

VICTORIA SANFORD

The Moral Imagination of Survival

Displacement and Child Soldiers in Guatemala and Colombia

I stood in the courtyard with the other young recruits of my unit, strangers all; in the gloom of initial anonymity, what comes to the fore is coarseness, otherness; that is how it was for us; the only human bond we had was our uncertain future.

Milan Kundera (1982, 59)

DISPLACEMENT AND CHILD SOLDIERS

Though the exact number of Maya youth in the army and guerrilla forces has been difficult to determine, the Guatemalan Commission for Historical Clarification found that 20,000 children under the age of fifteen were forcibly recruited into the army-controlled civil patrols (CEH 1999, 3:80). In Colombia there are an estimated 16,000 child soldiers today (Paez 2003). One in ten Guatemalans was displaced by the internal armed conflict in the 1980s, leaving 1.5 million displaced (CEH 1999). Each day violence in Colombia forces some 300 civilians to flee their homes (ICG 2003). Some 2,900,000 Colombians have been internally displaced since 1985 (CODHES 2003), and Bogotá alone is home to more than 400,000 displaced people (WCRWC 2002). Women and

children represent fully 80 percent of the total displaced population, and children alone comprise more than 54 percent (Profamilia 2001, 123). If these percentages have remained roughly constant since 1985, that means that more than half of displaced Colombians, or nearly 1.5 million people, were displaced as children. In other words, the majority of displaced people are/were children at risk for forced recruitment.

The ever-increasing numbers of internally displaced Colombians presents a humanitarian crisis of epic proportions. While much has been written about displacement, in-depth comparative studies of child soldiers remain scarce. In the literature on displacement in Guatemala and Colombia, there are numerous studies about the basic needs of the displaced (Fajardo-Montaña 2001), their uncertain legal status (CCJ 1999a, 1999b; Tassara et al. 1999), and the disproportionate effect of displacement on women and children (Young 2002). Often times, the conditions of displacement are explained in tandem with the lives of refugees (Malkki 1995; Manz 1988). While the lives of displaced Maya in flight (Falla 1992; Sanford 2003a, 2003b) and the experiences of Guatemalan refugees in Mexico (Manz 1988) have been documented, there is no published study on the Communities of Population in Resistance (CPRs) or their role in postwar reconstruction. Literature on displacement in Colombia focuses on the aforementioned topics (Osorio and Lozano 1995; Hernandez-Hoyos 1999; HRW 1994a; ICG 2003; Peacaut 2001) or provides a history of displacement within particular regional studies of La Violencia (Roldan 2002; Ramirez 2001). My articles on peace communities (2003c, 2004) and this chapter on child soldiers in Guatemala and Colombia are the first scholarly studies on the topic. This chapter builds on existing literature on displacement and contributes to emerging literature on child soldiers by seeking to understand the role of internally displaced people and forcibly recruited youth and children within the complex web of internal armed conflict.

Most literature on child soldiers emerged in the fields of law, medicine, and psychology based on the reflections and efforts of human rights advocates and service providers working in zones of conflict and postwar reconstruction in Africa.¹ In her work in Mozambique, Thompson (1999) suggests that the conditions of child soldiers “erase” analytical categories of military, civilian, and child. Transformation in kinship and family situations in Sierra Leone (Zack-Williams 2001) and the cultural meaning of the category of youth in Mozambique (West 2000) have been explored in relation to the phenomena of child soldiers. Millard (2001) challenges the primarily legal approach to child soldiers, suggesting it limits our understanding and policy options. De Berry (2001) identifies state crisis and local influences as the two contexts for the emergence of child soldiers in Uganda. De Waal (1996) notes that child soldiers are part of the war aims of armed actors in Africa, who tend to be local and specific

bands integrating commerce and violence to sustain and enrich themselves. This research in Africa resonates with the findings of Lovell and Cummings (2001) on children in Northern Ireland. They argue that children do not merely react to conflict, but they interpret the meaning of conflict for themselves, their families, and their communities. They suggest the need for research on families and communities to achieve successful interventions for children. Likewise, De Berry (2001) suggests the need to develop a community-based approach to the problem of child soldiers, and Wessells calls for "research on the anthropological factors that affect child recruitment and prevention strategies" (2002, 254).

This chapter seeks to take the lessons learned through the sequelae of violence as well as humanitarian and peace-building outcomes in ongoing violence and place them in a framework for peace building and the prevention of violence. This chapter recognizes the increased importance of preventive action and humanitarian intervention around the world and bears witness to the insistence that international aid be used to strengthen peaceful alternatives, not escalate wars that disproportionately take the lives of civilians. The lived experiences of children and youth who have been displaced and forcibly recruited into state, insurgent, and paramilitary armies are among the most extreme consequences common to internally displaced people (IDPs) in the new millennium. Through my comparative exploration of the forced recruitment of displaced youth in Guatemala and Colombia as well as peace-building initiatives among IDPs, this chapter challenges the nonsubject stasis often attributed to displaced people (especially youth and children) who daily remake their lives in the midst of violence.

Conflict prevention should begin before conflict starts or at least as it emerges. Successful conflict prevention involves early prevention. Bad governance and exclusionary governance lead to conflict. In post-conflict situations, governance issues are key to ensuring that countries do not slip back into conflict. Throughout the world, United Nations agencies and nongovernmental organizations have increasingly recognized women and youth as key constituencies for peace building. Peace agreements alone between male leaders of warring groups are not sufficient to bring lasting peace or to deal with structural causes of conflict.

If we can learn how the lives and survival of the displaced become part of the violence, then perhaps we will be better able to understand how and why displaced communities can also organize to generate spaces for peace and democratic participation in the midst of war. How have seemingly utopian Colombian peace communities and Guatemalan Communities of Populations in Resistance survived in war zones, and what are their prospects for the future? How do children and youth become a part of these peacemaking projects, and how does this participation transform their visions of their own future?

In this chapter I explore these questions by comparing the experiences of displaced and forcibly recruited youth in Guatemala and Colombia. I begin by offering the experiences of those surviving displacement in CPRs and peace communities. I then move on to the experience of forced recruitment as told by former soldiers and combatants in Guatemala. These testimonies of forced recruitment are then complemented by the experience of a Colombian paramilitary. I then offer an analysis of their memories of trauma. I close this chapter with the efforts of Colombian youth who today seek to avoid forced recruitment and work for peace in the ongoing conflict in their country.

The basic findings of my research are threefold: (1) displaced children and youth are more likely to be recruited by armed actors; (2) displaced children and youth participating in community peacemaking projects are less likely to seek out and more likely to successfully resist recruitment by armed actors; and (3) the moral imagination of local peacemaking projects in ongoing conflict creates new possibilities for peaceful resolution of internal armed conflict. Further, by juxtaposing testimonies of forcibly recruited youth with the experiences of Colombian peace communities, Guatemalan Communities of Populations in Resistance, and Colombian youth peacemakers, I identify some of the ways in which creative peacemaking and reconstitution of citizenship are central elements of the survival strategies of IDPs during conflict and in post-conflict situations. Creative peacemaking and the reconstitution of citizenship define new community projects of recovery that represent a new kind of political power grounded in community integrity, moral courage, and the hope, energy, and optimism of youth. Moreover, this chapter situates children not merely as victims and dangers to internal security and occupying armies but as active subjects in their own lives and crucial actors in any national and local peace settlements or refugee/IDP repatriation programs.

THE MORAL IMAGINATION OF SURVIVAL

In the early 1980s, as 200,000 Guatemalans were killed or disappeared and 626 Maya villages were massacred and razed, tens of thousands of survivors fled and sought refuge from the Guatemalan army in the highlands (CEH 1999). With no stable food source and no safe exit, survivors organized themselves into Communities of Populations in Resistance (CPRs) seeking to survive and build a just and peaceful community while under continued attack from the army (Falla 1992; Manz 1998; Sanford 2003a, 2003b). In Colombia, following several years of marginal life on the urban peripheries after being displaced from their villages by paramilitary violence, some 12,000 Colombian peasants negotiated the return

to their land (in the middle of the war zone) as Peace Communities in 1999 (Sanford 2003c). Though separated by time and geographically divided by the Central American isthmus, both CPRs and Peace Communities have sought to rebuild community life as neutral, unarmed civilians. Moreover, they have sought to build interdependent utopian communities based on citizen participation, mutual respect, and collective survival. After years of struggle, both the CPRs and the Peace Communities were recognized by their respective governments and by the United Nations as civilians with the right to rebuild their lives. Since the signing of the peace accords in 1996, the CPRs have played an integral role in post-war reconstruction in Guatemala. The Peace Communities continue to struggle for their survival in Colombia's ongoing war.

Given the large numbers of displaced people living in desperate circumstances of misery, how and why have these communities sought not only reconstruction but also a better, more peaceable way of life in the midst of war? While living in war is not unique, efforts to build utopian communities in war zones represent a highly creative response by seemingly powerless peasants to the violence that crashes unbidden upon them. In an era of lawlessness, they reassert their rights as citizens. In this chapter I explore how the practices of creative peacemaking and reconstitution of citizenship represent a new kind of political power grounded in community integrity and moral courage. This power is not of a violent nature but rather derived from the moral imagination—power that creates new realities and new possibilities by pushing the frontiers of the possible in the midst of the war zone. It is power that supports Hannah Arendt's (1973) belief that violence can destroy power but not create it.

COMMUNITIES OF POPULATIONS IN RESISTANCE

Despite ongoing army attacks and captures as well as surrender resulting from the dire conditions of survival in the mountains, thousands of internally displaced Maya remained in the mountains struggling to establish some semblance of daily life.² Fleeing army attacks, massacre survivors sought refuge in the mountains. They lived in near-constant movement, sometimes able to stay in a temporary village for a few months, sometimes just a few days. In groups of twenty to thirty families they traveled through the mountains, always in search of safer ground. In northwest Quiché, northern Ixcán, and the Petén, the Maya survivors organized themselves into what became known as Communities of Populations in Resistance (CPRs). Following more than six hundred massacres during the army's "scorched earth" campaign between 1980 and 1982, the

Guatemalan army labeled any village outside the army's model village structure and control as an "illegal village."

The army relentlessly attacked the CPRs as "illegal villages" using the same counterinsurgency techniques of the scorched earth campaign: occupying villages, killing any civilians in the community, burning huts, destroying crops. And, like earlier massacres, they continued to hunt for survivors in the mountains by firing machine guns, throwing grenades, and dropping bombs. These army attacks against civilians continued into the 1990s.

Don Samuel is a small, soft-spoken, and unassuming man of forty-two. In late 1997 he was helping his neighbors make lists of their financial losses during the violence—cattle, horses, chickens, turkeys, tools, houses—and the number of dead and disappeared in each family. His house in Salquil was burned in 1981. His first site of refuge was in Bachaalte with his family. "We were hidden there for almost a year," he explains, "but after the civil patrols were formed, we had to escape. We fled when they came to destroy the village." Each CPR testimony involves numerous moments of flight, survival, and reconstruction followed by an army attack setting off another round of flight, survival, and reconstruction. Don Samuel's experience is representative of the many testimonies survivors shared with me. After fleeing Bachaalte, he recounts:

We were about sixty families. So there were many of us. We had to find a way to protect ourselves. We organized a community structure with *responsables* and different people responsible for being lookouts and we would dig hiding places in the earth. This was how we were able to reach Santa Clara. Still, with so many people, the army was able to find some of us even though we were all hiding. They would kill anyone they found: elderly, youth, children. They would kill whoever was there simply because they were there. Each time the army would catch up with us, some of us were unable to escape. The army would catch them and kill them.

We were always moving from one place to the other, looking for a place without the army. The army continued to persecute us until 1990 when we became known to the public. The army lessened their offensives against us, but they still didn't stop. Beginning in 1980 until 1990, we suffered so much in the midst of all of this.³

At the end of 1990, the CPR issued a public declaration announcing the existence of communities that had been resisting army capture and control for more than eight years (CPR Support Group 1993, 2). One year later, just moments after arriving at the CPR in the Ixil region in October of 1991, Chris-

tian Tomuschat witnessed an army air attack on the civilian community. Sent to Guatemala as a United Nations expert to investigate human rights violations, Tomuschat was the first official observer to reach the CPRs. When he presented his findings to the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva in February of 1992, he condemned the Guatemalan army, government, and other security forces for their deliberate and continuous violation of the political, civil, cultural, social, economic, and human rights of Guatemalans (Guatemala Health Rights Support Project). In 1992 some 30,000 Maya massacre survivors were still living in the CPRs under army attacks. Though the army continued to harass and attack CPRs, Tomuschat was witness to the last army bombing in the Ixil area (Sanford 2003a, 2003b).

COLOMBIAN PEACE COMMUNITIES

In her work on displacement, Hannah Arendt wrote: "The first loss which the rightless suffered was the loss of their homes, and this meant the loss of the entire social texture into which they were born and in which they established for themselves a distinct place in the world" (1973, 293). And as recounted by Don Samuel, displacement is driven by violence. In the Uraba-Choco region of Colombia, Joselito was one of 45,000 people displaced by paramilitaries in the late 1990s. Recalling when he fled his community in 1997, he said: "Helicopters were bombing and paramilitaries were firing machine guns. To go to the river to cut bananas was to risk one's life. They burned our village and we lost all our rice. When the army would come, they would say, 'Don't be afraid of us, have fear of those who come after' meaning the paramilitaries. They had no respect for our lives. We had to leave."

According to those who have been displaced, these displacement operations are joint maneuvers between the paramilitaries and the army. The army frequently uses planes and helicopters to bomb civilian areas, forcing the inhabitants to flee while paramilitaries carry out ground maneuvers, destruction of the physical community, threats and assassination of those deemed by paramilitary lists as "subversive" or potentially so, and sometimes full-scale massacres (author interviews, 2000 and 2001). Yulian, a paramilitary soldier who had recently returned from combat, confirmed these survivor testimonies. Specifically about massacres, he told me, "Human rights are a problem. Now we can't massacre everyone, we have to kill them one by one, one by one" (author interview, August 7, 2001).⁴

Hannah Arendt suggested that the term "displaced persons" was expressly invented for the liquidation of the category of statelessness (1973, 279), which

paved the way for the loss of the rights of citizenship and created a category of the persecuted as rightless people. Significantly, she stated, "The more the number of rightless people increased, the greater became the temptation to pay less attention to the deeds of the persecuting governments than to the status of the persecuted" (294). Moreover, she pointed out that this shift from the deeds of the government to the needs of the displaced constituted an innocence, "in the sense of complete lack of responsibility," that "was the mark of their rightlessness as [much as] it was the seal of their political status" (295) because as rightless people, she wrote, "their freedom of opinion is a fool's freedom, for nothing they think matters" (296).

Joselito became a peace community leader because, as he explained to me:

When one is displaced, one loses the feeling of being Colombian, a citizen with rights and responsibilities. After many community meetings of the displaced, we decided to return together in 1999. We decided to live in the middle of the conflict because if we waited for it to end, we would never return to our lands. We opted for pure non-violence. They should respect the decision of the people. If they want to fight with each other, they can—but not on our land and we won't fight with them. As the peace communities, we have a life of peace, not violence. Our goal is to support peace, not war.

In this way peace communities reassert their rights, rebuild community structures, and transform the isolation of displacement. Colombian Peace Communities, like Guatemalan CPRs, constitute new domains of social justice, citizenship, and conflict resolution. This is not to suggest, however, that these constitutive processes of the peace communities, like the CPRs, are not affected by the violence of the armed actors who surround them.

THE FORCED RECRUITMENT OF MAYA YOUTH

It is perhaps among the youth within the communities of displaced people and their efforts to avoid or seek out recruitment by armed actors that one encounters both the moral imagination and the iniquitous monotony of survival. It is most often through displacement that violence and criminality appear to these children and youth to be their only opportunities. Displaced children and youth live without power in a world of armed power. In this section I offer abbreviated testimonies of former child soldiers and combatants in Guatemala to provide an opportunity to understand child and youth experiences in armed conflict. Rather than narrow the focus from the complications and tragedies of individual suffering of child fighters, these testimonies move through the layers of

violence and organization that structure displaced lives to provide a nuanced, holistic, and complexly rendered understanding of the lived experience of these youth. These testimonies allow us a privileged lens through which we can (1) distinguish and analyze new types of public spaces and new forms of community produced by displacement and forced recruitment; (2) identify critical moments in displacement when survival strategies can feed the violence the displaced seek to escape; (3) outline recruitment mechanisms of armed actors; and (4) identify effects of forced recruitment on children and youth relationships with their families and communities.

The testimonies presented here challenge us to overcome the tendency to simply categorize these children and youth as victims on the one hand and as a danger to citizen security on the other. In both international humanitarian aid as well as popular images found in the media, these children and youth are displayed as victims of war structures that have destroyed their lives. Yet, if in order to survive the child or youth becomes a soldier, combatant, or urban gang youth member, this same child is no longer viewed as a victim but rather as a dangerous delinquent because s/he no longer fits within the framework of the innocent child, which society continues to maintain despite all realities to the contrary.

THE TESTIMONIES

GASPAR

Gaspar is a Tz'utijil-Maya who grew up on *fincas* (large farms) and in the streets of Guatemala City. He became a Kaibil after being recruited into the Guatemalan army.⁵

My mother gave me to a finca owner when I was six. I cut coffee for several months until I could escape. I went back to my mother because when one is little, you always look for the warmth of a mother's love. I never had that. My stepfather would get home drunk and beat my mother, my little sister, and me. He was very strong. He would knock me across the room and tell us that we were garbage because we were Indians, but my mother never wanted to leave him. Instead, she would give us away to another finca.

Once I asked a finca owner for shoes. She told me that my mother told her I didn't like shoes. She threatened me a lot and beat me. They put my food on the floor inside the house where the dogs ate. I wasn't allowed to sit at the table.

I tried to kill myself because I felt that life wasn't good enough, it just wasn't worth it for me. There was a place, a lagoon of water contaminated by

the plane that fumigated the cotton. I decided to bathe myself in the lagoon to see if I could die. But I wasn't lucky. Ever since then, I have thought it was bad luck and bad luck follows me. All I got was a rash.

Then, my sister and I went to live with my half-sister in Guatemala City. She told us we were Indians. She was very prejudiced because her last name was Juarez Santos. I have scars on my head from her beating me with burning sticks. She was trying to rid herself of rage. She beat us a lot. Sometimes, she would leave us tied up all day. Sometimes, she wouldn't let us in the house to sleep at night. She left us on the streets. I lived with her for three years and I tried to kill myself. I drank a toxic liquid but didn't get any results. I ran away from her.

I lived in the streets of Guatemala City and ate what I could find. I survived digging through garbage, begging, and stealing. I tried glue and paint thinner, but I didn't like it because it made me vomit. It is because of the way people look at you when you live on the streets. They never know the real feelings we have. Even living on the streets, I still felt I could be someone someday. But the people look at you and say you're lost, worthless, the scum of society. It was out of desperation that my friend Carlos put a rope around his neck. Afterwards, I tried the same thing, but had no luck.

Then, I went back to Mazatenango and got a job collecting garbage. I gave the money I earned to my mother to help her, but she gave it to my stepfather and he beat us. I collected garbage in the day and went to school at night. I wanted to learn and improve myself. But in the class, they laughed at me. They said I came from garbage, that garbage made me. People stopped calling me Gaspar. At school and in my neighborhood, they called me garbage man. Even the teacher called me garbage man.

When I would say my name, they would laugh at me because my surname is indigenous. I even changed my name for a while. But it made no difference, I was Indian because of my features and because that is who I am, whether or not I want to be. This created great conflict in me and I began to see a division between what is ladino and what is indigenous. I was humiliated so much that I began to hate ladinos. The hatred was so strong that I wanted a weapon. I wanted to kill my half-sister.

The army was always recruiting in the park, at the cinema, and anywhere else where young men congregated. I always got away. I was good at slipping away because I had lived on the streets. I saw that the world was made up of abusers and abused and I didn't want to be abused anymore. So, one day when I was sixteen, I let the army catch me. But they didn't really catch me, because I decided I wanted to be a soldier. I didn't want to be abused anymore.

I wanted a chance to get ahead. I saw what the soldiers did. I knew they killed people. But I wanted to see if in reality it could really be an option for

me. If there would be an opportunity to get ahead, to learn to read and write. I always thought that it would be very beautiful to learn to read and write. I was always looking for a way to get ahead, to improve myself, but sometimes the doors just close and there is nowhere else to go. The army says we will learn to read and write, but when you go into the army, they teach you very little. They give you a weapon and they teach you to kill. They give you shoes because you don't have any. Many times, you join the army for a pair of shoes. When they grab you to recruit you, they say, "You don't have any shoes."

In the army, I was full of hate. I used the weapons with the hatred I had carried inside of me for a long time. Even though the hatred can be strong, you are still a human being with the spirit of your ancestors, with the spirit of peace and respect. So, inside you have great conflict. It was very difficult for me to find an internal emotional stability.

When I was recruited, there were a lot of indigenas recruited. They were beaten hard and called "stupid Indians" for not knowing how to speak Spanish. The soldiers who beat them were indigenous. The problem in the army is that no one trusts anyone else, even though most of the soldiers are indigenous.

After I was recruited, they told me that I could be a Kaibil because I was tall, fast, and smart. But I wasn't so smart. They took us to the mountains. Each of us had to carry a live dog that was tied up over our shoulders. I was thirsty. There was no water. Well, we had no water and we were given no water. But our trainer had water. He walked ahead of us on the path spilling water to remind us of our thirst. I was innocent. When we were ordered to pick up the stray dogs on the street, I thought we were going to learn how to train them, that we would have guard dogs. But when we arrived at the camp, we were ordered to kill them with our bare hands. We had to kill some chickens, too. We were ordered to butcher the chickens and dogs and put their meat and blood in a big bowl. Then, we had to eat and drink this dog and chicken meat that was in a bath of blood. Whoever vomited had to vomit into the shared bowl and get back in line to eat and drink more. We had to eat it all, including the vomit, until no one vomited.

The army kills part of your identity. They want to break you and make you a new man. A savage man. They inspired me to kill. There was a ladino recruit who said that Indians were worthless and that we didn't go to school because we didn't want to. I pushed him off a cliff. I would have enjoyed it if he had died. This is how the army creates monsters.

You become very hard in the mountains and sometimes the only thing you feel is fear. You are afraid of any man, or every man. After my first battle with the guerrilla, I decided to escape, because I wanted to improve myself and found no way to do it in the army.

MATEO

Mateo is from Pueblo Nuevo, Ixcán, and a survivor of the Mam-Maya Massacre. He joined the EGP⁶ at age eleven and was forcibly recruited into the Guatemalan army at age fifteen.

Most of the [army] recruits were indigenous, but there were also some ladino students. There were five instructors and they were in charge. They would hit us. Everyday they punished us. The punishment is very harsh. Sometimes they would hang us tied up very tightly to the bed. They would leave us like that for fifteen minutes. Then we would do fifty push-ups. Then, we would have to go outside and lay on the ground. We had to roll to the other side and back until we vomited. Then they would line us up and go down punching us in the stomach and knocking the air out of us. But by then it didn't hurt so much because we didn't have any food left in our stomachs.

I never said that it hurt because if you said it hurt they would hit you more. Our training was called the Tiger Course. They explained to us, "You have to complete this course to become a real man." They would say, "You have to know a lot. You can become an important officer. You can order other people. But now you have to suffer three months. If you don't obey the rules here, you can die."

There were indigenous recruits who didn't know anything. They didn't know any Spanish; they only spoke their language. The majority of recruits were indigenous. Those who didn't know Spanish had to learn. There were some who only liked to speak their language. They were separated from each other. You could be beaten for not speaking Spanish. Sometimes you got beaten just for looking at someone or something.

There were three recruits who deserted. They were caught on the border because all their hair was shaved off. They were put into an underground jail [a pit]. Each day, water and garbage was thrown on them. They weren't given anything to eat. They were in there for almost a month. They were brought into our classroom all tied up as an example of what happened when you desert. They were kept in that cell for three more months. Then they had to start training all over again.

We were taught to use weapons and practiced with live munitions. Some of the recruits died in training from bullets and others died from bombs. In the third month, they taught us how to beat campesinos and how to capture them. We practiced on each other. They gave us our machine guns. They said, "It is better than a girlfriend." The machine gun is a jewel. The truth is that it is a pure jewel.

One day, they asked us if we liked our meal. They told us we had eaten dog. I never thought that it was dog. Some people had stomachaches and oth-

ers vomited. They fed us dog so that we wouldn't be afraid because it would have been impossible for us to withstand everything. I changed a lot after eating the dog. I wasn't afraid anymore. I just hated. I hated my compañeros. After three months, I was a very different person. I felt like a soldier.

After a year in the army, I went to my grandfather's village to visit. They looked at me differently. My form of speaking was different and my mannerisms had changed. The next day, I decided to go work with my grandfather. He said, "No, you have to stay here. How are you going to work? You are not one of us anymore."

In the afternoon, I met some friends. There are a lot of bars in the village. I had to go to a bar. I was overwhelmed with sadness. It is the only way the people in Guatemala can rid themselves of sadness. There you don't talk or discuss your problems. The only way is to go to the cantina and drink. I got really drunk and had to be carried to the house.

My grandfather said, "He had reason to drink, but he can't drink well." They all looked at me, but they couldn't hit me because I am a soldier. My grandfather said, "He has his reasons. Let him drink." So, they let me do whatever I wanted. And if I had hit them, they would have had to put up with it. I went to the cantina and drank with the soldiers.

When I was little, I remember the soldiers having good food. They had everything. They arrived in helicopters and airplanes and they had everything. I thought the army was good, that it was there to protect the people. My grandparents thought the same thing. But, a child is afraid of the soldiers because they have a weapon and a uniform and a very hard face. They don't look respectable. They can kick you whenever they want to. The army was very dangerous. You couldn't look a soldier in the eye. If you were watching a soldier, he would come over and say, "What are you looking at?" They would kick the children. A soldier could kill you. He could do it. They did it to some children.

Sometimes in Pueblo Nuevo on a Saturday or Sunday, the people were very frightened. They were very humble and didn't do anything. They never looked at the soldiers because if they did, the soldiers would grab them and take them to the base. I would go and hide behind an adult.

After the massacre in Pueblo Nuevo, we lived in the mountains. The army began to burn our homes and our people. They began to burn our animals. I cried because I saw our house burning. They destroyed all our crops. The corn, the beans, everything. They fired bullets. They threw grenades at my father's house. We were left with nothing. We returned to the jungle walking in a stream so we would leave no tracks for them to follow. The army killed my father in an ambush. He had gone to look for medicine because there were many sick people in our community. After the ambush, we all fled in different directions. It was two weeks before we could go back to look for my father.

I was very scared. I was nervous because I didn't know what it would be like to see my father dead. I was afraid from the moment we left. I felt like something bad was going to happen. The people were behind me, but I felt like I was being stalked. But I didn't say anything. I didn't say anything to my stepmother because she was nervous, too. When we arrived, I said, "This is my father's body."

He was in pieces and it made me very scared because I could see bits of his clothing and the things he had with him. Everything was in a path of blood. We didn't see his whole body. He was a puddle of blood. If his body had been more whole, I would have embraced my father. But all I could do was pick up the bones.

We had never seen anything like this. The people were watching to see if the army would come. So, we had to do everything in a hurry. There were frightening spirits there. There were haunted spirits there. Who knows if the spirit was devilish? I don't know. There was such fear there. There were flies and crows. There were hawks. They had been eating him. They had eaten a lot. The flies everywhere. The fear everywhere.

Many people died there. I lost my father. But really it was the children. I believe more little children died than adults. They died because of the cold and they died because they weren't well fed. The mothers didn't have any milk. So, they would give the baby water. Many died. Babies were born dead. Some were born alive, but in two weeks they would be dead. They did not have a great life. Every family lost some children. After my father was killed, I joined the guerrilla. I was a courier. I was eleven years old.

Later, when I was a soldier, I went to villages. Once I had to interrogate a woman. The woman didn't tell me anything, but she had to respect me because I was a soldier of the government and I had a gun. There was an officer behind me, watching me. I had to do it right because if you don't they beat you and sometimes they kill you. I interrogated the woman. So did some other soldiers. They beat her and I did, too. Sometimes they tell us, "Go get this person and beat him." A man was denounced by his neighbor. We beat him. He said, "I am just a campesino. I dedicate myself to working in the fields and nothing more." The man began to cry in front of us. I had to have such a face. I had to keep a tough face in front of the others because I had my orders and I was obligated to complete them. The man never said anything. The officer sent him to the base and I didn't see what happened to him after that.

The sub-lieutenant would ask the campesinos, "What have you been doing? What have you seen?" The campesinos would respond with their civil patrol titles. The sub-lieutenant would then ask them what they had seen. When they would respond that they had not seen anything, he would contradict them. He would lie and say that he had been told that subversives had

*been in the village. Then, the poor people would regret their answer and tell the sub-lieutenant, "Yes, we did see that." The army wants the people to give them information that is untrue. The only thing that matters is that the people will say whatever the army wants them to say.*⁷

ESPERANZA

Esperanza is a survivor of the Q'anjob'al-Maya massacre and a former guerrilla combatant. She joined the EGP when she was fifteen years old.⁸

I found them in the mountain. I found the commander and I told him that if they would accept me I wanted to join their forces. I told him I wanted to fight the army. I told him I had seen the horrible things they did to people in my village, to unarmed people. I told him I wanted to go into combat. I told him it wasn't fair to die defenseless. That it was better to be armed and prepared and die in combat. They accepted me. That same afternoon, I joined the forces of the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) and they gave me a weapon. I began my training.

Everything went along fine. But the truth is that, after about eight days, I was finding it pretty difficult. In my house, I had hardly ever worked. My sisters and I were the smallest, so we had always been pampered. We were peasants, but we always had enough to eat because my father had a lot of land. In my house, there was always a lot of food at mealtimes and we had enough water to bathe everyday. But in the EGP, a lot of times there wasn't any water for bathing. The truth is this was my biggest desperation, that I couldn't bathe. Sometimes we didn't even have water to drink. I even told them that I felt desperate for water—for water to drink and water to bathe in.

Two or three days had passed and there was no water for bathing, there wasn't even water to drink. I felt truly desperate. I wanted to bathe. At first it seems extremely difficult—you're very hungry, you haven't gotten any sleep, you walk all night long in darkness, you trip, you fall, you get wet, and you just keep going, going, going. You see, we had to walk at night so the army could not easily locate us. In the beginning, I really regretted my decision. But, I just kept thinking, "I'll see if I can make it through today and maybe I will leave tomorrow."

And, so this is how it was and the days began to pass. I started to get used to not bathing everyday. Every two or three days, we would organize into squads of ten combatants to bathe. We would go to the water in squads of two. One squad would bathe while the other stood guard. If the army arrived, the squad standing guard would engage in combat while those bathing got dressed and withdrew. Some days we had no food, other days we had no water, some days we had neither. But some days, we had both.

I had been in the EGP for about one month when I realized we were walking through mountains very close to my village. I thought it would be very

easy to walk back there alone. As I walked I thought how one month earlier, I would have run back to my house. But the day I walked near my village in the EGP platoon, I felt proud of what I had endured and the strength I had found in myself. I thought to myself, "Tomorrow there might not be food, there might not be water," and I laughed because I realized I hadn't bathed for two days. I chose not to go home. After a month, I liked being a combatant.

It was after this first month that I began to receive military training. The training was very difficult. We had to crawl through the ground on our stomachs. In the mountains, there were lots of stickers and rocks and mud. We had to crawl through like any other soldier in military training. We had to crawl across the ground, walk across ropes and jump very high.

For me this was all a great challenge. Because of my inheritance of being so chaparrita,⁹ there were times when things were simply out of my reach. This always put me behind the men because they are always taller than I, so it was easy for them. But the best thing is that it was in training that I discovered that I really loved being a combatant. I loved having a weapon at my disposal and I learned how to use it well. I couldn't jump as high as the men, but I could shoot as well or better than most of them.

So it was in this month of training that the commanders asked me what I wanted to do when I was finished, if I wanted to be a combatant or an organizer. There was also a collective where uniforms were made for combatants. They asked me if I would like to work there in the sewing workshop. They told me there was also a workshop where explosives were assembled. They asked me what I preferred to do. I told them straight out, "I would like to be a combatant."

Our first action was to ambush a jeep of judiciales—these are different from the army and the police. They are the squadrons, the ones that disappear and kill people. Anyway, these judiciales always had very good weapons. We had been informed that they were transporting weapons. So, we ambushed them with a Claymer bomb that we had actually made ourselves. This was my first experience. So, when the car passed by, I didn't know what would really happen. I had never been so close to the military. The judiciales passed by and the bomb exploded. Actually, right after the explosion, I stood there frozen, half-stupid. With a big explosion like that, one feels somewhat absurd immediately afterwards.

We took their arms away and quickly withdrew from the area because almost immediately after the explosion, a helicopter arrived. It was a very bare area. There was almost no vegetation. This was my first close call. We had been running as fast as we could for about ten minutes when I felt I couldn't go on any longer. I felt dizzy. I felt like I was about to suffocate. I just couldn't breathe anymore. But then, I just calmed myself. I took some deep breaths. I told myself that my body was functioning normally and I continued to run.

We ran and ran. We all escaped the army. I learned a lot, especially about weapons. I learned how to handle them all. This was my job in the guerrilla for one year.

My next job was with the National Direction,¹⁰ which is always located in very secure areas, in places that it would be difficult for the army to find. It was not the grand physical sacrifice I was used to, but there were many new rules to learn. The security was very tight. The arms were very good, very lightweight. But, we were very heavily armed. Sometimes, I almost couldn't tolerate it because I am so small and I was carrying a mountain of weaponry. I carried an M-16 with 300 rounds of fire, a 380 with 50 rounds of fire, 2 grenades and a dagger. And all this was around my waist. I was really full of weapons. But, I loved it. I was enchanted.

Still, I started to think that what I really wanted to do was to directly engage in combat with the army. I wanted to see if I was afraid of the army. I wanted to see how brave I was. I asked for authorization. In 1986, I joined the military unit. I was very happy because I was going to go into combat with the army.

We attacked the army base in San Lucas on December 31. We were 80 combatants. They were 800 to 1,000 soldiers. So, we were few in comparison to them. We had been spying on them for days. Every afternoon at one, they went down to the river to bathe. So, we went down to the river and we set up an ambush on the shore of the river. Because it was the 31st of December, the soldiers started to play soccer at 10 in the morning and they played until one in the afternoon. So, we knew that when they finished playing, they would come down to the river to bathe. But, at two in the afternoon, they finished playing and then returned to the barracks. We had been there since six in the morning. We hadn't eaten and we were thirsty. We couldn't move from our positions because they might see us. We had used all kinds of plants and weeds for camouflage and they tickled and itched. We were all feeling sad because they weren't coming out. Then, at four in the afternoon, we can hear everyone shouting inside the base and the first platoon comes out and heads straight down to the river.

The compañeros positioned closest to me were four women and some other compañeros from the capital—these are people who suffer a lot and take a long time learning to survive in the mountains. I still didn't have much experience in this type of situation either. I saw that really we were not ready to directly combat the army when the soldiers were right in front of us. I had never before seen a Kaibil. He was four meters in front of me. He was armed and I was armed. I thought, "I am going to die here." And, I began to tremble with fear. There was another compañero who was supposed to fire first. And, I thought, "This Kaibil is going to be on top of me before he fires." And the Kaibil was actively looking all around himself, checking everything out. He didn't

see anything. We were all around and he was looking, but saw nothing. When he was only three meters in front of me, the *compañero* began to fire and I also began to fire. The attack had begun. He was the first soldier we wasted.

Then, the entire army force came out. While the army was positioning itself, we were gathering the weapons from all the soldiers we had killed. Then, the soldiers began to fire heavy weapons. So, we withdrew to protect ourselves. We were three, one man and two women. We were ordered to advance, fire, and take the weapons away from the fallen soldiers. At first, I didn't want to do this. There were bullets flying everywhere and I knew that if I stood up or moved forward on the ground, any hidden soldier would fire on me. Then, I thought, "Well, if I am going to die anyway," and I said to the other woman, "Let's go. Advance with me so I'm not alone." Then the man said, "Let's go. The three of us go together. If we die, we die together." So, we moved forward and we took the machine gun away from the dead soldier. But it was very difficult to get his munitions because he had his belt very tightly fastened. We kept ours tightly fastened, too. You have to keep it tight to hold all the weight. But, he even had little lassos on his belt. To make it worse, he was full of machine gun fire and it was all very hard to remove. Everything was full of bullet fragments. There were three dead soldiers there, but we were only able to remove weapons from one because another army platoon came upon us and our unit was almost wiped out. We had four injured and one dead. On top of that, a lot of our weapons weren't working.

By this time, I had fired 250 rounds of munitions from my M-16. I had 400 rounds altogether. I was afraid and I was trembling, but when I started to fire, I forgot that I could die. I forgot about everything. I just kept fighting. All I thought about was how to continue firing until I heard the order to withdraw. We continued to fire. Some of us carried the injured, while others protected us.

There were dead guerrilla combatants, too. We were able to remove them from the site. We buried them. We never left injured and dead combatants behind. The army did this. They would just leave their dead soldiers wherever they fell. The only thing the army did was remove their weapons. We had more respect for our *compañeros*. We removed them from the battle site. If the dead combatant had a better uniform than one of us, then we switched uniforms. We took the best for the living because all combatants always needed uniforms. It was really a desperate situation. Can you imagine removing your dead friend's clothes before the burial? In the beginning, one really doesn't know how to adjust to this kind of life, plus it was very sad; it gave me great sadness to see the dead *compañeros*, friends I had been living with for quite some time. It was very sad.

But, one gets stronger. You get used to seeing dead and injured all the time. It begins to feel normal. It is normal. You see a dead compañera and you say, "Well, she was lucky. She is no longer suffering. Now, she is resting." And each one of us knew that the next day it could be any one of us. We were all conscious that death could strike us at any moment.

So, these were my experiences in combat. This is how it was for me. As a woman combatant, in the beginning I really felt that I was out of place. But, I began to believe that women have every capacity that men have. Even more, I put forth a great deal of effort to be a good combatant and I succeeded in this. The only thing I really wanted was to not fall behind the men. I wanted to always be at their side, at the same level as them, to demonstrate that a woman could be just as good a combatant as a man.

In my village, men would always say, "I am the man and I can do everything. You can't do anything. The only thing you can do is have children." So, in the mountains, everything is different because everyone knows that everyone is capable of doing whatever a man does. I think that this is really psychological work for the men—that they have to look at the compañeras as their equals, that they can't discriminate against them. This is one of the things we learn—that everyone has equal value, men and women, indigenous and ladino, that no one is behind anyone else. I want my daughter to understand this, that she is on an equal plane with men.

Of course, all of this was difficult when I came to Mexico to live with my parents. My opinions are now different from theirs. I would say, "Women's freedom is the same as men's." And my mother would say, "No, my daughter. You have to let the man run the home. He is the one to give orders. He is the boss of the family." There was an entire year of these conversations. It was very hard, especially with my brother. He would say, "I am the boss of my house and my woman will do whatever I tell her. I'll make her do it." And I would tell them that he had to respect her as his partner, that he couldn't hit her. This was all very trying, but we are a very united family and we stick together. So, in the end, this is all part of our own personal liberation. I think we continue to liberate ourselves with these discussions even when they are very difficult. We learn from one another.¹¹

PABLO

Pablo is Achi-Maya; he was recruited into the civil patrols and forcibly conscripted into the army at age fourteen.

First they organized the Military Commissioners, one or two in every community. Then they organized us—the poor peasants—as patrollers. They told us that every eight days, we had to patrol. So, as more days passed, everything

got even more complicated. Some of us weren't patrolling because we are very poor and needed to work because we had so much poverty. Then they accused us of being guerrillas. The army really believed these accusations against us were true. So it became even more complicated, more and more. The judiciales became even more organized, the death squads is what we call them. They started killing people. If you went to the market to buy or sell, they killed you. People carrying their load of wood on their back to sell—they killed them right on the path. The squads traveled in groups and they kept vigilance on every path. They would just grab and kill anyone. They didn't even ask questions anymore. They grabbed people as if they were no more than dogs. That's where all this began.

It was on the 15th of September when I was working in the bean field with my aunt in San Miguel Chicaj when we heard that everything was very difficult in Rabinal, that it was no longer possible to travel through Rabinal to Plan de Sánchez. So what we did is that we just stayed in San Miguel working with my aunt. She fed us and took care of us. So, it was on this day of the fiesta of September 15th that everything fell apart. The judiciales were already well-organized and prepared. At five in the afternoon, they began to kill people.¹² First, they invited everyone to attend the fiesta. They charged people for entering. The people didn't know what was going to happen to them. My brother and I didn't go in. They told us we could go in for free, that they wouldn't charge us. But I could see inside. I saw their red bandanas, white shirts and black jackets—all army-style. They insisted that we go in, but I didn't want to. Plus, my brother had been drinking beer and he was drunk. Thanks to God, the bus arrived and my brother was drunk, so I helped him get in the bus and we went home. Look, if my brother hadn't been drunk, we would have fallen into the trap in San Miguel. My uncle was there. He survived because he threw himself in a gutter and pretended he was dead. He came into the house crying, "Oh my God. Oh my God!"

After that, my mother heard about the killing in San Miguel. My mother was still alive that year. She came to get us. But we couldn't go through Rabinal. There was no longer the possibility of traveling through the center. We couldn't take a bus, we came back by foot. When we reached the entrance to Rabinal, we turned to take a path through the mountains around Rabinal. As we turned, we saw four judiciales with guns and the same style—red bandanas and black coats. We crouched down and kept moving. If we stopped to look at them, they might see us and shoot. "Dios, Dios, Dios," we passed by them praying to God that nothing would happen to us. Somehow we were saved and we got home. When my father saw us, he began to cry, he thought we were dead. We all cried.

A few days later, we were summoned by the military commissioner. We presented ourselves to the patrol commander and he put us in charge of

patrolling at night with the patrollers. Because we were obedient, we were just kids, he gave us sticks and rope to make road blocks to catch people. Then a commissioner, who had recently left the military base, said he was going to organize a company of kids and youth to go to the villages and hide in the cliffs to see who did not patrol. I was just listening. I was just a kid of fourteen and didn't think much about it.

So that was how it was at the end of 1981. There were two men who worked for the army base. They told us their work was to "orejón" [spy]. They would hear a bad word about someone and arrive to investigate the poor people here. They said every day new squads were being organized. Our job was to watch over the house where the orejas [spies] slept at night.¹³ They would be inside sleeping and we would be outside with our sticks. If we didn't obey them, they would accuse us and we would be killed. They said, "Anyone who doesn't patrol is acting like he wants to be a guerrilla." So we followed their orders.

They were killing people, but we didn't know why. Then, one day I was summoned again. They sent me to the army base. The commissioner said, "We have to take twenty-five patrollers and whoever doesn't go, well we know why." Still, I said, "But, I am underage. I am still a minor. I'm not an adult yet."¹⁴ He ignored all that. He said, "As soon as you are called, you have to go and complete your orders. If you don't go, they will accuse you of being a guerrilla."

At that time, my whole family was still alive and they were just sitting there listening. Then my father asked, "How is that possible? My son is just a kid. He is still little. He is not an adult. What I know is that he has to be eighteen [for army service] and he isn't." But the commissioner said, "No. If he is called, he has to go." So, I went. My mother was crying. My father asked, "So, you are really going to go?" I answered, "I have to go because if I don't, they will say I am a guerrilla."

So I found myself in the army at fourteen. The first thing the base commander said to the new recruits once we were all gathered was, "Welcome to all you guerrillas. Welcome to all of you. You are all guerrillas and your parents are all guerrillas. So welcome, fucking guerrillas." The captain of the company grabbed one of the recruits by the scruff of his neck. He pulled out his bayonet and stuck it in the recruit's mouth. And this is how it was. Each day was a new punishment. They kicked us around like balls. They tied us up and mistreated us. We were just surviving. Some were crying. Others tried to flee. But there were orders to kill anyone who tried to get away. We were full of fear. We were like startled baby chicks.

I wrote to my father that everything was really screwed up in the army. He wrote that he would come to visit me at the base on July 18. But he never came. A few days later, a friend of mine came to see me. He was going to

Rabinal and asked if I wanted to send anything to my father. So, I gave him a letter. Then, that same friend returned a few days later. He asked me, "Do you know your father is dead? Your whole family is dead," he said. "No," I said, "I don't know that." "Your father is dead. Your whole family. Your mother. Your brothers. In Plan de Sánchez, no one is alive. The army did it. For God, I come to tell you."

I went to the sergeant of the company. I told him what had happened. "Who killed them?" he asked. "The army did it," I told him. "Who told you this?" he asked. "The people of Rabinal saw it. Everyone knows. Everyone in Rabinal knows it was the army. It happened on Sunday." He argued with me. "No, you are mistaken. Why would they have killed your father?" I asked him to help me investigate what had happened. "Why should I do that?" he said, "There is no killing here."

Then, a sub-lieutenant, a woman, arrived. She asked me what had happened. I told her. She helped me because women have more conscience. Still, it was fifteen days before I had any confirmation. I went to radio communications every day. Everyday, I went and pestered them until they got mad at me. But, I still went again. Finally, the brigadier called me. He told me he was an orphan, "that's why I have never hit you or mistreated you." It was true, this brigadier never beat me, never hit me, never punished me. He defended me when others wanted to punish me. It was true, the army killed my family. "Look," the brigadier said, "do you have any money? What are you going to do now?"

"What am I going to do? I want to know about my father's case," I said. "It is not just that they killed my father. What are we doing? The army says it is here to defend our families. They say that is why we are here. But the mistake is that we are here and not defending our families. No, our own compañeros are the ones who are killing our families. Here we are taking care of the army and the army is killing our parents."

I went to the colonel. I told him I was resigning from my position and was going to search for my family. "I will never again be in this army! The army killed my father, my brothers, everyone. Never! Not one more day. I am not going to stay here. I resign. Please give me a discharge," I said. "No," said the colonel, "you're not going anywhere. They will kill you if you leave." "If they kill me, they kill me," I said. I left the next morning.

When I finally got to Plan de Sánchez, it was empty. Some of the houses were burned. When I got to my house, it was still there. I found my little brother José crying inside. He was twelve. He had some birds in a cage. He was alone and there was no food. He was hungry. I had some tortillas with me. So, I killed the birds and gave him the tortillas. I told him I would be back for him.¹⁵

THE (PARA)MILITARIZATION OF YOUTH IN COLOMBIA

The preceding Guatemalan youth testimonies chronicle forced recruitment in the early 1980s. Though separated by geography, culture, and time, their experiences resonate with testimonies of youth in Colombia and elsewhere today. In this section I offer the narrative of Yulian, a paramilitary youth in Colombia. His testimony resonates with those of the forcibly recruited Maya youth. Thus, these testimonies transcend their experiential location in Guatemala and become a site of contestation challenging forced recruitment of youth and demanding recognition of the rights of the child and international humanitarian law. Moreover, understanding their experiences provides an opportunity for international humanitarian aid programs to develop alternatives to violence for children and youth now living in internal armed conflicts.

My field research in Colombia indicates that displaced and orphaned children and youth generally have four options: (1) join the army, (2) join the paramilitaries, (3) join the guerrilla, or (4) rural to urban flight. Moreover, those children and youth who are displaced from rural villages under siege to urban *barrios* must frequently move from one urban site to another in order to escape recruitment by urban armed actors (author interview, May 31, 2003). Many people are afraid of these (displaced rural) urban youth; authorities treat them like criminals, and they are often targets of paramilitary "social cleansing." One way to escape "social cleansing" is to join the ranks of the paramilitaries. This was the case of nineteen-year-old Yulian, who lived in the paramilitary-controlled Barrio Obrero in Apartado, a *barrio* founded by displaced people in the early 1990s. He told me:

I lived each day in fear that the paramilitaries would grab me and accuse me of a crime I hadn't committed. I had no opportunities until one day a friend of mine said, "Come on, let's go join them." As soon as we got there, they gave us camouflage uniforms, rifles, new guns and other equipment.

The campesinos help the guerrilla, so sometimes we have to grab them. Grab them means kill them. They have to respect us because we wear the symbol that says, "AUC": Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia. When we kill a campesino, it is because there are really few displaced people. What there are among the displaced are a lot of guerrilla infiltrators who are very astute and intelligent.

Once, some campesinos told some others that we had arrived in their community. We didn't want the guerrilla to know we were there. So, we had to kill them with machetes and chop them up piece by piece and bury them. Human rights are a problem because we can't grab thirty people and kill them all at once because that would be a massacre.

But we don't kill anyone without authorization. Because I have a family, sometimes it was painful for me when we got to a town and the civilians would be praying. But I am just a patroller and surely when a commander tells a patroller, "Kill this civilian," I really cannot ask him why. No, I simply have to do what he tells me to do. Because one goes there to kill or one is killed, right?

I am on leave right now, but if a patron here (in Apartado) comes to me and says, "Let's go do a little work, we have to grab someone," I go do it because I am part of the organization. Sometimes in a week, we have to kill five people. Maybe on one day, we kill two. If the police and the prosecutor aren't doing much, we kill more. It all depends on what we are ordered to do. We have to follow orders. This is a war without end. If you make a mistake, you pay with your life.

MEMORIES OF TRAUMA

Yulian's testimony, like each of the four testimonies from Guatemala, chronicles a childhood and adolescence of poverty, displacement, the witnessing of atrocities, and survival. Each also communicates profound feelings of powerlessness in an unpredictable world of terror mixed with nostalgia for the elusive power that came with carrying a gun. Whether ten years have transpired between the forced recruitment and the giving of testimony (as in the Guatemalan cases), or just ten days after returning from paramilitary actions (as in the Colombian case), the sensations of fear, self-doubt, betrayal, and self-hate as well as the desires for individual and community liberation and transformation remain palpable in the memories of each of these survivors. In each testimony, it was an overwhelming sense of rightlessness associated with direct or indirect displacement that led to forced recruitment. In this chapter I want to heed Arendt's caution about the slippery slope implicit in focusing on the status of the rightless and refocus the lens of analysis on the deeds of those responsible for forced recruitment. We can learn about them through the testimonies of former child soldiers and guerrilla combatants because the deeds of those responsible for forced recruitment can also be read as the constitution of available options for youth living in armed conflict.

Further, I suggest that the constitution of available options for youth living in armed conflict can be traced to the original traumas preceding forced recruitment, which are recounted in these testimonies. From his memories of familial battles over self-hate with his sister to his attempt to kill a *ladino* recruit, Gaspar's testimony reflects deep contradictions in his personal struggle with what it means to be indigenous in Guatemala, as well as the limited options available in his life

when, in his own words, he “chose to be an abuser, not abused.” Despite his weapon, he recalled fear of “any man, every man.” The torture of his military indoctrination is mirrored by Mateo’s experience of training with live munitions and the ritual consumption of dog. Though Mateo evokes the power, luxury, and danger of the army from his own childhood, as an adult he still remembers his weapon as “a jewel.” Fear of superiors and hatred of their superiors, fellow recruits, and the peasants upon whom Gaspar and Mateo were ordered to carry out their actions is compounded by Mateo’s grandfather’s acknowledgement that “You are no longer one of us.” The powerlessness of Maya adults in the face of army interrogators serves only to heighten this loss of Maya identity in the everyday life of soldiering. Recall Mateo’s conclusion: “The only thing that matters is that the people will say whatever the army wants them to say.” His conclusion also resonates with the experience of recruits that “had to have such a face” to escape the wrath of their commanders. When Gaspar was recruited, he lacked the security of the family structure that Mateo lost to the violence of the war. Pablo was taken from his family, and after learning of the army massacre in his village, he stands up to his commanding officer and challenges the army for destroying both his family and community. In Colombia, driven to paramilitarism by fear and poverty, Yulian sees no exit from the violence of the paramilitaries to which he has now tied his survival—however reluctantly.

Esperanza expresses pride in her physical strength and endurance as a guerrilla combatant. Though she sought out the guerrilla, she did so after witnessing army violence in her own community. She liked being a combatant. Like Mateo’s memory of his machine gun as a “jewel,” she recalls, “I loved having a weapon at my disposal.” While Mateo, Pablo, and Gaspar’s experiences are conflictive and painful memories of assaults on their indigenous identity, Esperanza’s identity struggles involve her gendered position more than her ethnicity. At first, she felt out of place, but then she “began to believe that women have the same capacity that men have.” While Gaspar, Mateo, and Pablo’s experiences of violence in the army, and Yulian’s experience in the paramilitaries, are mediated with memories of fear and hatred, Esperanza remembers nostalgically that, “Everything is different because everyone knows that everyone else is capable of doing whatever a man does [in the guerrilla].”

Today, Gaspar and Mateo live with political asylum in the United States, Esperanza is a legal refugee in Mexico, and Pablo is a leader in his reconstructed village and has a pending claim against the state for the massacre of his family. Despite these different contemporary life situations, each continues to struggle with what it means to be a former soldier, combatant, and/or civil patroller while living a disjointed existence, disarticulated from their communities of origin and struggling to survive at the margins of the state—each a product of

trauma preceding their recruitment. Though each participates in Maya rights organizing, each also lives with the suspicions that their previously militarized lives continue to cast upon their present struggles. My meeting with Yulian was clandestine and anonymous, so I do not know his fate.

The experience of forced recruitment, even when remembered as consensual, is layered upon original displacement—what Arendt referred to as the “loss of social texture” (1973, 293). Forced recruitment was not the first trauma in any of these testimonies. Rather, survival of selective and massive violence, marginalization, poverty, and displacement marked each of these young people for recruitment by armed groups. In each case, this displacement or loss of social texture represents the displacement of individual and community life boundaries. This displacement of boundaries in turn defines new fields of subjectivity and memory.

Pierre Janet wrote that memory “is an action,” but that when an individual is unable to liquidate an experience through the action of recounting it, the experience is retained as a “fixed idea” lacking incorporation into “chapters of our personal history.” The experience, then, “cannot be said to have a ‘memory’ . . . it is only for convenience that we speak of it as ‘traumatic memory’” (Herman 1992, 37). Further, Janet believed that the successful assimilation or liquidation of traumatic experience produces a “feeling of triumph” (41). Judith Herman suggests that those who have not liquidated their “traumatic memory” express it through “post-traumatic play,” which she describes as “uncanny” in its reenactments of original trauma. She writes, “Even when they are consciously chosen, they have a feeling of involuntariness . . . they have a driven, tenacious quality”; this resonates with Freud’s naming of “this recurrent intrusion of traumatic experience” as “repetition compulsion,” which is no less than “an attempt to master the traumatic event” (Herman 1992, 41). Whether recruited through coercion or consent, child soldiers and combatants attempt to master previous traumas in the violent acts of everyday armed life. At the same time, the new layer of trauma produced in the everyday life of the child soldier or combatant *demands consideration*.

Few would dispute Herman’s assertion that traumatic experiences “destroy the victim’s fundamental assumptions about the safety of the world, the positive value of self, and the meaningful order of creation” (51). What is of particular interest to us in analyzing the case of forcibly recruited youth is our own underlying assumptions about trauma events and where on the continuum of life experience we choose to locate these events. Forcibly recruited youth face double trauma—the trauma of the violence that preceded and made them vulnerable to forced recruitment, as well as the trauma of witnessing and participating in violence whether as soldiers, patrollers, or combatants. While forced

recruitment may be the public trauma of structural violence, each who gave testimony first shared their private traumas leading up to their recruitment.

Whether our focus is on prevention of forced recruitment or postwar reintegration, the experience of these former soldiers and combatants behooves us to pay close attention to how the fractured subject positions of Gaspar, Mateo, Esperanza, Pablo, and Yulian reflect the formation of agency and survival in structures of terror (Das 2000, 222). Here, I am suggesting that experiences of armed action are remembered within the framework of preceding structural traumas (in Arendt's words, the "deeds of those responsible") that crashed into their lives long before they ever held a gun. Weapons and their accompanying power are remembered with nostalgia because their use was a "post-traumatic play" where unresolved traumas and powerlessness were violently reenacted as a "spontaneous, unsuccessful attempt at healing" (Herman 1992, 41) pre-recruitment trauma. Thus, whether we set our sights on preventing recruitment in situations of armed conflict or reintegration in post-conflict civil society, we must problematize the pre-recruitment traumas of displacement.

CHILD PEACEMAKERS

Still, there are children and youth who seek to make peace in the very same communities in which other children have been recruited. In Colombian peace communities, youth have organized to reject recruitment by all the armed actors. Alvin is a youth leader in the Costo de Oro peace community. He decided to focus his energies on youth organizing against forced recruitment because, in his words, "A weapon resolves nothing." He explains: "Weapons destroy the soul. I have seen this happen since my childhood."

When I asked him how the youth were able to organize themselves, he said:

One of the principle sources of support for us, for the youth, is the example of the process of the peace communities. We are non-violent. We don't support what the armed actors are doing. We have developed a way of life without weapons. We have shown the Colombian government and also the world that we are capable of building peace. For this, we have become the target of the armed actors. Our future is something that we have to build for ourselves. Many times youth take up weapons because they are unaware that it is not really in their interest, nor their family or community's interest. We have to teach one another how to live together in peace. We want the children in our communities to grow up with positive feelings about the future and a commitment to the community so that

they can be leaders in the community, not obstacles to the community peace process.

When I asked Alvin and others how the international community could support the youth, Alvin said: "I know that when people come to visit us from outside, they leave with a weight of pain because it is inhuman what is taking place here. But we need very simple things to develop ourselves. The most basic and most needed is education and recreation." Others agreed:

Yes, we always aspire to have an education.

Training to improve our skills.

Musical instruments for the youth because our communities lost our instruments when we were displaced.

Soccer uniforms so that we can exercise and have soccer tournaments amongst the communities.

From 2001 to 2002 a series of violent attacks against youth leaders culminated with the assassination of Edwin Ortega, who represented the youth of peace communities internationally and was an outspoken advocate of the right of youth to resist forced recruitment. Rather than abandon their organizing project, peace community youth gathered on October 22, 2002, to restructure their organization, because "It is only through our organization that we have the possibility of a future. Alone, only weapons await us." The restructuring included two key points: First, the leadership training would no longer identify and train youth leaders; rather, all youth would be trained and viewed as leaders. Further, all intercommunity meetings would involve groups of youth leaders rather than one single representative from each community. As one youth explained to me, "If we are all leaders, we remove the individual targets from our backs" (author interview, October 22, 2002). The second key point was to establish an international commission to begin a new dialogue with the armed actors. The youth presented these proposals to the general assembly of the peace communities at their meeting on October 23, 2002.

Both of these proposals were received favorably by the General Assembly of the peace communities. During the discussion of the youth proposal, Celsa, a mother who lost her son to paramilitary violence, said: "We have to recognize that we must support our youth. If we look beyond the barrel of the gun, it is our youth pointing the guns at us. We have to stand with our youth to support them. We must unite with them to stop the armed actors from taking them" (author's notes, Asamblea General, October 23, 2002). The peace communities

celebrated their sixth anniversary in October 2003 with a General Assembly of peace communities followed by an international anniversary celebration. A central focus of both the assembly and celebration was the right of youth to organize for peace. "We are here because we want a positive future," explained Luis. "We refuse to be targets of the armed actors. We refuse to carry their guns. We want our right to peace respected" (author interview, October 17, 2003).

It is not only in the peace communities that youth organize to provide a respite from the violence that engulfs them. Yolanda, a youth organizer in Barrancabermeja, told me, "Our work is difficult. We open a space here so that youth have a place to distract themselves from the violence that surrounds us. We have hope that this violence will end. We struggle for life" (author interview, October 12, 2000).

CONCLUSION

While testimonies and interviews from child soldiers indicate the connection between displacement and forced recruitment, the experiences of the CPRs and peace communities demonstrate that apparently powerless peasants can organize to survive and assert their rights in the midst of war. These collective survival strategies generate local spaces for peace and democratic participation despite the ongoing armed conflict. The survival of these seemingly utopian, community efforts deserve both the attention and support of the international community because they represent the survival of civil society in increasingly restricted political spheres. Moreover, the resilience of these CPRs and peace communities offers an opportunity for the greater civil society of both Guatemala and Colombia to learn from these experiments about the long-term strengthening of citizen participation. The value of this participation is evident in the enthusiastic participation of youth in the peace communities. In contrast to the youth who have been forcibly recruited, the youth of the peace communities have hope for their futures and see a role for themselves in shaping the life of their community. The international community should heed the call of the youth for support for education, soccer, and music. It should honor Celsa's plea that "we must support our youth."

Testimonies of child soldiers and peace activists demonstrate that youth do not merely respond to conflict, but they also interpret the meaning of conflict for themselves, their families, and their communities. These lived experiences rupture the binary stereotype of innocent victim or dangerous delinquent and challenge us to recognize these children and youth as active subjects in their own lives who develop survival strategies for themselves, their families, and their communities.

In this way, youth peacemakers reassert their rights, rebuild community structures, and transform the isolation of displacement and everyday life in the war zone. These youth peacemakers, like the peace communities, constitute new domains of social justice, citizenship, and conflict resolution. Moreover, these constitutive processes (1) connect the individual to the nation-state and international community; (2) rebuild the social fabric damaged by displacement; and (3) construct new modes of agency and citizen participation, which are necessary for peaceful resolution to the internal armed conflict as well as for postwar reconstruction. These transformations are not grounded in determinism or utopia outside of power. Rather, as Hardt and Negri suggest, the “actual activity of the multitude—its creation, production and power” is a “radical counterpower” in the present (2000, 66). This “counterpower” is evident in the everyday life and moral imagination of the peace communities and the youth peacemakers.

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NOTES

1. The trauma and medical needs of child soldiers have been empirically documented (Machel 1996, 2001; McBeth 2002; Castello-Branco 1997; Pearn 2003; Somasundaram 2002; Maier 1998; Keairns 2003). Additionally, abuse and trauma of child soldiers have been explored to establish the need for rehabilitation

and/or reintegration programs specific to the needs of child soldiers (Thompson 1999; Chaudhry 2001; Rakita 1999; Alfredson 2001; De Silva 2001; Bracken 1996; Menkhaus 1999; Skinner 1999). The Rights of the Child (Ramgoolie 2001; Heppner 2002; De Berry 2001), human rights (Maslen and Islamshah 2000; Von Arnim 2000), international humanitarian law (Cohn and Goodwin-Gill 1994; Rone 1994; Human Rights Watch 1994b, 1995), the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (Khabir Ahmad, "UN Resolves to Protect Children Against Wars," *Lancet*, September 11, 1999, 929; American Academy of Pediatrics 2000; Dennis 2000), and the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention on Child Labor (Halsan 2001; Dennis 1999; Amnesty International 1999, 2000; Fernando 2001) have provided legal frameworks for the international community to condemn the use of child soldiers and establish legal protections for children (Kalshoven 1995; Abbott 2000; Campbell 1999).

2. This section draws from my books *Buried Secrets: Truth and Human Rights in Guatemala* (2003a) and *Violencia y Genocidio en Guatemala* (2003b)

3. Nebaj Testimony 3N5, March 9, 1997, 1 of 1.

4. This interview with paramilitary youth was organized clandestinely. "Yulian" is a pseudonym. The interview was granted on condition of anonymity.

5. *Kaibiles* are the elite fighting forces of the Guatemalan army. The following testimonies draw from my book, *Buried Secrets: Truth and Human Rights in Guatemala* (2003a).

6. The EGP (Ejercito Guerrillero de los Pobres, or Guerrilla Army of the Poor) was the largest of the four guerrilla groups in Guatemala and later became a part of the URNG (Union Revolucionario Nacional de Guatemala, or Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union), which was composed of all four guerrilla groups.

7. San Francisco Testimonies, Mateo, 1991–92.

8. See chapter two of *Buried Secrets* (2003a) for more of Esperanza's experiences.

9. *Chaparrita* is a colloquial expression meaning short, petite, or tiny. Esperanza's height is four feet, eight inches.

10. National Direction (Direccion Nacional) was the high command of the EGP.

11. Mexico Testimony 7, July 1993.

12. San Miguel was not the only community attacked by the army that day. On September 15, 1981, the people of Rabinal went to the plaza to celebrate Independence Day. The army had obligated everyone to participate and attend the Independence Day parade. Accompanied by *judiciales*, military commissioners, and civil patrollers, the soldiers opened fire on the crowd and killed some two hundred people. See CEH (1999, 8:144).

13. *Oreja* (ear) is a colloquialism for army spy.

14. With these statements he was attempting to protect himself from forced recruitment because by law, recruitment age was eighteen. Here again is another example of youth consciousness of their rights.

15. Rabinal Testimony no. 6-4, June 17, 1997.