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Review/Reseña

Oscar Iván Maldonado, ed., Daniel Hernández-Salazar, Photos, *So That All Shall Know ~ Para Que Todos Sepan*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007.

Photography and the Battle for Guatemala's Memory

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So That All Shall Know ~ Para Que Todos Sepan reflects on the visual work of photographer Daniel Hernández-Salazar. Through photojournalism, portraits and photos of installation art, it reminds us that the battle for Guatemala's memory is a 21st century struggle for justice in a country where the intellectual and material authors of genocide remain free and continue to hold a significant balance of

power despite legal efforts in Guatemala and abroad to bring these war criminals to justice. Hernández-Salazar is perhaps best known among travelers to Guatemala, human rights activists and scholars of Latin America for his evocative photographs of Maya women in mourning and struggle over public space with the Guatemalan military and police. His powerful 1992 “Clash of Two Worlds, 1492-1992” captures the struggle of Maya widows and orphans facing off with the National Police (PNC) [See photo # 1]. But his photos reach



Image # 1

beyond documentary to art in the tradition of Robert Mapplethorpe—“shocking for their content, but exquisite in their technical mastery.”¹ The unsettling image of the naked, winged angel who can speak no evil, see no evil and hear no evil, but then must shout (*Para Que Todos Sepan*) first came to my attention in the four different panels on the covers of the four-volume *Guatemala: Nunca Más. Informe Proyecto Interdiocesano de Recuperación de la*

¹ Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation, accessed Jan 5, 2009.
<http://www.mapplethorpe.org/biography.html>.

Memoria Histórica published in 1998 by the Archbishop's Office for Human Rights.² These powerful images became the protest banner for a public demonstration demanding justice for the assassination of Monsignor Juan Gerardi, just days after the release of the report [See image # 2].



Image # 2

Hernández-Salazar also meticulously documented the funeral of Monsignor Juan Gerardi that brought tens of thousands of Guatemalans to the streets to protest his assassination, which was universally seen as a murder to silence those who dare to call attention to the brutal killings of the past and demand accountability. One year later, Hernández-Salazar documented protests on the first anniversary of the assassination of Monsignor Gerardi, and members of the Human Rights Office of the Archdiocese protested by holding

² ODHA (Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Arzobispado de Guatemala), *Guatemala-Nunca Más*, vols. 1-4. Informe Proyecto Interdiocesano de Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica (Guatemala City: ODHA, 1998).

the volumes of *Guatemala: Nunca Más* and *Memoria Del Silencio*. In this way, the images of Hernández-Salazar are more than evocative book covers, more than documentary photos. They have become a weapon of contestation in the ongoing struggle for memory and justice.

January 2009 marks the 10th anniversary of the publication of *Memoria del Silencio*,³ the twelve-volume final report of the Guatemalan Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH) that quantified the magnitude of Guatemala's internal armed conflict by documenting the more than 200,000 dead or disappeared, 626 villages massacred, 1.5 million displaced and the 150,000 driven to refuge in Mexico.⁴ The CEH determined that the Guatemalan Army was responsible for 93 percent of all human rights violations and the guerrillas responsible for 3 percent with the remaining 4 percent of violations committed by unknown assailants.⁵ Most significantly, the CEH found the Guatemalan army and national security state responsible for acts of genocide committed against the Maya who comprise a majority of the Guatemalan population, yet remain politically and economically marginalized by poverty, inequality and discrimination.⁶

Five years after the CEH findings of genocidal acts, on April 29, 2004 the Inter-American Court condemned the Guatemalan government for the July 18, 1982 massacre of 268 Achi-Maya in the village of Plan de Sánchez in the mountains above Rabinal, Baja Verapaz.⁷ In this judgment, and for the first time in its history, the Court ruled that genocide had taken place and attributed the 1982 massacre and the genocide to Guatemalan army troops. Beyond the

³ CEH, *Memoria del Silencio* (Guatemala City: CEH, 1999), vols. 1-12.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Memoria del Silencio*, 5:42

⁶ *Memoria del Silencio*, 2:315.

⁷ See Corte IDH. *Caso Masacre Plan de Sánchez Vs. Guatemala*. Sentencia de 29 de abril de 2004. Serie C No. 105. http://www.corteidh.or.cr/pais.cfm?id_Pais=18

importance of this judgment for the people of Plan de Sánchez, the Court's ruling is particularly significant. For its key points include a declaration that there was genocide in Guatemala, which was part of the framework of the internal armed conflict when the armed forces of the Guatemalan government implemented their National Security Doctrine in their counterinsurgency actions. Moreover, the Court placed responsibility for the genocide during the regime of General Efraín Ríos Montt, who was the architect of the National Security Doctrine.

Two years and some months later, the Spanish Court issued an international arrest order charging various former generals and military officials with genocide, terrorism, torture, assassination and illegal detention. Those charged include General Efraín Ríos Montt (head of state through military coup from March 1982 to August 1983); General Oscar Humberto Mejía Victores (head of state through military coup from August 1983 to January 1986); General Fernando Romeo Lucas García (president of Guatemala from 1978 to March 1982); General Angel Aníbal Guevara Rodríguez (Minister of Defense under Lucas García); Donaldo Alvarez Ruiz (Minister of Interior under Lucas García); Colonel Germán Chupina Barahona (director of the National Police under Lucas García); Pedro García Arredondo (Chief of Command 6 of the National Police under Lucas García); General Benedicto Lucas García (Army chief of staff during his brother's reign).⁸ As of January 2009, none of these military officers has been extradited and each has filed numerous appeals to slow the process.⁹ Moreover, they continue to make public justifications and/or deny any knowledge of human rights violations. While not one of them has been jailed, the country of Guatemala is

⁸ *El Periódico* (Guatemala), July 8, 2006, 1.

⁹ General Fernando Romeo Lucas García appears to have died in Venezuela shortly before the arrest order was issued.

now their jail because INTERPOL (International Criminal Police Organization) agreements bind any country receiving a visitor on INTERPOL's international arrest order list to make that person immediately extraditable.¹⁰ Still, they continue to argue that self-granted amnesties give them immunity from prosecution as they live with impunity in Guatemala.

So That All Shall Know ~ Para Que Todos Sepan defies the generals and their cronies in a multi-layered presentation of Hernández-Salazar's images in three high-quality portfolios, which are accompanied by four engaging essays and a prologue by Nobel Laureate Rigoberta Menchú. Edited by Oscar Iván Maldonado, the book opens with the words of Eduardo Galeano: "These photographs look at us, they speak to us, and I believe what they tell us" (i). A moving portrait of Menchú taken by Hernández-Salazar in 1992 during the 500 years campaign is followed by Menchú's reflections on the importance of truth and memory which she finds necessary for survival and justice (ix). All writings in the book are in both English and Spanish with translations and proofreading credited to essay authors as well as country experts Megan Thomas and Barbara Kohlen, and notable Guatemalan writer Ronald Flores.

In his introduction to the works of Hernández-Salazar, Oscar Iván Maldonado observes that the power of the images comes from "his concrete commitment to reporting the truth about suffering, to demonstrating that pain is not anonymous: it always has a face and a name" (1). Moreover, the work has a transcendent connection to and reflects the shared commitment of Hernández-Salazar and Bishop Juan Gerardi "to reveal truth as an act of liberation" (2). In this way, Maldonado rightly places the work of Hernández-Salazar firmly in Guatemala's struggle for justice and liberation.

¹⁰ For more on INTERPOL's role in extradition, see INTERPOL's official website: <http://www.interpol.int/Public/Wanted/fugitiveInvestServ.asp>

"Angels, Conquests, and Memory", by W. George Lovell, uses Eduardo Galeano's *Memory of Fire* as a framework to explore Hernández-Salazar's work in conversation with Lovell's own field research experiences. A longtime chronicler of Guatemala and historical geographer by training, Lovell offers a concise history of Guatemala beginning with the Conquest. Through this lens, he recounts his experience with documentary filmmaker Mary Ellen Davis and Hernández-Salazar as they accompany Mateo Pablo, a Chuj Maya, on his return to Guatemala. Lovell remembers both Davis and Hernández-Salazar as amiable and flexible artists who ultimately work together because they share the common goal of denouncing the violence. Lovell recounts: "Daniel's angels become a central motif in Mary Ellen's film. Together, the four angels, he tells us, constitute a single artifact, *Clarification*" (8).

"Daniel Hernández-Salazar, Photojournalist" is the title of the first portfolio that begins with a 1992 full-color image of impoverished Maya widows and relatives in public mourning over the loss of their kidnapped and assassinated loved ones. The lingering grief of the widows is assaulted with a turn of the page with one image of a Guatemalan soldier standing over a bridge damaged by a guerrilla explosion and another of the feared elite Kaibil battalion heavily armed, shouting and marching in war paint. We are then brought back to the sorrow of bereavement with an image of widows and mothers wailing after the 1990 army massacre of Santiago Atitlán which is juxtaposed to the previously mentioned "Clash of Two Worlds," where widows, mothers, and their children confront police in riot gear in 1992.

Black and white images of protests of the Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (Mutual Support Group-GAM) from the 1980s and black and white and color images of mothers, widows, and orphans holding images of their missing loved ones in protests in the 1990s grace the

pages of this portfolio. Rural religious processions commemorating the exhumation and reburial of massacre victims and the massive procession for assassinated Monsignor Juan Gerardi in the nation's capital move us from the past to the present, and back again. The portfolio creates a shared gaze refusing to allow us to forget that these massacres, disappearances, and assassinations are not only events that must be documented accurately in the historical record, but that they are crimes against humanity committed against real people who continue to suffer the consequences of injustice while the intellectual and material authors of these crimes continue to live with impunity. Hernández-Salazar closes this portfolio with a hand-painted cloth banner from the 1996 signing of the peace accords that reads: *La Lucha Sigue ~ The Struggle Continues*.

In his essay, "Icon of Memory", Guatemalan art critic Miguel Flores Castellanos offers an intellectual and artistic biography of the evolution of Hernández-Salazar's work from photo-journalism to "an oeuvre immersed in the aesthetics, techniques, issues, and symbolism of our age" (23). In this way, he introduces Hernández-Salazar's second portfolio. "Eros + Thanatos", which is a collection of highly stylized portraits evoking the millennial struggle between the life instinct of Eros and the death drive of Thanatos. A nude series calls to mind the violence of the past as it portrays an inner prison, a prisoner with his hands bound, the pathways of pain with the model prostrate across railroad tracks, and then the "Christ of My Passions"—a disturbingly beautiful color image of a collage of sepia photos that pieces together the model's nude body on a wooden cross. The photos are mounted with nails and a red ribbon runs from photo of the model's heart to the floor. From there, the portfolio moves to the famous angel portraits in "Clarification" that became the cover for the *Nunca Más* report and the symbol of a past that refuses to be silenced. From there, the portfolio moves to the edge of darkness with partially sepia-toned images that conjure the grim

reaper and painful deaths; again reminding us of torture in Guatemala.

The final segments of this series integrate the inner prison and what is revealed in exhumations of clandestine cemeteries. A collage of three different images of the main grave of the Panzós massacre is eerily reminiscent of the mass graves at Bergen-Belsen, the Nazi Concentration Camp in Germany [See Image # 3].



Image # 3

But Hernández-Salazar does not allow us to view the dead or their remains *en masse*. He individualizes the mass with a portrait of one skeleton and the study of the bones of one hand. He connects these images with a black and white print on fibered paper deliberately distressing the image of the nude angel covering his mouth, but this time the angel has no wings and the title is “The Buried”. This is not the angel who speaks no evil. This is the 200,000 Guatemalans who were silenced, along with their stories, when they were killed and buried in clandestine graves. The portfolio concludes with a study of Thanatos through portraits and images of mixed medium photographic exhibits of human remains. The photographs

are powerful and disturbing. They are respectful of the dead and damning of those responsible for the Guatemalan genocide.

In his essay, “Postmodern Humanist”, Michael A. Weinstein describes Hernández-Salazar’s work as “multidimensional.” He describes the form of Hernández-Salazar’s work as “postmodern” and with a “political significance” as well as representing “an existential response to life” (39). He writes: “Hernández-Salazar is profoundly unwilling to be sacrificial; he will remain at the forefront of the artistic times conceptually and technically, he will convey a public message—and he will do all of these at once” (39). Further, Weinstein observes that Hernández-Salazar “does not wear his philosophy on his sleeve; he evinces it in his images” (44). In this way, Weinstein provides a bridge from the first portfolio of photojournalism to the second portfolio of more highly stylized images, and leads us to the third and final portfolio of installation art entitled “Memory of an Angel”.

The portfolio “Memory of an Angel” is like Susan Meiselas meets Robert Mapplethorpe in a Spencer Tunick installation. Using the shouting angel as installation art posted at politically strategic yet public locations throughout Guatemala, “Memory of an Angel” has the political immediacy of the work of Meiselas’s powerful images documenting rights violations in Latin America and the disturbing beauty of Mapplethorpe’s work. While Tunick’s installation art of masses of nudes challenges notions about nudity in the public space as well as the ways in which the body is represented in culture,¹¹ the work of Hernández-Salazar places the memory of the dead in public spaces and forces an engagement with those responsible for the deaths. As Tim O’Brien has written, “It comes down to gut instinct. A true war story, if truly told, makes the stomach believe.”¹² And the work of Hernández-Salazar make all who see his images believe—

¹¹ <http://www.artquotesbook.com/artists/spencer-tunick/index.htm>

¹² Tim O’Brien, *The Things They Carried* (New York: Penguin, 1991), 84.

even those who deny the genocide and prefer oblivion to memory. Thus, the first image is "Zachriel, Angel of Memory. Sequence of the destruction of the installation across the street from the military intelligence facilities April-June 1999" (Plate 48). This is followed by more images of the shouting angel with different titles reflecting the locations of the installation, such as "Vasarah, Angel of Justice" for the installation on the wall of the Army Headquarters in Guatemala City (Plate 49) and "Misran, Angel of the Persecuted" for the installation on the wall of a building facing the military intelligence headquarters (Plate 52). There are other installations at key historic locations and other seats of power [See Images # 4 and 5]. These images reminded me of the risks of rapid fly-posting of protest banners and quick graffiti against past military regimes and the very high and potentially fatal cost of being caught. A close friend of mine was caught along with 10 other school friends after releasing a paper bag of political pamphlets from a lightpost. It was 1982, he was 13 years old. These children were held and tortured for two weeks by security forces under the Ríos Montt regime. My friend was one of nine children who survived the ordeal. The other two children were never released and joined the 5000 children who died or disappeared during the Guatemalan genocide. No doubt, histories like these are present in Hernández-Salazar's shouting angel and his defiant choice of installation locations.



Image # 4

Hernández-Salazar's installations are like the *escraches* of Argentina and the *funas* of Chile, which are protests organized by activists who gather at the home or place of employment of known torturers—their *escrache* or *funa* are a guerrilla theatre form of protest that denounces the torturers and also informs the local community that the person in this house or this office, their neighbor, their daughter's friend's father, is a torturer. The *escrache* and *funa* also force a public confrontation with the past and remind



Image # 5

the torturers that though they live with impunity, their crimes are not forgotten. Hernández-Salazar's angels serve the same purpose. The army does not like to be in the gaze of the shouting angel. The installation of the angel in front of the Guard of Honor military barracks in Guatemala City was painted over within two days (Plate 63). The installation on the walls of the army stadium was destroyed after a newspaper article highlighted the angels as part of a campaign for justice in the murder of Monsignor Juan Gerardi (Plate 64). And the angel was again removed from the wall facing the old military school and another next to the UN Verification Mission was also destroyed shortly after its installation (Plates 65 and 66). The shouting angel was reproduced as a banner the width of five people and taller than their height for a demonstration outside the Constitutional Court to protest the candidacy of former general and genocidaire Efraín Ríos Montt (Plate 67). This larger than life banner of the angel reappeared at a ceremony commemorating the 25th anniversary of the 1980 Spanish Embassy massacre of 37 people,

when the Guatemalan police firebombed the Spanish Embassy to end a peaceful protest (Plate 68).

Indeed, the shouting angel joins the *escrache* movement with the 2001 installation of “Impunity” on the door of the Teatro del Sur (Plate 70) and the Office of the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires (Plate 71). In 2002, the angel gazes on the US Consulate from a window facing its offices in Levesque, Montreal, Canada (Plate 72). In Chicago, the angel joins a Picasso sculpture and links Hernández-Salazar’s work to Picasso’s denouncement of the Guernica massacre in Spain (Plate 73), and also shows solidarity with the slaughter of Native Americans at a monument on Michigan Avenue (Plate 74). The angel shouts by the statue of George Washington at the main building of the University of Texas at Austin (Plate 75) and from the Texas Memorial Stadium below the remembrance of fallen US soldiers in the Vietnam and Desert Storm wars (Plate 76). The Angel shouts from the Atomic Bomb Dome in Hiroshima (Plate 78) and the eternal flame that honors the victims of the world’s first nuclear bombardment (Plate 81). The final image is the angel shouting from the monument in Tlatelolco, Mexico, that honors the 200 students assassinated in the Tlatelolco massacre by government forces in 1968.

“Photography, Urban Space, and the Historical Memory of Atrocity”, by Steven Hoelscher, is the final essay that closes the book with a moving reflection on the history of *Guatemala: Nunca Más*, the murder of Monsignor Gerardi two days after his release, and the importance of photography for bearing witness. Specifically, he speaks to the power of Hernández-Salazar’s images to bear witness through their insertion into the public space. He reminds readers of the Guatemalan government’s intransigent unwillingness to promote forms of remembering and honoring victims of the violence by changing the names of plazas, streets, or places as was recommended in the conclusions of both *Guatemala: Nunca Más* and the CEH

report. Indeed, today most public schools, public buildings and parks continue to carry the names of military officials. Hoelscher quotes Hernández-Salazar's observation: "The lack of collective memory in my country and the world is not an accident. It is something fomented by those in power to keep the population unconscious and easy to manage" (62). Hernández-Salazar's work, in the very best of artistic traditions, defies those in power by challenging their official history and their dominion over public space by placing the space under the gaze of the angel that shouts *Para Que Todos Sepan*.

This amazing book could be used for teaching in undergraduate and graduate classes in Photography, Latin American Studies, Human Rights, Visual Anthropology, Urban Studies, Latin American Art, and Art History as well as specialty courses that explore memory, social movements and genocide. By publishing this book, the University of Texas Press has made a significant contribution to the memory of Monsignor Juan Gerardi and all the victims of the Guatemalan genocide.