while they tied my hands but I still couldn't see them. They took a rag they had brought and wrapped it tightly around my mouth and around my head ... when they finished with us they started to hit my father again. I could hear them hitting his face and his body; I could hear them kicking him with their boots. It seemed that my father was already hurt badly because his responses to their hitting him were weaker ... No one came to help us until it began to get light outside ... When our relative saw that we were tied up he ran to get a machete to untie us. He took the rags off our mouths and we asked him if he had seen my father ... Then my grandfather saw the boot marks of the guerrillas in the ground heading out to a field near our house. He started following the path and we ran behind him. He followed the path for about a half mile when he said, 'there he is'. We saw my father's body from a distance and ran to see if he was alive. We saw him, then, and we saw that his head had been cut off from his body and that his

body was badly beaten ... Someone went back to our house to get a sheet. My grandfather and the man who had found us put my father's body on the sheet and carried him back to our house ... That night we had the wake. Not very many people came because they were afraid ...

### Deposition: Miriam

Then, looking at me, he said, 'then we are going to take her'. I was terrified. I thought they were going to kill me ... the camp was located somewhere in the municipality of \_\_\_\_\_. The guerrillas there spoke many different [Mayan] languages. A \_\_\_\_\_ Indian and a man who spoke Spanish were the ones in charge. Most were dressed in green uniforms. The others wore civilian clothes ... The women guerrillas ordered me and the other women who cooked to do different things. I always knew I was a prisoner. There were always guards around the camp and they kept a close watch on us ... then things got even worse. One morning one of the other cooks, whose name was \_\_\_\_\_, and I were walking together to the place where we went to the latrine. It was about one hundred meters outside the camp ... This time, one of the guards grabbed \_\_\_\_\_ and pulled her aside. I heard \_\_\_\_\_ say to me, "be careful". Before I could do anything I felt something coming close to me and it was the other guard who had come up behind me. He grabbed me by my upper arm and spun me around and pushed me down with him on top of me. He got up on his knees and ripped off my blouse and pushed the waist of my skirt up. I didn't have any panties. I was trying to push him away and I was screaming when he put his hand over my mouth and said to me, "if you're going to scream, I can say that you are running away and I can kill you". He also said angrily if I told anyone what he was doing he would kill me. He was very mad. I stopped screaming and I tried to push him away but I couldn't because he was so strong. My arms were caught between him on top of me and my chest and I couldn't push him away. Then he raped me.

As soon as he was finished with me, the only thing I could think about was to get away from him and the other guard as fast as I could. I ran towards the camp, trying to hold the ripped blouse together. I looked behind me as I ran and could only see the guard who raped me watching me ... About two weeks later I was raped again. I had to go to the latrine area alone in the afternoon. There were two different guards there. Before I could go to the bathroom one of them grabbed me from behind by my hair and pulled me down on my back. The same guard pulled my hands over my head and pinned them to the ground as the other guard came in front of me, flipped my skirt up and raped me. They didn't say anything ...

It is evident from these very vivid accounts of absolute horror—killings by the Guatemalan military and paramilitaries, killings by the guerrillas, rapes by the military and rapes by the guerrillas—that they provide narratives for defending the right to gain legal asylum. Yet beyond the functional purpose of these recollections, they are mnemonically directed testimonies of recognition. In these cases, the social agency of recollecting has been directed through legal evidence-production, thereby forming an epistemic legalistic-framework. More significantly, these oral histories in the form of depositions are all representations of surviving genocidal trauma.

The idea of representation is key here, for it is suggestive of causative agency outside the individual's own memory processes wherein others such as lawyers create mnemonic happenings through the deposition process. Additionally, is it possible such epistemic mechanisms misrepresent indigenous others as fragmented and partial

accounts? Does the lawyer as a social agent reinforce different sorts of mnemonic processes? As these are accounts out of situ, taken in the United States, and out of context in Guatemala, does their de-contextualization provide another type of memory? As legalized productions for creating narratives, does the legal format exacerbate trauma in distinctive ways as opposed to an open-ended, biographical interview?

This next section will address such questions in terms of understanding representation and exaggeration in association with Indian “others”. Such issues as will be evident are noteworthy to the history of anthropology and the conceptualization of indigeneity.

### **(Mis)Representing Indian “Others” and Exaggeration**

By returning to the idea of “exaggeration” as noted in the introduction, especially in association with biographical ethnography of Mayan immigrants in South Florida, it is important to ask how indigenous others are represented or even misrepresented by texts within anthropological literature. Such notions are discussed to varying degrees by several authors, underlining the significance of Indians in relation to colonial contexts, as biographical fabrications of Indian lives, or even questioning the veracity of Mayan testimonials and their meaning. Addressing how to represent Indian others, and asking why some aspects of indigeneity are exaggerated from separable contexts, equally demonstrates a continuing need for both caution and sensitivity over the anthropological portrayal of indigenous peoples. The need to ask reflexive questions and to emphasize varying controversies of Indianness is all the more significant in discussing how to represent Mayan Indians and their personal histories of trauma as will be evident below.

Authors who have studied general characteristics of anthropological biography, such as Langness & Frank (1981: 50–51), enquire about certain aspects of “reliability” by way of enhancing the research experience through observation, cross-checking with other participants about information, and through repetitive interrogation techniques in order to verify informants’ viewpoints. In contrast, my underpinning argument here is to understand the greater philosophical question regarding how anthropology makes its object in biographical ethnography. Moreover, in terms of the notion of exaggeration, which as I understand it is transforming an event, a happening, a circumstance into something more than its original representation, and in the negative sense to alter happenings in such a way as to fit one’s own circumstances and/or needs through elaboration of hearsay about events for personal recognition or gain.

Issues of exaggeration and representation have been widely discussed in the literature. The dispute between Marshall Sahlins and Gananath Obeyesekere is one of the most well-known and recent examples. It is centred upon historical issues of social interpretation and the authority of essentialization through a hermeneutics of the “Other”: specifically whether or not ancient Hawaiians transformed Captain James Cook into a god before his demise in the Hawaiian Islands in the eighteenth century; whether so-called natives possessed “practical rationality”; and/or are products of colonial fantasy; and/or whether ancient Hawaiians may be compared to modern-day

Melanesians from contacts with whites; and/or by imposing upon Hawaiians a South Asian colonial experience (Sahlins 1995; Obeyesekere 1997). In as much as the Sahlins versus Obeyesekere dispute highlights the dilemmas of exaggeration, so too we should be mindful of framing the notion of exaggeration as multilayered and polyvalent, as it is fragmented through different prisms of representing Indian others.

Notions of exaggeration are evident in Michael Taussig's (1987) evocative work about the history of the Putumayo region of Colombia. Particularly, Taussig describes how Huitoto Indians were attacked, exploited, and largely terrorized by the rubber barons and their cohorts in exaggerating and fabricating accounts of savagery and cannibalism. As Taussig explains:

the importance of this colonial work of fabulation extends beyond the nightmarish quality of its contents. Its truly crucial feature lies in the way it creates an uncertain reality out of fiction, giving shape and voice to the formless form of the reality in which an unstable interplay of truth and illusion becomes a phantasmic social force. (1987: 121)

Through such exaggeration, the rubber boomers of the Putumayo became purveyors of their own fear and hatred, thereby justifying their own brutal actions from fantasies of their imagination.

Such historical accounting of exaggeration and its devastating effects upon Indian others is not unique. Another example is the biographical ethnography by Theodora Kroeber (1969), *Ishi in Two Worlds*. Theodora was wife of the prominent American anthropologist, Alfred Louis Kroeber (1876–1960), who until his death held a professorship at the University of California at Berkeley. Theodora's book about Ishi's life, the last of the Yahi people in California, depicts Ishi's survival prior to encountering Whites, his encounter with Alfred Kroeber, and subsequently Ishi's living at the university museum in Berkeley until Ishi's demise in 1916 due to tuberculosis. The fact that Ishi was housed at the university museum I think explains how he was regarded by his caretakers as a living object, an oddity rather than a person, a curio for anthropologists, faculty, students and university visitors alike, all of which has been carefully researched by anthropologist, Orin Starn (2004). It is ironic and tragic to realize only now are anthropologists and other researchers questioning Theodora's account of Ishi's biographical history. Prior to Starn's critique and for many, Ishi's biography represented the "archetypal story of hatred and genocide" of all Native Americans and "because it seemed to confirm the new politically correct common sense about white guilt and Indian innocence in frontier history" (Starn 2004: 98–99). According to Starn (2004: 99) and his estimation of Theodora Kroeber's work, numerous inaccuracies and exaggerations about Ishi created more interesting reading for the public, such as he was the last survivor of a singular ethnic-group.

Such tales of exaggeration are relegated to the imagination "of" Indians "by" others, but as depictions are not ascribed to the consciousness of Indians themselves. For the latter, I turn to the controversy surrounding the Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Rigoberta Menchú Tum, particularly the anthropological debate about her story of surviving Guatemala's devastating civil war. Menchú's life story was transcribed and written by the French ethnologist of Venezuelan origin, Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, resulting in the

popular book, *I, Rigoberta Menchú* (Burgos-Debray 1984). In questioning Menchú's account, the anthropologist David Stoll found, through his own research, the circumstances surrounding her survival of the civil war to be factually inaccurate, publishing his own book, *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* (1999). The publication of Stoll's book stirred enormous debate amongst Guatemalan academics and anthropologists of Latin America, resulting in Arturo Arias's (2001) edited volume, *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy*, aside from other critical articles.

Rather than try to understand the many falsehoods in Stoll's own ethnography, media outlets in the United States, Spain and Latin America took Stoll's work at face value, thereby exacerbating the academic controversy to such a degree as to question whether the Nobel Prize committee should revoke Menchú's Nobel award. Hyperbole from the negative press aside, Burgos-Debray's account of Menchú and Menchú's Nobel Peace Prize as a whole brought worldwide attention to the Guatemalan genocide. *I, Rigoberta Menchú* is exemplar as a representation of oppressed peoples everywhere, as much as Frantz Fanon's (1963) *The Wretched of the Earth*. Menchú's biography has been promoted to teach students at secondary school and university levels about subaltern peoples by giving people like the Mayas voice through multicultural curricula.

As anthropologist Beatriz Manz (2004: 9) argues, Stoll's critique and reasoning is faulty by underestimating "the ways in which memory may change over time and the reasons why peasants may not trust a stranger". Such a comment stems from the fact that Stoll interviewed Mayas in Guatemala ten years after "the guerrilla insurgency was near collapse", and his reckoning of events according to many academics tends to oversimplify the views of the Mayan populace during the civil war (Manz 2004: 9). Furthermore, Stoll leaves out information about the United States government as a complicit actor and its involvement in the Guatemalan civil war with the larger project of containment of communism in Central America during the Cold War period. Excluding these hegemonic processes and the people caught up in them equally excludes how the "genocidal military" in Guatemala was able to carry out what it did on a large scale (Manz 2004: 10). According to Arturo Arias (2001: 4–5) "human rights organizations and the army itself often spoke of the destruction of more than 450 Maya villages, more than a hundred thousand deaths, and more than a million refugees". As Mary Louise Pratt states, part of the rejection of the Menchú book stemmed from conservatives who wished to exclude subaltern texts in the higher education classroom and maintain "the predominance of classical and northern European philosophical materials" (2001: 32).

Such views raise the issue of the purpose of a "testimonial", or in Spanish *testimonio*. The need to take Menchú's story literally and to place on it Western values I think is at odds regarding the criticisms upheld by David Stoll (Pratt 2001: 42–43). A testimonial is not the same as, say, a legal testimony, nor should selectivity be considered to be "deviant", nor is it autobiography in any strict sense (Pratt 2001: 43).<sup>16</sup> By contrast, Kay Warren (2001: 201) explains that "realist modes of representation" are illusory since they purport to represent the world without interpretation, whereas *testimonios* use metaphors as an act of witnessing and through this type of accounting "gain their powerful narrative". In the Menchú biography, Elisabeth Burgos-Debray is the

interlocutor of Menchú's worldview and that of the Western activist. Such an exposé, as Warren acknowledges, Menchú could not have written herself. Moreover, the writing style epitomized in the book, *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, is expressive of a Western genre wholly unfamiliar to Maya people. Mayas know other forms of expression such as "mythohistories, surreal narratives, formal oratory, divining rituals, festival theater, and abstract social critique" (Warren 2001: 202).

Therefore, as scholars we must be careful to navigate the dialogue between the West and non-West and the inherent inequalities between subjects as objects. The Guatemalan/Mayan anthropologist, Victor Montejo (1999: 13) declares, "As Mayas we find it hard to deal with the academic world, because if we tell the 'experts' what is Mayan, they are reluctant to listen". The idea of exaggeration is as much a fiction how academics represent Indians as it is how accounts of Indians by government officials and non-government organization (NGO) workers interpret testimonials, especially of Guatemalan asylum seekers.

### **Biographical and Collective Memory and the Problem of Exaggeration**

Part of my claim in this essay is to suggest the role of memory itself may be considered to be a collective object, wherein the collective sharing of memories by indigenous peoples about atrocities committed against them as individual persons or against their people as a whole become one and the same. This also somewhat explains how biographical accounts of memory are blurred with collective and social memory, wherein the individual is less significant in memory terms in relation to the group. To regard memory in this fashion makes it easier to understand why a caseworker in a Mayan service-agency might suggest some of the Mayan testimonials are exaggerated and is generally a misinterpretation of memory and trauma. (At least this is one version other than conforming to governmental views in the late 1980s and early 1990s.)

Similarly, Maurice Bloch (1998: 85; 120–121), in recounting parallel circumstances to the Guatemalan civil war, tells how Zafimaniry villagers of Madagascar, particularly those memories from his adoptive family, shared in the tragedy of the "anti-colonial revolt of 1947 when the French army probably killed at least 80,000 people". What is remarkable about this sequence of recollection is how the children could recall for Bloch in great detail hiding in the forest without ever having lived the experience or even having been born when the events had taken place. Prominent in their discussion, both young and old family members used the "we pronoun" as if all shared in the experiences (Bloch 1998: 120). Not only does this demonstrate how memory is distributed and shared but also how it becomes a collective experience, as one lived by the entire group. Such sharing of memories I think provides an analogue for the Maya sharing experiences of fellow villagers or fellow Maya from the same language grouping in the "we" sense. Hence, if Maya accounts were exaggerated in any way, and if not individually experienced in the autobiographical sense, such atrocities of the civil war were certainly known in the "we" sense as a group. Such civil war narratives of survival are horrific and so unspeakable that even if partially true make them no less terrible by the fact of being partially true at all.

Such memory-imagery, in this case genocidal images from the Guatemalan civil war, I suggest following Paul Ricoeur (2004: 7) also become the image of experience even if not directly experienced by the individual. What I am asserting here is something more, the image of memory knowledge, or (and it can be) cultural transmission, for the group as a whole may become the real experience and not necessarily based upon actual recollections. Rather, it is something, which can be shared because it happened to the group. Such a depiction, I argue, may help to explain why an individual might exaggerate their own witness experiences by recollecting vivid images about the group's trauma experiences. This in essence is moving beyond what Ricoeur claims for the "memory-image". And like Bloch (1998), I believe memory may be identified with the history of a group, its associated kinship relations, and language-grouping adherences aside from material forms like dress within a societal framework. These are social terms and not strictly memory ones associated with recollection.

This understanding also diverges from the "collective memory of the family" through Maurice Halbwach's (1941) conceptions, but addresses a people, a society and neighbouring villages sharing in collective trauma or experiences rather than individually lived memories or bearing individual witness to particular events. These are social perceptions of the group without having to have real memories of occurrences from actual witness-experiences. Rather, such memories are really oral histories of trauma for the group. Such memory sharing in my sense, and I think that of Bloch, is related to discursive practices of oral narrative and what cultural transmission signifies for a group. In my interpretation, following Bloch's lead, is how memory does not have to be witnessed to be shared or, rather, be exactly the same for collective members, but is something known to be true for the collective. What is done to the collective by outside forces becomes part of the "we" experiences, whether they are actually autobiographically experienced or not.

Indigenous memories as those of the Mayas of my experience tend to include not only individual narratives of trauma and survival but also incorporate narratives of village atrocities, friends and neighbours. They also represent indigenous forms of knowledge and knowledge production. We memories in the indigenous sense also incorporate other biographical histories into personal memory narratives. Such plural remembering are narrative elisions between individuals and collectives as well as incorporating different value systems.

Generally speaking, and first and foremost, memory forms may be selective and never may be complete in relation to events and happenings. Secondly, whilst memory also transforms over time, and when comparing the memories of two or more individuals concerning their relationship to a specific time and/or an event, such recollections are apt to be individualistic and different. Thirdly, and by contrast, memory too may be shaped by cultural factors, and thereby narrative memories of pasts may be fashioned and reformulated through discursive practices whilst aiding in their preservation. For all of these reasons, we can never say for certain how collective memory is distinguishable from individual memory in relation to epistemological and ontological production of cultural transmission, especially in indigenous contexts as those of the Maya.

Moreover, researchers may not know how subjects are selecting particular memories, unless of course subjects relate why they do so. The limitations of this type of biographical enquiry are obviously many. If several informants are chosen based upon a category, such as ethnicity, and if research subjects are unrelated through kin, either affinally or consanguineally, the possibility of knowing how specific memories relate to one another are limited between individual informants. Ways of knowing become nuanced through intergenerational recollections of family members and recollections of events in the ethnographic sense for understanding specific happenings via different clans, neighbours, villagers and so forth. Of course, the objective of a biographical ethnographic enquiry may exclude interrelated categories of subjects in ascertaining how a collective imagines its shared awareness by interviewing complete strangers. All such divergent guidance and perspectives in relation to the research object have varying focal outputs for the final analysis of social enquiry and knowledge production and reproduction.

Adding to this there is the legal-orientation of the deposition in this study for asylum, or agency of forced recollection, specifically for the purposes of protection and refuge. These are recollection happenings for the real salvation of lives through political asylum. Yet in terms of hermeneutics by analysing transcripts as texts, how are depositions distinct from research interviews? (Perhaps implicit in the former the answer is a fear of being deported, and the latter less so if subjects are legal residents.) But if the interviews are based upon subjects recalling childhood memories, and other subjects recall memories for legal purposes in the deposition, does this in fact mean there are greater chances of narrative exaggeration in either case? There are no easy answers here, because it is extremely difficult in either case to prove recollection accuracies and influences. Above all, when discussing genocide such hermeneutical considerations are really beside the point.

As such, different perspectives about methodological enquiry within the subfield of biographical ethnography therefore may present a kaleidoscope of varying possibilities and philosophical predicaments associated with the montage of research experience and analysis of narrative memory. Notwithstanding, Johannes Fabian maps out other uncertainties concerning these issues and research practices. His detailed study of philosophical issues related to memory, language, time and history are appreciable contributions to anthropology. Fabian's (2007) recent collection of essays in *Memory Against Culture* is a poignant reminder of his scholarly acumen. Pointing out why "collective memory" does not necessarily have to be public memory and may be kept secret is recognizing there are different types of memory, all the more apropos if we apply such memory forms to closed societies like the Maya Indians of Guatemala (Fabian 2007: 97). Such distinctions between collectives and publics allow for memory to happen in different imagined spaces. These two types of memory necessitate a differentiation of methodological approach in order to disentangle divergent forms of remembrance.

Another noteworthy example within Fabian's work is his examination of memory selection by maintaining "in socio-cultural and historical studies of memory we would have to identify agency, that is, practices of selection" (2007: 97). Yet some of his

passages in the same analysis tend to be more sweeping than others when he states: “the assumption is that traumatic pertains to bad memories. But could salience and tenacity not also be attributes of good memories?” (Fabian 2007: 98). In making such a claim about the persistence of memory, no one would deny that surviving a massacre, or a concentration camp during the Holocaust, or remaining alive from the destruction of Hiroshima, and/or forced migration because of warring factions, are traumatic memories for individual survivors. To this degree it is unclear to me how he is defining such a proposition by disagreeing with the traumatic, or for example disagreeing with a psychiatrist about a pathological condition. Good and bad memories persist, but in different ways, I would argue, and as I will explain below may be persistent through certain cognitive factors as well. Even so, by pointing to the concept of *Erinnerungskultur*, or a “culture of memory”, the need for societies to remember and to purposefully commemorate and create circumstances of active remembrance resonates from his wealth of ideas in the genre of short-essay format (Fabian 2007: 102–103).

### Cognition and Trauma

While Fabians’s notions of memory and history are highly engaging, he fails to mention the likes of Scott Atran (2002), Maurice Bloch (1998), Pascal Boyer (1990, 2001), Dan Sperber (1996), Harvey Whitehouse (1995; 2000; 2004) or Tim Ingold (2000), among others, with the regard to the cognition of remembrance.<sup>17</sup> Generally speaking, Fabian tends to be dismissive of cognition and cognitive anthropology, and oversimplifies in believing cognitive analyses as ineffectual for the social sciences and anthropology. He states, “‘purely’ cognitive memory, I take it, is not researchable except clinically through nonverbal indicators or experiments” (Fabian 2007: 93). This is a bit misleading, since Maurice Bloch in his writings has tried to answer such a problem in his book, *How We Think They Think* (1998). It is this new literature within cognitive anthropology that I find important for my own enquiry of Mayan trauma. Useful for my purposes in interpreting the trauma suffered by political refugees such as the Guatemala/Maya of South Florida is Whitehouse’s (1995; 2000; 2004) theory of “divergent modes of religiosity” and to an extent the work of Boyer (1990). By elaborating upon Whitehouse’s model of the imagistic or episodic mode, and demonstrating why it is practical for secular purposes and not simply sacral ones, especially as a means of understanding memory and violence, provides a template for understanding immigrant trauma as a whole. Episodic memories from different violent events are only part of the trauma suffered by immigrant groups. As I will explain below, other insidious aspects of memory trauma include long-term suffering through notions of discrimination, or “structural violence”, and as such form another type of memory, or semantic memories.

There are also several writers who have dialogued with psychology and psychological approaches in a cross-disciplinary manner with anthropology in recent years to explain trauma.<sup>18</sup> For an analysis of distress and suffering through an interdisciplinary dialogue between psychology and anthropology, the work of Antonius Robben stands out, especially his edited book with Marcelo Suárez-Orozco, *Cultures Under Siege*

(2000), and his latest book, *Political Violence and Trauma in Argentina* (2005). In the first book and collection of essays in *Cultures Under Siege*, the contributors search for a cross-disciplinary dialogue between psychology and anthropology by analysing empirical evidence from Argentina, Bombay, Israel/Palestine, the former Yugoslavia, US immigrant groups, Greek/Turkish relations and Turkish women in order to explain different facets of psychological trauma. Among the essays significant for my purposes here is Carola Suárez-Orozco's essay, "Identities Under Siege" (2000), especially its focus on immigrant trauma. Her essay encapsulates distinctive stories of immigrant suffering, from the ordeals and stresses of forced migration to uneasy adjustments of assimilation in the United States, and meaningfully the perspectives of child immigrants from various ethnic groups, Mexican, Chinese, Haitian, Dominican and Central American. As Suárez-Orozco (2000: 199) asserts: "children are quickly forced to contend with the host society more intensely than their parents". Sometimes immigrant parents, according to Suárez-Orozco, neglect their children's education because of the stress of employment, and in some cases immigrant parents are forced to leave their children with caretakers when migrating to another country—both situations exemplify different stresses placed upon children (2000: 198–200). Additionally, as she explains (2000: 205–208), immigrants have experienced "structural violence and social exclusion" because of increasing patterns of social segregation and unfair labour practices. She states that "some minorities are targeted for 'psychological disparagement'. They become the object of symbolic violence which stereotypes them as innately inferior (lazier, prone to crime, and so forth)" (Suárez-Orozco 2000: 210–211). Such negative consequences of structural violence are also mirrored in children, what the author calls, "social mirroring", whereby the harmful stereotyping from society, the media, educators and the larger society are mirrored through the reflections of immigrant children as "shame", "self-doubt" and "low-aspirations" (Suárez-Orozco 2000: 211–214). Such views are noteworthy and valuable for research on immigration.

To another degree, Robben (2005) explores the devastating effects of suffering inflicted on Argentine society from the years leading to the "Dirty Wars" (1976–1983), and the subsequent effects political violence has for the Argentine population. What is remarkable about Robben's work is his conceptualization of trauma, which he views as being interconnected through multiple levels of violence, and not solely as a process of violence begetting violence but how prolonged trauma has led to more violence (2005: 344). His approach is to examine historical factors, which have devastating consequences for Argentine society, while also explaining the negative effects of trauma as a causal reason in creating the most unspeakable brutalities.

It is my contention not to diminish the excellent interdisciplinary considerations of Robben, or for that matter Suárez-Orozco, but to ask as researchers how we might further understand social trauma by examining models of cognition derived from recent anthropological studies of religion. From my perspective, such a new line of enquiry may help us to better engage with notions of memory and trauma of immigrant populations, especially political refugees or those who have experienced forced migration from their homelands. To examine these theoretical relationships, I derive my own model for the cognition of trauma from the works of Boyer (1990) and

Whitehouse (1995; 2000; 2004), both cognitive anthropologists. In assessing such a theoretical claim, it is my belief we must first ascertain why such a model of memory is helpful and how it may enhance a conceptualization of immigrant trauma.

Simply put, we may begin with the question: what is memory? As Boyer (1990: 16) explains, there are several fallacious assumptions about human memory, which need to be dispelled in order to comprehend how it operates at different levels. One assumption is that “human memory is considered as a storage mechanism which is more or less under people’s control” (Boyer 1990: 16). However, having this notion for memory does not make it true. According to Boyer (1990: 16) “an elementary fact of psychology is that most memory processes are out of the user’s control; the latter’s ability to modify or improve the storage capacity or fidelity only concerns a very small portion of what they actually remember”. Contrary to popular belief, moreover, “there is no *direct* relationship between wanting to remember something and actually succeeding in recalling it” (1990: 16). People have a tendency to forget. Often what is remembered is trivial and sometimes what is forgotten is more crucial to a given person. The fact that people have good reasons to forget certain things and remember others, it does not make the intention of remembering versus actual recollection any less true (Boyer 1990: 16). In other words, no direct correlation can be made about wanting to recall and actually remembering. Disposition, acquisition and retention are quite distinctive conceptions.

Second, we may distinguish between different memory forms. There is a distinction in psychology, for example, between memories and knowledge. The former may be expressed as “episodic” whereby “memory is supposed to store events as such, i.e. with some indication of their location” (Boyer 1990: 43). By contrast, knowledge acquisition or cultural transmission of knowledge, is considered to be “semantic”. It is “memory” that “contains representations which are not linked to a particular context” (Boyer 1990: 43). The question is how do people represent world-views through episodic and semantic shifts, and how are these transformations further conceptualized from deductive and inductive reasoning? (Boyer 1990: 43–44).

In this essay, I argue how such distinctions are useful in comprehending the devastating effects of trauma wreaked upon the Guatemalan-Maya population of South Florida, as victims of violence, as political refugees and as survivors of Guatemala’s genocidal civil war in the 1980s. For example, a further nuanced approach is necessary to distinguish between episodic trauma or traumatic memories experienced by witnessing violence, and being forced to migrate because of the threat of violence. Such episodic memories of trauma are distinct from general patterns of semantic understanding of discrimination with its conceptual antecedents in the colonial experiences with the *Ladino* (non-Indian) population in Guatemala.

Let me further elaborate my argument by taking into account Whitehouse’s (1995; 2000; 2004) conceptualization of religion and his model, he calls “divergent modes of religiosity”, or DMR for short.<sup>19</sup> Whitehouse bases his religious theory on fieldwork (1987–1989) in Melanesia, and specifically in New Britain, a large island off Papua New Guinea. He developed his theory after studying the varying ritual and religio-aspects of *Pomio Kivung* in East New Britain, a highly-influential and politico-religious movement with splinter groups (Whitehouse 1995: 1–7). To analyse the varying ritual and

religio-aspects of *Pomio Kivung*, Whitehouse (1995: 197) understood religion as operating through systems of indoctrination or the “doctrinal mode”, and by periodic and traumatic forms of experience or what he calls the “imagistic mode” (Laidlaw 2004: 6–7). Whitehouse (1995) realized the politico-religious movement embodied both doctrinal and imagistic modes of religious transmission. In terms of religious practice, religio-experience is built upon repeated forms of recalling certain texts, and memorizing religious teachings in a semantic manner or through prescribed doctrine. Religious practice also may be heightened through infrequent practices of traumatic experience, such as circumcision rites for young boys to pass from adolescence to manhood or by stimulating trance states through ecstatic forms of religio-experience. These latter religious experiences become part of the imagistic repertoire of adhering to religious beliefs by the intensity of these experiences.

Such religio-distinctions from cognitive anthropology and directly related to Whitehouse’s (1995; 2000; 2004) studies, I argue, can be transferred to a more comprehensive view of memory acquisition in association with political refugees like the Guatemalan-Mayas. Returning to episodic and semantic forms of experiential and epistemological memories, and in light of Whitehouse’s (1995; 2000; 2004) and Boyer’s (1990) theorizing about cognition and memory, I contend can be applied to the episodic forms of trauma memory among political refugees as well as to semantic forms of symbolic violence against immigrant groups. To repeat: “episodic memory refers to mental representations of personally experienced events, conceptualized as unique episodes in one’s life. Semantic memory refers to mental representations of a general, propositional nature” (Whitehouse 2004: 5).

In the following section of this essay, I will describe why episodic memory forms apply to the trauma of migration and violence against the Guatemala-Maya. In general, by categorizing the trauma of remembering episodes of migration and the violence from the Guatemalan civil war as episodic periods in informant lives is hardly controversial. Perhaps more interesting is why such events are poignantly remembered and not forgotten. It is therefore salient to ask what are the cognitive processes that make traumatic memory memorable? Such memories, with their post-traumatic stress baggage, are known in psychological circles as “‘flashbulb memory’ (FM)—a term originally coined by Roger Brown and James Kulik (1977) to describe a type of episodic memory in which images of photograph-like vividness are ‘printed’ in memory, apparently due (at least in part) to the unique and emotional character of the event” (Whitehouse 2004: 106).<sup>20</sup> Such events that make “flashbulb memories” so unique and create such an emotional response that the individual is able to recall, on many occasions, vivid memories from events in question and exact details “specifying the location of the event, the action sequence, who was involved (e.g. as news bearer), the type of intensity of arousal (in self and others), and the aftermath” (Whitehouse 2004: 106).<sup>21</sup>

By characterizing the memories of my Maya informants, Maria, Lorena and Sergio, and those oral histories from the legal depositions, as having both episodic and flashbulb memory qualities for recalling events related in their life stories of migration from Guatemala and to specific episodes of violence surrounding the civil war period and genocide, dramatically illustrates why such events are remembered and the specific

cognitive processes that make such memories so vivid. Already, above, we have examined the episodic memories of genocidal violence and rape, as experienced through the narratives of Carlos, Victor, Ines, Felipe and Miriam in the form of legal depositions and problematized the mnemonic processes as part of social agencies for recollections, whether through lawyer-oriented mnemonic processes or researcher-oriented ones. Adding to our dilemma of characterizing such memories below will be to elaborate how childhood memories are, on the one hand, certain types of memories and collective memories on the other, or a bit of both, and thereby how individuals become socially informed of their memory repertoire through varying social processes. The childhood memories of violence for the three interviewees may be the episodic and traumatic memories of their parents' generation, or even grandparent generations, and of the collective group (kin, neighbours, nearby villagers). These are not memories in isolation of solitary individuals but are collective ones, and are probably part of familial stories. We may also ask: if childhood memories of trauma are taught, do these in fact form separable sorts of episodic memories than direct witness-accounts? It may be there are some residual memories from childhood, and there may be those reinforced through the parents' narratives. Hence, from my perspective, it is not solely important to recognize post-traumatic stress disorder in informants, but also to identify those cognitive processes which make such memories memorable and, moreover, how they define immigrant lives through collective and social experiences.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, it is one of my theses here that all political refugees who have suffered some form of forced migration, or have experienced and/or witnessed violence, have these sorts of flashbulb memories, without assuming an equivalency of imprint for everyone or for every cultural group. For the most part, though, such episodic memories may be part of collective memories of vivid recollection for groups who have experienced such trauma, and thereby become meta-narratives of episodic trauma with all sorts of negative repercussion for individuals. Equally, it is my contention that many immigrant groups like Guatemalan-Mayas suffer from everyday violence in the form of discrimination, and that these types of memories are related to in different ways than episodic forms. In the following sections, I analyse these different memory forms through the narratives of my Mayan informants, from biographical research-interviews and their life experiences as survivors of genocide, and as persons who have experienced discrimination as immigrants first hand.

### **Mayan Narratives and the Cognition of Remembering Genocide**

The practicality of employing Whitehouse's (2004) model of the "imagistic mode of religiosity" for secular trauma exemplifies how surviving a genocide produces imagistic narratives based upon a heightened emotional state and the highly-aroused mental state of individuals who are witness to trauma, while also demonstrating the cognitive faculties involved for imprinting such memories. Traumatic recollections of escaping genocide are similar, in cognitive patterning but not in kind, to recollection processes for engaging in traumatic ritual activities like circumcision, scarification, and other bodily-mutilating rites (Whitehouse 2004: 70–72).

Each of the individuals in the discussion below—Maria, Lorena and Sergio—have suffered from childhood memories of violence done to their villages and families in Guatemala.<sup>23</sup> All of the interviewees were in their late-twenties and early-thirties at the time of their interviews. They were all well educated, and two of them had university level degrees. All of them also worked for a Mayan service-agency at the time of the interviews, and were legal residents in the United States. Indeed, such memories may, in fact, reflect the memories of their parents more so than having remembered from childhood such memories of these experiences. To put it simply, the following recollections may be those of their parents and their familial stories of trauma. These may be taught episodic memories as well as having some episodic qualities for each of these individuals.

Maria, for example, has very detailed memories of her village being destroyed and other villages being burnt by the army. She recalls a harrowing tale of escaping the army with her family and the members of her village needing to hide as a result of being accused of collaboration with the guerrillas. Her memories of this devastating horror and genocide are quite stark:

### **Interview: Maria**

We [Maya at the Mayan Non-Profit Organization and Maya who come to the Mayan Non-Profit Organization] are a lot here that have very ugly memories, very difficult, and many lost their family, my uncle was killed, they killed him, it was a war that existed between the army and the guerrilla, and he was killed in that time, and later my aunt was killed in '89, still so, more or less it is calm [the situation] a little bit but the fear its always present of not being able to express ourselves, the good thing is that in this country you can say whatever, look, you can say something about the government, that is the good thing about this country but not over there, so, as I say that I remember that all the stories that we have lived in the mountains, many families, children dead in the mountains, they get sick because there is no medicine, no food, the only chance is to wait, when a child got sick they remained [dead] in the mountains and my aldea [village], like other aldeas, they burnt everything, for example my aldea, it was on Sunday, like flea market right, where there are a lot of people, and suddenly the soldiers arrived with their weapons to kill everybody like animals and they burnt the market, they put fire, they disappeared all that, like many other aldeas, in Mexico you call them colonias [villages] right, but every colonia has several habitants right, that is the way how many people died, that more or less we have the list but there might be more, there might be more, and sometimes the army filled the houses with children and people and ignited the house and all were burned, I have some documents, and also a video, and it has been like that, so, for that, I see that all our people who are here are here because of consequence of the war, that is why they are here, and others don't want to go back to Guatemala because the fear is still present, more when you lost your family, one always keep that fear, it is like a trauma ...

**Interviewer:** You mentioned that you left when the war started in the 80s, could you tell me a story about it and how old were you?

**Maria:** I was eleven years old, no, ten I was, so, yes, in that age is when we went to the mountains, we had to look for refuge in the cuevas [caves], and where we didn't have food, that was, and there was another family that wanted, they came with us but later they wanted to go back to their house and what happened, their house, the army was already

there and the army got them, they didn't kill them but they were tortured because the woman was raped and the husband was tortured, and in front of the husband the woman was raped, inside a river, so, like five years ago the man died because of the golpes [beatings] that he received by the soldiers, the woman is already there but the sad thing that I saw in the mountains is that you can't do anything, the children got sick and also because there was no food, mother were breast feeding their children but there were no vitamins, no food, how can you give breast to your children, So there were several children who died and were buried and until now perhaps nobody has gone to get the bodies...

**Interviewer:** How long did you stay in the mountains?

**Maria:** Two months, then we could escape because when we were in the mountains the guerrilla men helped us to escape from the army but later the guerrilla didn't want that us to leave from there because if somebody leaves from that group and somebody would catch them the others die, because if the army notices that there is a group hiding they kill everybody, that's why they say that you cannot escape, but my father said that we cannot wait two months more here, we have to go, but when we moved to another mountain, and when we found the other mountain we escaped, all together walking, my father, my mom, my little brothers, and that is how we came to Chiapas, we didn't know what happened with the people who stayed over there, in the mountains, ((very soft)) ...

**Interviewer:** Could you explain to me why they burnt the aldeas [villages]?

**Maria:** Because they thought that we were with the guerrilla, they thought we were all guerrilla men, like always, the government always blamed the guerrilla, they don't know what they are doing, that's what they [the government] always said, they always blamed us, and in reality it is not like that, the highest percentage of damages were done by the government and the army, many soldiers were forced to, many not, and the government looked up from a strategy saying that within the families people are killing each other, that was a lie because they [the government] brought many youngsters of fifteen, seventeen to twenty years old forced by the army to kill their own family, they [the government] used that strategy right...

All was about to be covered-up, but they [the government] were the ones who were committing the massacres, more than the guerrilla, the guerrilla yes they did in part, but it was less, and they started good, they organized it good, for the human rights, but when many members from Cuba, Nicaragua arrived, they kind of changed their way of thinking from what they were in the beginning, it is like make a meeting right now and suddenly somebody shows up, that is not okay because they said, why don't you do this, what don't you organize this way, and the others are just following what they are saying right, and that is not the right path, the thing that happened is that the guerrilla organized them, actually they were not guerrilla men, they were only organizations, the thing is that the government of Lucas, before Rios Montt, started to take out the land from them and it started to own big lands in Guatemala, the rich people wanted to be richer and the poor remains poorer, there were poor people who had their own land, the ones who had a lot, they [government] took it out from them, so, that is how many Mayan communities organized them, well, it is not okay what the government is doing because they took out land which is from our grandparents, and ancestors, and it is like this because our ancestors 200 to 500 years, they always lived there, so when the government arrives they start to take out everything, you see, that is how it happened and that's why these people organized, so the government didn't like it anymore right, because they want to keep everything, so they started to organize their army, and asked help from this country, because this country also sent a lot of money to massacre the people, but of course I can imagine that the government presented it very differently, so, that is how, but yes, many others took another way, that's why there

were many dead people too, but they were bad armies and government, that sent people to massacre, it didn't matter which side you was because you die...

It is quite clear from Maria's story how much she and her family suffered during this period and because of the Guatemalan civil war and their forced migration from the country. There is also a "we" quality to Maria's narrative as happening to us as a people, and by including other Mayan villages into her narrative, as well as those villagers her family encountered during her family forced migration, it embodies the imagistic mode of cognitive trauma.

Following Maria's narrative, there is Lorena's story, which is similar. However, Lorena recalls how her mother had to lie about her father by reinventing him as a drunkard to disguise his whereabouts and protect him. There is also Lorena's recollection of yawning and hitting out at a soldier, and Lorena remembering her uncle's death. Yet such a memory of his death and its vividness do not imply one of a two-year-old, as she was at the time, but perhaps a story repeated to her by her family members:

### **Interview: Lorena**

My parents happened to be educators, they did a lot of community work adult literacy, because of that, especially my father he was very involved in that, and because of his role in that he was persecuted by the Guatemalan army and he was an internal refugee for about three years in Guatemala itself, and since they couldn't get my father, many family members were attacked along the way, I have a cousin who was disappeared meaning that one day he just didn't show up, and this was around the same time the army was in the town and we never heard of him again, and one uncle who was killed and our house was burnt, so all of these different things were done to intimidate the whole family, so my father had to come and show up to rescue us type of thing, and but I think the defining moment as to when my parents decided that we had to leave was after my uncle was killed, a few months, I think it was a couple of months later the army, at this time we were living with my grandmother because our house was burnt, the army showed up and they did a raid around the house, looking for my father everywhere, including under the beds, I remember I was sleeping and there was a connecting window frame between our room and my grandmother and my cousin's rooms, and this guy this soldier came in and took all the covers off while I was sleeping, and I remember I pretended to yawn just to punch him in his face because I don't know who this person was, but I also remember you know, again they were interrogating my mom, where was my father, why wasn't he there that he was definitely hiding something and that he was guilty if he wasn't around, and my mom mentioned that she was no longer with him that she had been separated for three years, and that he was a drunk, he was no good, and he wasn't there for his children ...

Well actually I do do, simply basically my memories are kind of selective, there are certain things that I don't recall, I don't remember ever meeting my grandfather because he passed away of cancer, but I was two years old, I have no recollections of him [grandfather], so it is like I've never met [him], but the memories I do have are those when my uncle was killed, his body was brought by the military themselves, to the house, in a coffin, and I just remember everybody's reaction, my grandmothers reaction, she was hyperventilating, she had a nervous breakdown, my aunt the same thing, and my mom you know just being the calm individual that she is, just trying to get all the facts, trying to calm everyone down from the kids to her own children, her nieces and nephews, her sister and mother and all of that, and I remember the coffin scene quite well, because my mom, I remember her

saying, I don't believe that he was killed a week ago because his limbs still are very flexible, she picked up his arms and moved them around and she picked up his head and the blood is still running, and it does not make any sense, but that's my mom, she would just, before getting all the emotional stuff, she would just, she is just more analytical or practical, just wanting to get the facts, once she has all that she will go to her own quarter and breakdown, but she wanted to make sure that we were all safe and understood the situation, I remember because simply you don't see that everyday a coffin coming to your house and an adult moving all the limbs, that was one memory ...

While Lorena does not explain how as a two-year-old she could possibly have such vivid memories of these tragic experiences, Sergio is more articulate about pointing out such distinctions. He tells how his traumatic memories are those of the witness accounts of his parents, which are related to him. Here he points to these parental recollections in his narrative:

### **Interview: Sergio**

I left Guatemala at the age of three. I do remember leaving the village where I was born—San [village name], I do remember leaving in the middle of the night, and just leaving with what, with what I had on my back which was my shirt and pants. Like, let's go. Everything—toys, documents, everything was just left. It was one of those midnight crossings when we left. So as far as memories go, I really don't have any memories 'cause I was so young at that time; memories that I do have and that are very bright are the ones when we crossed the border. I do remember crossing the Rio Grande. I remember my sisters holding on to me. I remember, uhm, loading in a bus and hiding in the back of a bus of an eighteen wheeler and crossing the borders from Texas to California. One of the main memories that I have is—tasting Coca Cola for the first time and being housed in this little room with a black and white TV, uhm, previous to that point, I had never seen a television so this was an amazement to me. Those are my earliest memories as far as being from Guatemala, and after that it's all ... it's just a blur.

... Uhm, really it's a melancholy story 'cause I think what if the war of a genocide had never happened, I don't think that I would be here in the United States. I could picture myself living in Guatemala but being a productive member of society. I don't think I would end up in the fincas [plantations] or in the coffee fields if I would slowly work my way up the capital and become a ... whatever, merchant or lawyer, something. But I know because my parents firmly believe in education – that was the route we were going to take. So, uhm, but it's all my parents. When they do talk about Guatemala, they talk about it as if it's a time machine, where you sit down and they tell you and you could just picture everything happening—with the war and how, how the night before we escaped, uhm, they came knocking onto my parents' house door looking for my brother-in-law, excuse me, my uncle and my uncle was in the house at that time and my mom made all of us run outside the back of the house they kept pounding the door, the guerrillas were pounding the door requesting that he come out and my mom was protecting him and she shielded him by saying "he's not here, he's not here" but they knocked the door down, dragged him out and in front of her eyes they shot him in the head and killed him and then they said okay we're going to come back for your husband 'cause he too is on our list, so that night, of course we escaped. And those memories still you know, uhm, they're not spoken of but when they do come up, it is as if my parents were reliving that same night over and over again. But they also do remember the good times how back then everything was so simplistic. Survival just meant making sure that—that season—the cornfields were plentiful, the coffee was

good and everything was simplistic but now as you know times change, it's different now—so that way they defeat us (?) in a different country, with a different language and different culture.

Such nightmarish images of these Mayan informants articulate how traumatic the Guatemalan civil war was for survivors. Even though Maria, Lorena and Sergio were only children when these events occurred, they are still memories that exist for them.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, as mentioned before, they may in fact be memories “taught” to them or at least told and retold over again and again in family storytelling gatherings. To explain the cognition of traumatic memory, we may say that even though such stories are partially remembered and partially ones told to children, they are carried forward to the present as being very real and as having qualities of witness. Again, this “we” sense of memory is what Bloch (1998) discussed about Zafimaniry children of Madagascar, as a parallel example. As Bloch (1998: 121) asserts: “what was being stored in [the] mind was therefore a mental model containing both imagery and emotion and which could therefore subsequently be ‘searched’ in the same way as autobiographical memories”. Like Maria, Lorena and Sergio as childhood survivors, the Zafiminy children, while not witnesses or survivors, recalled “lived experiences” of their people (1998: 121). It proves I think that one does not have to have actual memories but memories which are shared between families and villagers as becoming “we” memories of social trauma. In this manner the cognition of trauma is also a social process more than simply a form of individual recollection, especially indigenous discourses of storytelling, which are just as indelible and enduring. By enhancing collective memory through oral histories, those of adults, parents and co-villagers and other family members, such memory narrative explains a certain consciousness about trauma as not something which needs to be witnessed but needs to be told and retold.

These recall forms also suggest something else. The narrators of these autobiographical memories, Maria, Lorena and Sergio, may not simply be recalling the events themselves but the last time they recalled these stories or how these stories were told to them by close kin and others (Bloch 1998: 124). Hence, there is a blurring of genres, memory formations of childhood witnesses, oral histories of Mayan ethnic groups, Mayan villages, and Mayan families, and the repetition of a story retold from its retelling in the past as implied by these narratives of survival. Such are the complications of sifting through the cognition of memory trauma.

Furthermore, in assessing these interviews, we find there are demonstrable differences between these interviews and the depositions. In the depositions, the grammar is cleaned up to be presentable for the immigration services. Whereas and by contrast, I have decided to keep the discourse of the interviews in raw form and without correcting for grammar. The interviews are transcribed exactly from audiotape with all mistakes of the speaker. Such qualities of difference between the deposition and interview point to other ways in which memories of such trauma are both captured and portrayed to an audience and for different effects. For the deposition there needs to be precision and chronology, whilst for the open-ended interview it is up to the interviewee and not an outside agent, such as a lawyer. The researcher is more aware of allowing the interviewee to tell their story, not for any purpose beyond the study. While

the specific purpose of the deposition is for protecting the individual and in telling their story, the hope is asylum will be granted one day in the near future. In essence, these are other hermeneutic layers for analysing interview texts in the deposition form and in the interview form and how to represent memories of trauma, especially in some cases, as above, genocidal trauma.

### Mayan Narratives and the Cognition of Remembering Discrimination

In addition to having episodic and flashbulb memories of trauma, it is my contention that in many cases political refugees and those forced to emigrate because of political upheaval have suffered from some form of “structural or symbolic violence” in their host countries. (Inasmuch as the depositions differ from the interviews, knowing whether the deposed Maya also faced discrimination is much more difficult to prove, since I did not interview them and have no way of knowing their present difficulties.) These types of memories, I argue, differ in category and kind from flashbulb memories. They, in fact, may have episodic qualities by revealing specific periods of time, but they are traumatic to a different degree than those of flashbulb-traumatic memories. What these memories allude to are more semantic in character because they point to a way of knowing discrimination and oppression, which not only may be carried from such experiential episodes or “schema” from their home countries but may be reinforced in host countries.<sup>25</sup>

In my estimation “structural violence” is a type of violence with an everyday quality, which means that such experiences have become the norm in immigrant lives. These are memories based upon the “routines of humiliation and violence” (Scheper-Hughes 1992: 225) of discrimination, prejudice, racism, stereotyping and labelling which demean individuals and collectives to such an extent as having permanent consequences. These negative experiences define immigrants and political refugees in different ways. Such experiences as assimilating into host countries, and adjusting to a new way of life, are formulated through the everyday as forms of “social exclusion”. As Pierre Bourdieu (1972: 237) maintains, they are part of the social repertoire creating “symbolic violence”, which as a “form of domination which, transcending the opposition usually drawn between sense relations and power relations, communication and domination, is only exerted *through* the communication in which it is disguised”.

It is thus significant to emphasize here that “structural or symbolic violence” is repetitive and routinized experience. These are social experiences that become social norms and, because of this, structurally violent memories have “semantic” qualities. As Whitehouse (2000: 8) contends, “semantic memory results from strengthening over time of such repertoires, such that the organism is able to classify and model experiences on the basis of common features, in other words, to develop schemas for recurrent experiences”.

In terms of my Mayan informants and interviewees, Maria, Lorena and Sergio, they experienced and can relate to specific episodic memories of discrimination. Therefore, ways of knowing structural violence are traumatic memories of different sorts, and form the everyday aspects of coping in a foreign environment and trying to adjust to

host societies. My argument in this discussion is how such experiences do not only relate to structural violence in the United States or the host country in this context. Such exclusionary practices are part of the historical structures of discrimination and oppression, which are known in their home country of Guatemala from interethnic relations with the *Ladino* or non-Indian population. Such structural violence is part of the legacy of colonial history, which may be “prescriptive” by assimilating “the circumstances to themselves” (Sahlins 1985: xii). In other words, the structures of symbolic violence in the home country become the structures of violence in the host country, whereby seeming social norms of discrimination are carried forward and embodied by oppressed individuals to new forms of oppression with old antecedents. “Ladino-Indian relations are described as paternalistic ...” meaning “that Indians act submissively and are treated with benign condescension if they know their place” (Wade 1997: 45). Such discrimination resulted in the social segregation of the Maya from *Ladino* society in Guatemala, the latter believing themselves to be superior to the former, and a social condition of class and hierarchy carried forward from a Spanish colonial past to the present (see also Hale 2006; Reeves 2006; Hiller, Linstroth, and Ayala in press).

To understand semantic memories of these Mayan informants is to encompass an epistemology of structural violence from the past and inter-ethnic relations with Ladinos in Guatemala, with similar experiences at school, in the workplace and in other social arenas in the United States through similar structural forms of discrimination. Maria, Lorena and Sergio relate to these forms of symbolic violence through their experiences as immigrants in South Florida while explaining how such discrimination is part of their ontological outlook, as being Maya or indigenous.

### Interview: Maria

There are scholarships but they were given to the Ladinos, and not to Mayan people, even though they [Mayan] had good points [grades] they [the government] always want that the Mayas are always down and continue being peasants, and housewives because they [the government] are the ones who want to control the country ... the ladinos are descendant from the Spanish, that are not Mayan, they don't have Mayan blood, they have Spanish blood because they are the descendants, that is the Hispanic or Spanish, I don't know, I think all the Hispanic are descendants from the Spanish, right, they come from Spain, so those are the ones who are in Guatemala.

**Interviewer:** You mentioned that you are not Latin nor Hispanic, could you explain to me then, how do you perceive yourself?

**Maria:** I am a Mayan, I have my own language, my own culture, rituals, clothes, we don't dress like that [western], well, we have to do it because is cheaper and because our clothes are not sold over here ...

### Interview: Lorena

I tried belonging to La Unidad, which was the Latina club on campus, I went to one or two meetings and I was just like, I've never really truly have identified myself as Latina, I mean I happen to be from Latin America, but I've always identified myself as Mayan, as a

Guatemalan Mayan with indigenous background, so being there in La Unidad I was just like this is so strange, I can't relate to any of these women, and so instead I also had friends who were native American, Hopi, especially Hopi and Cherokee, and we decided to expand the Native American club on campus and it was, there weren't many of us, but we did that, and that was a lot of fun, because I could relate to them on so many levels, because there is so much we have in common with the native Americans ...

### **Interview: Sergio**

Grade school was pretty difficult, especially, uhm, trying to learn the language and not using the language correctly. Uhm, we were ridiculed a lot, uhm, interestingly, we weren't really ridiculed by the Americans or African-Americans, we were ridiculed by the Mexicans and Latinos—Spanish people. Uhm, in hindsight, the reason why is 'cause we were trying to learn Spanish first and our Spanish was broken, ah, so then they would ridicule us regarding that. That was really a blow to the ego, 'cause, you know, you think you're saying it right but then someone points out that you're saying it wrong but they do it in a manner that, uhm, it's bad and it's a step backwards instead of forwards. So, once we got past that, now it became English, became the obstacle too ... When I say that, it's uhm, it was okay to go out there and use the English language, and even though you got ridiculed you still felt good because they understood what you were saying, they might laugh at you but they understood what you were trying to say and the majority of the time they would correct us but it was done in a way that we didn't take it as an insult compared to when we were leaning Spanish and then all kinds of Spanish people would just laugh at us and ridicule us.

**Interviewer:** What about now, what is it like being here?

**Sergio:** Now, it's, you know, now you're in the real world and now you're not secluded, you're not protected and racism, discrimination—it's an everyday ... it's a part of everyday life. You learn to live with it, uhm, we come from a culture of where we're a passive people. We're not in your face, we're not vocal, so when we are mistreated we accept it but we try to play the role of—ok, these people are uneducated, they just don't know what they're talking about ... they're quick to categorize you as something—"ok, this guy, he's a landscaper, he's (mumbles)." But they don't know the credentials I have but I not going to sit here and be like "don't judge me 'cause you don't know me", I'm just wasting my time with that individual and there's more productive things that I can do for society in different avenues, different areas ...

All three narratives provide context to varying aspects of discrimination and oppression for each of these Mayan immigrants. There is an ontological sense to these memory forms, which are distinctive to the imagistic memories in the previous section. These memories of "structural violence" point to the everyday condition of being Maya, of being an immigrant, and by remembering similar symbolic violence in Guatemala.

### **Trauma and the Cognition of Time for Political Asylum Seekers**

While I have demonstrated above why Mayan political refugees have certain memories characterized as episodic and semantic, I argue that all political asylum seekers probably experience these two types of trauma, and therefore they share these types of memory forms of production as part of the epistemological and ontological structures

shaping their lives. Interestingly, neither Whitehouse nor Boyer have associated cognitive explanations of memory acquisition and retention to the conceptualization of time. It is therefore my assertion that an understanding of time is essential, especially for biographical ethnography and the chronology of life stories and narrative structures of informants, to provide a specific historical context to the definition of memory and those social processes that give meaning to individuals. It is also my belief that a conception of time in relation to biographical ethnography is crucial for defining how political refugees, for example, relate to their pasts, and how we as researchers may explain differing forms of memory, both episodic and semantic. Elsewhere, and following Alfred Gell (1992: 52), I explained how diachrony and synchrony are not formulations of two kinds of time but are really just one (Linstroth 2002: 169).

In relating to episodic forms of memory, we may view them as synchronic structures, episodes of trauma in an individual's life. These are episodes I will call "synchronic trauma", because they structure the political refugee experience as recalling the time of forced migration and the episodes of witnessed violence and/or experienced violence which defined their lives and that of their parents and their ethnic groups. Such synchronic episodes of trauma have significant claims upon the identity of a particular individual. For biographical purposes, placing these time episodes into a chronological sequence and by referring to cognitive formations of memory as having synchronic qualities—their childhood, the period of migration, the burning of the village, the killing of an uncle, etc.—places specific episodes of trauma as being characterized by another mental framework than the mentality of everydayness of semantic forms. Thus, we may wish to explain why semantic forms of structural violence, by contrast, are part of the identity of the immigrant experience and the long-term history of suffering by a people through inter-ethnic conflict. Long-term trauma of this kind experienced through discrimination, social segregation and oppression, I will call here "diachronic trauma". Such forms of trauma are not limited to one generation but may affect subsequent generations, and may form structural aspects of violence in society. We know this through studies of children of Holocaust survivors, who also suffer from varying forms of trauma.<sup>26</sup> These memory forms of trauma are diachronic because of enduring effects on the individual's psyche from everyday happenings rather than specific episodes. Such distinctions of time and the particular forms of suffering and trauma explained here are fundamental for differentiating memory types, the varying experiences political refugees carry with them from their home countries, the new experience they have in host countries.

Adding to this discussion, I do not disagree with Bloch (1998: 110) and his contention that "humans construct a multiplicity of narratives of different types appropriate to different contexts"; however, I am in disagreement with another statement of his. He declares, for example, that it is "unacceptable" to think "the notion of time and other fundamental categories is constructed through narratives", demonstrating a people's worldview (1998: 102). From my perspective, the episodic and semantic memories of my Mayan informants discussed above do point to particular aspects of a cognition of time which can be directly correlated with specific but diverse experiences of trauma—periods of forced migration and witnessing violence from the Guatemalan civil war and

genocide, as contrasted to a heritage of symbolic violence and colonial legacy of discrimination and similar forms of repressive experiences in the host country of the United States. How else are we to make sense of these narratives and memory forms in relation to time if not to structure them through a cognition of time, episodic versus everyday? While these Mayan narratives are only partial and allude to individual life stories, they are nonetheless representative of similar experiences of political refugees everywhere and of the Mayan Diaspora in general. Understanding these time relationships between synchronous episodes and diachronic persistence are foundations of ontological identity fashioned by genocidal trauma and epistemological formations from continuous discrimination. Hence, these particular narratives are representative of the Mayan political refugee experience, because Maria, Lorena and Sergio explain the significance of their perceptions to us through their oral histories and their worldview altered by differing levels of stress and suffering.

### Concluding Commentary

To be certain, in assessing Mayan cognition and trauma and its historical implications, there are many strands of thought to bring this discussion to a conclusion. In part, this also means examining some aspects of this essay not elaborated upon above, but should nonetheless be part of future discussions on this subject.

I begin by addressing more of a cathartic note, or at least the need for one after explaining so much suffering of Mayas living in exile. This is the concept of healing (see Figures 1–4).<sup>27</sup> What I also mean to say in relation to trauma is there is sometimes the need to forget and to heal. For some this may be possible, for others it may not be. In regard to genocide, the memories reprinted here are not forgotten and we must not forget them. Nor should we forget the varying aspects of discrimination against exiled Mayas. For the Maya themselves, of course, they do not forget, but they do find solace in occasional rituals of renewal such as in the Mayan New Year ceremonies, *Wajxaqib' B'atz'*, in which I was invited to partake along with one of my colleagues and students. Two of our interviewees also participated in the ritual event. To me, these Mayan blessings with the Maya shaman, which took place in the spring of 2006, also seemed a way to heal the fragmented Mayan community itself now living in South Florida. I believe such healing has a positive quality, what Taussig (1987: 328) once explained as a “poetics of catharsis”, something artful and ritualistic amidst such horrific memories of survival.

Aside from healing, there is also a need to say something about what Matthew Engelke (2008) describes as “objects of evidence”. At the outset, this essay began with the notion of “exaggeration”, that is, whether or not the oral histories of Mayan refugees may be exaggerated accounts, or whether such depictions misrepresented Mayan forms of narration and collective memory. As Engelke (2008: S7) rightly proclaims, “‘evidence’ is often linked to questions about truth” and in order to denounce the proposition of Mayan untruthfulness, I demonstrated how indigenous “others” have been misrepresented in history and, in some cases, by anthropologists. The article also explored how anthropology makes its object in relation to oral histories



**Figure 1** Mayan New Year celebrations, *Wajxaqib' B'atz'*, are based upon the 260-day ancient Mesoamerican calendar. The *Wajxaqib' B'atz'* are now also celebrated in Lake Worth, Florida, US, because of the Mayan refugee presence (photo credit: Mariana Paloma Ayala Vela 2006 ©).

associated with legal depositions and research interviews. It was explained how these different sorts of recording narratives in fact have distinctive social agencies for the mnemonic process. Whereas the goal of lawyer-oriented interviews for the purpose of



**Figure 2** Mayan shaman or *ajq'ij*, literally meaning “day keeper” and helpers preparing circle offering for *Wajxaqib' B'atz'* in Lake Worth, Florida, US. For more on Mayan shamanism see Tedlock 1992 (photo credit: Mariana Paloma Ayala Vela 2006 ©).

deposing the client may be political asylum, the researcher's open-interviews are more open-ended in the hopes of capturing a biographical history.

Other dilemmas were explained in relation to cognition and memory. For one, and as elaborated upon above, Whitehouse's (1995; 2000; 2004) model of the “divergent modes of religiosity”, or DMR, is thought to be a useful guide for explaining in a secular manner the cognition of traumatic memory of genocide and discrimination among the Mayan immigrants in South Florida. What is particularly important is realizing how different memory forms operate in relation to trauma. For example, the most traumatic memories have episodic qualities, whereas persistent and everyday memories have more semantic qualities. By examining the oral histories of three Mayan interviewees, I found their memories of genocide and discrimination to correspond to the memory models of DMR in a general manner, while the memories of five deposed Mayan-witnesses or archival witness-accounts of Mayan genocide and trauma corresponded only to episodic types of recollection. In organizing these memory traits, aside from analyses of transcript texts and the social agency of mnemonic recollection, the aim was to find new avenues wherein to elucidate such oral histories beyond linguistic deconstructions, or contextualizing through more historical accounting.

Aside from cognitive models for understanding trauma, there are also the problems associated with childhood memories as those of interviews and social memories and



**Figure 3** Offering during *Wajxaqib' B'atz'* ceremonies in Lake Worth, Florida, US (photo credit: Mariana Paloma Ayala Vela 2006 ©).

how to account for collective memories in general. In answering these queries, there are no facile answers except to state that some episodic memories may have qualities that are both socially derived and witnessed. For some, their episodic memories may actually be the episodic memories of their parents, and therefore we cannot discount a teaching component to familial storytelling or even cultural storytelling, or modes of cultural transmission. What is more, another important component to the explanation above recognizes how memories, in fact, become “we” memories for the collective, something beyond a mere Western representation of remembrance.

Finally, the essay concluded by illuminating why trauma, especially immigrant forms of trauma among the Mayas, may be characterized in relation to time as “synchronic” or “diachronic”. I termed the phrases “synchronic trauma” and “diachronic trauma” in order to fully articulate how forms of trauma may be represented for the victim. Synchronic trauma, for example, may be characterized by episodic and flashbulb memories of traumatic happenings of particular instances in time, such as genocidal violence, wartime rape, forced migration and other specific moments of horror. By contrast, diachronic trauma is closely associated with structural violence to express how discrimination and racism may have more ontological and everyday qualities and, in the Mayan case, memory forms carried forward from a colonial legacy. The latter types of memory-trauma may not necessarily be as specific, but may manifest in



**Figure 4.** Mayan *marimba* players at *Wajxaqib' B'atz'* festivities in Lake Worth, Florida, US (photo credit: Mariana Paloma Ayala Vela 2006 ©).

sentiments about class and social relations with others. Then again, there may be particular episodes that are more synchronic, but overall the ontological aspects of diachronic trauma are different in the degree and kind of experience in association with attitudes, language and habits.

To summarize, this essay is meant to forge new understandings for explaining Mayan cognition in relation to genocidal trauma and long-term forms of discrimination, and as an alternative explanation to analysing memory forms associated with the Mayan genocide coinciding approximately with the period 1978 to 1985 and the ensuing mass exodus of Mayas from Guatemala. By exploring these different aspects of memory, representation and testimonies from Mayas themselves living in South Florida through research interviews and from an archive of legal depositions, the hope is others will recognize Mayan suffering and empathize with these extraordinary narratives and the experiences of all Mayas in the Mayan Diaspora.

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## Notes

- [1] The INS is no longer under the US Department of Justice and is now called, the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) under the US Department of Homeland Security.
- [2] There is a well-known Hollywood film with this same title, *El Norte* (1983, Director Gregory Nava, 139 mins.).
- [3] My knowledge of this is not from a US State Department official but rather from immigration lawyers who dedicated their work in seeking political asylum for Mayan immigrants in the 1980s and early 1990s. For a confirmation of this elsewhere, see Grandin (2004: 190).
- [4] I would like to acknowledge personal communication with Pauline Turner Strong and her pointing me to Ricœur’s notion. Even so, I think it worth explaining the notion more in depth: “Ricœur insists therefore on the need for a hermeneutics of suspicion which demystifies our illusions, permitting us to decipher the masked writings of desire, will and interest. Hermeneutics doubt reminds us again and again that consciousness (individual or social) is a relation of concealing and revealing which calls for a specific interpretation” (Kearney 2004: 7–8).
- [5] We may regard the Guatemalan Civil War as roughly the period beginning in 1962 to the peace accords in 1996, even though violence has continued well after the peace process in the form of vigilante justice and other internal forms of violence.
- [6] Even so, it must be noted I am fully aware of the ethnic and cultural differences between the more than twenty linguistic groupings of Mayas of Guatemala, whether characterized as Kanjobal, Mopan, Mam, or Chuj. (Some linguists will distinguish between as many as thirty-two Mayan languages in Guatemala.) Each of these groupings may have quite distinct weaving-patterns associated with them and their own particular traditions. Yet in order to protect my informants, those individuals interviewed and those individuals in the deposition archival, I have purposefully left out language-ethnic grouping identifiers.
- [7] I have critiqued Connerton (1989) for his study of collective memory elsewhere (Linthroth 2002), and I will not dwell on him here. Suffice it to say that Connerton concentrates on European memory and history rather than non-Western forms, such as indigenous forms of knowledge and memory-making.
- [8] To this end, my views are also distinct from clinical and psychological studies as those held by the contributors to the volume edited by Wilson and Drozdek (2004), *Broken Spirits: the treatment of traumatized asylum seekers, refugees, war and torture victims*.
- [9] The Mayan testimonies excerpted here were originally taken as legal depositions in the 1980s. They form part of an archive, which is representative of the trauma suffered by this group of immigrants who fled the civil war zones of Guatemala and eventually arrived in South Florida, USA. None of the names of those who gave these testimonies are used here. Pseudonyms have replaced real names, and all identifying place names (towns and villages) and regional locations have been de-identified to further protect the witnesses of these horrific events. It must be stated that many Guatemalans still suffer from the fear of reprisal today. These are justified fears because of the current political situation there, and the continued violence

- suffered by much of the populace in rural areas of the country, despite the passing of more than a decade since the Peace Accords in 1996.
- [10] This is contrary to the likes of Harbury (1995) in her descriptions of the guerrillas in Guatemala.
- [11] The statistics related to CEH reports are directly quoted from their website, see: <http://shr.aas.org/guatemala/ceh/report/english/conc1.html> and <http://shr.aas.org/guatemala/ceh/report/english/conc2.html>. Other important statistics may be found on the website for “Office of Human Rights of the Archbishop of Guatemala” (*Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Arzobispado de Guatemala*, ODHAG), especially Part IV: <http://www.odhag.org.gt/03publicns.htm>. Also see Beatriz Manz 2002.
- [12] <http://shr.aas.org/guatemala/ceh/report/english/conc1.html> <http://shr.aas.org/guatemala/ceh/report/english/conc2.html>
- [13] Again, see: <http://shr.aas.org/guatemala/ceh/report/english/conc2.html>
- [14] <http://shr.aas.org/guatemala/ceh/report/english/conc1.html>
- [15] <http://shr.aas.org/guatemala/ceh/report/english/conc2.html>
- [16] For a further discussion of “testimonial” or *testimonio*, see Beverley (2008); even so, Beverley does not distinguish between oral histories from interviews and depositions, as in my analyses.
- [17] Purposefully, I have left out the work of Roy D’Andrade (1995) mainly because, with the exception of p. 190 in his book, he does not develop similar models of cognitive anthropology in relation to episodic and semantic forms of memory as do Whitehouse and Boyer in their works. Moreover, his models are somewhat dated in comparison to new findings from the British School of Cognitive Anthropology.
- [18] One eminent anthropologist not mentioned here, who is also a psychiatrist, is Roland Littlewood, primarily because his work does not focus on the same analytical problems of memory in relation to refugees, or even memory and trauma to the degree of Robben. This by no means diminishes Littlewood’s significant contributions. To wit, I am in complete agreement with him when he states: “... anthropology and psychiatry, but also medical jurisprudence, cognitive science, ethology and the sociology of knowledge—the practical problems of reconciling causation and volition become especially salient” (Littlewood 1998: x).
- [19] For a thorough exploration, albeit prescriptive investigation, of Whitehouse’s theories on religious ritual, the reader is recommended to attempt McCauley and Lawson (2002).
- [20] Regarding “flashbulb memories”, Brown and Kulik (1977: 75) state: “an actual photograph, taken by flashbulb, preserves everything within its scope; it is *altogether* indiscriminate. Our flashbulb memories are not”. They further stipulate the “higher consequentiality of an event for an individual works both to make more elaborate flashbulb memories and also to compel more frequent rehearsal of that which is all or part of the FB memory. An event which has great consequentiality for an individual is more likely both to be ‘on the mind’ of the person ... and to be worked into conversation ...” (Brown & Kulik 1977: 85).
- [21] For further studies on “flashbulb” memories, see Tulving (1972); Winograd and Neisser (1992); Conway (1995); Finkenauer *et al.* (1997); and McCauley (1999). There are, it should be noted, critics of “flashbulb” memory studies (namely Brewer 1986; Neisser 1986; Barclay 1986; Fitzgerald 1986). What these latter psychologists argue is that so-called “flashbulb” memories cannot be distinguished from autobiographical or personal memories, and that such memories need not be limited to a traumatic recollection such as the assassination of John F. Kennedy. However, what none of them take into account are how “flashbulb” memories become reproduced as much through collectives and groups, especially indigenous peoples, as simply from individual recollection. It is my contention throughout this essay that episodic memories of trauma experienced by native peoples are distinctive from Western notions of trauma (a more obvious point for anthropologists than unavoidable for psychologists). It is not that indigenous peoples have different mental capacities, but rather how they relate to such memories in a collective sense as a group and the manner in which such

- memories are recalled through storytelling. Similarly, the same may be said for the contributors in Winograd and Neisser (1992), that while critical of flashbulb memories, they do not take into consideration non-Western forms of collective memory production (also for obvious reasons in that they probably never needed to consider them). On the other hand, McCauley (1999), among others, such as Whitehouse (2000; 2004) has provided counter-arguments to such critiques in their examination of religious rituals of non-Western peoples as in Papua New Guinea.
- [22] As Suárez-Orozco and Robben (2000: 20–21) contend regarding post-traumatic stress disorder: “PTSD has become a blanket term for a wide array of conditions. Current uses of PTSD generally fail to take into account key aspects such as the context of the traumatic experience, whether the trauma was inflicted on an individual or a group, through natural disaster, conventional warfare, state terror, or interpersonal acts of violence”.
- [23] It should be noted that I did not concentrate on the idea of repressed memories in my argument. Mostly, this is because the subjects for this study were not asked specifically if they tried to block out the traumatic memories they had experienced as children from the genocide in Guatemala. For an excellent discussion on memory repression, see Loftus and Kaufman (1992).
- [24] Such traumatic memories are similar to those encountered by other researchers and their interviews with Mayan informants (see Carmack 1988; Falla 1992; Harbury 1995; Carlsen 1997; Montejo 1999; Green 1999; Nelson 1999; Fischer 2001; Sanford 2003; Moller 2004; Manz 2004; Wilkinson 2004; Sexton 2001; Stølen 2007).
- [25] Grandin (2000: 228), for example, refers to racism in Guatemala in claiming: “racism is a powerful ideology in Guatemala, and it manifests itself in multiple ways: social exclusion, political repression, economic exploitation”.
- [26] Via personal communication, I am grateful to Julia Chaitin for insight into her work on children of Holocaust survivors, and for providing me with an intergenerational understanding of long-term trauma and her critique of these present findings (see Bar-On & Chaitin 2001).
- [27] I am grateful, via personal communication, to Pauline Turner Strong for making me think more about the concept of healing. As she explained, probably without knowing, I felt the need to show some pictures of Mayan rituals of healing and renewal at the end of my Powerpoint presentation.

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