

Yetu' – Nanik – Satajtoj

**Retrospective and Anticipatory Memory and Storytelling among
Young People in the Guatemalan Diaspora in Southern Mexico.**

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For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy – Anthropology

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I _____ declare that this thesis and the work presented is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, or reproduced photographs, this is clearly stated.

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Abstract

My thesis is concerned with young people in the Guatemalan diaspora in Southern Mexico and the ways in which they actively participate in the social making of their hometown in past, present, and future. My young interlocutors find themselves in an interesting position between two layers and temporalities of migration; their parents and grandparents who came to Chiapas as refugees in the 1980's as well as older siblings and peers who frequently migrate to the US. The young people are key actors in the process of negotiating narratives from the past as well as notions of futurity for themselves and their community. During my fieldwork I engaged with young people and the wider community of La Gloria as a teacher, educator, and youth / community worker. A youth group resulted from the process and the topics of space, memory and storytelling are explored through different creative projects that the group and I worked on (oral history, photography, theatre).

This thesis contributes to the study of memory specifically by showing how postmemory (as defined by Hirsch 2008) interlinks with futurity. I hope to show that young people are active in the making of space and memory in La Gloria, two aspects which profoundly impact their aspirations for the future.

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Preface

As a child I remember an old farmhouse with a massive wooden arch as a doorframe standing next to the house I grew up in. The old farmhouse belonged to my great-grandmother and stood as an anachronistic reminder in the middle of a neighbourhood full of new-builds until her death in 1996 after which it was demolished. The wooden doorframe-arch however was kept, restored, and placed in what would then become my family home's backyard. My friends and I were delighted since it perfectly worked as a goal for football matches that we regularly played all the way into our adolescence. I never thought much of this wooden relict of past times standing right in the middle of our garden. I also never paid much attention to the inscriptions that the arch entailed some of which date back to the 1700's. It was only after moving away as a young adult and coming back to visit that I started to ask questions. My dad being a family member and a historian at the same time, explained that each owner of the house had left their mark on this doorframe and that their names can be found if you pay careful attention to the details. It blew my mind that the writing on the arch, which I had taken for granted as something from a distant past, had been done by my granddad skilfully imitating old fonts and spellings just after the farmhouse was demolished in the 1990's. It was here that I became aware for the first time of the many layers and temporalities that inform the multiple ways in which the past manifests itself in present and future, how it is narrated, layered, and performed by contemporaries. History and the past are being rewritten and re-signified in the present informing the future; just like the doorframe which has been inscribed by multiple people over three centuries and re-signified as an object for my childhood and adolescence entertainment all the way into the 21st century.

This thesis is about young people growing up in the Guatemalan diaspora in Southern Mexico. The young participants (children and grandchildren of Guatemalan refugees) relate, mediate, and connect to their family and their town's past, in a setting where diverging temporalities of migration co-exist and interact. I argue that the young people's processes of mediating past narratives from their grandparents' generation (postmemory) are connected to their aspirations and anticipations for futures in form of migration. I hope to show that narrative acts and storytelling are crucial to both modalities of memory; retrospective as well as anticipatory, and that young people play an active role in these processes despite not having come to Chiapas as refugees themselves nor having migrated to the US (yet).

It is the 26th of September 2017 my first day in La Gloria and the first time I witness the ceremony in which La Gloria crowns the winner of the beauty-pageant¹ that marks the beginning of their

¹See glossary pp.235ff. for a more detailed explanation.

annual patron-saint celebration. The ceremony is just over, and I congratulate Matias on successfully conducting the ceremony and introduce myself to Veronica Ruiz-Lagier a Mexican anthropologist I had been in touch with via email who told me about La Gloria and today's festivities. She quickly tells me to quit formalities and just call her 'Vero' and we walk towards the Municipal building where the typical post-ceremony luncheon will take place. Vero and I are walking past a couple of young people sitting on the back of a pick-up truck in the shade. I recognise one of the girls to be Matias' co-host who narrated parts of La Gloria's history earlier during the ceremony. She is still wearing her festive *traje*², Vero introduces us, and I congratulate her. The girls on the pick-up truck are looking in amazement at Vero and ask her how she became an anthropologist and what anthropologists do. Vero says it can involve lots of things but mainly one is interested in human beings and what they do, she points at me: 'Like Malte here for example he is also an anthropologist, and he is going to work with young people just like yourselves'. The three girls and Danny turn around to look at me. 'He will work with us?', Araceli exclaims and looks at Claudia and Nayeli in astonishment. I introduce myself and the three are surprised that I speak Spanish, Claudia says: 'I am so happy that you speak Spanish because our English is "no good"'. We talk about the Akateko language and my idea of working at the local high school (CoBaCh), they tell me that they are all students there. 'That would be awesome then we could really learn English'. I smile and am quite happy about where it is going, Vero excuses herself and encourages us to talk more. While the four girls chat away and explain La Gloria to me, Danny is sitting on the drivers' cabin listening to all of this. (from fieldnotes 26/09/2017).

Little did I know that the four young people in this vignette would become regular members of the Jocox youth group and some would even travel with me to Guatemala just a year after our first brief encounter. This thesis represents a unique contribution to debates around youth, diaspora, and memory, through its theoretical focus and its unique methodology. Throughout my fieldwork starting from this first brief encounter, I developed ideas and techniques around 'youth work as ethnography' and applied them when working with the young interlocutors in workshops and activities of informal education. The unique perspective and ethnographic relationships that formed through this engagement (i.e., working on creative projects and workshops with young people) are the foundation of this thesis in which all theoretical debates around memory, agency, and storytelling ground themselves. The thesis is divided roughly into three parts. An introductory section introduces the reader to the fieldsite, the research participants, and discusses the concepts of 'youth' and 'performance' which are central to the thesis as a whole. The second section deals with young people's

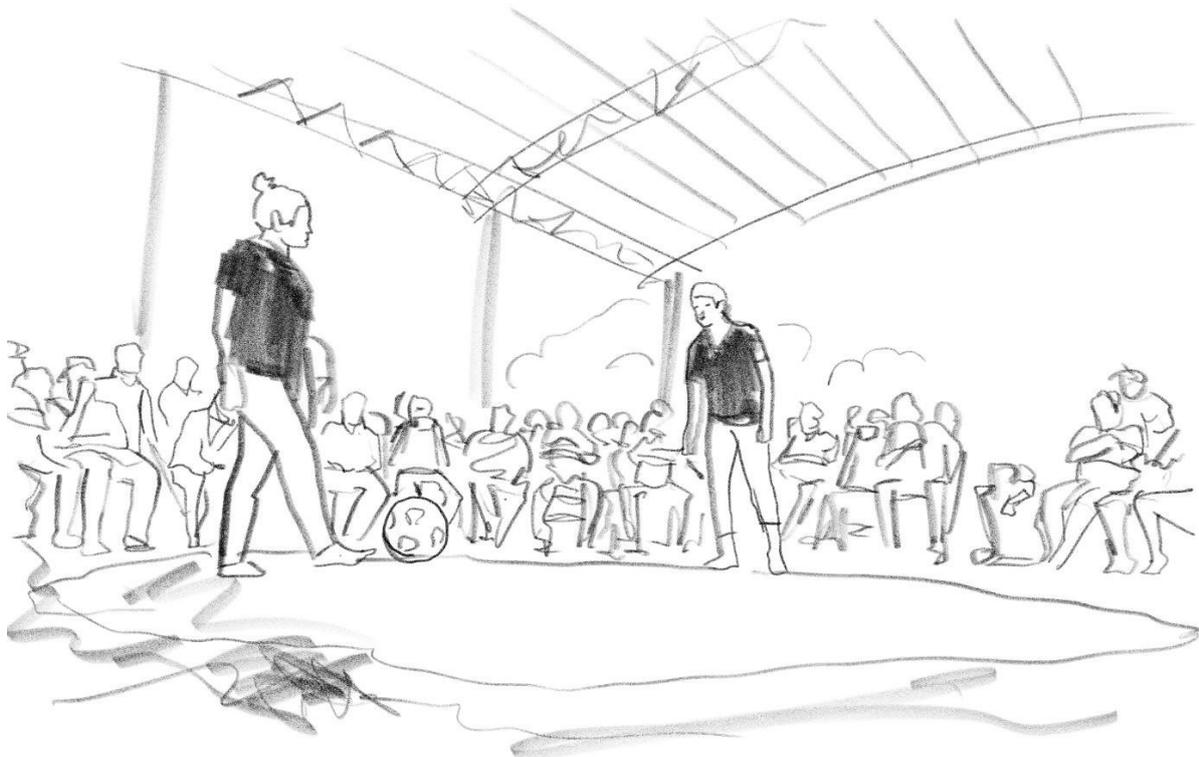
² See glossary pp.235ff. for more details about *chané* / *traje típico* in La Gloria.

**Script of Theatre Play: *El peregrinaje* (The Pilgrimage) by
Jocox' Theatre Troupe**

**First Scene (Spanish): 'I am leaving without knowing the
history of my people'.**

Characters enter the stage dressed in black and carry out a 'warm up' making eye contact with each other, passing small colourful balls, while one character is circling around them with a clay thurible releasing incense, they leave the stage.

A young person enters the stage to play football followed by a second young person who joins him / her, they speak about the journey that one of them will soon embark on towards the United States.



Throughout their conversation the young person that will travel expresses that he is leaving 'with a doubt', he doesn't know the history of his people.

The other young person tells him / her that his grandparents used to say that they have spoken to the water and that the water sometimes tells stories.

The conversation continues but lowers in volume bit by bit until they stay silent and sounds from natural ambience appear (water and animal noises).

Second Scene (Akateko): The Water Talks.

A narrator (the water) appears on the edges of the stage and starts speaking while he is circling the stage, at the same time the other characters enter the middle of the stage and carry out bodily movements based on the energy of the four elements (earth, wind, fire, water), the narrator starts talking.

I am the water - I come rolling down from a small mountain where I have formed rivers, streams and lakes. Plants, animals, and people live off me. I see everything that exists here in mother-nature. I know a tale from the beautiful town of San Miguel Acatán. They say that where the waters of the Acatán River flow - a young woman called Maria first saw the Archangel San Miguel in several occasions. From then on she informed the people of the town that she had seen a person that told her he was the host of this beautiful place. This is how the people of the town went and looked for this person, but instead found his image carved in a piece of wood.

The narration finishes and the characters leave the stage.

Third Scene (Akateko): The Appearance of *San Miguel*.

A young woman enters the stage and walks towards the centre washing clothes in a river complaining about the fact that she has to do all the work and that her brothers don't do anything.

A man appears to drink water from the river. The man mysteriously tells her that she should go back to her town and tell everyone that they should come here to bring flowers and candles explaining that he is the host of this place - the young woman is sceptical but also intrigued and decides to go and inform her people - they both leave the stage.

The other characters enter and carry out quotidian tasks (working the land, making food, etc.) when the young woman reaches them and tells them what she had seen and heard.

She convinces the people to come with her to the river, when they get there, they find a wooden image of the man.

They form a circle and adore him then sit together to eat in celebration.



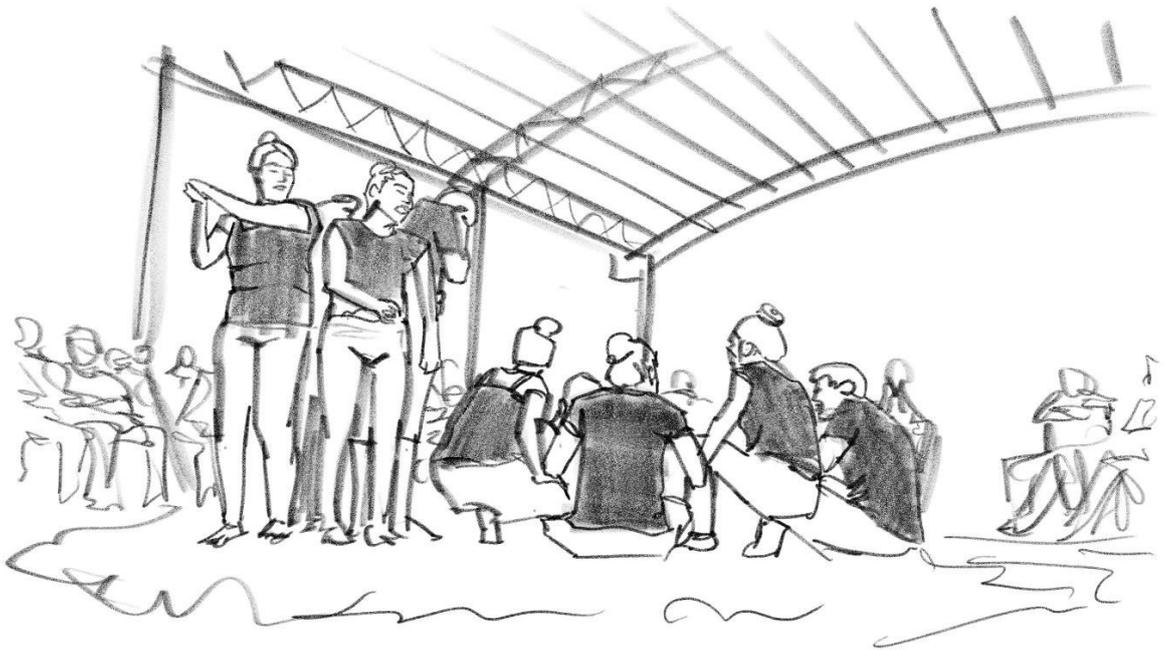
Marimba music (son de la fiesta de San Miguel) is played which gets the characters to get up and dance in pairs one by one -
Representation of the first *Fiesta de San Miguel*.

They all sit down and stay on stage.

Fourth Scene: First appearance of the 'destruction machine'.

The town's population stays seated and starts to carry out quotidian activities (seeding, washing, cooking).

The destruction-machine enters the stage from one of the 4 entry points (representing the Guatemalan military) - 3 actors standing back-to-back moving towards the others (the ones representing the people), once they reach the place where the others are seated, they start attacking them - never giving up the shape of their machine (standing back-to-back).



The town's population tries to escape to the other side of the circle however three villagers are being trapped and killed. The others manage to escape and disperse themselves within the audience.

Fifth Scene: The Violence Continues.

Narration in Spanish: *The people of this beautiful place San Miguel Acatán are hard workers, they work the land. But then a time came where they became victims of a wave of violence carried out by the government against their own people. Because of this critical situation full of terror and panic they were afraid for their lives and saw themselves obliged to leave their land and roots behind looking for refuge in other places - the majority managed to cross the border line with Mexico where they lived in initial camps called 'La Sombra', 'La Hamaca', 'Rancho Tejas'. These were times full of suffering; hunger, thirst and illnesses. Because they were still persecuted by the Guatemalan government, they had to continue their search and finally established themselves in another camp called 'El Chupadero'.*

The people slowly enter the stage from the 4 entry points - they look frightened and horrified and are proclaiming loudly their losses: *mis hijos, mi tierra, mi familia, mi gente* (my children, my land, my family, my people).

They congregate in the middle forming a circle and slowly break again starting to do movements that symbolise the re-establishing of quotidian tasks: building houses, making fire, making *tortillas* etc.



Dramatic music starts playing again and the 4 elements of the destruction-machine slowly start to move towards the centre where the people have by now sat down to eat - they again form an outward circle (the destruction machine) and the persecution starts again. Some villagers escape between the crowds but three are being tortured and finally executed by three of the 'soldiers' (parts of the destruction-machine) while the fourth gives them orders.

Some villagers escape between the crowds but three are being tortured and finally executed by three of the 'soldiers' (parts of the destruction-machine) while the fourth gives them orders.

The dead bodies stay on the floor while the 3 soldiers salute their superior each other in a military fashion.



Sixth scene: The community comes together.

Narration in Akateko: One year and 4 months they lived in this camp. Then it happened again; at dawn of the 29th of April 1984, everybody was at home, tired after a long day of work, not knowing what would happen to them. At 2 o'clock in the morning the first shots were fired by the Guatemalan military. The people left, running into the dark trying to save their lives. 7 people were murdered that night and the painful and sad times returned. The persecuted people - in their despair - went to look for protection in the nearby town of 'Las Delicias.

Mayan Children's choir music sounds in the background. The people enter from different points shaking audience-members' hands and expressing words of gratitude in Spanish and Akateko (representing the gratitude for the people of Las Delicias).

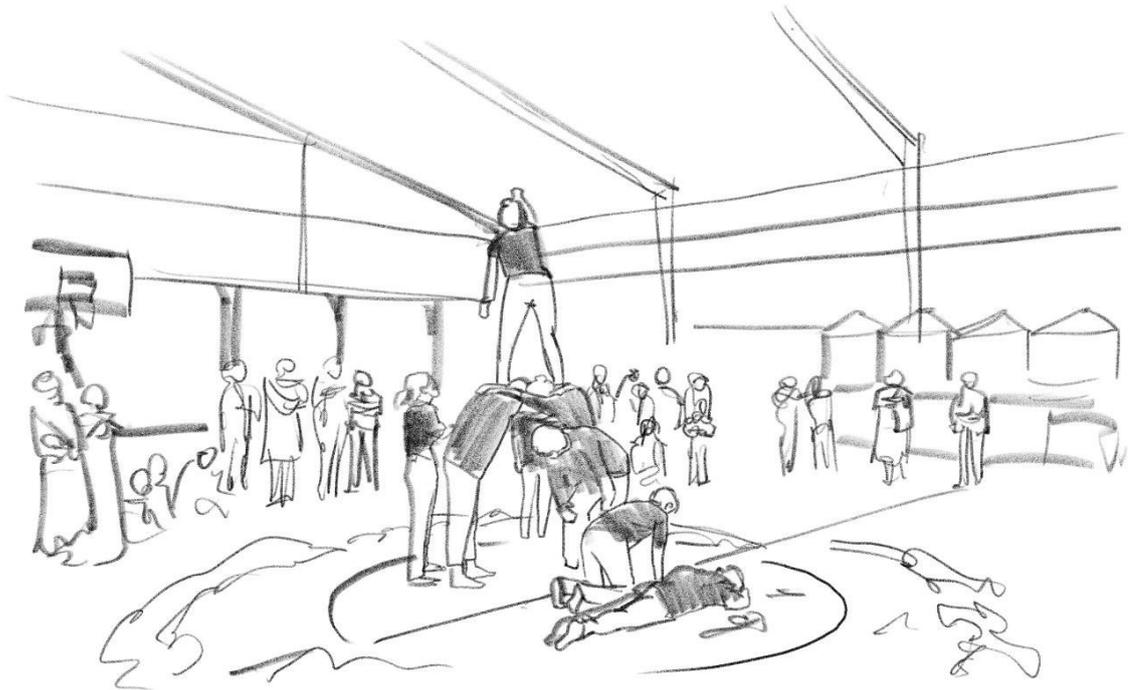
The villagers gather again in the middle of the stage and comfort each other.

They squat and break into different images representing the construction of the first houses in La Gloria

As the music picks up they break into pairs sitting against each other's back on the floor writing and studying while two others walk around checking in with them (**school scene**)

The music picks up a second time and they all congregate in the middle while two of them are distributing injections (**clinic scene**)

A third time the music picks up and the people create a pyramid which one of them climbs to 'install a light bulb' (**electricity scene**)



They all sit down to eat.

Seventh Scene: The Fight for the Water and Division

Dramatic change of sound as one person gets up to drink a glass water, fast drum music appears and the others follow the glass in his / her hands while exclaiming 'water' (in Spanish and Akateko) he / she stops them and indicates that they have to work if they want the water which they do (working the land) - the glass is passed on to another person with the same succeeding - at the end everybody has their own glass of water.

The music disappears - and the actors stand in a large circle on the edges of the stage looking outwards drinking water.





One person turns around and steps into the circle yelling words that represent divisions in town while pulling invisible strings that move the rest of them into images:
**Politics, Economy, Lack of Communication,
Society, Religion, Customs.**

Eighth Scene: Goodbye

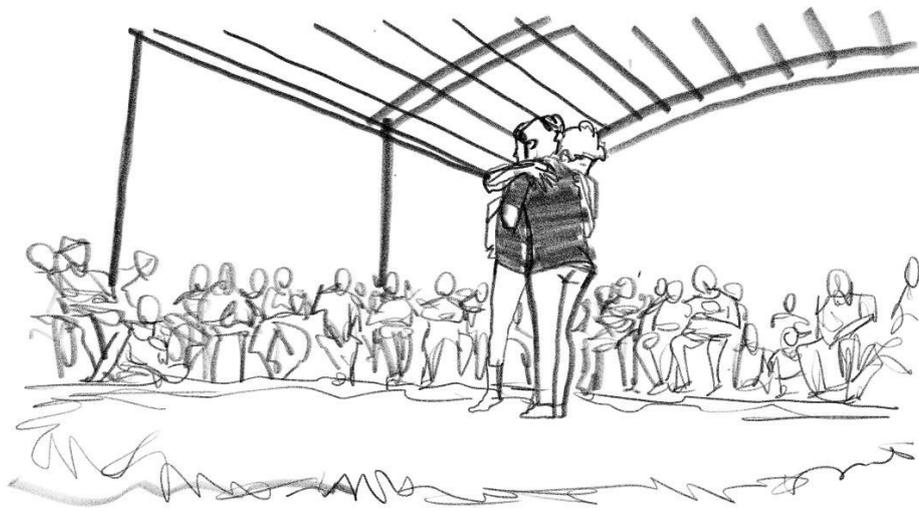
The water - narrator enters again while the others leave one by one.

Narration (Akateko):

35 days they spent in this town. On the 4th of July they started again in their search of looking for a place to live. On the 6th of June 1984 they finally arrived at this place which they called 'La Gloria' where they started to organise themselves again without houses, water or food - but they worked collectively creating committees for each of the most pressing necessities: education, health, electricity, religion among many. But most importantly showing their respect towards the Mexican population and respecting the scarce water because as generations before have told us; one should not argue about the water because it gives us life.

The two young actors from the very first scene re-appear on stage, as we remember one of them (Ivan) was about to travel to the US, now he is wearing a backpack while the other one (Yenni) looks sad.

'I only came to say goodbye' Ivan says. and asks Yenni to look after his mother and siblings while he is gone, Yenni says he should take care of himself especially during the journey. She hands him a bottle of water 'Here, you will need it'. They hug and each one is going their way.



Introduction Part I: La Gloria, The Jocox Youth Group & I.

Most days in La Gloria start with the sound of a rooster crowing; it is still dark at this point (roosters are not precise alarm clocks after all as I have learned during my time here). 'As long as it's just one I can still sleep a bit longer' I remember thinking the first time I woke up here. This however proved not to be more than wishful thinking since another rooster usually joins in with the first one after a short while and another after that and another 'it's sort of like a chain-reaction' Cristina, the oldest daughter of the family I am staying with, explains to me over breakfast; 'once one starts crowing it won't stop for the rest of the day'. While the rooster-crowing spreads from house to house, other sounds start emerging all over town and mix into what acoustically makes up a typical morning in La Gloria. The soundscape includes dogs barking, radios playing music (always somewhere between *Marimba*⁴, *Banda*⁵ and American Pop depending on who oversees the radio), the occasional long honking sounds of taxis driving around looking for passengers, and the louder and more consistent car-alarm sound coming from the public transport minivans announcing their departure for the first of about four trips to Comitán, the nearest city of the region. All of these sounds (coming from animals or humans) blend into a unique rhythm which will be complemented later by the constant sound of bird-chirping and announcements in Akateko and Spanish through the communal speaker system, where any activities and news of the day are being made public (church group meetings, school assemblies, clinic news events etc.), also here residents learn which family is selling what from their house (cooked food such as *tamales* as well as groceries or other goods). 'La Gloria is a place of many sounds' I say to Nayeli, a young La Gloria resident, while we are waiting on the town's main square. 'Yeah, you could say that' she replies 'or you could just call it a really noisy place'.

On other days, I drive into La Gloria on the back of a pick-up truck, in one of the collective taxis or in a minibus coming from Comitán. Visually La Gloria announces itself from afar through small billows of smoke rising from the densely arranged houses. The landscape here in the valley is flat, few hills or larger trees obstruct the human eye, which is allowed to detect objects and people even from the 5-kilometre distance of the Pan-American Highway. The level surface is contrasted by the presence of two large mountain ranges; the Cuchumatanes (highest non-volcanic peak in Central America) that cover large parts of the Guatemalan North-West and the *Altos de Chiapas* which elevate up to almost 3000 metres above sea-level just after Comitán. Getting into La Gloria feels like a change in comparison to the scarcely populated surroundings that characterise this part of the border region (the Guatemala-Mexico border town of La Mesilla is about 45 kilometres away). One hardly sees people on the 15-minute ride getting to La Gloria from the Pan-American highway and especially

⁴ Large wooden percussion instrument similar to a xylophone.

⁵ Regional Mexican music usually performed with wind instruments, brass, and percussion.

aspirations for the future within processes that I call 'anticipatory memory'. My interlocutors' active participation exists in between larger regimes of intergenerational, societal, and historical exclusion and marginalisation which frame potentialities that are frequently obeyed and contested by young people. My own intervention as a youth worker and the resulting encounters and relationships with older and younger residents are at the core of this thesis. I initially arrived in La Gloria during the town's annual patron-saint celebration in September 2017 to which I was invited by Veronica Ruiz-Lagier, a Mexican anthropologist who has worked in La Gloria for almost two decades (see opening vignette). I quickly established relationships to community-leaders who were organising the event (Don Matias, Don Alex, and their families), to the local high-school's headteacher and to the young people. I proposed to work as a volunteer English-teacher at the CoBaCh⁹ (local high-school) and was delighted that this was welcomed by the headteacher. In October 2018 I started teaching daily classes at the high school. During these initial months I was able to get to know La Gloria's 120 high-school students (aged 15-18) while teaching and participating in the school's daily life. I was also able to attend and participate in wider community activities such as the *Día de la Revolución*-celebration in November (described in chapter 2 pp.91ff.) and the activities around the *Virgen de Guadalupe*-day in December. In February 2018 I started to advertise creative activities outside of school hours, together with Don Matias who is the local Akateko-language teacher and 'cultural promoter' and would become my main point of contact, collaborator, and friend in La Gloria over the next year. These creative sessions started to take place in February 2018 on the main square. The initial meeting (12/02/2018) was attended by twelve young people most of whom would become regular members of the youth group that developed as a result of this process. La Gloria's past emerged as a shared interest among the young participants during our weekly sessions. The group agreed to organise a community event in June to commemorate La Gloria's foundation and we spent most of February, March and April investigating the town's history by interviewing older community members, collecting old photographs, and taking pictures of contemporary life; the name the group gave this process was *Yetu' – Nanik – Satajtoj*; the Akateko words for past, present, and future. In May two theatre artists from Guatemala joined us (upon my invitation) to work on creating a theatre play about La Gloria's past. The play was presented in La Gloria on June 5th and later in Nuevo San Juan Chamula (in Las Margaritas, Chiapas) in August. In October 2018 the youth group embarked on a journey to Guatemala to present the theatre play as part of an international festival (see chapter 6 pp.199ff.).

⁹ *Colegio de Bachilleres de Chiapas*: system of high-school education financed by the federal state and run by a regional office in each state, see glossary (pp.235ff.).

La Gloria and its historical background

Throughout the second half of the 20th century Guatemala experienced thirty-six years of civil war between insurgent groups¹⁰ and several *juntas* of military dictatorships, embedded in the dynamics of the cold war. The early 1980's saw an intensification of the military's counter-insurgency campaigns in the countryside. It was assumed that the *guerrilla*-groups were gaining vast support from the mostly indigenous rural population to which the military regimes of Lucas Garcia (1978-1982) and Ríos Montt (1982-1983) responded with brutal 'scorched earth' campaigns, including massacres and mass-disappearances. The civil war officially ended with the 1996 Peace Accords and the UN truth commission (CEH) recognised the atrocities committed during the regimes of Garcia and Rios Montt as genocide as early as February 1999 (Prensa Libre 1999, New York Times 1999). However, it took more than a decade for the two dictators to be prosecuted. Lucas Garcia never returned to Guatemala and died in his Venezuelan exile in 2006. Ríos Montt stayed in Guatemala, served as member of parliament and made several attempts as a presidential candidate. He was sentenced for genocide on May 10th, 2013 in a historical trial that shook Guatemala. The sentence was revoked just days later due to a minor technicality, Rios Montt's representative team had walked out on April 19th in protest against what they called 'illegal proceedings', which left the ex-dictator without a public defence lawyer for this last part of the trial. The court ruled that anything that had happened in the trial after 19th of April was therefore revoked. The trial never reopened, and Rios Montt died on April 1st, 2018 without having spent a single day in prison (for a more in-depth analysis of the Rios Montt trial see Struesse et. al. 2013).

The years of escalating violence and persecution in the early 1980's are known throughout Guatemala as *la violencia* (McClintock 1985, Warren 1993, Green L. 1999, Sanford 2003, Zur 2007, Nelson 2009). At the same time in Chiapas, on the Mexican side of the border people remember this period as *el refugio*, stressing that between 150,000 and 250,000 people, mostly speakers of pre-Hispanic languages from the Guatemalan highlands crossed the border into Mexico.

The refugees' trajectory took many different forms in the late 1980's and early 1990's: while some went further north to the United States, others eventually returned to Guatemala¹¹; others again settled permanently in Southern Mexico. La Gloria, located about 30 kilometres from the Guatemala-Mexico border, is one of those towns that resulted from *la violencia* and *el refugio*. It all started in the UNHCR administrated refugee-camp called *el Chupadero* which was one of the largest camps in the area and existed for about a year and four months. On April 30th, 1984, the Guatemalan military crossed the border into Mexico and attacked *el Chupadero*, killing seven people and forcing the rest

¹⁰ There were several of these groups throughout the years however they are mostly subsumed under the overarching label *la guerrilla*.

¹¹ On a government sponsored returnee programme established after the 1996 Peace Accords.

of the population to abandon the camp (Revista Proceso 1984). A group of mostly Akateko speaking refugees¹² (as many others) grew increasingly sceptical about the UNHCR's ability to protect them and decided to found a town of their own. After over a month of seeking refuge and camping in different places the Dioceses of San Cristobal de las Casas became aware of the refugees' situation and arranged a piece of land for the refugees to settle on. On June 6th, 1984 hundreds of Akateko-speaking families arrived in what had been known until then as 'Finca San Pedro' to permanently settle here, 34 years later the young people from the Jocox youth group would commemorate this day in form of an event.

Throughout the decades after La Gloria's foundation (1980's and 1990's) migration became a common pattern, so that nowadays remittances from the US or money being sent from other parts of Mexico (Riviera Maya) make up the subsistence of most families (Ruiz-Lagier 2013, 182ff., Gil-Garcia 2015). At the same time many households maintain some small-plot farming for their own consumption as well as other small-scale economic endeavours generating some income by providing local taxi services, running small convenience stores, selling food, or locally working as builders or handymen. The relationship between La Gloria's inhabitants and the neighbouring towns is complex; a land dispute with the 'Ejido Rodolfo Figueroa' from the 1980's is present in the memory of many La Gloria-residents since their town's size was limited substantially. While legal proceedings about land rights are still ongoing, the conflict however is talked about as a past event and *convivencia*¹³ exists between inhabitants in form of friendships and visits to their respective annual patron saint celebrations. The relationship to other towns is equally ambivalent, while differences are being stressed (above all focussing on the ethno-linguistic 'otherness' of La Gloria's inhabitants) there is also exchange of labour and goods and many young people from surrounding towns come to La Gloria to study at the high-school level. La Gloria-residents refer to San Miguel Acatán in Huehuetenango (Guatemala) as their *lugar de origen* or *nuestra raiz* ('place of origin' or 'our root' – my translation; see pp.133ff. for a deeper engagement with the term). The reference back to the 'origins' however has different meanings for different people. For some older residents San Miguel Acatán is their actual geographic place of birth, for others however (who either came from Akateko speaking towns in Nentón or Jacaltenango closer to the border or were born already in Mexico) San Miguel Acatán refers to a more abstract place of origin; more to do with the collective origins of the ethno-linguistic group they feel belonging to. These divergences show us how different phases of Akateko / *Migueléño* migration are present in La Gloria. The term 'Akateko' was only introduced in the year 2000 by linguists who declared the language that people speak in the municipality of San Miguel Acatán sufficiently distinct to the area's dominant language Q'anjob'al. Akateko thus was considered a language of its own rather than

¹²They originated from the Guatemalan region of San Miguel Acatán about 60 kilometres on the Guatemalan side of the border.

¹³Literally 'coexistence' or 'getting along'.

a dialect of the main language¹⁴. Links with San Miguel Acatán nowadays exist rather sporadically, mostly in form of family relations often with those who moved back as part of the voluntary return programme, however it was rather unusual for most families that I interacted with to visit San Miguel or to receive visits from there. Akateko is the town's general language in which virtually all inhabitants are fluent except a couple of exceptions, however only a very limited number of people are able to read and write in their mother-tongue. Among young people in La Gloria Akateko continues to be the predominant spoken language however nearly everybody in the younger cohort is bilingual (Akateko and Spanish) and reads and writes Spanish. English is spoken sporadically especially among the ones that have spent long periods in the US.

La Gloria's organisational forms are discussed in detail in Ruiz-Lagier's comprehensive ethnography of three *comunidades del refugio* (2013, 107ff.). I would like to highlight here the role of the *asamblea general* ('general assembly') which is a public forum that takes place once a month. Every La Gloria-resident is invited to attend these meetings during which important matters are discussed and a chance is given for anybody to give their opinions and vote. A local representative called *Agente Municipal* is elected annually together with a vice-representative (*soplente*) and a bookkeeper (*tesorero / tesorera*). These roles rotate every year and are elected in a complex system that divides La Gloria in different sectors and ensures that each is represented adequately. The *Agente Municipal* team (or *las autoridades* as most La Gloria-residents refer to them) take on all administrative tasks that arise and oversee the functioning of the *cargo* system (each family has to assign one person for a limited amount of time according to a list to help with the communal tasks such as police work, infrastructural construction etc.) and the work of the different committees (school-committees, water committee, electricity committee etc.). As was highlighted to me by residents, the *Agente Municipal* role is not supposed to have any direct decision-making power but rather work on behalf of what is decided in the general assembly.

The past (and the ways it is remembered) plays a major role throughout the thesis however I do not want to focus on the Guatemalan civil war, *el refugio* or the foundation of La Gloria as historical events. I rather aim to explore the ways in which these are imagined, mediated, and performed by young people (and others) in town, especially in form of the theatre play.

The economic significance of Migration in La Gloria.

Migration is a major feature of economic subsistence in La Gloria. Hardly any households live self-sufficiently (feeding themselves from small-plot agriculture) while employment and entrepreneurial

¹⁴ However older people in La Gloria continue to refer to their language as Q'anjob'al until today.

opportunities are scarce. As Nash notes economic changes in Chiapas throughout the early 20th century have created a situation where ‘Societies [...] in which a major part of the economic activities is oriented to subsistence, are becoming extremely rare’ (2001, 16). Young people in these circumstances of economic precarity become ‘bearers of hope’ as potential migrants and senders of remittances for the relatives they leave behind in the Mexican South.

In the 1980’s agriculture was the primary means of subsistence in La Gloria. The peasants that originated from the Guatemalan *altiplano*¹⁵ were accustomed to the fertile and wet climate of the highlands, however now found themselves in the dry lowland valley of La Trinitaria which presented multiple challenges to their agricultural productivity. Land disputes further minimised the initially promised dimensions of La Gloria and the lack of water made subsistence through agriculture almost impossible. Economically the ‘first generation’ relied heavily on working as day-labourers or receiving humanitarian aid from refugee organisations (the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR] and the *Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados* [Comar]). While adults often struggled to get at least some days of work on the *fincas* close by, their children almost without exceptions started to attend the UNHCR-Comar financed Primary school called ‘Olof Palme’¹⁶ and later the Secondary-School and the CoBaCh (which was inaugurated in the early 2000’s). The children and adolescents that grew up in La Gloria throughout the 1980’s and 1990’s almost without exception received basic education, which led to new sources of income becoming available to them; such as wage-labour in the larger towns of the region (La Trinitaria, Comitán), the pursuit of higher education in high-schools and universities (often in larger cities of Chiapas and beyond), or jobs in the booming tourism industry on the Yucatán peninsula (today known as Riviera Maya). However, throughout the 1990’s it also became very common for so called ‘contractors’ to recruit groups of short-term agricultural labourers from the South of Mexico to work in the northern states which border with the US (Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua). It was only a matter of time until agricultural workers from La Gloria would move further up north to California, Arizona, New Mexico, or Texas and look for work on the other side of the border.

These developments manifest a drastic change of La Gloria’s economic tapestry within a short period of time. Nowadays most households maintain smaller plots of land (often outside of town) where corn, beans, fruits, and other crops are grown and harvested mostly for their own consumption. Local *combi*¹⁷-driver Botas made this very clear to me on one occasion when I saw him leaving town with agricultural tools in his hand and a straw hat on his head. I asked him whether he is going to work on

¹⁵Highlands – my translation.

¹⁶Named after the Swedish prime minister assassinated in 1986. Nobody I spoke to was able to collect information as to why the UNHCR-Comar decided on this name.

¹⁷Mini vans used for public transport throughout Chiapas.

account with a beginning and end-scene which tells a 'side story', consisting of two young people saying goodbye to each other since one of them is about to migrate to the US. A further scene was added which represents the contemporary problems of divisions in La Gloria (chapter 4 discusses the play in more depth).

Participants

Through my work at the local high school, I immediately was in regular contact with a large group of young people aged 15-18, with the exception of those who were not attending school. Out of the 120 students at the CoBaCh, thirteen became regular participants in the Jcox youth group and would regularly exchange their ideas with me while working on creative projects, their names are: Alexis, Araceli, 'Azza', Bersain, Claudia, Cristy, Danny, Eduviges, Ivan, Marco, Mary, Nayeli and Yenni. Gaby and Marce were regular participants at the beginning of workshops however disengaged around April, since Gaby moved to the US (see Alabama vignette at the end of the thesis) and Marce was not allowed to attend anymore by her parents. These are the young participants I sometimes refer to throughout the thesis with their individual names and sometimes in a collective manner as 'the youth group'. My relationship to each of them will be examined a bit further when they appear in the ethnographic sections of the thesis. My relationship with the young participants was generally marked by dynamics between facilitator and participants. Despite my constant strive to maximise young people's participation within the process (in accordance with youth work principles) I was clearly being seen as somewhat in charge of the activities, due to my role as a schoolteacher as well as my wider pre-dispositions of being a privileged outsider (white European adult and male in a setting where relationships are framed by the continuum of coloniality). Friendships developed among the young people in the group as well as with myself as I was getting to know them in a variety of settings including their familial space.

My work with young people meant that I had a profound ethnographic engagement with the CoBaCh teachers and local male community leaders. Especially the community-leaders helped with the organisation of the 5th of June event. Don Matias stands out here as my main collaborator who was involved with the youth group activities from the very beginning, appeared in the theatre-play and accompanied us during the journey to Guatemala. Matias' role as a cultural promoter meant that he had a keen interest in the work that was developing with the youth group and a deep friendship developed between us and with his extended family (wife, daughters, grandmother, neighbours). Matias and I travelled to San Miguel Acatán in Guatemala to make contact with the Academy of Mayan Languages, and I started to stay overnight at Matias' house when needed, became associated with the household and was Yegni's (Matias' youngest daughter) *padrino* at her secondary-school graduation

ceremony. I further developed a good relationship to the leaders of *Mayaonbej'* the cultural association organising the *baile de venado* (dance of the deer – see glossary p.235) presentations among other activities (see Gil-Garcia 2015 for a more thorough description of their activities). Especially Don Alex (who also works as a health promoter) and I would often sit together in the shade of his garage / shop to talk about La Gloria, with his brother Don Remigio and neighbour Don Alfredo, the three coordinate the association's activities. Alex specifically supported the photography project and provided old photographs from his private archives (see pp.109ff.). Andres (or also referred to as Lesho) is my age and was fulfilling the role of *Agente Municipal* for most of my time in La Gloria (October 2017-October 2018). He was heavily involved in the organisation of the 5th of June event and volunteered his time to paint a mural on the town-square together with some of the members of the youth group. My relationship to the older male community leaders was framed by dynamics of friendship and collaboration as well as dynamics of community leaders negotiating potentially beneficial projects with an outsider. La Gloria has a long history of collaborating with external development agencies (state and non-state) as well as with researchers. There is a specific group of male local leaders who are experienced and skilled in the interaction with these external players, a new generation is growing up equally making their own connections and building their own relationships. The discourse around the implications of development and educational projects for community relations is long and lasting, however I would like to focus here on the fact that my relationship to adult-male community leaders was characterised by friendship and collaboration with the framework of negotiating how my involvement can be beneficial for the community.

'About the author', my personal relationship to Guatemala and the stories I tell myself (and others).

My choice to work on a topic related to Guatemala and its history did not fall from the skies. When starting fieldwork in 2017 I had already been familiar with the region, having lived there on and off for about 12 years. 'Guatemala' formed a central part in my own development, it was my 'coming of age' experience so to speak. The story I tell myself (and others) goes something like this: In 2005 I graduated from high school in my hometown Bielefeld located in Germany's North-West. I was eager for a change, having felt for a long time that Bielefeld was suffocating me with its mid-sized suburban mediocracy. I was hungry for more; I wanted to see things, do things, explore the world. I didn't care where I was going as long as it was away from Bielefeld. Well not exactly anywhere, I also wanted to avoid the military service that was still mandatory for me as a male 18-year-old German citizen. I found an organisation that was sending young Germans as volunteers around the globe in order to carry out a 'civil service' that legally replaced the military service. I initially had applied for a placement in South Africa which never materialised due to complications with the host organisation. The only options left

were: Colombia or Guatemala. I spoke to my mother at length, and she begged me not to go to Colombia a country she considered to be extremely dangerous (little did she know that Guatemala's violence and crime statistics actually exceed those common in Colombia). Guatemala it was, so I packed my bags and left the airport in Frankfurt seeing my parents through a glass-wall hugging each other with tears in their eyes waving me goodbye (almost like in the movies). I remember (or at least I think I do) quite vividly the moment of leaving Guatemala-City's La Aurora airport. The flight and everything before went alright and my nervousness about missing one of my connections in London or Miami faded quickly when I realised the mechanical nature of intercontinental flying that works according to rules one can quickly learn (it was only my second time on an airplane and the first time I was flying by myself). I remember getting nervous about my luggage (which I hadn't seen since Frankfurt), I didn't trust in the power of airline logistics and even if it did arrive how would I be able to distinguish it from other bags and suitcases? I quickly realised that my black (or was it dark blue?) Kipling bag stood out quite obviously from all the other luggage pieces arriving on the baggage carousel, not least because the Belgium bag manufacturer in those days had a custom of attaching a small monkey puppet to each of their products. For some reason I remember this monkey vividly; seeing it and picking the bag up was the last thing that made sense to me for a little while. Leaving La Aurora airport meant leaving a lot of things behind; it meant leaving the protective and structured environment of my intellectual / education-oriented household behind (my dad is a teacher and my mum a social worker), it meant that for the first time in my life I was really by myself without anybody watching protectively over me. It meant I could do what I wanted but it also meant I had to figure things out for myself, on top of that in a country that was unknown to me. I quickly found the driver that the organisation had contracted to pick me up and my first couple of hours were already full of new experiences; the driver's son (who was about my age) dressed in full military uniform (including a large rifle and a pistol in his belt) entering the car to get a ride back home from the military school that he was attending, passing by a deadly accident on the highway (my first time seeing corpses covered with the typical white sheets – again something I had only ever seen in movies) and finally getting to my host family's house where I would spend the first month until I figured out my own accommodation, being welcomed by a group of 10, 12, 15 ??? Japanese language students who were celebrating someone's departure from Guatemala with a meal in their host family's living room. All of this was crazy, new, and exciting to me at the time and exactly what I had been craving during my adolescent years in Bielefeld where, as I would frequently claim, 'nothing ever happened'. Looking back on it now, these occurrences seem nothing more than ordinary to me and would not cause me any type of excitement.

Ok, enough of this Malinowski-style beginning-of-fieldwork story that glorifies the white-male ethnographer as the central hero of everything happening around him. The next 15 years of my life (until the time of writing this in 2020) consisted of shifting between obtaining educational titles in Berlin (2006-2009) and London (2012-2013) and continuing to live and work for NGOs in Guatemala (2009-2012). My mum would always say ‘there is something there that always draws you back’ and I think it is the fact that it was here where I first experienced the world on my own terms, these were the experiences that profoundly shaped the person (adult) I have become (and continue to do so).

The story I tell myself (and others) is full of my own mediations, imaginations, half-truths, and blurred memories. It serves to position myself in Guatemala and to justify my own presence and my personal interest in the country, its history, and its people. I have told this story in numerous variations throughout the years; often to cut a conversation short but also to give my own opinions about Guatemalan politics, history, and society more weight. Especially in conversations with privileged Guatemalans I would stress the fact that I came as a volunteer to work in the capital’s poorest neighbourhoods which gave me an insight into the marginalised segments of everyday Guatemala, a perspective that many of my counterparts would not have. To friends and family in Germany I would continuously stress the resilience of Guatemalans who deal with their own precarity every day without losing their faith or their enjoyment of life. I would diminish my friends’ and families’ ‘German’ problems by continuously comparing them to ‘what people in Guatemala go through’. In these stories I would assume different roles; that of a spokesperson, a hero, or an adventurer. These stories are central to my own understanding of self and the world, I hold on to them, even though nowadays with a bit more critical distance. None of these stories are true, none of them are false either; they simply exist in my own imagination and reproduction, in interaction with others and in my own project of self-making.

When I worked for an education-focused NGO in Guatemala-City in 2005 I was only slightly older than some of the young people I worked with (sometimes they were my age) and had been a high school student just a couple of months earlier. And here I was on the realising what the ‘other side’ of education looked like. Getting older I continued to work with young people; in a fishing community in Nicaragua, in a summer-camp in North Carolina and with young refugees and diasporic communities in London. I returned to Guatemala in 2017 to carry out fieldwork for this doctoral thesis. Focusing on the Guatemalan diaspora in Chiapas meant I was living in Chiapas but would travel back frequently to Guatemala-City and Antigua, constantly being reminded of my experiences from years earlier. The story I tell myself is that working with young people keeps me young, and I only later found the concept of ‘liminality’ to describe where the creative energy of being a person constantly ‘in the making’ comes

from. Theatre proved a great way of channelling this energy into creative outputs which I specifically realised when working with the North-London youth group *Mustaqbal* during my Masters-years (Gembus 2017). It was here that I found my conceptual 'home' working on the overlaps between ethnographic inquiry and participatory, creative, and performance-oriented youth work. These experiences have deeply influenced the development of this research project.

At the time of writing, I am sitting in my old childhood room, using the same desk where I used to do my primary school homework, wondering where the story I tell myself (about myself) ends and where this thesis starts. My narrative of self and my life-experiences have deeply influenced this thesis in the same way as the young Jcox-members' processes of being and belonging have. In 2020 the sanitary crisis due to Covid-19 prevented me to regularly visit La Gloria as I had done before when living in Guatemala. The youth group presented their play one last time on the 8th of March 2020, the Guatemala-Mexico border was closed just two days later.

the wrong reasons, but they don't understand how much of a difference this could've made' (Fieldnotes 17/05/2018).

The conflict about mobile phone antennas clearly displays varying notions of the problematic relationship between older and younger residents in La Gloria. Common tropes of intergenerationality are rehearsed; young people as 'agents of modernity' while older residents position themselves as the protectors of 'the traditional ways'. Interestingly in both statements Ivan (just as other young people) uses the term *los señores* to describe the group of people having a negative view of the local youth and being opposed to the installation of the mobile network antennas. The term refers to the male population of a particular age; grandparents within their own family nucleus, the ones that were already adults in the 1980's during *el refugio*²⁷. The conflict does not solely evolve between 'young' and 'old' but rather seems to run along multiple lines of separation. My interlocutor in his early 30's genealogically belongs to the parental generation (his children are in primary school), but historically speaking he is also regarded as a *niño del refugio*; which refers to everybody born in the late 1970's or early 1980's just before or after (some even during) the mass exodus from Guatemala to Chiapas. People of this age (in their thirties or forties now) were the first 'generation' to grow up in La Gloria and often remember very little of Guatemala and the time before *el refugio*. People in this 'generation' were the first to have access to primary school education; through the educational programmes of the *Diócesis de San Cristóbal* in the early (camp) years and later at La Gloria's 'Olof Palme' primary-school which was run by local *Promotores de Educación* (Ruiz-Lagier 2013b). Most men in this 'generation' learned how to read and write (to a lesser degree also women) often being the first in their families. These men were exposed to a set of educational and vocational opportunities that differed drastically from the ones available to their parents' generation who grew up in the Guatemalan countryside during the violence-ridden years of the civil war (with its devastating social and economic effects on the *campesino* population). Many of these men lament the antenna project's rejection by older residents however the picture seems to be more complicated. A conversation I had with local internet café owner Roque comes to mind. Roque and his brother Tzey are in their thirties. and both run their own internet-cafés out of their homes. They are specialists for the installation of private wireless internet antennas, always on the lookout for new technologies (*cibers* and their spatial implications are further debated in chapter 1 pp.82ff.). One afternoon I get talking to Roque about the antenna-conflict when printing a couple of documents in his internet-café. 'You must be devastated that the antennas weren't installed back then' I say hoping to get a reaction from him. He replies: 'It was a pity, and many things would be easier now' but Roque is very quick to add that '*los*

²⁷ Alternatively, I have heard young people using the term '*nuestros abuelitos*' (our grandparents) to refer to this group which is slightly more positively connoted.

of their parents' generation, the same is true for the *niños del refugio* who already grew up in between different potentialities and aspirations (both imaginative and concrete) in comparison to the generation of La Gloria-residents that were adults already in the 1980's.

We are gathered in small groups during one of our first workshops with the youth group. I am happy that a good number of young people have showed up, which I was nervous about all week. After all it is our first session as a group and my experience tells me that creating a bit of excitement (a fuzzi so to speak) at the beginning is important for the entire process. Maybe I am also reading the good turnout as a sign of the relationships I have been building with them over the past couple of weeks and months. Maybe I need it as reassurance that we get along and that these young people want to be part of something I am initiating. I rely on their social acceptance as a human and as a researcher. There are enough participants to split up in smaller groups and then come back together with everybody. The topic today is history and more specifically 'ruptures' and 'continuities'. We have been doing some work to distinguish the aspects of life that have changed in La Gloria over the years from the ones that have more or less stayed the same. I am surprised to read '*jóvenes* have lost their culture' on one of the group's flipchart that is titled 'ruptures before and after the exodus'. When we all come back to the big group discussion, I ask the group about it and 16-year-old Gaby explains that she was referring to the fact that young women stopped wearing their *traje* and that 'we are generally not following the old traditions anymore'. This is reiterated by Eduviges (17 years of age) who says that she strongly identifies with being *joven* which for her is closely tied to being Akateka but that a lot of things have changed and that many of her peers 'have lost our *costumbres*' (from fieldnotes 14/02/2018).

'Losing' is a common trope among both younger and older residents when describing attitudes of young people towards 'traditions'. The verb suggests a pre-existing almost natural ownership of these qualities, which include ritualistic practice, symbols, and values all of which rhetorically merge under the umbrella terms '*nuestra cultura*', '*nuestra tradicion*' '*nuestra costumbre*' (our culture, our tradition, our customs). The possessive pronoun symbolises the natural link between these practices and the individual. The seemingly naturally possessed qualities are then 'lost' by those who do not centre their lives around ritualistic practice and traditions and stop making use of cultural symbols (often younger residents). Danny similarly uses the term 'forgotten' when he says that 'each one [of the young people] has their own music genre like Pop and so on and they are almost forgetting all about Marimba and these kinds of things' (Interview recording 11/11/2018). Danny's statement speaks to the process of negotiating supposedly contradictive registers of identifications through music, in this case *Marimba* and Pop. Danny himself is a living example of the dialectic relationship

between binaries supposedly in opposition to each other (tradition and modernity) and how they can co-exist within one (young) person. He is equally a fan of contemporary rock music as he is an admirer of the *Marimba* music his grandparents listen to. Danny was specifically excited to see a trailer I showed him after one of our workshops for a Guatemalan film titled '*Las Marimbas del Infierno*', which tells the story of a traditional *Marimba* player and a failed rock musician brought together by destiny deciding to start a band together (Cordon 2010).

A couple of weeks after the commemorative event in June I asked the group to meet for a reflection session. The pressure of organising the event had dominated our sessions in May and I felt it would be a great moment to take some time to reflect about the event and collectively think about the future of the group. I also wanted to include some exercises and discussions about the topic of identity that had been implicit in most of the creative projects we worked on but had seldomly been discussed explicitly. I promised to bring Pizzas (bought from a US franchise in Comitán) which is a particularly popular food among young people, specifically since it is rather hard to get (only available in Comitán's shopping-mall and sold at exorbitant prices) and certainly worked as an extra incentive for the group-members to take part. During this workshop, I asked the young people to choose between different 'identity-labels' (written on flipcharts) to decide which one best described them. Most young people chose 'being Akateko(a)' as their most important aspect of self-identification. Eduviges elaborated that 'being Akatekos identifies us because that is where our culture, our language and our customs come from', to which Ivan added that being Akateko 'identifies where I am from and my way of life which is very important; language and tradition identify me as a person' (Fieldnotes 09/06/2018). These statements stand in somewhat of a contrast to the notions of 'losing and forgetting' cited afore. There is some resonance with Comaroff & Comaroff's depiction of post-modern youths' 'intrinsic bipolarity' (2005, 29), losing and forgetting the 'old ways' while at the same time upholding these traditions and customs as a central aspect of self-identification and a 'way of life'. The participants reiterated this by considering culture both a 'rupture' and a 'continuity' during our initial workshops. The young people expressed their frustration about the older residents' rejection of the mobile-phone antennas (which supposedly would compromise traditions), at the same time these young people honour 'tradition' as an important aspect of their own lives. By combining these seemingly contradictory notions young people create their own unique systems of meaning, being, and belonging. The fusion of symbols and rituals from the imagined domains of 'tradition' and 'modernity' is what Comaroff & Comaroff mean when they describe young people as 'signifiers of exclusion, of impossibility of emasculation, denigration and futility' but at the same time 'a constant source of creativity, ingenuity, possibility, empowerment a source of alternative yet-to-be imagined futures' (Ibid.). The terms used here are 'suture' or alternatively 'fusion' to describe this process, both of which

are lacking the situational and processual character of such actions, which rather take the form of internal negotiation and re-negotiation.

Cada uno tienen su grupo – Subculture and clique-building.

During the identity-workshop the young participants created a list of what they considered to be 'traditional': *marimba* music, the Akateko language, the *baile de venado* (see glossary for further explanation pp.235 ff.), the annual celebration in honour of the town's patron saint (San Miguel / Saint Michael) and the coronation ceremony of the annual beauty-pageant (see glossary pp.235 ff.). The symbols the young participants associated with 'modernity' however seem to be more vague and less concrete: the access to mobile phones and internet, the choices of fashion, lifestyle, music genres and other tropes deriving from popular culture. Ivan, who had just minutes earlier described how being Akateko defines his 'way of life', explains that electronic music to him 'is like a way of life, many of my friends identify this music with me' (Fieldnotes 09/06/2018). Cristy adds that she identifies a lot with what she describes as 'young people's ideologies which are always a bit crazy; like the rockers for example', Marce adds 'yeah the way they dress is quite crazy' (Fieldnotes 09/06/2018). Even rhetorically we can see the process of negotiation clearly when Ivan expresses his relationship to the ethno-linguistic label Akateko and his self-identification as an electronic music enthusiast by using the same term ('way of life'). Cristy and Marce take this a step further by referring to the way young people chose to identify through fashion or music choices. Cristy later explains it to me like this: 'Everyone has their group, right? You have the gangsters and then this other group who listen to Reggaeton. [pauses] Well everyone has their own genre and that is how they go out on the street, that's how they divide themselves by the way they dress and talk' (Interview recording 24/08/2018). This discussion heavily resonates with debates around 'youth subcultures'. Especially the 'Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies' at the University of Birmingham is accredited for developing the 'subcultural approach' in the 1960's and 1970's when researchers started to describe how 'collectivities of youth used rituals they had created around cultural commodities such as music or clothing to respond, if only imaginatively or symbolically, to the material contradictions shaping their lives' (Maira & Soep 2005, xxx also Hall & Jefferson 1975, Hebdige 1973 among others). This represented a drastic theoretical shift for the multidisciplinary field of 'youth studies', centring young people as active agents who create cultural symbols and rituals rather than being passive recipients. Cristy's description of 'clique building' in La Gloria through identification with fashion, lifestyle or music trends resonates when she describes how these subsequently create subcultural youth-domains. At La Gloria's CoBaCh wearing school uniforms is mandatory every day of the week except on Wednesdays ('casual-day') which is supposed to give students time to wash their white polo shirts. An array of shirts is visible on these days, some

containing band-names in large letters (mostly with a black background), others are more colourful containing large brand names and logos (Armani and Gucci among the most popular)³⁴. Both types (black band- and colourful brand-shirts) are among the most common goods sold at market stalls in the Guatemalan border town of La Mesilla. During breaktime young people frequently divide themselves into smaller groups (often similarly dressed) to sit down and share earphones to listen to music. The subculture angle has been criticised for its theoretical limitations, an over-stressing of the importance of popular culture, and for simply creating a different kind of taxonomy instead of deconstructing taxonomical categorisation. These critiques however should not prevent appreciating 'subculture' as an interesting framework to make sense of being young in La Gloria, especially since this framework is reiterated in the imagination and language of the young research-participants.

Young People and Mobility – Re-configuring Geographic Space.

The early 2000's saw an awakening of scholarly interest in young people. Globalisation became the new buzzword and generations of adolescents were conceptualised as the agents of a newly globalised world. On a theoretical level, essentialisms were challenged in the process of postcolonial and postmodern deconstruction which expanded into discourses around youths as active 'makers and breakers' of culture (Honwana & DeBoeck 2005) and further as key in the reconfiguration of geographies. Maira & Soep see 'youth as itself both a force and a product of globalization' (2005, xx) and advocate that '*both* youth and globalization have to be considered together' (Ibid., xxiii). It is not my goal to engage in a long and lasting discourse about the contested concept of 'globalisation', a lot of which is implicit in the debates around 'modernity'. I rather want to centre the ways in which young people in La Gloria negotiate geographic space through their actions. Using digital-online modes of communication to converse with friends and families residing in the US or other places outside of La Gloria, the consumption of digital media originating from globally dispersed localities, the physical migratory movements of young people crossing the 'migrant region from Central America to North America' (Jonas & Rodriguez 2014, 1); all of these are acts through which young people re-signify geographies. When my young interlocutors post pictures and videos or send messages through social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp etc.) to friends and family in Guatemala, other parts of Mexico, or the US, when young La Gloria-residents watch Japanese anime movies while sitting in their local internet café or when young migrants cross international borders on their journey northwards; all of these actions contribute to the reconfiguration of geographic space.

By looking at the ways in which young people from La Gloria (re)negotiate the local and the global through their actions we see how modernity is 'at large' through the creation of 'diasporic public

³⁴ I have observed how these shirts are being worn by male and female students at the CoBaCh alike.

spheres' where imaginaries 'frequently transcends national space' (Appadurai 1996, 6) which describes a process that has also been referred to as 'glocalization' (Robertson 1995 among many others). More analysis of young people's relationship to geographies and space can be found in chapter 1 (pp.60ff.) and an in-depth discussion of youth and mobility (migration) in chapter 5 (pp.179ff.). To conclude this section, I want to highlight Comaroff & Comaroff (2005) who eloquently show that young people cannot be considered separately from global processes since they are crucial agents connecting localities like La Gloria symbolically and concretely which challenges us to think about youth in non-genealogical frames. 'Being young' is therefore not necessarily dependent on age or genealogy but rather on the engagement with communicative technologies and migratory movements that re-configure the distances between the local and the global. The essence of the youth concept is shifted towards individual and collective active practice and participation in global and local processes rather than static and essential assumptions of age and generations.

***El paraíso está en la otra esquina*³⁵ - Young People's Aspirations, Migration, and Absence.**

Back on the bench with Marco, he tells me that he just turned 18 and reflects about what he calls his 'youth-years' in La Gloria. I ask him which activities he most remembers / associates with this time to which he replies: studying, playing football, and taking drugs. We get talking about why he stopped with the last two of these, which he explains by saying that among the people he was playing football with and the ones he was taking drugs with 'many are not here anymore'. Where did they go? I want to know but he just shrugs his shoulders and says: 'the usual - some went to Playa [del Carmen] and others you know – up there to *El Norte*' (Interview recording 29/07/2018).

In Cristy's statements about gender (p.48) we see how she imagines (and aspires to) a future family constellation less organised by gender binaries, when I asked her where she envisions this future, she simply replied 'definitely not here, don't know where really but it would have to be somewhere else' (Interview recording 24/08/2018). In separate conversations Ivan and Danny agreed with Cristy that to follow one's dreams (in their case becoming a teacher, a DJ, or a handicraft shop owner) they would have to move away from La Gloria to study or to make money elsewhere. These are only three examples of the many young people that have told me about their aspirations for the future, in most cases envisioning to move away to distant localities. The destinations mentioned included: bigger cities in other parts of Mexico (often the country's capital) for those who want to pursue higher-education, the *Riviera Maya* in Quintana Roo for those looking to work in the tourist industry³⁶, the

³⁵ Literally 'The Paradise is on the other corner' title of a 2003 novel written by Mario Vargas Llosa referring to a children's game popular in Latin America.

³⁶ Often consisting of cleaning or reception jobs in large hotel complexes.

Northern Mexican states for those working in the agricultural industry and an array of places in the US, mostly resulting in shift-work in assembly-line factories, landscaping (often as *jornaleros*³⁷) or cleaning jobs. I have hardly come across a young person at the CoBaCh who did not at least reckon with the idea of going away after graduation (not even to mention those who do not start or finish high school). In the streets of La Gloria a large proportion of the population in their twenties and early thirties (males more likely than females), are absent, which is particularly visible during larger gatherings (such as the general assembly). During the three *ferias* I witnessed (in 2017, 2018 and 2019) I could feel the town's streets becoming busier and I met a lot of youngsters, residing in the US who were 'visiting home' during the days of the festivity. The constant leaving of young often male adults has significant implications for the social reproduction in town. I have been told multiple times about businesses, community leadership, initiatives, and other activities (political, leisure time etc.) that stopped operating because the initiator now resides elsewhere. This came up while we were discussing the future of the JocoX-group on my last day in town. It was very clear to all of the group-members that in order to continue the work, younger members needed to be recruited since the current ones were a year or less away from graduating high school and were considering their options for futures elsewhere.

Young people's aspirations and the absence created by their departures point to connotations about La Gloria-specific definitions of being young. Youth and the transition from adolescence to adulthood are almost inseparably connoted with notions of migration. In works conducted in similar circumstances³⁸ Weston argues that 'young men most frequently made the journey to the States during my fieldwork, it was becoming almost as common for young women to the extent where several people were referring to it locally as a rite of passage' (Weston 2020, 23-24). The overlaps between migration and youth and the role young people play in the making of 'anticipatory-memory' are explored in more detail throughout chapter 5 (pp.179ff.) however it should suffice here to point to the link between being young and migrating in La Gloria. Once more the focus regarding local conceptualisations shifts from static genealogy to young people's actions; they who migrate and send remittances are considered adults regardless of their age. Young people are expected to migrate in order to be fully recognised and taken into account within the hierarchies of family and community. 'Youth' can be approached from a variety of angles with significant implications for the self-positioning of the young research participants. My interlocutors sometimes engage notions of age and genealogy in order to identify as young people and at other times they are displaying and producing youth-specific subcultural modes of being. These notions are embedded in wider discourses around 'modernity' and 'globalisation' and show how young people reconfigure geographic space through

³⁷ 'Day-labourers' – my translation.

³⁸ Weston's fieldsite (Todos Santos Cuchumatanes) is only 80 km away from San Miguel Acatán in *Huehuetenango*, Guatemala.

migration and the usage of digital-online forms of communication. Lastly, migration and absence further contribute to locally specific meanings of youth and the demarcation to adulthood. Interesting patterns arise from these analyses that are helpful when discussing young people's active participation regarding space, memory, and future-making.

Ethnographic Performances.

A couple of considerations regarding my own ethnographic engagement with the young interlocutors and other La Gloria-residents seem necessary before the first chapter. Performance works on many different levels throughout this thesis and is an important concept to make sense of the relationship between diverging understandings of being young. As I expand elsewhere, Erving Goffman proposed that 'different aspects of ourselves are rehearsed and performed in our day-to-day life becoming conscious and unconscious parts of context-specific repertoires' (Gembus 2017, 4). The diverging notions of what being young means in La Gloria co-exist as performative repertoires performed by research-participants according to context. I observed on many occasions how young people express and manifest the divergent and contradictory understandings of being young in momentary performances. All lives are full of contradictions, and I argue that the ethnographic method offers us some insight into the rich space in between what people say and do (including research participants and myself), by pausing and reflecting upon these contradictions embedded in performances. The performative angle helps us to dismantle the ethnographic encounters that led to these observations in the first place.

Ethnographic encounters within this thesis would not be complete without reflecting 'on potential problems that accrue from underthematizing the substantive (seemingly extraethnographic) relationships forged between anthropologists and the anthropologized' (Jackson Jr. 2010, S280) i.e., understanding knowledge to be produced in the collisions and negotiations of ethnographic relationships. Elsewhere Keisha Green encourages ethnographers to learn 'the ropes before playing the field' (2014, 149) as part of what she calls 'Double Dutch Methodology' referring to ethnographic research with 'youth from historically marginalized communities' (Ibid., 148). She suggests exploring the 'ways in which *who I am* affects how I might "play" in the field of qualitative research' (Ibid., 149) i.e., to engage in the 'critically important and relevant process of exploring researcher positionality' (Ibid., 150). The encounters produced through my seemingly sudden appearance as a white European man in a rural Central American town where residents self-identify as indigenous, have to be examined more carefully in order to avoid 'vulgarizing' or 'occult[ing] intersubjectivity' (Ibid., S280). It is important to recognise that 'the anthropologist is always a political actor' and that the 'unit of analysis is not the anthropologist but instead the collision she is part of – whether intended or not' (Jackson

Jr. 2010, S285). It is my goal to invoke these considerations throughout the thesis to make sense of my ethnographic encounters and relationships. Rather than a ready-made theory I consider Jackson Jr.'s 'ethnographic sincerity' (2010) a fundamental principle and an important intervention especially in regard to writing. I myself am unsure how to fully embrace collaboration and the co-production of knowledge while being engaged in the self-centred process of writing a thesis. After ending fieldwork, a process where collaboration was always at the core of research (space, memory, migration but more importantly my relationship to the young participants), I found it incredibly hard to find words and ways of writing that were equally collaborative. I came to realise that collaboration exists as a mostly unfulfilled ideal and thus aim to write and make sense of ethnography in the sincerest way possible.

During one of my first weeks in town I arrive at the large football field on the Western End, where a lively match is being played between two teams of boys from the local High and Secondary School. Plenty of young people are gathered watching on the side-lines standing in groups under trees, some drinking *refrescos*³⁹, others betting small sums of money on the match's outcome. I recognise Andrés (It will be at least a couple of months before I start calling him by his much more commonly used nickname *Azza*, which translates to 'the tall one') sitting behind one of the goals. I go up to him and say hi. I sit down and ask why he is not playing. 'Don't know am not really into football' he says, and we sit for a moment in silence. I am quite surprised when he suddenly turns his head and asks me what my research is about (I had not gotten to know him as very talkative so far). I give him one of my rehearsed *spieles* telling him that I am interested in the towns that were founded here after *el refugio* and how people understand themselves and the world around them, especially the *jóvenes de la segunda generación*⁴⁰. He turns around to me with a questioning face and asks me 'You mean us, right?' while making a circling gesture with his finger that refers to all the young people gathered here in and around the football-field. 'Yes, well technically that's true' I reply awkwardly and again we are both quiet for a moment. It is Andrés who breaks the silence again by asking me more questions, he wants to know how I heard about La Gloria and how I first got here, he wants to know where I got the car from that he saw me in on the first day I came into town and who introduced me to Don Matias, he also asks me how I pay for all of this and whether I have a visa and so on and so forth (from fieldnotes 22/02/2018).

Jackson Jr. points out certain 'inside-out moments' in which 'the academic researcher finds research subjects that are already researching themselves and, increasingly researching us, too' (2010, S284). To assume the ethnographic process to be unidirectional means ignoring the agency of research

³⁹ 'Refreshments' – my translation.

⁴⁰ 'Young people from the second generation' – my translation.

participants (as well as any other individual in the field that potentially could be ‘anthropologized’). My interlocutors (as well as most people) are constantly engaged in acts of ‘incidental ethnography’ of their everyday experiences. They are equally interested in knowing the ‘life-reality’ of people that come to ask questions and disrupt their daily lives (and often are visually distinct, ‘out of place’ or ‘foreign’ to the context in which they research). In my case these reciprocal encounters constantly involved and invoked intersectional notions of power, many of which are linked to historical (colonial) dynamics of racialised and gendered subordination. Awareness of these reciprocal interactions embedded in the uneven historical context leads to what can be described as ‘ethnography as performance’, which describes the partly rehearsed answers and the general adaptation of a fieldwork ‘alter-ego’ on my side and equally performatively influenced engagement on the side of my research participants.

Dwight Conquergood describes the process of ‘ethnography as performance’ by explaining how ‘a practicing ethnographer is one who is performing at many levels, and aware that she is performing’ and that the ‘performative view brings ethnographer and native together as co-actors’ (Conquergood 2013, 21). Jackson Jr. quotes Sedgwick (2003) describing fieldwork as a ‘periperformative mix that aspires to describe a social landscape while simultaneously producing a node of politically charged intercultural contact’ (Jackson Jr. 2010, S284). My own performance during ethnographic encounters consisted in sometimes giving prefabricated (rehearsed) explanations about my research (*my spiel*) as well as negotiating my whiteness through jokes; about my skin being burned, about me being the cousin of another person in town with light skin complexion, or about referring to myself as a *sajxhil wena*⁴¹ or *gúero*⁴² both of which functioned as nicknames, synonymous with my person. As interactions with specific young people became more frequent through the youth group, these jokes started to be reciprocated by them. My ethnographic performance further involved giving answers of expertise when asked about an array of topics that I know very little about (agriculture, climate, migration law etc. all mostly related to Europe) and for many people performing the role of the knowledgeable outsider. It involved me negotiating my masculinity with male peers for whom my attire (often shorts and a baseball cap) and some parts of my work (theatre workshops with young people) did not represent ‘male-ness’ and balancing my youth work and ethnographic relationships with young women in order to avoid crossing ‘invisible lines’ of appropriate behaviour.

It has been a long day in La Gloria. I started teaching at 7 am today and we just finished our afternoon session with the youth group (plus additional basketball match afterwards). It is getting dark (almost 6 pm) and I am considering whether to stay here tonight or try to get back

⁴¹ Literally ‘white man’ in *Akateko* my translation.

⁴² Mexican slang for white person – my translation.

to Comitán where I am still renting a room. The young people help me pack the workshop materials together when suddenly Don Pedro drives by in his smaller car that he uses as a taxi; 'Güero, how is it going? You need a ride?'. I affirm and am quite happy that I will still make it back to Comitán where I will be able to have a shower, spend some time by myself and disconnect for a while from the busyness of fieldwork. I get into the car, and we leave town towards the highway crossing from where I will most likely be able to get on one of the *combis* to Comitán. We do a bit of chit-chat but then Don Pedro changes the topic: 'Güero I have been meaning to ask you about all those *señoritas* in your youth group, tell me which one of them is your girlfriend?'. He smiles conspiratorially and adds 'or is it all of them?'. I am irritated and do not know how to react. 'But no Don Pedro that's not what I am here for' I reply trying to maintain the friendly tone of our conversation 'I am a youth worker and a teacher this would go against all the ethics of my profession. I am not interested in any type of romantic relationships, also I have a girlfriend in Guatemala whom I am going to marry soon so this is really not something I am ever thinking about'. Don Pedro looks at me for a second and then smiles 'Ok, ok *güero* calm down. Nothing wrong with that, I was just thinking because you know they're young, you're young and so on but anyways have you heard about the national elections coming up this year...'. I am still a bit irritated but also interested in Don Pedro's ideas about the election. We reach the highway crossing where I leave the car and we say goodbye until tomorrow (from fieldnotes 03/05/2018).

This was the first occasion where I was asked these (or similar) questions, usually by male adults and mostly when there was no one else around. I would reject vehemently any suggestion regarding the female research-participants and refer to ethics and values of my profession and the fact that I was in a serious relationship. These conversations would then abruptly change topic. I often felt that I had not convinced my counterpart sufficiently and that it remained a mystery to them why a 'guy like me' would spend time with teenage girls for any other reason. The gendered connotations of these ethnographic encounters are clearly visible as well as the fact that Don Pedro and other men were observing and analysing my behaviour, applying categories, and making sense of me as a person.

To conclude, ethnographic fieldwork is never unidirectional, and neither is the performative and negotiated nature of ethnographic encounters. While I was performing my fieldwork 'alter-ego', young people and other interlocutors 'performed' themselves in conversations and interactions with me and to a certain degree reflected my positionality back to myself. These are exactly the 'periperformative' interactions Jackson Jr. describes which include a reciprocal performative process of 'mirroring' between ethnographer and interlocutor. These gendered and racialised expectations of

behaviour influenced my ethnographic performances, bearing important nuances of interactions which are far from extra-ethnographic. These performances formed an integral part of my fieldwork experience in terms of positionality and localisation in the context of my field-site and represent some of many 'performances' that I came across during fieldwork.

Chapter 1: Places *with, for and by* Young People- Youth and ‘Safe Space’ in La Gloria.

This section deals with the ways in which the young interlocutors inhabit and remake unexpected spaces, both geographic and metaphysical (the space of memory). The section gives the reader an idea of how young people are active by claiming physical spaces and further spaces in local hierarchies through an engagement with their town’s past. By looking first at space and then at memory we get a sense of the roles my young interlocutors occupy and how they contribute to the remaking of La Gloria’s sociality and localised identifications. This chapter is focused on questions around space and place while the following (chapter 2, 3, and 4) deal with memory. This chapter seeks to answer how young people perceive La Gloria as a space and how they contribute to the making of space and place, specifically how do they negotiate and re-define physical spatiality to create spaces of their own (safe spaces)? Young people were some of the first ‘guides’ showing me around La Gloria during my first days of fieldwork. They continued to expose me to new places and spaces that they inhabit. I want the reader to experience this chapter as a tour through different places in La Gloria each with their own idiosyncrasies highlighting important aspects of young people’s relationship to the spaces that surround them.

The CoBaCh – a place with young people and many encounters.

La Gloria is a town with many schools: Kindergarten, Primary, Secondary and High-School are located within no more than two to three minutes walking distance from each other. The majority of children and young people from La Gloria aged four to eighteen spend most of their weekdays in one of these institutions. However, asking young people during casual conversations and interviews about spaces for young people in La Gloria, hardly any mention of the schools was made. The foundation of the CoBaCh Plantel 122 in 2004 meant that young people from La Gloria were no longer required to move away to complete their studies at high-school level, nowadays it hosts around 120 students (fifteen to eighteen years of age).

It is one of those typical mornings in La Gloria, the sun has just risen enough above the hill-tops visible at a distance to paint the whole place in a golden tone, with a crystal blue sky visible above. The roosters have already been crowing for at least an hour or two when the first groups of young people dressed in white polo shirts start gathering at different street corners, to walk up to the CoBaCh⁴³. Due to its relatively recent installation the school buildings lay a bit on the outskirts of town, however always within short walking-distance of the main road. The campus consists of three separate single-storey buildings distributed closely to the entrance with a

⁴³ People in La Gloria refer to the school as ‘el CoBaCh’ which is how I am using it.

massive amount of land laying behind them⁴⁴. The buildings are quickly visible walking up the non-paved road (which is either full of stones or mud depending on whether it is dry or wet season). The aluminium-wire that surrounds the school shines in the morning sun. The barbed wire on top shines especially bright since it reaches higher than most houses in town.



1.1 CoBaCh students waiting for their first classes of the day to start.

It is 7 am and the gates are opened by the school's caretaker Luis who oversees anything to do with facilities' maintenance. He greets in a friendly way while letting students in and shares a laughter here and there with the ones that maintain a joke-relationship with him. The young people quickly divide themselves on the vast campus getting into little groups and cliques. On most days, teachers arrive shortly after the students, the first period (7.00 – 7.50 am) is mostly interpreted as a warm-up without the everybody arriving at a particular time.

The CoBaCh is a place of constant peer encounters and interactions which happen in an atmosphere of publicness. The daily routines of arriving in groups and gathering at certain marked places is performatively connoted, happening in the 'public eye' i.e., being observed by peers gathered in the same space. Whatever happens at the CoBaCh in the morning will be talked about later in the day between peers in the street corners and internet cafes or between parents, uncles, aunts or neighbours in the houses and backyards of La Gloria. At the CoBaCh neighbour kids and family members study together with complete strangers. I chose the CoBaCh as point of departure for my fieldwork engagement with young people since it is inhabited by 120 students on a daily basis and without a doubt is one of the central localities of youth encounters and interaction.

It is November in La Gloria; the last rainfalls are more than a month away and the dry season is starting with cold nights and really hot days. I have just finished teaching one of my first classes

⁴⁴ There is a future plan that I have heard a couple of times to attract one of the universities operating in the border-region to use the land as a campus.

here at the CoBaCh and am still getting to know new students every day. A group of boys enters my classroom to say hi. They gather around me asking if I want to participate in *reta* (challenge to a football match) they are organising for the afternoon. I love sports and am delighted that they asked me, so we agree to play sometime after 1 pm. When they leave the classroom, I am surprised to realise that this group of friends strictly converses in Spanish. When I ask them about it later, I learn that neither of them is from La Gloria (from fieldnotes 09/11/2017).

Within the student cohort at least one quarter come from one of the (monolingually Spanish speaking) small towns or *Rancherias* surrounding La Gloria⁴⁵. These young people do not share the same historic and linguistic background as students from La Gloria, whose parents and grandparents originally came as refugees from Huehuetenango in the 1980's. In fact, the largest group of *fuera*-students are the children and grandchildren of those from 'Ejido Rodulfo Figueroa' with whom La Gloria-residents are having land-right disputes since the 1980's. These families mostly live by the *desvio* (see pp.79ff.) which they either refer to as 'La Gloria's extension' (officially even 'La Gloria II') or as 'San Pedro'. The encounters between young people from La Gloria and those who come from *fuera*⁴⁶ is one of the defining elements of peer interaction at the CoBaCh.

It is almost the end of the school day (about 1.30 pm) and most of the CoBaCh students are already mingling outside of their classrooms in the few shade-places the campus has to offer. Nobody is allowed to leave the campus until 2 pm so I start kicking a ball around with a group of students from the 5th grade A-group. Each grade at the CoBaCh is divided into a group 'A' that consists solely of Akateko-speaking students from La Gloria and a group 'B' where students from La Gloria and those from *fuera* mix. A couple of boys from group B in the grade below (the ones that spoke to me about football a couple of days before and come from outside of La Gloria) turn up and start making gestures towards me saying that they want a *reta*. I go up to Miguel whom I have observed being the 'organiser' of his grade and ask him whether we should start a match with them. Miguel is quick to respond: 'We don't want that. We don't get along with them'. I am surprised about this direct response however the other boys from his grade quickly gather around and I hear a bit of mumbling in Akateko until he turns back to me saying: 'Alright

⁴⁵ During my time at the La Gloria's CoBaCh we had students from: Santo Domingo, Ejido Rubén Jaramillo, Ejido 13 de Septiembre, Venecia and Laguna Seca.

⁴⁶ Literally meaning 'outside', this term will be applied throughout the thesis to describe people who are not from La Gloria since it reflects the colloquial / local usage.

then let's do this!'. I look over to Francisco who is standing next to Miguel telling me that they want to 'give them a good beating' (from fieldnotes 30/11/2017).

The separation between Akateko-speaking students from La Gloria and the solely Spanish-speaking students from *fuera* is one of the largest identifiers among CoBaCh students. The separation is quite purposefully encouraged by the school's administration through the division of each grade into two classrooms: one exclusively from La Gloria and one mixed. On the other side the separation is visible in the way friendship groups and cliques are formed and by who forms part of them and who does not.

Back at the hot November afternoon I am having doubts whether it is a good idea to play this match or not. I am not quick enough with my thoughts and the two teams are already standing on each side of the dust and gravel pitch ready for the kick-off. Just before the first ball is kicked Daniel (from the La Gloria team) shouts clearly audible for everybody and in Spanish '*Vamos a jugar la colonia contra los ranchos*' ('Let's play town vs. ranch' – my translation). (Fieldnotes 30/11/2017).

This situational statement provides us with a good example of the many aspects that the complex interrelation between young people from La Gloria and young people from *fuera* entails. It speaks to a self-understanding of La Gloria-residents. Daniel describes his town with connotations of an urbanized, densely populated place (*colonia* – 'the town / neighbourhood' a centre so to speak) and clearly demarcates it from the widely dispersed thinly populated surroundings where people live in *ranchos*⁴⁷. The invoked division here is not based on linguistic demarcation⁴⁸, it is a divide between a proclaimed centre and its peripheral margins. Economic connotations of superiority are missing, since inhabitants of the marginal *ranchos* often own large bits of land and cattle and are economically well off. La Gloria being the *colonia* in this context however refers to another type of superiority: modernity as superiority. Different aspects of developmental superiority are being invoked. La Gloria is the largest town in this part of the border-region and the only one that is equipped with an infrastructure of shops (*tiendas / abarroterías*⁴⁹, *ferreterías*⁵⁰ and barbershops), its own health centre (*clinica*) and a high-school of their own (CoBaCh). This means that inhabitants of the nearby margins (read *ranchos*) rely on La Gloria for all kinds of aspects of their daily lives. They come to La Gloria to buy goods or tools, get their hair cut, to see a doctor or to study the highest grades of the Mexican school system (*Bachillerato*). These 'modern advances' and the general rapid development of their town are being

⁴⁷ 'Ranch' often a single family living in a complex of one or more houses with large amounts of farmland surrounding it.

⁴⁸ As I have observed in many other situations and repeatedly heard in conversations 'They don't speak Akateko / Spanish'

⁴⁹ Convenience Store – my translation.

⁵⁰ Hardware Store – my translation.

greatly celebrated by La Gloria-residents. During several conversations mostly middle-aged male inhabitants told me that La Gloria should (or will) establish itself as its own *municipio*⁵¹ in the future which would make it the regional capital (*cabecera*).

This self-understanding seems to be inseparable from the historical context of *el refugio*⁵². For many years, La Gloria was known as a migrant-settlement or camp after the first generation of refugees arrived in 1984. This story has been told to me numerous times and is being re-told collectively during the annual patron-saint celebration (*Feria de San Miguel*) or whenever a group represents La Gloria in other places. The telling of the La Gloria-story, starting from the refugees' arrival until now is inherently important to the making of localised and diasporic identities among the population of La Gloria (this will be discussed in more detail in chapter 2 and 4, pp.91ff. and pp.137ff.). The school-, clinic-, and shop-buildings stand as materialised symbols of La Gloria's success. For many residents, these infrastructural advances are central aspects in the process of identifying La Gloria as a space 'of their own' and to take pride in the fact that they as 'foreigners' or 'migrants'⁵³ managed to surpass other near-by places developmentally. These aspects are at play in the rhetorical divide Daniel invokes here between *la colonia* and *los ranchos*, his phrasing affords him to establish La Gloria and its young people (children and grand-children of the 'refugee generation') as the inhabitants of a centre while he creates rhetorically *diférence* (in the Derrida – Levi-Strauss sense) to the young people from the outside who rely on La Gloria infrastructural advances.

The match turns out to be as rough and intense as I had expected; lots of elbow pushes and arm pulling, quite different to the match before when we were playing among the 5to A students. Confrontations happen after fouls and the absence of a referee is felt quite clearly. The *Colonia* ends up winning 2-1 without anybody getting hurt, however also without post-match handshakes. The *fuera*-boys leave the scene quickly, loudly complaining about how 'unfair those boys from La Gloria play' and that 'they don't know the rules'. The La Gloria team in the meantime maintains on the dusty pitch, instead of celebrating loudly they just stand there in a circle talking and laughing amongst themselves, watching the *fuera*-boys leave (from fieldnotes 30/11/2017).

Young people's territoriality is a widely studied topic within the social sciences, especially applied to the cases of male urban youth-groups and more specifically in regard to gangs. Jones & Rodgers describe how widely accepted definitions of gangs actually resemble 'universal aspects of the youth

⁵¹ Municipality – the local administrative level within the federal Mexican system, currently La Gloria is part of the *Municipio* La Trinitaria.

⁵² *El refugio* is a term that is locally used to describe the mass-exodus from Guatemala to Chiapas throughout the early 1980's.

⁵³ For a more detailed analysis regarding the labelling of the refugee population consult Ruiz-Lagier (2013a) especially her chapter on 'The Construction of Citizenship among the Guatemalan ex-refugees' (pp. 225 – 305).

life cycle during which young individuals learn to socialize and interact with their physical and social environment through the group' (Jones & Rodgers 2009, 5), these include: congregating in peer groups, engage in collective behaviour patterns, and demarcate a specific territory. There seems to be some resemblance between this body of literature and the football match in La Gloria, however not all interactions between these two 'groups' of students are characterised by territorial demarcation. Friendships exist in and outside of the classroom and occasional romantic dating relationships develop between students from La Gloria and those from *fuera*. While separation is the general 'state of affairs' there certainly are numerous counterexamples that show how these interactions can unfold in different ways. A different reading of the scene is possible when replacing the fixed and static concept of 'youth-territoriality' with the more flexible processes that describe young people's 'making of space' in non-essentialist terms. I suggest understanding my interlocutors' relationship to space in more flexible and less geographically anchored way, highlighting their active role in the making of space (specifically safe spaces) as point of departure rather than portraying them as simple recipients of spatial culture or as defenders of a pre-existing territory.

The concept of 'safe spaces' is a frequently-used practical term in youth and community work as well as in educational or therapeutic settings to describe the creation of an environment where people feel 'at ease' and comfortable to express issues, thoughts or experiences that may otherwise be kept silent (Boostrom 1998). The question is whether it is beneficial to start with the spaces themselves as point of departure. Djohari et. al. point out that 'no single definition of safe spaces is quite appropriate' (Djohari et. al., 2018, 251), they propose to approach conceptualisation by looking at three common threads; a 'location of physical safety [...] free from harm' (Ibid.), 'the social and emotional conditions required for "psychological freedom" [...] for discovery, play and creativity' (Ibid.) and lastly the 'conditions to facilitate "free expression" [...] free from dominant hegemonies that silence or restrict subaltern groups' (Ibid., 352). The last two threads relate to 'conditions' rather than locations and therefore trouble the notions of safe-spaces as geographically anchored and rather depart from the people within them. Setha Low highlights the social production and social construction of spaces (including safe spaces) and the active role people play within this process as 'mobile spatial fields'. 'A spatiotemporal unit with feelings, thoughts, preferences, and intentions as well as out-of-awareness cultural beliefs and practices who creates space as a potentiality for social relations, giving it meaning, form, and ultimately through the patterning of everyday movements, produces place and landscape' (Low 2014, 35).

Back at the CoBaCh, one morning I am standing in front of the fence waiting for Luis to open who is walking from the back of the campus to the front gate as soon as he sees me. A couple

[Irizarry 2011] and where school personnel's resistance to addressing these realities "cuts [students] off from home, from heritage and from lived experience and ultimately severs [them] from their education process [Fine 1991 p.35]' (2014, 66).

The CoBaCh occupies a very specific role within La Gloria's community being only one of two institutions directly financed by the federal government (the local clinic being the other; local primary and secondary schools are run by the municipal government). This makes the CoBaCh-teachers (together with one doctor and a nurse) the only federal employees that are present in town on a regular basis (Monday to Friday). It is not unusual that party affiliations and political organising overlaps with the teachers' work as educators. Young people are aware of the political affiliations of some of the CoBaCh-staff. CoBaCh headteacher Sergio for example was quite openly involved with the *Partido Verde* (Green Party) his decisions as headteacher therefore were often framed as political acts by students and parents (for example several students who received bad grades complained at some point about being 'punished' for belonging to a family that supported another party). The presence of the high school facilitates political dynamics and debates being brought from the municipal and federal level to the local, some of the school's employees act as representatives of the state within that process. The interaction between teachers and students within the school space is characterised by divisions that represent larger-scale Mexico-wide issues; namely the urban-rural divide as well as the power asymmetry between *mestizos* and indigenous people. The history of race-relations in Mexico is long and complex and it is beyond the scope of this chapter to sum up the historical developments since colonization in the sixteenth century. It should suffice to mention what Nash describes as the 'mestizocratic' (2001, 56) conditions of modern Mexican society. All seven teachers working at La Gloria's high school in 2017 and 2018 commuted daily from the urban centres in the north of the border region (either Comitán or La Trinitaria), were university-educated and without exception came from monolingual Spanish-speaking urban middle-class families. These aspects singled teachers out as a group visually and symbolically distinct from the rest of La Gloria's population. While the speaking of indigenous languages is not forbidden at the CoBaCh in La Gloria (whose population is entirely Akateko-speaking with a few exceptions) it is however definitely not encouraged. None of the teachers speak any other language than Spanish and the federal curriculum does not include efforts towards bilingual or intercultural education. The teacher-student interactions therefore are marked by a variety of unequal power relations, such as age, position in the school hierarchy, ethno-linguistic markers, urban-rural divide, all of which fundamentally influence the young people's perception of the CoBaCh as a space. Doreen Massey's concept of 'power geometries' (Massey 1999) points to the ways spatiality and mobility are shaped by and reproduce power differentials in society; the CoBaCh-space is characterised by these power geometries; the school is

perceived as an authoritarian and mestizocratic place by young indigenous La Gloria-residents that come here to study.

When conflicts arise (which happens on a regular basis) CoBaCh teachers are able to reinforce the institution's hierarchies by reminding students of their roles and their obligation to obey the teacher's instructions; ultimately the school reserves itself the right to expel (either temporarily or permanently) young people who are perceived as disruptive by the teachers. These measures are hardly unique to La Gloria's high school but rather represent general features of how schools operate universally; they are however important features on the local level especially when taking into account the CoBaCh's unique role as the only federal institution in La Gloria. In a way the disciplinary measures and restrictions that are being applied to the indigenous (and second-generation refugee) student-body serve as a framework of learning not only to obey teachers or the CoBaCh as an institution but ultimately as an exercise in obeying the mestizocratic Mexican nation-state. The learning young Akatekos do at the CoBaCh can also be framed as 'learning how to be Mexican' i.e., an obedient Mexican citizen. Véronique Benei describes how formal education is one of the main sites of what she calls 'banal nationalism' (i.e., the quotidian experience of nationalism that is so integral to people's lives that it goes unnoticed, based on Michael Billig's earlier work [1995]). She highlights how 'formal education is seen as both a prerequisite for the stability of the state and a powerful means of national integration' (Benei 2008, 4). Aida Hernandez-Castillo describes the roles of state-schools in Chiapas from a historic perspective starting after the end of the Mexican Revolution in 1924. Her discourse displays how state-schools were some of the primary sites and promoters of what she calls the early Mexican nation-states' 'modernizing project' whose goals of national uniformity of culture and language continue to influence the present in form of post-colonial power dynamics and *mestizaje*⁵⁴ (Hernandez-Castillo 2001, 49). The CoBaCh in La Gloria has to be seen in this tradition occupying a space where 'Mexicanness' is represented and promoted on behalf of the federal state. The weekly *actos cívicos*⁵⁵ (singing of the national anthem and pledging allegiance to the flag) and the holidays and celebrations linked to the nation-state (like the *Día de la Revolución* discussed in chapter 3 pp.110ff.) here in the southernmost margins of the nation-states' territory clearly indicate nationalist acculturation as an integral part of the CoBaCh's mission.

The CoBaCh in La Gloria works as a space on many different levels, as a public space of peer contact, as a site of encounter (and conflict) with youths from *fuera* (teachers and other students), as a controlled site of institutional power and as a site of national acculturation. The CoBaCh staff is

⁵⁴ See glossary pp.235ff. for a more thorough discussion.

⁵⁵ Public acts that usually consist of singing the national anthem and pledging allegiance to the Mexican flag, performed uniformly throughout Mexico in schools and other federal institutions.

But where do young people go as soon as they are on the other side of the fence? Which are the spaces that young people in La Gloria choose to spend their time in whenever they move around town freely? Let's follow Miguel down to the plaza where youth-spatiality takes place in a different way.

Public Space and History *en la Plaza*: La Gloria's Civic Centre.

It only takes around five minutes by foot to walk from the CoBaCh to the *plaza*. Knowing Miguel, he has probably been avoiding the CoBaCh road as well as the main road completely due to the lack of shade and the possibility of running into neighbours or friends of his parents who could inform them of his absence in school. He has probably taken the side road that runs by the local Secondary School where large trees give shade and apart from *Secu*⁵⁹ teachers and students only few people frequent these backroads. I ask a group of boys playing behind the *Secu* fence if they have seen him. They point towards the *plaza* and I continue to walk two more blocks down and get to the *plaza*.



1.2 Aerial shot of La Gloria retrieved from google-maps, the red arrow points to the location of *la*

⁵⁹ Short for *Secundaria*, this is how the secondary schools is unofficially known in town.

Despite being the largest open and public space in town, La Gloria's *plaza* is not located in its geographic centre (as one might expect) but rather at the Southern end of the chess-board outline of town. This means that while passing the *Secundaria* building the town limit is clearly visible, no houses lay to my left and a small dirt road is visible which leads to Santo Domingo. While in the rest of town it is difficult to see past the closely aligned houses, on the *plaza* there is space for the human eye to wander. This 'central' square mostly consists of gravel and dirt with about five buildings located around it. Two buildings immediately catch my attention since they both have a second storey: the new and the old *Agencia Municipal*⁶⁰. 'This was the first building in the community built completely with brick' tells me *Matias* (the Cultural Promoter) on one of our first wanders through town.

Next to the old and in front of the new *Agencia* we can find the *Salon de Actos*, the town's most spacious building where all larger meetings, events and celebrations take place. Any public event is held here: the annual patron-saint celebration, graduation ceremonies, Mother's Day celebrations and the monthly General Assembly.



1.3 La Gloria's Catholic church ca. 1988.



1.4 La Gloria's Catholic church in 2018.

⁶⁰ Literally 'Municipal Agency' – administrative building containing the Agente Municipal's office, similar to a town hall.

La Gloria's catholic church is located next to the *salon*. The church was among the first buildings constructed shortly after the foundation of town in 1984. Its look has changed quite substantially over the years first starting as a simple wood construction as pictures collected by the young people during our workshops show (1.3). The wooden construction was replaced by a brick building in the 1990's with a convent (a wood building next to the church containing a kitchen and two multiple use rooms). Recently (2017-2018) the church was equipped with a tile floor and the outside façade was painted in blue. Most La Gloria-residents are Roman-catholic (Ruiz-Lagier 2007, 151) some more some less regular church attendees. Evangelical churches are present too; namely one Pentecostal and one Apostolic congregation both of which have gained a large followership throughout the past decades (La Gloria's religious make-up is discussed in more detail in chapter 4 in relation to the theatre play pp.153ff.). The Catholic Church hosts a youth-group led by a coordinator chosen by the group's participants and the local catechist. This group organises different activities such as youth-exchanges with other parishes, collection of clothes and groceries collections for local people in need and weekly bible study. Their most visible activities however are the annual *antorcha*⁶¹ runs. These runs have a long tradition throughout Mexico and consist in a group of (mostly young) church members running over extensive distances carrying a torch from another church to their own. These runs require a lot of logistical effort (usually just one group-member at a time runs with the torch while the rest ride on a pick-up truck which also carries food and water supplies) since they can last for days (or even weeks) depending on the distance that the group decides to run. The catholic youth group in La Gloria organises one of these *antorchas* in September, honouring their local patron-saint on the last day of the *Feria de San Miguel*. A much bigger run takes place at the beginning of December, where the youth group blends in with the Mexican-wide celebration of the *Virgen de Guadalupe* (the nation's patron-saint). Tens of thousands of young people run self-chosen distances during these weeks to arrive back at their hometown on the 12th of December (the *Día de Guadalupe*). In La Gloria, the members of the catholic youth group collect funds during the months prior to finance their sometimes ambitious activities⁶², for example by going from house to house to sell *Pichi-Cacao*⁶³ or other types of food or drinks.

The clinic is another important institution in town whose building is located right on the *plaza*. Established in 1996 it immediately became a focus point within La Gloria which especially during the early mornings (at around 6-7 am) draws large crowds waiting to be seen by the doctor who is here on four days a week. Apart from curing the ill the clinic has developed into a centre for community dialogue around important health-related topics over the years. Especially the work of the *Promotores*

⁶¹ 'torch' – my translation.

⁶² In December 2017, the church group brought their torch back all the way from *Villahermosa, Tabasco* covering almost 350 kilometres.

⁶³ *Pozol de Cacao*: drink made from fermented corn dough and cocoa – my translation.

with a cheeky smile, 'I mean you are tall enough'. I do want to distinguish myself from the other CoBaCh people who usually travel back to Comitán as soon as classes are over, so I say goodbye to the teachers and start walking towards the *plaza* with the students. When the group and I reach the *plaza* it is already full of CoBaCh students, some waiting for the ball to arrive, others are on their phone trying to connect to the extremely weak wi-fi signal coming from the *clinica*, others are sitting on their motor-bikes or on benches chatting in groups. I say hi to most of them. A Basketball match is already in full swing on the *cancha* which does not hold anybody back from starting another one parallel to it; in no time the pitch becomes quite a chaos, and nobody really knows who plays on which team or in which match. Nobody seems to be massively bothered since it is quite a normal occurrence. I cannot cope with all of these things going on at the same time, so I stop the game and talk them into playing one match after the other. We start playing and soon I realise that rules do not really count here either, players do as many steps as they like, stop and start dribbling whenever they want to and sometimes even continue to play outside the pitch. For a second, I think about intervening and putting myself forward as referee, the thought is brushed to the side quickly though. A couple of minutes later Gaby comes up to me and says: 'Why don't you referee? That way we learn the rules, you know to play like a real team.' I interrupt the match again telling them that I will referee. 'Ah no' I hear a group of boys shouting from the back 'we don't need a referee here' (from fieldnotes 12/02/2018 and 06/03/2018).

The *cancha* is probably the most visible youth-dominated space in La Gloria. It is no surprise that adults and young people alike mention it quickly when asked for places where young people in La Gloria gather. These youth gatherings happen quite routinely in the afternoon after four or five pm when the sun starts to set, temperatures drop, and shadows get longer. It usually just takes the first sound of a ball dribbling for young people to arrive on the pitch, the number then multiplies while the afternoon advances. Adults hardly use the rectangular-shaped concrete pitch. I have only observed 'older' residents play here during the basketball tournaments organised as part of the annual *feria*. Young people set the rules here. The resistance to my intervention of acting as referee is a clear signal that some young La Gloria-residents feel ownership of *la cancha*. My sheer presence already fused different domains, regimes of power and hierarchies. The institutionalised rules that dominate the CoBaCh space (and make adults authority-figures *per se* who have the monopoly on what is right) are clearly out of place here on the *cancha*. The rules that dominate the basketball matches are much less generalised or established and rather momentarily negotiated between the players present. Instead of diverting decisions to a 'regime of truth' (Foucault 1976, 14) they are made through verbal and non-verbal communication between players in the moment, which of course is not always free from

conflict. My efforts to 'organise' the pitch and the young people associating my person with the hierarchical order of the CoBaCh space, were felt as a disruption to the social dynamics that characterise peer interaction in the *cancha*-space. The first organising-intervention was silently tolerated, something I partly associate with my obvious physical otherness of being *güero* (white, blond-ish and tall as pointed out by Baltasar), and my relatively recent arrival which still afforded me the position of a guest. Among the young people on the pitch this triggered post-colonial power dynamics as well as social reflexes of hospitality. The second intervention of putting me in charge as referee however would have resembled too much of the regime of power that young people are subject to for most of their day. It deforms 'their' *cancha* into yet another space where they are expected to oblige rules externally set up by adults. It seems that the *cancha* in La Gloria works as a space where young people freely decide to spend their free-time and where they feel ownership over what happens. The occasional presence of teen couples quite openly showing their affection for each other through cuddles, handholding or even kisses (something that I have not observed anywhere else in town) is another indicator that young people enjoy a certain degree of freedom here. However, let us have a closer look at the place in order to gain an understanding of what 'parental supervision' in La Gloria means.

A couple of days after participating as a referee I go to the *cancha* again at about 4.30 pm, this time with the intention of playing rather than refereeing. Six boys are playing '3 on 3'. We have just finished a workshop with the youth group in the *salon* and two of the female participants (Gaby and Araceli) are walking towards the pitch with me. 'Let's play' I say. They are a bit reluctant and tell me that they might just go home. I am surprised since they usually are all in for any type of sports, especially basketball. 'What's the matter?' I ask them and they silently look at each other for a moment until they tell me 'Well, it's all boys up there, *nos da pena preguntar*'⁶⁵. I think for a second and then talk to Momia who is one of the older and most regular guys on the pitch (he is in his early 20's). He goes back to consult with the other players and then makes a gesture towards us that indicates to come on the pitch. We quickly make teams and play a nice '4 on 4' match, the boys even cheer the girls on and applaud every time they score. As soon as the match is over, the boys get back into their earlier formations and I can see Momia putting a couple of bills in a hat on the side of the pitch. It is only then that I realise that the earlier match was for money.⁶⁶ I sit down with some of the players waiting on the side and start talking to Tere when I realise the large group of *policias*⁶⁷ sitting by the side of the pitch. 'They always come out at this time' tells me Baltasar 'it's because the *Agencia* opens

⁶⁵ 'We are too embarrassed to ask' – my translation.

⁶⁶ It is quite a normal occurrence for teams to play for small sums of money here.

⁶⁷ Policemen – my translation.

bend and break rules at the CoBaCh, escape town in search of unsupervised spaces in the surroundings or when they look for the seemingly restriction-free platforms of online communication. Young people emerge as active agents in interaction with La Gloria's spaces creating a spatiality of their own. In order to describe the ways in which spaces are created and made 'safe' by young people I depart from Low's conceptualisation of people as 'mobile spatial fields' (2014, 35). By joining the circle of young people at the street corner I disrupted the momentarily created 'safe-space' that the young people had established through banter and humour. My inability to speak Akateko did not allow me to understand the specificities of their interaction prior to my arrival. Gestures and body language however indicated that they were having some sort of friendly group banter behind the pick-up truck. This 'safe-space' dynamic was interrupted by my presence and re-established as soon as I departed. Elsewhere I have expanded on the ways in which performed carnivalesque acts (on and off-stage) of banter-play, mockery, and burlesque-parody aid diasporic young people in London to make sense of the 'everyday surrealism' of their lives (Gembus 2017). This seems to have some resemblance here in La Gloria where young people (children and grand-children of the *generación del refugio*) create, break, and re-create non-geographically anchored spaces free from adult supervision and control, through the sharing of group-specific jokes and laughter. The 'safe' aspect of these spaces is more a quality of their relationship and social interaction, constantly (re)negotiated and performed between the peers present. These relationships and dynamics have the potential to transform any street-corner, *tienda*-bench, *ciber* waiting area or schoolyard, into temporary 'safe spaces'. I have observed multiple times how this very friendship group (as well as other groups) gather in random places around town, filling these with their parodies, laughter and carnivalesque banter-play, thus (re)claiming their spatial surroundings as their very own momentary 'safe-space'.

Chapter 2: Remembering, Forgetting and Storytelling – Young People and Memory in La Gloria

About the history I only know what they [my parents] have told me but well I guess every person tells their own stories, to some people this happened to others something else. But in the case of my parents, I only know how they came here and how they managed to stay protected and find food (Interview with Ivan 4th of September 2018).

It is mid-November in La Gloria, only the second month since my arrival. It is the twentieth of November to be exact, a day is observed Mexico-wide as 'Revolution Day' (*Día de la Revolución*). This national holiday commemorates the 1910 uprising led by *Francisco I. Madero* against the army general *Porfirio Díaz*, which is considered the start of the Mexican Revolution. In 2018 in La Gloria this day is celebrated with marches organised by the four educational institutions (*Kinder, Primaria, Secundaria and CoBaCh*). These marches (called *desfiles*) are held nation-wide and more or less follow the same formula. An array of patriotic symbolism is displayed (marching bands, a military inspired squad of flag-bearers and escorts, typically 'Mexican Sports', etc.) as well as students representing the different fractions of the revolution's history: Soldiers (defending the army rule) dressed in black, Revolutionaries (fighting for *Madero*) typically dressed in *campesino* attire (straw-hat, white clothes and sandals) accompanied by the revolutionary women called *adelitas* (usually depicted with a white blouse, long skirt, braided hair and a rifle over their shoulder). The march usually ends with a short scene of historic re-enactment showing the battles between soldiers and revolutionaries. CoBaCh students this year have been encouraged to bring props in order to make the scene look as authentic as possible. I am walking up and down to take photos of the different groups waiting for the march to start and am quite shocked to find out that a couple of students dressed as soldiers have taken this call seriously and brought real guns and rifles. Head-teacher Sergio laughs when I tell him my worries, assuring me that he personally checked that none of them actually are loaded with bullets. I take some pictures (as is my agreed job today) and am specifically surprised by a rather antique looking rifle that Marco brought. 'Did you get that one from the museum?' I ask him jokingly, to which he replies: 'No it's my granddad's, from the *Guerrilla de Guatemala*.' (from fieldnotes 20/11/2017).

Memory is a central aspect of this thesis, which is implicit in earlier discussions of space (chapter 1) and performance (Introduction II). This chapter deals with memory explicitly and provides the theoretical groundwork for chapters 3 and 4, where memory is discussed in relation to two creative projects the Jcox group and I worked on (photography and theatre).

The *desfile* during the *Día de la Revolución* in La Gloria in 2018 has to be understood in the historical context of these integrationist policies. Especially in La Gloria with a population of Guatemalan origins living on the Southern end of the Mexican territory (more than 1000 kilometres from the country's capital and about 3000 kilometres from the Northern border with the US) the stakes to link the town to the rest of the nation are high. Celebrations of 'Mexicanness' (such as the November 20th marches) as well as regular staging of *actos cívicos* are considered important elements of the schools' *raison d'être*. *Actos cívicos* are public and formal ceremonies that include the singing of the national anthem, a military-style entrance and exit of the Mexican flag and the recitation of specific flag-salutes, which are being performed at the beginning of every public event in town and every Monday morning in each of the four schools. These patriotic ceremonies are received by the students in different ways however mostly without great enthusiasm. In the CoBaCh I have only observed a minority of young people who actually sing along to the national anthem or carry out the different flag-salutes required. However, it is also received without larger protest. Neither have I observed a student refusing to partake. For the young people, these patriotic ceremonies are simply seen as 'matters of fact', as acts that have to be fulfilled before public events, on Monday mornings or on the 20th of November; as unquestionable acts of (national) tradition. The bodily expressions that form part of these acts have through continuous repetition turned into automatisms (mostly enforced and rehearsed in the school context) manifesting a specific type of embodied memory through repetition; their absence on Monday mornings at the CoBaCh or before public events is simply unthinkable. Young people do not simply absorb these bodily automatisms but mediate, adapt and contest the 'correct' imposed order of movements on a regular basis, often in the slightest of forms (by simply not doing what is required in a certain moment). The *raison d'être* of these patriotic ceremonies and the fundamental concept behind them is rarely ever questioned through these contestations. National identifications are ambivalent in La Gloria where one finds three different countries of birth within three generations of many families (Guatemala, Mexico, USA). Young people situationally invoke their identification with 'being Mexican' for example when celebrating victories of the national football team (Mexico surprisingly won against Germany in the 2018 World Cup which sparked a crowd of mostly young people to celebrate in the streets of La Gloria shooting fireworks and waving Mexican flags), or when thanking 'the Mexican nation' during public speeches (for example at graduation ceremonies). A rather loose identification exists with 'Guatemala', interestingly in the absence of Guatemalan commemorative or patriotic ceremonies. Memory emerges here as a key figure when identifying with registers of national belonging. Commemorative acts are at the core of these projects aiming at collectivising identification with the Mexican state. Other forms of collective remembrance exist in La Gloria alongside of these patriotic regimes of memory.



2.2 The CoBaCh's escolta entering the flag during the 2017 *desfile*.

The 'La Gloria-story' – From counter-memory to public and collective commemoration-ceremony.

Memory plays a crucial role in the process of identification among members of large groups of people that 'will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion' (Anderson 1983, 6). While Benedict Anderson's analysis is mainly concerned with the creation of 'national identities' his description is equally highlighting other forms of 'collective memory'. Young people in La Gloria are exposed to commemorative ceremonies and narratives (and their implicit potentialities of identification) which instead of nationwide projects form part of a rather particular memories closely tied to La Gloria's history and localised forms of identification.

It is September 2017 and my first full day in La Gloria. It is the first day of the *feria de San Miguel* and I had been told by a Veronica Ruiz-Lagier that this is a great time to get an idea of La Gloria and its history. Today the winner of the annual beauty pageant, the *Reina Indígena Migueleña* is crowned in a public ceremony attended by a large crowd of locals as well as visitors from the nearby villages and towns. I am a bit early since I wasn't sure about starting times and find a group of men decorating and preparing the *salon de actos* assuring me that the majority of La Gloria residents will eventually come to the square to have a look and that some *Migueleños* even travel from as far as Quintana Roo, the Mexican North or the US to attend this event. The *salon* is slowly filling up, but it will be another hour or two before the ceremony starts. As soon as the few sitting spaces on benches inside the salon are taken (mostly given to guests and the

important for contemporary young people in La Gloria who do not have first-hand experiences of any of the events narrated in the 'La Gloria-story' and are increasingly in contact with non-Akatekos in the school environment (see paragraphs about *fuera* students in chapter 1, pp.62ff.). Apart from the Akateko language as a distinguishing feature, the familiarity with and the engagement in the retelling of the 'La Gloria-story' function as markers of Akateko-ness. This has been invoked by young people during interviews when I asked what makes them different from young people in other places. Cristy for example explained the difference between herself and the *fuera*-students at the CoBaCh like this:

'We have several customs and traditions that they [the non-Akatekos] don't have. This comes from our grandparents (ancestors) who brought the tradition from way before and we still celebrate them nowadays. Instead, they [the non-Akatekos] don't do that anymore, they just speak Spanish and they don't ground themselves in the things from the past, they just live in the present – that is the difference' (Interview with Cristy 24th of August 2018).

Cristy fuses memory and identity here when she describes how connectivity to the past is crucial when identifying with La Gloria. She describes a direct link between her ethno-linguistic identification and her connection to the past. Being *Akateka* for her means connecting with the past and the ancestors in form of customs and traditions which makes her (and all Akateko-speaking residents) different from non-Akatekos who 'just live in the present'. In Cristy's statement we can see traces of temporality or temporal positioning which are invoked in the indigenous – *ladino/mestizo* binary; indigenous connectivity to the past versus a *mestizo-ladino* negligence of the past in exchange for a focus on the present. This binary is vehemently present in the multiple land-right disputes between indigenous communities and the *mestizo*-world (represented by nation-states, local governments, transnational companies etc.) around Latin-America. Local communities claim their ancestral rights to land and protesting violations of their customs, while the indigenous communities themselves are being accused of standing in the way of development and progress since they 'cling on to the things of the past'. Johannes Fabian famously critiqued Anthropology's 'denial of coevalness' (Fabian 1983, 35) i.e., a world-view which displays various contemporary societies literally as living in different historical epochs, which is precisely the temporal positioning at play here. There is a different quality and valorisation in Cristy's statement where she does not locate Akateko-ness to the past but rather highlights that honouring the past is a crucial part to this type of identification. The past in form of the memory of the 'La Gloria-story' is crucial for Cristy to describe the difference to her non-Akateko peers. However, memory here must be understood within Cristy's own chronological remoteness to the story's events. Young people perceive the 'La Gloria-story' not as a 'memory in the making' as it has been the case with those who came to Chiapas as refugees in the early 1980' and have seen the narration taking its current form. For young people, the La Gloria-story rather represents a monolithic

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tradition which formed many years before their own existence which is reproduced in and as an unchangeable tradition.

Julia Dickson-Gómez has explored what happens in the aftermath of violence specifically the transmission to those born after the end of violent conflict. She questions clinical approaches that define trauma as ‘a cluster of symptoms that make up a diagnosable illness, posttraumatic stress disorder PTSD’ (2002, 416). She describes shortcomings of the clinical / PTSD approach which focuses on the transmission of trauma as the result of unexpected and intense events which ignores other types of distress for example those that occur with frequency, are expected, and vary in intensity. She describes how survivors of the civil war in El Salvador (which in many ways displays similar features to the one in neighbouring Guatemala) often display a certain expectation of violence. The violent logics of the conflict (civil war) are therefore ‘reinforced in everyday social interactions [even after the conflict is officially over] and continue to be part of the social reality that can be transmitted to future generations’ (Ibid., 419). Young people in La Gloria grow up in a social environment where a ‘traumatized worldview of fear, pessimism and violence is socialized in the next generation’ (Dickson-Gómez 2002, 416). This expresses itself in the individual, particular and subtle transmissions of trauma occurring in the private and intra-familial space. Narratives of past traumatic events however are also reproduced in the public space through the re-telling of the La Gloria-story. Matias who narrates the story annually during the patron-saint celebration, situates the ‘La Gloria-story’ within his general mission to ‘rescue our culture, language and history’ (Interview Matias 20/11.2017) which highlights a clear intentionality that motivates the public annual narration. The act of telling this account of historicity is an example of a direct and intentional mode of transmission, which aims to ‘uniformise’ the account. The ‘La Gloria-story’, from which almost all subjectivity is removed, is being perceived by young people as a form of archival and unquestionable tradition, ‘supposedly resistant to change’ (Taylor 2003, 19). The story collapses ethnic and historic identification as well as temporal distances. The ‘ethnogenesis’ (appearance of San Miguel) is a shared narrative that is told in La Gloria as well as anywhere else where Akateko people live (Guatemalan *municipios* of Nentón and San Miguel Acatán as well as among migrant communities in the US). In the La Gloria-story however this narrative appears in an intermingled form together with rather recent historic events that are particular to the refugee population’s experience, i.e., persecution during the *conflicto armado, el refugio* and the foundation of La Gloria. While the ‘ethnogenesis’-narration speaks more to identifications with the ethno-linguistic label ‘Akateko’ generally, the remembrance of the political events that unfolded in Guatemala during the early 1980’s is a specific feature of the Akateko-speaking diaspora in Chiapas. Remembering the *conflicto armado* will most likely take different forms among Akatekos in other locations and is extremely unlikely to form part of annual celebrations. Perspectives and opinions about the *conflicto armado* vary among Akatekos as is evidenced by conversations I had in San Miguel

Acatán (Huehuetenango – Guatemala) and Fort Payne (Alabama). Young people who grow up in La Gloria experience the appearance of San Miguel and the sufferings of the *conflicto armado* as related parts of the same narration, as interlinked parts of the same tradition. Ethno-linguistic (and syncretic-religious) identification (‘remembering’ the appearance of San Miguel) is collapsed with a specific type of historic memory. Being Akateko in La Gloria (and to a certain degree in the whole of Chiapas and Mexico) does not only consist of speaking the language or annually celebrating the appearance of San Miguel (something that not all Akateko-speakers do anyway, see discussion of evangelic Akatekos in chapter 4, pp.153ff.), but further means to remember the historic events that led to the foundation of La Gloria and re-tell them in its specific, uniform and collective way (i.e. the ‘La Gloria-story’).

Young people embodying the past – Postmemory and Performance.

The literature cited thus far in regard to memory as well as the ethnographic material stress the role memory plays in the present. Memory becomes present among young people in the after-generations which have not themselves experienced the events on display. Marianne Hirsch has provided us with the term postmemory describing the controversial assumption that ‘descendants of survivors [...] of massive traumatic events connect so deeply to the previous generation’s remembrances of the past that they have to call that connection *memory*’ (2008, 105-106). In La Gloria, young people make sense of their parents’ and grandparents’ past in a multitude of ways creating spaces for ‘intergenerational acts of transfer’ (Ibid.) that can tell us a lot about the relationship between older and younger family and community members in the here and now. Postmemory, Hirsch continues, is more than just the process of remembering a past one has not lived since ‘postmemory’s connection to the past [...] is not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection and creation’ (Ibid. 108). Young people are actively engaged in the making of postmemories by reactivating and re-embodiment ‘more distant social / national and archival / cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression’ (Ibid. 111).

Storytelling is of special importance these modalities of ‘past-making’ implicated in the interlocutors’ postmemorial processes and their artistic expression discussed later in the thesis (chapter 3 and 4, pp.109ff.). Michael Jackson points us towards the social dimensions of storytelling when he says that: ‘No story is simply an imitation of events as they actually occurred [...] in making and telling stories we rework reality in order to make it bearable’ (Jackson 2002, 16). Young people construct, relate, and share stories, giving meaning to their relationships with others. The relational and intersubjective dimension of storytelling is central to understanding the postmemorial nature of the young people’s play and their photography (as discussed in the following chapters). A collective way of storytelling is exemplified here where ‘stories are inevitably revised in memory and reworked as they pass through

the hands and minds of a community' (Ibid., 231). The young research-participants do not only relate to others (peers as well as the older generation) by telling 'their story' but also contribute to and mediate the uniformly told 'La Gloria-story' itself.

'Stories are redemptive [...] not because they preserve or represent the truth of any individual life but because they offer the perennial possibility that one see oneself as, and discover oneself through, another, despite the barriers of space, time and difference' (Jackson 2002, 250).

Precisely here lies the argument I make throughout this section: young people in La Gloria reactivate and re-embody the past through the telling of 'their (his)story' in the present. They fuse elements from the orally transmitted accounts of eyewitnesses (mostly family members) and the rather archival and generalised forms of collective remembering, in written records or uniformised public re-telling, and express these aesthetically and creatively. This chapter as well as chapters 3 and 4 are dedicated to memory and highlight photography and theatre as forms of young people's expression of *memoria histórica*. Through creative and artistic forms of expression the young participants create new forms of inter-subjectivity with others (inter and intra-generational) through memory, while mediating and negotiating their very own ways of remembering, which through storytelling become shared and collective processes; 'once verbalized the individual's memories are fused with the inter-subjective symbolic system of language and are, strictly speaking, no longer a purely exclusive and inalienable property' (Hirsch 2008, 110). However, these forms of sociality and inter-subjectivity through memory and storytelling are never without conflict, as we see when lived memory and the storytelling of postmemory collide.

Postmemory and Memory – Seeing with your own eyes, remembering *en carne propia*¹⁰⁴ and mediated postmemorial performances.

A week has gone by since the Jocox theatre troupe presented their play for the first time in La Gloria, and today is my first day back since then. I get dropped off by the *combi* at the main road, people greet me in a friendly way and I am keen to know what they thought of the event. 'Good, very good we liked it' I hear, nobody says anything further, so I continue walking down the road and run into Don González. He is a very friendly slightly older man that I know from the CoBaCh since he is an active member of the school's parental committee, always around doing work or talking to the head-teacher. Apart from being one of our group member's grandfather Don González is also a good friend of Matias' and they often visit each other's houses or help each other with agricultural or building work. Through their close bond

¹⁰⁴ Literally 'in one's own flesh' – frequent idiom in Spanish meaning 'first-hand experience' not very different from Don González's statement 'seeing with one's own eyes'.

I have been able to talk to him more about La Gloria and the past through which I realised that he was involved with the *guerrilla* back in Guatemala in the 1980's. This is not an uncommon occurrence among men

(and occasionally women) of his generation however he is one of the few that speak about it rather openly. 'How did you like the play?' I ask him today. He thinks for a moment, looks to the side and then says: 'Yeah it was alright, but you guys really should've mentioned the names of the towns in Guatemala where massacres happened and why was everybody dressed in black? They didn't look like soldiers, *guerrilleros* or *campesinos* at all, they were all wearing the same thing and that is not what people looked like back then, I know what they looked like I saw it with my own eyes' (from fieldnotes 12/06/2018).

'Postmemory is not identical to memory' Hirsch writes (2008, 109) and this distinction between lived memory and staged postmemorial display becomes clear when Don González insists on the play's failure to authentically represent 'what really happened'. Don González's account as a contemporary witness and actor with direct experience of the *conflicto armado*, takes issue with what he experiences as a 'misrepresentation' of his embodied knowledge i.e., the events he experienced *en carne propia*. The young people's postmemorial mediation and imagination suddenly stand in contrast (and conflict) to the claims of 'truth' and 'authenticity' made by Don González. These clashes between contemporary witness accounts and the staged postmemory performed by the young people, tell us a great deal of the work that postmemory does in the present and how it engages young people in a process of making, imagining, embodying and performing the past rather than remembering; 'the index of postmemory (as opposed to memory) is the performative index, shaped more and more by affect, need and desire as time and distance attenuate the links to authenticity and "truth"' (Ibid., 124). This is reflected in the way intergenerational relationships in La Gloria unfold (as mentioned on pp.104ff.); young people feel misunderstood and *los señores* think young people are failing at giving continuity to their traditions and customs. We get a sense of similar dynamics in this example where Don González laments the young people's failure to represent history 'in the right way', while 'misunderstanding' the young people's artistic interpretation and mediated performance of the La Gloria-story. Interesting questions around the ownership of history arise from these tensions; we ask ourselves 'Who owns history?' and 'What is at stake when young people tell and perform this particular history?'

Further it makes us think of the relationship Diana Taylor describes between the archive and the repertoire. Don González's statement for historic authenticity can be understood as a claim to direct

eye-witness accounts being a type of 'archival memory [...] supposedly resistant to change' (Taylor 2003, 19). As an eyewitness Don González stresses his account's authority over the imagination of past displayed by the young people, his claim is that what he lived *en carne propia* and what he 'saw with his own eyes' cannot be changed. The insinuated authority of the archive is juxtaposed by Don González with the seemingly subordinate embodied forms of knowledge and memory (which Taylor describes as repertoire) and their representation through the young people's performance. This is not to say that the La Gloria-story or Don González's own account of the *conflicto armado* actually are unmediated, archival and therefore 'resistant to change', however the fact that they are strategically treated as such in certain moments is what points us to contemporary investments of the past and its remembering. 'Who has a stake in such investments, who makes these claims and in which situations?' are important questions to be examined. Considering the archive and the repertoire together Taylor concludes that they 'usually work in tandem' (Ibid., 21) which is precisely my argument in this chapter: the young people's postmemorial, performative repertoire is shaped by archival (or seemingly archival) memory.

Storytelling and memory are the two main aspects and points of departure for the exploration of young people's relationship to the past in this thesis. Young members of the theatre group as well as adults in town are invested in the writing and telling of history for different reasons and seem to have something to gain or to lose here. The theatre play and its development are explored in great detail throughout chapter 3, I want to focus here however on a couple of aspects important to the discussion of memory. The decision what the play should be about was taken quite quickly by the group when we talked about it after a couple of weeks of theatre workshops. It had to be the story told annually during the *Feria de San Miguel*, the 'La Gloria-story', or 'our story' - as Yenni one of the young people as well as Matias called it (Fieldnotes 1st of May 2018 and Interview with Matias 20th of November 2017). While the theatre workshops included an array of different ways of exploring bodily expression and movement, the content was clear to the young people from the very beginning. It was also decided to invite Don Matias, in his role as the local cultural promoter and annual narrator of the La Gloria-story to take part in the play. After a good hour of questions and answers with Matias about the history, the group came up with the idea of using Matias' narrator to frame the different scenes the group had developed over last couple of weeks; needless to say Matias agreed willingly.

It is the last week before the first showing of the theatre-play and one of the first times Matias joins us for a whole session to rehearse how his narration can fit in with the scenes the young people have developed. The scene we are just rehearsing is one that shows the re-building of livelihoods in the UNHCR administrated camps after the initial exodus. In pairs the young actors fulfil different tasks such as: lighting a fire, making *tortillas* and most importantly re-building

houses. A couple of weeks earlier we had a conversation with the group about how to display these scenes, it was decided that the use of props would complicate many of the procedures on stage and that the actions of re-building livelihoods would mostly rely on gestures and bodily expression. Matias looks at Danny and Ivan who use their invisible hammers and nails to construct an equally invisible house. The scene stops and the young people turn to Matias to say hi. We form a circle and I point out to the group that with Matias we now have someone here amongst us who lived these experiences *en carne propia*. Matias must have been between two or three years old when people were living in these camps. Everyone is looking at Matias now and he explains; 'Well yes this is good but pay attention to the details of what you are doing. Look for example in the camps people were living in tents not in houses, there was no wood, there were no nails, it was all plastic tents, that's how we lived.' (Fieldnotes 1st of June 2018).

Matias' role as a narrator within the play meant that he was also party to the creative process, which opened up interesting analytical spaces that illustrate other notions of the relationships between eyewitnesses and those born after the events. Matias' claim is similar to Don González's in many ways; he also appeals to an authentic representation of the events; however he is doing so from a genealogically different perspective. Matias (genealogically speaking) belongs to what could be called 'the generation in-between'; he experienced the *conflicto armado* and *el refugio* as a very young child, most likely having been too young to actively participate in the events and potentially remembering very little of the details first-hand. His role in the genealogical tapestry of memory in La Gloria however is a rather important one; within the process of the play's development, he functioned as an intermediate, a 'bridge' between the eyewitnesses that experienced the violence and flight as adults and the young people who were born many years after these events. This is reiterated by his role as the narrator of the annual re-telling during the patron saint celebration, which is partly dedicated to the younger residents attempting to create continuity in the telling of this particular story, so central to the making of localised identifications. The young people who have heard this story multiple times throughout their upbringing, decided to make the narration (and Matias himself as a narrator) a central part of the play. It is exactly here where the seemingly archival (historical) eye-witnessed memory (in form of Matias' narration that is based on what has been told as history in La Gloria since the first *Feria de San Miguel* in 1985) and young people's postmemorial repertoire of imagination and mediation collide, interact, and sometimes clash with each other. The decision to include Matias in the play as a narrator can be read as an effort on the side of the young people to maintain a connection to the archival 'authenticity' and social authority of former generations. It seems that young people felt the need to validate their 'version' of the La Gloria-story by connecting it to the already approved and commonly accepted historic account that initiates the most important festivity in town and links

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the *Feria de San Miguel* to La Gloria's past of the early 1980's, but also to a general past that encompasses the entirety of ethno-linguistic identifications; Akateko or *Miguelero*.

It is important to stress once more that I do not take the publicly and collectively told 'La Gloria story' at face-value when it comes to memory. Neither Don González's account as eye-witness nor Matias intervention from the perspective 'in-between' and even less so the 'La Gloria-story' itself, actually are unmediated, archival accounts and therefore 'resistant to change' (Taylor 2003, 19). Centuries of postmemorial work and storytelling are implicit in all of them. This is specifically true for the La Gloria-story, a uniformly told account that has been mediated, altered, and interpreted in its transmission from generation to generation; thus forming 'a collective imaginary shaped by public, generational structures of fantasy and projection [...] a shared archive of stories and images that inflect the transmission of individual and familial remembrance' (Hirsch 2008, 114). While postmemorial work is implicit in the development of this story, the narration is strategically treated as archival and perpetual 'truth' in La Gloria which is exactly what the young people attempt to align themselves with in order to give weight to their own version of this history.

The 'La Gloria-story' reaches its end in the play with the foundation of town and infrastructural advances of the 1990's (clinic, schools, electricity and the water well). As soon as this ends the young actors stand in a circle drinking a glass of water (representing the foundation of the water well) suddenly one of them steps into the circle and yells the word 'Politics', he / she makes a gesture of pulling 'invisible strings' which leads the other actors to be pulled around on stage, everybody ends up in uncomfortable body positions, dispersed randomly on stage; another one of the actors steps forward and yells 'Economy' again causing the other actors to be pulled around on stage. (see the play's script for more details, pp.10-24)

At several stages of the creative process our group conversations came to the topic of contemporary issues that exist within La Gloria. Just as the initial title of the project (*Yetu' – Nanik – Satajtoj - Past – Present – Future*) suggested, investigating the past also led to some collective thinking about the present and future. The political, economic, and religious divisions were among the most discussed topics which is why this scene was added into the play in order to represent the young people's analysis of contemporary problems in La Gloria.



2.3 Young People performing the 'division' scene at the presentation in La Gloria 05/06/2018.

While I return to this scene in chapter 4 when analysing the play's creation, I want to highlight the questions that were put forward earlier; 'What is at stake for young people when telling this story?' As we can see the tense as well as productive relationship between postmemory and memory provides a helpful lens through which we can see and understand young people's postmemorial storytelling and performance. By using the La Gloria-story's content the young actors aim to establish a metaphysical and perennial link to predecessors. This link however reaches further than simply relating to those who were alive in the 1980's (many of whom the young people will still have met in person) but rather creates an ontological connection to the whole tempo-spatially disperse spectrum of *antepasados*¹⁰⁵ and the very origins of the *Akatekos* as a people (more clearly displayed in the appearance of San Miguel as discussed in chapter 4, pp.153ff.). It is a claim of specific importance in a cosmological landscape where ancestral connectivity plays a major role. Pre-hispanic *costumbre*¹⁰⁶, whose rituals are centred around praising and spiritually connecting with 'mother nature' and the *antepasados* and where parts of mother-nature themselves are seen as ancestors (such as moon, water, trees, animals; Cochoy Alva 2006, 63-67), is rarely practiced in town. However ancestral authority continues to play a major role in many domains; older as well as younger residents in La Gloria refer back to the generations before them in many occasions to justify decisions being made in the present. It continues to be a strong argument for any type of situation to invoke the ways of *nuestros abuelitos*¹⁰⁷, in this case strengthening the young people's case to tell the town's history from their perspective. Storytelling and memory interact with ancestral connectivity to which Jackson concludes that 'Stories are thus like ancestors [...] so too in time do stories become ancestral, abstracted from our individual preoccupations so that they may articulate, as myths, a vision of a shared humanity' (2002, 250).

The play's last scene therefore is of uttermost importance since it shows how through storytelling young people manage to contextualise and include themselves into the history of 'their people'.

Building on their ancestors' authority, through their usage of the La Gloria-story, gives weight to their own message. When these young people point out the (political, economic, or religious) divisions in town, after having portrayed their own version of the 'La Gloria-story', they are not speaking just as themselves anymore but with the weight of history, tradition, and continuity behind them. Through postmemorial performance the young people's contemporary claims and concerns cease to be singular and isolated opinions but rather become collective claims that result from a shared history. Contemporary concerns and claims merge with the performances of postmemorial repertoires in order to create potentialities of collective identification with the action on stage.

The young participants creatively expressed their relationship to memory in various ways throughout fieldwork. Two youth-work projects emerged while exploring the theme of 'Past – Present – Future' that allowed me to observe other layers of the young people's imagination of past (linked to aspirations for their future as is discussed in chapter 5). The following chapter explores a photography project which consisted of recollecting old photos as well as taking 'new'-contemporary ones, and secondly the process of creating a theatre play is discussed in chapter 4. The exploration of these two projects (and its creative processes), I hope, will enrich, and expand our understanding of young people's relationship to memory and the past.

¹⁰⁵ 'ancestors'.

¹⁰⁶ Literally 'custom', term encompassing ritualistic practice and cosmovisions that exist in Mesoamerica and are labelled 'Maya'.

¹⁰⁷ Literally 'our grandparents' frequently used term in La Gloria (and elsewhere) to refer to the whole spectrum of ancestors.

Chapter 3: Memory between Trees and Houses – Young People and Photography.

This chapter explores how the young research participants engage with photography to express their relationship to memory and the past. As we have seen young people actively participate in processes that constitute, alter, and augment the ways the past is remembered in La Gloria. My young interlocutors' postmemorial repertoires found their expression in numerous ways throughout fieldwork; namely in the telling and re-telling of stories, anecdotes, or the standardised public account of the 'La Gloria-story'. The Jocox-members had been subject to varying accounts of the *conflicto armado* and *el refugio* in their respective familial space (both in terms of frequency, intensity, and content) long before we started working together as a group. Especially in the early part of our workshops, photography was one of the central means that facilitated conversations about the past between the participants and me. The photos themselves are displayed throughout the chapter alongside stories and vignettes from fieldwork as well as further abstraction and analysis. Photos are this chapter's point of departure for the exploration of visual postmemorial expression and interaction. The photos portrayed include those taken by young participants during workshops or in their free time as well as photos that they collected from family archives. The chapter gives the reader an idea of how memory is being expressed, triggered, and expanded through engagement with photography, which includes taking, looking at as well as talking about photos. Just like photos themselves provide snapshots of lived moments, this chapter follows the photos and illustrates ethnographic moments that happened in relation to them. The snapshots portrayed assemble a portrayal of the myriad ways in which photography and memory interact and influence each other.

It is a Tuesday afternoon, and I am down by the football pitch watching one of the regularly organised matches between teams from the *CoBaCh* (high school) and *la Secu* (Secondary School). I look at my watch and realise that it is past noon, so I decide to walk back to the centre of town to find a guy called Giovanni. I have a feeling I might find him in his house during the midday heat (12-4 pm) when most people stay inside to eat and mostly avoid leaving until the afternoon. The problem is I don't really know much about Giovanni, have never met him before and don't know where he lives exactly but just this morning one of the taxi drivers told me that he is in possession of a collection of old photographs about the history of La Gloria. The taxi driver also pointed out that he is hard to find since his job requires him to travel a lot and that he only comes back here for a couple of days a month. The taxi driver told me that he lives close to *la plaza* but I don't know where exactly, so I approach one of the *Primaria* kids riding around on his bicycle. The little boy knows immediately who I am talking about and points towards a blue house right on the corner of the square. This must have been one of the first houses that

the photographed person and the photographer' (Azoulay 2008, 11). Further these authors have stressed the interactions with such memory-objects looking at the intersubjective process of 'material culture'. Despite photos being taken from a single angle 'the structure of looking is reciprocal; photographer and viewer collaborate on the reproduction of ideology' (Hirsch 1997, 7). In our example we can see a third dimension of these meaning-making acts; the conversations that photos instigate between people. Highlighting the material aspect of photographs, as suggested by Edwards, means that these develop an 'after-life'; once printed (or appearing as a digital copy on a screen) photos are handed around as objects thus attaching moments of social history to the physical print. These social interactions add further dimensions to the photos' 'material and presentational form and the uses to which they are put [which] are central to the function of a photograph as a sociality salient object' (Edwards & Elart 2004, 1).

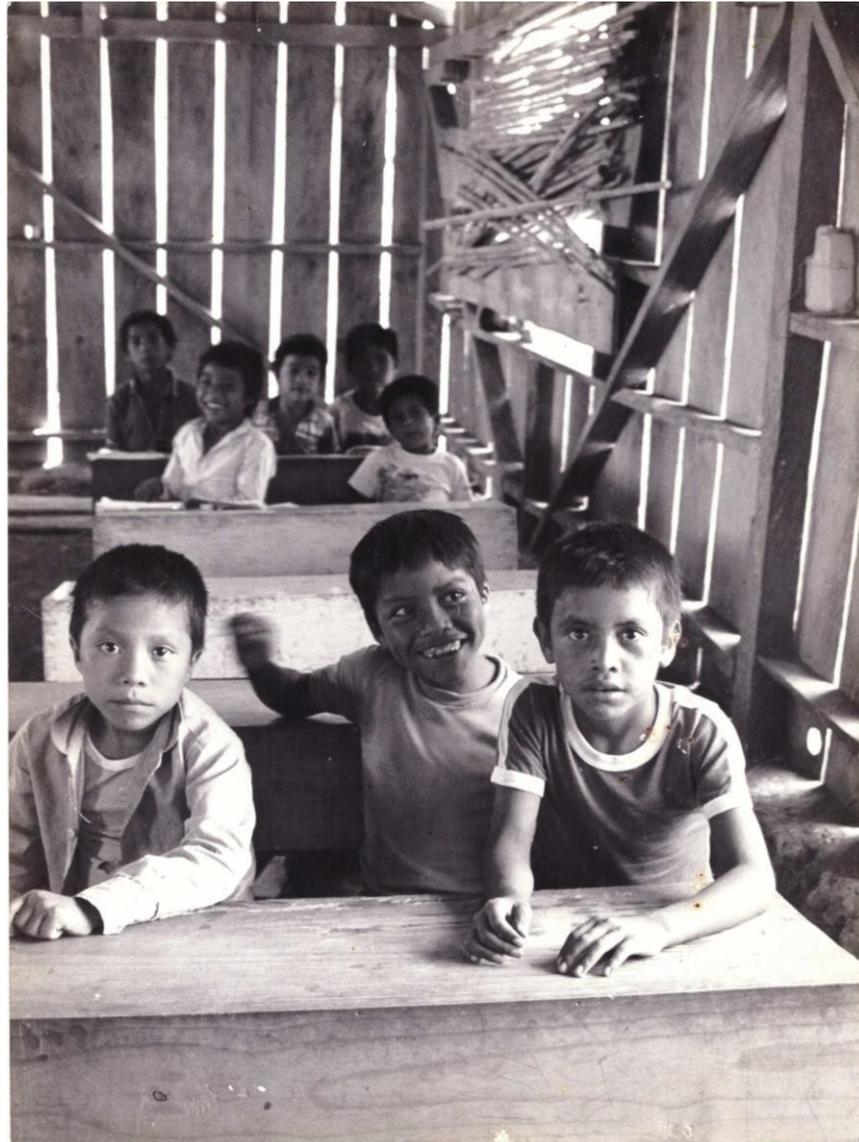
Precisely these fruitful clashes between the 'deeply ideological nature of imagery' (Hirsch 1997, 7) and the attached processes of unpredictable and nuanced acts of sociality and inter-subjectivity (taking photos, looking at them and talking about them) form the core of this chapter and are being put in conversation with the ways in which memory is performed in La Gloria. The intersubjective understandings and effects of memory are explored in the previous chapter and are being applied here while shining a light on the narratives behind and beyond the photos discussed. This analysis includes an array of photos some of which have been taken by the young research-participants and others which stem from family archives that were looked at and discussed.

It is the morning of the 5th of June, the day of the commemorative event that the group of young people and I have been working towards for the past four months. I am not sure whether it is the nervousness or the tiredness that dominates mine and the group's mood (last night's theatre rehearsal finished at 3 am and none of us managed to get more than two or three hours of sleep). I see the first young people in *Secundaria* uniforms arriving in the *salon de actos* where the event will be held. At this point I realise that there are still photographs lying on chairs which need to be put up on the wall for the photo exhibition. I ask Claudia (one of the young people) to help me; she nods and quickly grabs one of the black and white photographs showing a group of young boys sitting in a classroom. The background of the picture shows the sun shining through the cracks of the wooden shack which functioned as Primary school classroom in these years (according to Don Alex the photo must have been taken in 1991 or 1992). A group of seven boys are sitting in lines of two or three on school benches made out of wood and stare into the camera. Just one of them, sitting in the middle of the front row seems to be distracted and smiles while looking sideways at something or someone next to or behind the photographer. Claudia skilfully glues the little soda-can ring opener that we have been using as

hooks to the back of the picture, attaches a string and gets on a chair to hang the picture up. When she is almost done, Don Alex arrives with one arm wrapped around Santos¹¹³ who is currently the vice-representative of La Gloria's authorities. 'Look here this is the picture I wanted to show you. What do you think?' says Alex with a cheeky grin. Claudia looks a bit confused while she is straightening the picture and giving it some last touches. Santos now smiles while Claudia keeps on looking back and forth between the photo and Santos. 'Oh my God!' she exclaims, 'that's you, isn't it?' she says while turning to Santos who shrugs his shoulders and smiles. 'Of course, that's him' Alex says quickly 'who else in La Gloria has a face like that, look he hasn't changed a bit, still the same *travieso*¹¹⁴ he's just taller now' to which everybody laughs loudly (from fieldnotes 05/06/2018).

¹¹³ Meaning 'Saint', his real name is Miguel but due to the proliferation of this name in La Gloria his parents started calling him 'Santos' in reference to San Miguel.

¹¹⁴ 'naughty' or 'misbehaved' – my translation.



3.2 Santos (front-middle) and his *compañeros* in their Primary school classroom ca. 1991 / 1992.

'The familial look then, is not the look of a subject looking at an object, but a mutual look of a subject looking at an object who is a subject looking (back) at an object. Within the family as I look I am always also looked at, seen, scrutinized, surveyed, monitored. Familial subjectivity is constructed relationally, and in these relations I am always both self and other(ed), both speaking and looking subject and spoken and looked at object: I am subjected and objectified' (Hirsch 1997, 9).

Hirsch's reflections are taken from her book 'Family Frames' (1997) during which she analyses photographs from her own family archives. The photo of Santos as a primary school student was collected by the young people from an album in Don Alex's house. Don Alex is a community leader who was a teenager / young adult when he fled Nenton (Huehuetenango) together with his family in the early 1980's and came to Chiapas. In Guatemala he wanted to study medicine so he quickly became

one of the first *promotores de salud* in La Gloria's clinic and continues this work here up to the day. He was one of *finado*-Arturo's protégés and considers him a mentor and great leader. In the same way as Arturo also Alex was taking pictures to 'document the important events and advances of our community' (Fieldnotes 26/09/2019). Both, Alex and *finado*-Arturo consider their collections as serving the purpose of documenting the history of La Gloria, both keep the albums containing them separate from their family pictures. Don Alex's photo albums are not as meticulously archived in the way Arturo's are (date, place, description) however Alex's contain pictures that show the work of the clinic from a rather personal and private perspective. Neither Don Alex, Claudia nor Santos are blood-relatives however their interactions and many others I observed during the exhibition resemble the dynamics that Hirsch ascribes to how people interact with photos in the familial space. The whole day of the 5th of June event I saw people pointing at specific photographs hanging on the walls while talking among themselves, sometimes bringing people to have a look at a specific photograph which showed either themselves or people they knew. There was a constant exchange between visitors of the exhibition, telling each other (or at least guessing) 'who is who' on the pictures and exchanging information of what happened to these people. Dead people were remembered with a respectful silence and living people were often targets of friendly banter and laughing about what their past looks. The exhibition reminded me of evenings with my extended family gathered in front of a slide projector looking at holiday pictures or those taken at past Christmas or Easter celebrations, weddings, or communions. The most important activity during these evenings as well as during the exhibition in La Gloria consisted in pointing out the photographic presence of other family / community members, either to make fun of them or to remember the ones not with us anymore. The larger the chronological distance between present and picture was, the more intense people's reactions became.

*Maestra*¹¹⁵ Katy is one of the first people in La Gloria to complete her training as a public-school teacher and now works in a Primary school closer to the Guatemalan border. During the event on June 5th, 2018 she came up to me and asked where we had found these photos. I explained that Don Alex had provided them for us from his private archives. She nodded and quickly pointed at one of them telling me 'I want this one here'. I was a bit confused and explained that we were just exhibiting not selling or giving them away. However, when I had a closer look of the picture of a young girl standing in front of a blue wall, I quickly realised that this was her. 'I don't have many photos of my childhood and never knew this one existed' she said. I later sent a scanned copy of the photo to her via Facebook¹¹⁶ (Fieldnotes 05/06/2018).

¹¹⁵ 'Teacher' – my translation.

¹¹⁶ The changing relationship to photographs that the recent proliferation of digital photography and sharing on social media have brought with them will not be debated during this section due to space considerations however new dimensions of interactions with photos can be seen in chapter 1 when debating La Gloria's 'digital space'.

The public display of these photographs (who up to this point were mostly hidden in private archives) opened up a new space for sociality and interaction. The materiality of the photos and their social and historical significance created new potentialities of interaction between the generations; the young people collecting and exhibiting them and 'older' people recognising and re-signifying them through their narratives from the past. Conversations sparked between people who would not necessarily interact with each other in their daily lives for example in the interaction between Giovanni and the young people which created a space of sociality that did not exist prior to their interest in photos. In a similar way as with the intra-familial interactions Hirsch describes, everybody in Giovanni's courtyard as well as during the exhibition was subject and object in the reciprocity of looking and being looked at; on photos and in the physical space of the courtyard or *salon de actos*. Resembling the internal dynamics of a family; the exhibition turned into a space where people who usually maintain little to no social contact in the quotidian were able to bond over a shared past and (re) establish social connections by collectively remembering.

Don Alex and *finado*-Arturo keep their family photos in separate albums from those showing the development of La Gloria, the binary of the private versus public domain is not as strictly spelled out as one would expect. The albums showing family memories and the ones showing 'community memories' are stored in the same place (boxes or shelves) and having a closer look they appear not to be vastly different despite their perceived contrariety. Don Alex's archive is not as precisely described and dated as Arturo's. It contains photographs of public events such as *ferias*, graduations or inauguration of the water well, however it also contains an array of photos showing people (often children) in mundane situations (see 3.3-3.7). Alex explains: 'I always worked as a *promotor de salud* so did Arturo; our work required us to visit lots of our patients in their homes – especially before the clinic was built, but also after that we would still do the rounds and see how the ill ones are doing. By doing that you get to know your community much better, and we established friendships with many of the families and occasionally bring a camera with us to take pictures' (Fieldnotes 26/09/2019). The photos we are talking about could be described as 'ethnographic' (even though Don Alex himself would not use that word) since they show people – a lot of them children – engaged in their everyday activities.



3.3 Girl washing clothes.

The flower-blouse the girl is wearing on this picture looks similar to the Chiapan *trajes* however very different to the Guatemalan ones. She laughs quite heavily while looking up from the water basin and for some reason I think the camera's presence is the reason for her laughter.



3.4 Two boys carrying water.

The taller boy in this picture (wearing a straw-hat) is carrying two of the typical plastic *cantaros* that were and still are used to fetch water from the well. The taller one looks quite proud of helping with his household's everyday tasks while the toddler is looking a bit shy.



3.5 Boy and puppet being bathed by girl in a courtyard.

On this picture taken in the 1990's we can see a very typical scene from a home in La Gloria. On a second view however we don't only see a boy sitting on a chair being bathed but also a little baby-doll sitting next to him, which is being bathed by the little boy. The non-human element of the doll next to the human toddler engaged in the same activity (of being bathed), adds a humorous and playful sentiment to the documentative character of this photo. Play and practical everyday-life mingle together in this intimate snapshot of family-life in La Gloria of the 1980's.



3.6 Two men sitting on a wall.

This picture of two men sitting on a wall at a construction site is another interesting snapshot of life in La Gloria in the early 1990's. It can be read as a visualisation of generational difference. The older man is wearing a *campesino* straw-hat, leather boots and a simple one-coloured button shirt, very typical attire for men during these years (1980's-1990's). The younger one however is wearing tennis shoes and his long hair is clearly visible under the baseball cap on his head.

None of the photos show any family-members of Don Alex however the pictures seem to have been taken with a felt intimacy and familiarity between the photographer and the photographed, reiterating the close relationships Don Alex was able to form as a *promotor de salud* with his patients and their families. Don Alex specifically seems to have had good relationships with the younger ones who frequently appear on his photos. Far from simply documenting the development of the community these have implicit and analytical value (as we can see in the case of 3.6) and further provide intimate portraits of the relationships Don Alex has been able to build in his community over the many years of his work. The strict separation of private and public domain becomes inherently blurred on these photos; they are part of Don Alex's endeavour to document the professional work of the *promotores de salud* (and the clinic) however the photographic and lived reality of social life in La Gloria does not allow for such strict separations of public (professional) and private spaces. Don Alex's activities as a health professional are intertwined with the private familiarity of his community relationships and his friendships manifest themselves in his work.

The photos themselves blur the lines of the familial-private / professional-public binary, their archival storage however happened rather strictly in the private domain. What Don Alex describes as 'general' pictures of La Gloria's development, has been stored for most of its existence in the private space of his house where the photos remained exclusively visible to Alex, his family and trusted visitors. They only became visible to a wider 'public' during the event on the 5th of June.

'Family photography can operate at this junction between personal memory and social history, between public myth and personal unconscious. Our memory is never fully ours nor are the pictures ever unmediated representations of our past' (Spence & Holland as cited in Hirsch 1997, 13/14).

The public display of Don Alex's 'ethnographic' photos opened up possibilities of re-signification through the social acts around them, it allowed for viewers to inscribe new meanings on them and to momentarily co-construct new forms of sociality and meaning through them. This is especially true for young people who were unable to see these pictures before and for whom the pictures are a visual representation of a past that predates their birth. Young people were exposed to the negotiations of collective remembering between eyewitnesses (as we saw at the beginning when Claudia formed part of a conversation between Don Alex and Santos) through which they actively participated in the negotiations around the photos' meaning. We have seen earlier how collective memory is created as tradition through rituals and bodily automatisms (see paragraph in chapter 3 regarding Connerton's ideas about collective memory, pp.93ff.), here however we deal with a rather momentary and spontaneous form of collective remembering which works on different generational levels. While older residents were able to find themselves and others on the pictures and remembered stories from their past lived-experience, young people equally participated in these interactions and negotiations not only as spectators but as active interlocutors, creating postmemorial and intergenerational meaning in the social moment between eyewitnesses and late-borns. While the pictures were stored in the private space of Don Alex's house these social interactions and potentialities were foreclosed through the restriction of the private archive, however the same pictures taken into the public space became collective catalysts of sociality and meaning. The archival photos taken out of their private context (of storage) function as a type of blank canvas for the negotiation of past and present social relations and for the expression of collectivity in La Gloria through a shared past.

Photos between Past and Present – The Memory-Tree project

A bit of background is needed about the creative process behind the young people's collecting and taking of photos. My first engagement with young people outside of the school space was the project that we later came to call *Yetu – Nanik – Satajtoj*: During our second workshop in February 2018, I proposed a type of photo-scavenger-hunt to the young participants. We spoke about the concepts of historic 'ruptures' and 'continuities' in La Gloria. The young people wrote on three flipcharts things they associated with either Past (*Yetu*'), Present (*Nanik*') or Future (*Satajtoj*);

at *El Árbol de la Memoria (Memory Tree)* and asked whether people could tell 'which is past and which is present'.

The exhibition's photographs were either collected from private archives or taken by the young people themselves. I want to introduce the reader here to both: the narratives *behind* the photographs (anecdotes of their taking and collecting) and the narratives *beyond* the photographs i.e., the young people's reflection about them and the conversations and interactions instigated by the act of collectively looking at them. Taking photos of the contemporary and reflecting on those taken in the 1980's and 1990's, gives us an interesting perspective on the young people's postmemorial imagination and mediation, visually represented in the contemporary pictures of the memory-tree. The 'hidden stories' of social interaction are further highlighted; photographs and the attached processes of meaning-making function as vehicles to enhance our understanding of the role photos as memory-objects play within the negotiations of memory in La Gloria's present.

Other accounts however circulate in La Gloria, which describe the Candelaria case as a legally sound deal between the owner's family and the group of residents. Everybody agrees however that there were some problems in the aftermath of the handover due to existing debts between the family's father and one of his sons, which resulted in halving the *finca*-terrain that could be inhabited by the group from La Gloria. The 120 families divided what was left among themselves and many started to build simple houses (made out of wood and straw). Most families however did not move there permanently and continued to live in their original houses in La Gloria's centre. Quickly the group realised the difficult circumstances for agriculture in Candelaria (difficult access to water, no electricity, difficult access from or to the main highway etc.) so that they abandoned the idea of Candelaria becoming their new home; around the same time migration and the subsequent remittances started to become a major factor in La Gloria's local economics, providing large sums of income for the majority of households. Today most of the initial families maintain their land in Candelaria where they do small plot farming and store firewood or agricultural equipment. Most families treat it as a recreational place. The implications of agriculture becoming a hobby in La Gloria are further explained in the introduction where I explore how agriculture continues to be linked rhetorically to tradition and indigenous registers of belonging (pp.32ff.).

A small number of families from La Gloria however live permanently in Candelaria. These are families who struggle economically and were forced to sell their houses to settle a debt or live in otherwise precarious circumstances. It is a common joke among the young people that if you do not make enough money you have to move down to Candelaria. Young residents sometimes walk to Candelaria in groups *para pasear* ('to go for a walk'), especially during *Jocote*¹¹⁸ season. As mentioned earlier in the thesis (chapter 1, pp.79ff.) some young people enjoy leaving La Gloria to escape the restrictions and social control. Candelaria is an easily reachable place where young people go to pick *Jocote* with their friends. Just a couple of days after I heard about Candelaria for the first time, five participants and I got together for a little excursion. I was surprised to see that the young people did not hesitate to approach the houses in Candelaria and in some cases even opened them (I only later understood that it is because most of them are uninhabited), they also shamelessly picked fruits (*Jocotes*) from the trees that I had assumed were standing in someone's garden. It was only our second month of workshops and the young participants were still getting used to taking pictures with my camera. In the silence of Candelaria, we had lots of time to explore the possibilities of different angles and try out some of the camera's features. Cristy and Marce were interested in taking pictures of the houses; 'see we told you they look like the houses on the pictures Giovanni showed us – hardly anybody in La Gloria still lives in a house like this' Marce said and Cristy added 'Yes and the nature behind it also

¹¹⁸ 'Red mombin' – fruit native to the tropical regions of the Americas.



3.17 Drawing made by young participant showing aspects of past present and future.

In urban or semi-urban areas houses seem to be the most immediate frame of reference when talking about differences and similarities of pasts and present. They surround inhabitants every day and people have witnessed changes being made to them over the years of their existence. Far from being finished objects or *fait accompli* houses change constantly. Tim Ingold points us to the inscribed social meanings of houses when he says that ‘the real house is a gathering of lives and to inhabit it is to join the gathering’ (2010b, 5). Such sociality however is never stagnant since ‘like life itself, a real house is always work in progress’; Ingold invokes Deleuze & Guattari when he talks about the house as an example of ‘matters in movement, in flux, in variation’ (Ingold 2010a, 94); to which he concludes that such a matter-flow (which he simply calls material) can only be followed, never fixated.

Some young interlocutors seem to have a special relationship to the materiality of houses that surround them daily, as indicators of the wellbeing of their community. They grew up seeing an array of changes being applied to the building-structures throughout the 1990’s when the majority of families re-build their wooden houses with concrete blocks and metal doors. As mentioned in the introduction (pp.25ff.) life in La Gloria in 2018 displays characteristics of urban-ness in which buildings are the most notable feature (rather than the changing nature around them). Sophie Day suggests that houses and memory are interlinked in biographic, social, or collective ways (Day 2018). Marco one day remembered his *Primaria* days when we were passing in front of the current primary-school building; ‘I and everybody else who is graduating from the CoBaCh this year we still were taught in the wood-shacks down there [points at the place next to where the *Primaria* is nowadays], at least the first two or three grades. I don’t know exactly but I remember when they were building the new classrooms, the ones made out of concrete that the *chamacos* study in today. They made them out of

block that doesn't let the heat in; it was always so hot in the *casitas de madera*¹¹⁹; it's just very different times' (Fieldnotes 19th of March 2018). The rupture with the past is here symbolised by the change of construction materials; for Marco a new 'time' started when houses stopped being built out of wood and straw and a time commenced with greater wealth and comfort. When talking about this topic during one of the initial sessions, Cristy raised her hand and said that 'it's true most houses are made of block now, but houses made of wood or straw still exist, for example in Candelaria people live in them or also down by the *campo* there are houses that look like almost nothing has changed' (Fieldnotes 12th of April 2018). Past and Present (and the ruptures between them) are here symbolised by infrastructural development; the ways in which Cristy and Marco talk about them invokes notions of modernity (more clearly expressed in the split-man drawing 3.16) with its ever-present uniforming and homogenising forces. As Schelling notes modernity in Latin America differs in the perception of 'the present not as a sequential moment in time but as a radical break with the past' (Schelling 2000, 4). More than a sheer chronological category, modernity comes to encompass myriad meanings of infrastructural, economic, philosophical, or political nature. In Cristy and Marco's statements we can see how local understandings of class and wealth are expressed within a chronological framework, almost as if the two domains (class and chronology) collapsed into each other. Poverty (houses made of wood and straw) is depicted as belonging to a past characterised by scarcity and suffering while wealth in form of concrete houses belongs to the present, characterised by comfort and prosperity. In this conceptualisation (again linked to Fabian's 'denial of coevalness' [1983, 35]) poorer or disenfranchised members of the community are thought of as 'people stuck in the past', which frames our afternoon in Candelaria as a journey into La Gloria's poor past. Taking pictures that look like the past brought us to Candelaria in the first place however our process of 'thinking with photos' (taking, looking at and talking about) has illustrated young people's conceptualisations of past and present, which is informed by understandings that anchor modernity and 'progress' in present and future while scarcity is being placed in the past. The co-existence of symbols from past and future in La Gloria's present is linked once more to Schelling's ideas mentioned earlier (pp.33ff.). She describes Latin American modernity as a 'combination and simultaneity of modern and pre-modern modes of production and ways of life' where 'the present seems not so much to replace the past as to superimpose itself on it, only partly altering it' (2004, 7-8). These conceptualisations are equally significant in relation to the young people's (post)memorial processes as they are to understandings of contemporary economic differences in La Gloria.

The thought-provoking question that closes the description of *El Árbol de la Memoria* ('can you tell which one is past and which one is present') is not only a call to think deeper about our understanding

¹¹⁹ 'Small wooden houses' – my translation.

The exhibition's trick really worked here since houses on the archival black-and-white photographs (collected from the archive in Giovanni's house). look almost identical to those displayed on the photos the young people took in Candelaria in 2018. The viewer can detect the same type of construction; bamboo sticks bundled together to build the walls and a roof made of corrugated tin sheets on top. Despite these similarities there is one big difference; the archival photos display people while the contemporary ones do not. On 3.10 we see two small girls standing with their backs to the camera; it looks like they are about to go inside of the house, an adolescent-looking boy (probably their brother?) is sticking his head out. On 3.15 we see eight adult men all wearing typical straw-hats engaged in work activities. They seem to be collecting something from the house in front of which they are standing or walking. We only see the house's entrance since the angle is very close. Most men are carrying buckets apart from one who is carrying a *costal*¹²¹ filled with something heavy on his back. All men look in different directions and we only see one of their faces clearly. A little girl is visible on the bottom left corner of the picture, but an elbow covers her face. The pictures the young people took of houses in Candelaria (3.12 and 3.14) do not show people; very much reflecting my initial impression of Candelaria being a ghost-town. Examining these pictures, we see that apart from the absence of people they also lack any signs of life in general. Nothing in these pictures indicates that people live or spend time here; no chairs for people to sit on, no garbage cans or plastic bags, no shoes standing in front of the houses to dry, no clotheslines. The wall of the house in 3.12 has even collapsed and the surrounding earth is full of twigs, rocks and burned grass, all of which could be interpreted as neglect to an audience unaware of the historical background of the place. There is a table and a plastic canister in front of the house in 3.14 however the visible layer of dust makes it clear that they are not in regular use.

Houses gain their significance through the people that inhabit them and the memories that are being associated with them. Just like photographs, houses attain meaning through their social context and interactions in past and present. Practically, the absence of people in the Candelaria photos is due to the young participants mostly photographing uninhabited houses. An interesting metaphoric dimension opens up when these photos are chosen to be exhibited alongside the archival ones. The absence can be interpreted as symbolising an 'abandoned past' from which people have moved on. If the spectator is not duped by the intended blur between the archive and the present (which in all fairness is quite easy when comparing the pixel quality of the two different groups of pictures), one can perceive the pictures of deserted houses in Candelaria as giving the impression that we are indeed looking here at the 'ruins of *el refugio*', that these were the houses and metaphorically speaking the past that people have left behind in exchange for 'a new life'. It could be thought that we indeed here

¹²¹ Large resistant bag often made of polypropylene-plastic used to carry heavy items or materials.

are looking at the artefacts of modernity's radical break with the past. The metaphorical dimension of temporality seems to be practically and historically grounded. Despite a small group of (economically) desperate families most people abandoned the idea of making Candelaria their permanent home in the 1990's due to the infrastructural problems that might have reminded them too much of the precarious situation of the early days as refugees from a decade earlier. When taking contemporary pictures representing the past the young participants focused a lot on houses which creates an interesting juxtaposition to the black and white snapshots from the 1980's. The black-and-white photos show a lively mundane world of a past characterised by scarcity and poverty. They bring another frequently invoked binary to the fore which speaks to the community's self-understanding; 'golden early years of cooperation' versus contemporary divisions. The abandoned houses in Candelaria can be read as a type of waste that economic abundance tends to create. The pictures from the 1980's show a scarce and poor past which however is also characterised by unity: the 'siblings' in picture 3.10 as the representation of a united family and 3.15 as a representation of people working together. As discussed in chapter 4 when discussing the play, this is another common framework through which (older and younger) people in La Gloria make sense of the past and present; the decades of *el refugio* are being remembered as years of suffering but also as years of a strong community-bond where people practiced *jelq'ab'*, a Q'anjob'al / Akateko concept literally meaning 'the joining of hands' (González 2010, vi) which translates to 'mutual help' or 'working together'. In stark contrast stands the conceptualisation of La Gloria's present as a time where the abundance of material wealth goes hand in hand with social divisions and the production of luxury refuse. To sum up here, houses in a similar way to photos work like 'memory-objects' and gain their significance through contemporary social interaction as well as the memories attached to them; however even the absence of people and the visual lack of social interactions opens up potentialities of metaphorical significance, inscribing histories, memories and relations onto the house's images. The houses and their images come to signify changes and contemporary relations in La Gloria.

Trees as symbols for time.

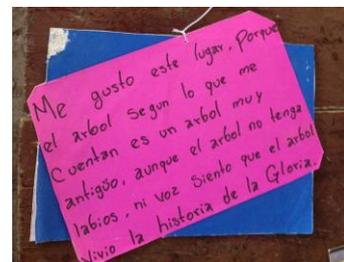
Apart from houses other symbols were of interest to the young people when 'thinking with photos' which become clear when we take a look at the way in which the exhibition was arranged. About two months before the exhibition the group-members started to think through different ways of how to display their photographs to the wider La Gloria public. The walls inside of the *salon de actos* consist of a small bottom part made from concrete which is about 1.20 metres high, and a wire fence on top, which prevents people from going in whenever they want but does allow people outside of the salon to watch important public events when the salon is completely filled up (which usually is the case).

This presented some challenges for the photo-exhibition since there were no concrete walls available to hang pictures on people's eyesight. The young people quickly came up with the idea of hanging the pictures from strings attached to the wire fence (using can-ring openers). The five participants that came with me to Candelaria and did the archival research in Giovanni's house however had a different idea; they decided to attach the photos to a small tree standing in front of the entrance to the *salon de actos* equally using string and can opener rings to hang them from the tree's branches. I at the time considered this to be a rather practical decision to avoid 'cluttering' the inside space and due to the location of the tree, perfectly situated at the only entrance to the *salon* so that people automatically see the photos before coming in or when leaving. As soon as the pictures were up on the tree, the visual perception of the memory-tree image attached further meaning to the exhibition as a whole, stressing the symbiosis of memory-objects and nature. The tree itself becoming part of the exploration of temporalities and how they interact with each other; in a way assembling and connecting the pictures of past and present (and in between) with each other.

Trees are also found among the other group of photos in the exhibition which were titled **'My favourite place in La Gloria'**: During the initial scavenger-hunt I asked the initial participants to take a picture of their favourite place in town; the resulting photos were exhibited together with a small paragraph written by each of them explaining why this place was special to them.

A couple of weeks before the event we were choosing the pictures which would be displayed within this part of the exhibition. Marco picked up a photo taken by him which shows a couple of thin and a relatively bigger tree whose crown is cut out by the picture's angle. I asked Marco to write a short paragraph about why this place is special to him; he wrote:

'I like this place because this tree – according to what I've heard – is very antique. Even though the tree neither has lips nor a voice I feel that he has lived the history of La Gloria.'



3.18 Picture of a tree and paragraph written by Marco.

In Marco's example he invites the viewer of his photo to see trees as a type of 'silent witness', a manifestation that the past actually existed and that it reaches into the present as a connection. This is also true for the tree in front of the *salon* holding the photo-exhibition, connecting old and new photos, past and present and everything beyond or in-between (for example contemporary photos that try to appear as old ones). The photo that Marco took of the tree and the photos of the memory-tree exhibition highlight the various changes that have occurred to the landscape around the two trees. It is quite evident that the surroundings of the tree on the main square have changed drastically throughout the years and also the tree photographed by Marco will have houses in front that were not there 34 years ago. Marco semi-humanises the tree when ascribing (some) human attributes to it; the tree does not talk according to him, but it does witness and store memory, thus represents continuity in a fast-changing world around it. The Memory-Tree of the photo exhibition does not talk either; however it does provide a symbolic and metaphorical background to the visual thought-experiment blurring the lines between past and present. Be it trees as historical witnesses and therefore themselves holders of memory, or trees as a canvas and platform providing a metaphorically meaningful background and creating connections between memory-objects; there seems to be some resonance between trees as nature's representatives and the human / social domain of memory. The methodology of 'thinking with photos' has illustrated how memory is being inscribed, insinuated and attached to trees through the social interplay of human interaction (even though imaginatively) with these perennial plants. In line with material culture literature, trees provide another dimension 'to think with' when making sense of local conceptualisations of memory and time among the young research participants.

Throughout this chapter I hope to have shown that taking, collecting, and eliciting photos opens up spaces for the expression of young people's relationship with memory and the past. The young people's active participation i.e., their choices of what they want to highlight when visually expressing their postmemorial repertoire in form of an image, gives an insight into their conceptualisations of temporality. Producing contemporary images, collecting past ones, and exhibiting them entailed a lot of decisions taken by the young people, which sparked many conversations that allow us to see the complex negotiations and imaginaries that form part of how young people make sense of the relationship between past and present and how memory has influenced their lives. The young people are active participants in this process of visual creative expression, through which they actively contribute to the visual archive and repertoire of images available about La Gloria. Images perform temporalities as objects, however other forms of performances surfaced through another creative project I worked on with the youth group, the creation of a theatre play.

Chapter 4: Postmemory on Stage - The Theatre-Play as a prism for multiple layers, temporalities, and agendas.

Thus far, the thesis has been concerned with young people's active participation in processes of negotiating and re-signifying space (chapter 1), remembrance (chapter 2) and memory through photos (chapter 3). We have seen how young people inhabit these unexpected spaces (both physically and symbolically), to finally explore the myriad ways in which memory manifests itself in La Gloria. How it slides into everyday interactions, how it is annually re-told in the public arena and how the young research participants express their very own imaginations and mediations through photography. The concept of postmemory has played an important role when describing the young group-members' relationship to a past that they feel a deep connection to, even though they did not live it in *carne propia*; 'the experiences of those who came before [...] were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively, as to seem to constitute memories in their own right' (Hirsch 2008, 106 /107).

This chapter centres the theatre play and reflects on its development, reception, and social meaning. The theatrical interactions and interventions between the young participants and the male-adult facilitators are at the core of the analysis. The six-week theatre project facilitated by Barry, Mike, and me, culminated in the presentation of the developed play during the event on June 5th, 2018 commemorating and celebrating La Gloria's 34th anniversary. The stakes of the adult-male facilitators (Barry, Mike, Matias, and I) as well as those of older community-members are as crucial to the understanding of postmemory in La Gloria as the young participants' imaginations, ideas, and mediations of the past. The play provided a framework for intersubjective postmemorial negotiations between different actors invested in La Gloria's past and its re-telling. I invite the reader to view the play as an 'ethnographic looking glass' which explicates, highlights, and unpacks these complex postmemorial negotiations. The chapter is guided by the play's structure and engages with each scene individually, just like the light reflected through a kaleidoscope we see how postmemorial negotiations derive from the same source but find very different manifestations in different contexts. Each scene highlights a different aspect or idiosyncrasy of intersubjective acts deriving from La Gloria's shared and mediated past.

On a particularly hot weekday-morning in May I am sitting on the second floor of the *Agencia Municipal* building with a couple of young people trying to stay cool with ice cream and cold drinks. Classes have been cancelled today due to some bureaucratic exercise the teachers have to carry out which apparently will take all day. I am waiting with four or five participants who came on time for the rest of the group to arrive. But today we are also waiting for Barry, one of the workshop artists (*talleristas*), who is scheduled to facilitate the first session of a six-week

process of collaborative theatre workshops. The young people are trying to get their homework done quickly so that we can spend a good amount of the day on the theatre activities. Barry who has been travelling all night from Guatemala-City, arrives and all my worries about him not finding his way diminish; 'It was super easy the taxi driver immediately knew where to find you guys' says Barry. We sit down and talk about spaces for the workshop. My initial idea was to stay here in the upstairs part of the Municipality where it is relatively cool, and we have access to a toilet. Ivan and Azza however point out that 'last time Barry was here we took him to this place in the woods where it is really beautiful and not too hot'. Barry remembers and says: 'Yeah that place would be ideal'. I am not sure if I am sold on the idea since it will involve a 20- to 30-minute walk from where we are right now (centre of town). The group seems to be excited about the prospect of the workshops taking place outside of town, so I abstain from further making a case for time-considerations and decide to give it a go. After about 15 minutes of waiting and packing we are on our way.

We walk through the midday heat of the centre and finally reach the outskirts (just behind the high-school campus) where a little forest starts. The trees provide shade which can be felt immediately, and I am surprised how quickly the young people's behaviour shifts as soon as we pass the first trees. Ivan who has been complaining about the heat all morning, starts jumping up and down the rocks on the banks of the dry ditch that used to be a river, Nayeli and Claudia, who told me earlier that they were in a very bad mood, start to get talkative and tell me and Barry excitedly about all kinds of things that are happening in their lives. We reach the place which is a perfectly sized clearing in the woods with massive trees and a soft floor covered with leaves. I immediately understand the group's excitement, this looks like an ideal place to start the theatre workshops. Three of the girls start exploring the other end of the woods. Just when they are out of visual reach, we hear them screaming loudly and running back towards us. Barry gives me a worried look and I am bit preoccupied myself. They are back in no time, completely out of breath from either running or giggling. 'What happened?' I want to know. 'Ehhh nothing we just wanted to give you guys a scare' says Yenni who is most likely to have had the idea, 'Oh come on' says Barry being jokingly upset.



4.1 Young participants during the first workshop with Barry 01/05/2018.

We start the workshop and after a couple of initial stretches Barry asks the group to imitate animal movements and sounds, which causes some laughter. At first it is only Barry who is jumping around on the floor like a frog repeating his 'ribbit'. After a couple of rounds however the first young people start to join in. Not even two minutes pass before everybody is crawling on the floor like a snake and walking on all fours 'mooing' like a cow. About two hours later we are back together in a circle reflecting on what happened during the session. Yenni is very quick to say that she 'forgot that the world around us existed', she points towards La Gloria while saying that. Other group members say that they felt 'alleviated', 'free', 'liberated', 'refreshed' and 'relaxed' (from fieldnotes 01/05/2018).

A couple of weeks after the event in La Gloria I asked the group to come together to reflect on the theatre play and the event in general. My agenda was threefold; I wanted to get their ideas about performance and postmemory, I also wanted to carry out a workshop on 'identity' that I had planned for a while (see description on page 35), and lastly I wanted to see what the participants' ideas were for the future of the group. I brought Pizzas since I felt a celebration was due after all the hard work, also I felt this was one of the first activities that were more focused on my research, almost like a 'focus group', so I thought the least I can do is bring their favourite food. One of the activities was talking in pairs about their experience of acting and how the participants think their behaviour differs or is similar on- and off-stage. After talking in pairs for a couple of minutes we got back to the big group, and I asked each pair to feed back what they discussed. Alexis took the initiative and told us that he and Marce both agreed that it felt good when we started acting and that they felt like another person on stage. I am interested to know more at which stage more people got involved in the

conversation. Cristy said that ‘the stage transformed us’ to which Nayeli jokingly responded: ‘Yeah just like in that movie “Transformers”’. While saying this she started mimicking a giant robot that is being transformed out of a car, which we all responded to with laughter (Fieldnotes 09/06/2018).

‘I just used to watch TV and then act it out at home but in front of others and the group I couldn’t do it – I didn’t want to, I felt embarrassed but over time – I don’t know – things changed. Everybody was doing the movements that Barry was doing and so did I. Well, and that is how we got to know each other better and nobody really cared what other people would say about us, even more so when we were up there [in the lugar mágico]’ (Interview Cristy 24/08/2018).

Transformation is present in all of these three accounts: Cristy’s statement during our interview, my observations from the first theatre workshop, and the description of our reflection session. Reflecting on the entire process Barry told me that his goal was for the young participants to ‘explore the possibilities of their bodies’ and to ‘experiment with alternative forms of bodily expression, movement and sound outside of their comfort zone’ (Facebook chat with Barry 25/01/2019). This was to be achieved using elements of the ‘Theatre of the Oppressed’ (Boal 1979) and what Barry refers to as the ‘Poetry of Movement’ (explained further on page 148). The young participants described their experience with Barry’s methods and exercises as ‘new’, ‘uncomfortable’, or as ‘some quite strange exercises’ (Interview Ivan 04/09/2018). Throughout the process of engaging in this very specific type of behaviour many participants also stressed certain ‘moments of transformation’. Transformation has been a common trope invoked by young workshop participants to describe their experience with performance. The activities proposed and facilitated by the *talleristas* exposed young people to a new set of interactions that challenged their everyday ways of relating and connecting with each other. Cristy invokes a ‘moment of change’ which led her from feeling ‘strange’ or ‘uncomfortable’ to ‘not carrying about what other people say’. This is echoed in the account of the other group-members and in the transformer-joke displayed above. The link between transformation and performance in anthropology was pioneered by the work of Victor Turner (1969, 1982) on rituals and specifically ‘rites of passage’. Turner analysed social drama among the Ndembu in Zambia, his work focused on ritualistic practice and liminality in the transition to adulthood. He developed these ideas further exploring theatrical drama across human societies as a tool of metaphorical expression with transformative potential. Cristy and Ivan talk about their personal transformation through performance which links in with considerations around ‘space and place’, explored in chapter 1.

Elsewhere I have explored the stage as ‘a place where it is accepted to behave in ways that are unacceptable in everyday social interaction. In this respect it resembles the ‘carnavalesque’ as described by Bakhtin (1968). Similar to the stage, the period of carnival represents a temporary space where the ordinary rules and obligations of social interaction and behaviour do not apply’ (Gembus 2017, 9). The particularities of the stage as a ‘safe space’ resemble a lot of what the young participants said in retrospective about the *lugar mágico*, where they felt ‘free’, ‘alleviated’ and able to overcome inhibitions to engage in the ‘act of acting’. The two workshop-spaces lay on opposite extremes of the ‘public’ spectrum, however they both bear the potential of becoming sites of transformation through performance. Ivan concludes connecting performance and personal transformation; ‘I feel a big change [...] to be able to let go and not be shy anymore. Presenting myself in front of others was scary to me before. Now that is something I dare to do’ (Interview recording 04/09/2018).

However, performance seems to happen on many different levels as Cristy points out when she says that acting together ‘transformed us as a group’:

‘On stage, we were giving each other silent signals and we looked at each other and that is how I started to talk to all of them [...] and if there was anything that – I don’t know – used to separate us then now that is in the past. It stayed in the past in the moment when we were doing the event and presented the play [...]. The way we get along now is as if everybody is showing their good side. Like with [mentions name of other participant] for example, before I didn’t like the way she was [...] but now I can see her good side and that she and the others are actually really cool people, and we get along (chuckles)’ (Interview recording 24/08/2018).

Ivan equally described to me how ‘at the beginning nobody was getting along but now everybody likes each other a lot, it is a great and big group and almost like a family’ (Interview recording 04/09/2018). The experience of interacting through performance - in the magic place and through the magic of the stage – brings about moments which the young participants remember as transformative on a personal but also on a collective level. The collaborative notions of acting together (and exposing themselves to a public as a collective) have transformed the way Cristy and Ivan make sense of their relationships with other members of the group.

The personal and collective notions of transformation take on a ‘therapeutic’ dimension for other group members. After one of the drama workshops one participant, who was experiencing some problems at home, mentioned to the other participants that she felt like ‘she was somewhere else’. Another participant, who was quite down one day due to a fight with her boyfriend, mentioned that she felt ‘alleviated’ after participating in the theatre activities. The physical and metaphorical ‘magic

place' in these narratives becomes a site of escapism where one not only is 'safe' from the restrictions and judgements of everyday social life (as mentioned by Cristy) but a place where one can forget personal conflicts and issues that impact the individual's emotional wellbeing. Transformation thus seems to occur on a spatial (linked to 'safe space' ideas in chapter 1) and psychological level. Lonesome clearings in the woods are generally not considered safe by most La Gloria residents (which is exemplified in the reluctance towards letting young people participate), their remoteness and lack of social control bear multiple challenges for the young people's safety. The collective act of walking up here together, engaging in the performance-based activities proposed by Barry and Mike, and developing group dynamics, transformed the clearing gradually and momentarily into a safe space, carried by the participants' relationships rather than the spatial surroundings.

Transformation through performance occurs on many different levels; young participants describe transformative moments regarding their personal development, the collective group dynamics, and the spatiality of the workshop space. However, the paradigm of 'transformation through performance' requires a critical examination and contextualisation and a deeper engagement with questions around performative behaviour and power. It is important to highlighting the distinction between performative behaviour that happens within a 'workshopped' environment and everyday interactions which can be understood through the lens of performativity. The young participants' engagement with theatre and drama games, exercises and staged showings of the play represent a very specific type of behaviour in which performance is centred as method, result, and aim of interaction. Performativity however has also been used to describe everyday interactions in which repertoires of self are displayed and performed according to context (among others Goffman 1959, Butler 1988). Young people's creative agency in the negotiation of subjectivities is highlighted. Theatrical performances in its conventional understanding are characterised by the individual's ability of playing 'make-believe', which stems from a European post-renaissance understanding of the performance-arts. As laid out in the self-understanding of young JocoX-members, the individual metamorphic notions had collective effects ('the stage transformed us as a group' Cristy). We find elements within the play that reiterate the focus on collectivity, for example the layout of a 360 degree-circle as a stage as well as the group focused movements and interactions that dominated most scenes, instead of individual-focused mono- or dialogues.



4.3 Circle shaped audience / stage during presentation in Nuevo San Juan Chamula 27/08/2018.

Collectivity and intersubjectivity are crucial to performance. Young participants mention in their narratives that it was the group dynamics that allowed each of the individual members to undergo this 'transformative process' ('everybody was doing it [...] so I did as well' – Cristy) which produced a collectively-oriented approach to rehearsals and stage-performances. The collective process and the developing intersubjective relationships laid the groundwork for transformations that took place on an individual, collective, and spatial level.

The ideas developed up to this point barely scratch the surface of grappling with the complexities at the intersection of youth, performance, and the theatre play. Performance as transformation played an important role in my pre-fieldwork thinking which I have since come to abandon or at least critically examine in the post-fieldwork writing process. At the same time, I was surprised realising that a lot of my interlocutors' statements about performance in fact invoked the very same paradigm by framing their experience with performance in terms of the multiple transformations described above. Performance as transformation requires critical examination and contextualisation which means describing how the male-adult facilitators and other powerful adults give context to young people's active participation through performance.

Memory and the Play.

I want to focus here on the theatre play examining it as a creative postmemorial project. The young participants make sense of the past through their theatrical embodiment of memory in which they negotiate narratives from private family-histories, collective and public re-telling of the La Gloria-

story, as well as other more archival and political histories. This part tells the story of what happened when a group of twelve young people came together with me and two theatre artists to create a play telling the 'La Gloria-story'. We have seen how the young interlocutors' relationship to performance has been framed in terms of transformation. Here, I want to centre the process of creating the play as a group and the creative and postmemorial negotiations of its development and presentation. The play's script¹²⁷ can be found at the very beginning of the thesis (pp.10-24) and is central to the understanding of this part therefore I encourage the reader to refer back to it for a better understanding of this part.

I propose to understand the theatre play as a vehicle, prism or kaleidoscope which brings to the fore different actors, temporalities, and agendas that have an investment in the telling of history in one way or another. The young participants' performances are framed by different temporalities of postmemory each of which comes with their very own actors and expectations as to how stories from the past are supposed to be represented and told. The expectations of older La Gloria residents towards young people have been explored earlier in the thesis (pp.42ff.). For older residents, the La Gloria-story together with other Akateko / *Miguelero* traditions: *feria*, *baile del venado*, etc. are the core means by which cultural continuity is being transmitted from generation to generation. The La Gloria-story contains at least two separate origin stories; one concerned with the 'ethnogenesis' of the Akatekos / *Migueleros* and one concerned with the rather recent history of the Akateko-speaking population's presence in Chiapas (Guatemalan civil war and refugee trajectory in Chiapas). The La Gloria-story usually reaches its end with the town's foundation as a sort of happy ending. Matias (whose role in the genealogy of memory in La Gloria is discussed in this chapter) calls the annual re-telling during the patron-saint celebration a 'reminder' and understands his work more broadly as an attempt to 'rescue our language culture and tradition' (Interview recording 20/11/2017), an appeal directed at the younger residents to give continuity to the telling of this narrative and the practicing of La Gloria's Akateko traditions. The origin stories were specifically important to the refugee-generation during the early years in Chiapas (1980's). Celebrating traditions 'brought' from Guatemala (San Miguel is the patron saint of San Miguel Acatán from which visually all La Gloria residents originate) was a key practice to assure and foster sentiments of shared collectivity and facilitated identification and cooperation among the different families. Especially during the burdensome years of living in camps or later when building a new town from scratch, it was important to maintain a sense of collective belonging within a period characterised by chaos and uncertainty. Ethno-linguistic similarities worked as a first point of contact and fostered mutual help between families that fled Guatemala and were seeking refuge in Chiapas. After the foundation of La Gloria in 1984 the founding

¹²⁷ A full recording of the play is available at: <https://vimeo.com/566006256>

However, my involvement in Guatemala dates back much longer. As mentioned in the introduction (pp.36ff.) by the time fieldwork started in September 2017 I had already been involved with Guatemala as a place for about 12 years. I was curious about Guatemala's history but more so, I was interested in what memories mean to people nowadays, and how remembering the past affects people's contemporary lives. I had experienced how divisive memory, history and remembering can be in Guatemala. Among my close friends civil-war memories often included stories of their (grand)parents living in fear of the military-dictatorships, a family member being killed or 'disappeared' by the army's death squads or remembering a relative that was threatened and went into exile. I however was also yelled at by a random guy in a bar in the capital many years before I started fieldwork. He called me a '*guerrilla*-apologist' and told me how his great-uncle was killed, and his land taken away by an insurgent group during the 1980's, 'but you foreigners don't want to hear that' he added. When travelling from Guatemala-City to Antigua (Guatemala) in 2018 a taxi driver told me about his experience as a military officer working in Nebaj during the worst years of the conflict. I remember him saying: 'The army has been unfairly treated after the war; it was our duty to defend the nation against this threat and we did exactly that. Guatemala would be a different country if it wasn't for us.' (from fieldnotes 22/04/2018). Similarly, the Guatemalan consul in Chiapas told Matias and me during a conversation in his office in Comitán that 'it is good to remember the ones who left [referring to the La Gloria and the other refugees in Chiapas] but it is also important to remember the ones who stayed to defend our homeland, they are the real heroes' (from fieldnotes 06/09/2018). These experiences (among many others) sparked my interest in how different ways of remembering and retrospective evaluation could so drastically expose the rifts of contemporary Guatemalan society. When it came to staging memories with young people in the diaspora however, I felt uneasy about undertaking this process on my own and felt that I needed help from facilitators with experience and personal involvement in these issues.

I decided to invite two Guatemalan theatre-artists I had worked with before. Barry and Mike have an intimate relationship with the legacies of the Guatemalan civil war, both have found theatre as a way of coping with and expressing these personal and emotional connections. While for Barry the remembrances are more personally connoted with his family-history, for Mike the civil war is a political issue and deeply connected to contemporary social struggles and movements. In the same way their approaches to theatre differ. Mike approaches theatre as an activity and a method of community-building and community-dialogue, for Barry theatre is more an act of collective exploration of self and a way of releasing otherwise oppressed emotions and feelings in a different state of sensorial consciousness. Both agree on many aspects and use similar methodologies and exercises (both are enthusiasts of Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed for example) however their

personal connection and passion for theatre is quite fundamentally different. Mike grew up in the urban-poor and gang-ridden Zone 18 neighbourhood in Guatemala's capital, where during his childhood he experienced the civil-war and its aftermath as a highly divisive force in his community. In Zone 18 the post-war period would prove to be even more violent than the war itself when gangs started to flourish in the late 1990's and 2000's. Theatre for Mike provided a way of doing something to counteract these divisions and bring the community and specifically the youth together. Barry grew up in the capital's old city-centre (Zone 1) where he studied theatre and formed part of different theatre-troupes and collectives. Barry is particularly interested in what he calls the 'Poetry of Movement' which he defines as a sensorial exploration of oneself in contact with others. Reflecting on the theatre process in La Gloria he said:

'The focus of the workshops was about the necessity of being in touch with your physical sensations and to feel emotions, stimulate trust to approach something so intimate and in many cases unknown, without having lots of information. How to connect or emphasize with the feelings of their parents and grandparents? Above all since it is a topic that has been stored in the silence of the past. In order to practice this type of theatre or theatrical exercises a psycho-physical training was necessary and based on that I wanted to create an atmosphere that really stimulated them to do their inquiry; a search that takes place on the outside as well as on the inside of themselves and their feelings.' (Facebook chat with Barry on 25/01/2019).

As we can see both approaches are closely tied to the practitioners' life-experiences and their pre-conceptualisations of temporality and theatre, which became important aspects in the development of the postmemorial theatre play. Our rehearsal space thus was filled with a variety of different (adult) agendas; Barry considering theatre and the implicit self-exploration a 'sacred' activity valuable as a collective exploration of trauma and emotions, Mike valuing the theatre space as a potentiality of political formation and exchange, Matias treating the space as an extension of his decades-long mission of rescuing La Gloria's culture and history, and myself a foreigner with an academic agenda of conducting research and with the (sometimes conscious sometimes unconscious) ambition to reproduce my experiences to further my own academic career (i.e. write a PhD thesis, publish articles and other academic texts, hold talks etc.). The young participants' agency and active participation in the theatre play needs to be understood within this framework of expectations and agendas. This includes the direct influence of Barry, Mike, Matias, and I as facilitators who occupied generational; and gendered as well other positions of power and hierarchy (that differed for each facilitator). The influence of us male-adult facilitators together with the implicit wider expectations in town formed

part of the postmemorial process. These factors and actors influenced the creative process of developing the play thus became registers, layers, and temporalities in the constant flux of postmemorial remembering in La Gloria (and beyond). The theatre play, and its presentations will be remembered by the young actors, audience members (peers or older residents) as well as the adult facilitators (Barry, Mike, and I). Memories from its development and the showings will be mediated, altered, and performed (re-told) in narrative interaction thus becoming part of La Gloria's postmemorial archives and repertoires.

Some reflections about decision-making within the Jocox group are necessary to better understand the complex and multi-layered creative process of which we were part. Barry and Mike are experienced artists and facilitators who follow principles of participatory and creative youth work, very similar to my own way of working with young people. Even though neither of the two would probably theorise it in this way, both follow ideals of 'horizontal decision making' while 'tipping the balances of power in young people's favour' (Davies 2005, 10)¹²⁹. However, the three of us (all quite experienced facilitators having worked with young people in Guatemala for years) were quite astonished by the difficulties we encountered in the early stages of working with the theatre group. Internal conflicts and a general fear to express opinions and feelings in front of others¹³⁰ made the kind of group conversation we were envisioning, not even to mention collective decision-making almost impossible at these early stages. One-to-one conversations proved to be a better way of talking about how each participant felt which in turn led to micromanagement and made us question the collective decision-making process, that we had taken for granted as an ideal. In the end decision-making within the group still happened on a collective level however often after one of us male-adult facilitators gave some initial stimulus (sometimes in form of an exercise sometimes in form of an idea), which was then changed, adapted, or discarded by the young people. This is an important consideration to bear in mind; the reader is invited to read those 'group decisions' with a critical 'grain of salt'.

The script of the play is central to this chapter, since it not only gives us the 'historic' background of what happened in Guatemala and Chiapas throughout the 1980's and 90's but further represents a unique project of postmemorial creative expression. The script as presented at the beginning of the thesis (pp.10-24) functions as a framing device to bring together the La Gloria-story with the young people's postmemorial work and to finally explore the meta-level that emerged through the process of staging these histories for public display.

¹²⁹ A more in-depth discussion of the principles of Youth Work as well as its overlaps with the methods of ethnographic inquiry can be found in the introduction on pp.35ff. of this thesis.

¹³⁰ This aspect is reworked elsewhere for publication where I explore *pena* ('shame') and what I came to call 'performative refusal'.

'Who is the audience?' – Warm-up and Frame Story (Scene 1).

The warm-up scene and the frame-story about two young people who are saying goodbye before one of them is leaving for the US, were the last elements added to the story at the beginning and re-appearing at the end. The framing story developed a week before the first showing; we had been talking within the group about how to transport the rather historical content of the play into the 'here and now' to make it interesting for the younger part of the audience. We got talking about the aspects of contemporary life that were most important to the young participants. Many of the group-members mentioned migration to the US and specifically saying goodbye as a constant feature of their reality. I proposed to include this in the play by creating a framing-story, about two young people parting. The framing scenes tell a common story in La Gloria; something the young people on stage and in the audience can relate to, since the considerations of migrating or not, play a constant part in their upbringing. The scenes however also find relevance with the older members in the audience, since they too are highly aware of the common leaving procedures and have most likely had to say goodbye to a younger member of their family. The topic of migration is being dealt with in more detail throughout chapter 5 however it should suffice here to mention the frequency with which especially young people leave town.

During the last rehearsals before the event Ivan (who is one of the actors in the scene) first improvised the line 'I am leaving with a huge doubt. I am leaving without knowing the history of my people', which was greatly praised by the rest of the group. In retrospect this line makes me think whether the young participants saw the framing-story as an appeal to younger audience members through the telling of a common experience for youth in La Gloria, or whether it also spoke to the ways in which the young actors chose to perform their postmemorial repertoire to the bearers of eye-witnessed memory (i.e., the older generations). As we have seen throughout the thesis many older La Gloria residents who have direct recollection of the *conflicto armado* and *el refugio*, do not think very highly of the ones growing up in the present. Young people being unaware of their own history (as well as 'forgetting' their traditions and customs) is one of the most widely spread assumptions, which lead to negative stereotyping of young people, as we have seen at several stages of the thesis (Introduction pp.42ff.). These intergenerational frictions show what is at stake when young people perform their version of the 'La Gloria-story' to their own community and invites a different reading of the line: 'I am leaving without knowing the history of my people'. Mentioning a common negative trope about young people can be understood as a strategy to connect with older members of the audience by invoking and re-performing youths' supposed failures and shortcomings, back to the powerful adults in the audience (that created these in the first place). This reciprocal and projective performance points to the

complexities of the play's directionality. At the same time Azza, told me during an interview that he felt nervous before the initial performance in La Gloria because he could see his neighbours and cousins in the audience, who had never seen him acting before. The play's directionality and whom the young Jocox-members had in mind as their audience are manifold. The play itself functions like a 'looking-glass' which allows us to see these complex and manifold inter- and intra-generational correspondences related to memory.

Matias' role in the play – Language, Genealogy and Postmemorial Hierarchies (Scene 2).

Earlier in the thesis (pp.26ff.) we have seen Matias' role as a narrator within the play. Matias was involved in the youth group from the very beginning but joined the theatre process about a month before the first showing. At that time, we were thinking about how to incorporate the narration into the action on stage. Should the story be told while the young people acted, or should the narration happen in between scenes; should the narration come before after or while the action unfolds on stage? Practicality played an important role throughout these discussions as well as thematic and metaphoric considerations that questioned representation. The result was that Matias' role and position in the script differed from scene to scene; it was not until the last week of rehearsals that these differing roles where subsumed under the metaphorical role of him narrating the story from the perspective of the water itself. In La Gloria water can take on symbolic, practical, and religious meaning. In accordance with traditions from the Guatemalan highlands in Huehuetenango the town annually celebrates the *Dia de la Cruz* on the 3rd of March with festivities that praise the water. This special day is celebrated with crowds congregating by the local water-well, decorating it with flowers, praying and playing music in order to 'rejoice together with the water'; as local residents have explained to me (from fieldnotes 03/03/2018). Unsurprisingly, water had come up as a trope at multiple stages throughout the young people's initial investigations (*Yetu' – Nanik' – Satajtoj*), which deeply influenced the development of the play. In the origin-story it is told that a young woman (Maria) saw Saint Michael first by the water of the Acatán river, water was scarce in the first camps where refugees settled in the 1980's, people had to work hard to obtain water in this dry land after La Gloria was founded and the scarcity of water continues to be a big issue of the town today¹³¹. In collective creative processes it is hard to tell who 'owns' the initial idea, but I remember quite clearly that it was Mike who proposed exactly this metaphor of the water-narrator to Matias and the group. Matias over the following days adapted the words of the narration showcased during the *Feria de San Miguel* and included the poetic and metaphoric parts at the beginning ('I am the water...').

¹³¹ In fact, construction-works of a new *pozo profundo* (deep water-well) began in March 2019 accompanied by large festivities that show the importance that water has for the local residents.

Interestingly Matias’ narration also represents a change in language. While the initial framing story and its dialogue about the two young people saying goodbye was held in Spanish, Matias here enters the stage and tells the story in Akateko. Code-switching between Akateko and Spanish is extremely common in La Gloria and happens at multiple stages throughout the play indicating shifts of the play’s direction. Within the group there was never a real debate about which language would be appropriate for Matias’ narration. His role as the local Akateko-teacher and cultural promoter left no doubt to the young group-members that the story would be narrated in their mother tongue. When preparing for the first presentation outside of La Gloria (in Nuevo San Juan Chamula) the issue of language came up. It was discussed that the parts of the play narrated in Akateko, (especially Matias’ parts) would not be intelligible to most audience members in Nuevo San Juan Chamula, with its Tzotzil and Q’anjobal-speaking inhabitants. Matias mentioned that the young actors would have to be clearer and more precise with their movements since they were now showing the play to an audience that was not familiar with the historical details. While some group members thought language was a minor issue since the entire play could just be performed in Spanish, others had a different opinion. Yenni made it very clear that she wanted their mother-tongue to be represented and reflected in the play; ‘This is a play about Akatekos. Why would we only use Spanish all of a sudden?’ (Fieldnotes 24/08/2018). Many in the group agreed and the idea developed to create large cardboard signs with the Spanish ‘subtitles’ of the text written by Matias, which were displayed by two of group-members simultaneously to the narration.



4.4 Matias narrating while Araceli is showing the signs with Spanish ‘subtitles’ to the audience – Nuevo San Juan Chamula 27/08/2018.

Again, we can see here how the play’s process of creation and the debates within our group illustrate aspects about young people’s self-understanding and the ways they relate to others through memory. The process of creatively representing the past (and memories) can bring contemporary concerns and expectations to the fore. Language is a topic constantly debated in La Gloria. The dominance of the Akateko language is the most mentioned aspect to distinguish La Gloria from other places of the region

(by La Gloria-residents and outsiders alike). Teachers from the local CoBaCh are quick to mention language when asked how La Gloria compares to other communities that they have worked in; language is also mentioned by some as an obstacle to academic success. On the other side local leaders such as Matias (Akateko teacher) or Don Alex (head of *Mayaonbej*¹³²) constantly point to the importance of their mother-tongue and the imminent danger of the language's disappearance¹³³; 'there are many things that are being lost simply because we don't practice them anymore, that's why for me it is important to rescue them, starting with speaking and teaching our mother-tongue' (Interview with Matias 20/11/2017). Young people in La Gloria find themselves in between two extremes; valuing their mother-tongue on the one hand as an aspect of uniqueness and collectivity and experiencing it as an exclusive demarcation on the other. The significance of Akateko (the default vernacular-language among young people in La Gloria) differs vastly as is illustrated by the debates within the group about the play's language.

A seemingly simple aspect of choosing each scene's language and the practicalities of how to incorporate Matias' narration, point us to wider negotiations among young people in La Gloria; their wishes of how to represent themselves, their town and their history can tell us a great deal about contemporary debates as well as their relationship to the past.

Saint Michael Appearance; Religion & Politics in the Play (Scene 3).

The third scene (the appearance of Saint Michael) was the first scene to be finished completely and had a rather different development than the other ones. After two weeks of drama activities focused on 'exploring possibilities of bodily movement' (Barry) some of the young people were unsure about where the process was going. It was unclear to some participants how games and exercises were getting us to create a whole play and the time of the first public showing was quickly approaching. Cristy expressed quite clearly that 'It's all fun and entertaining but these are just games not real acting, I am not really sure what we will do on stage' (from fieldnotes 22/05/2018). What Cristy described as 'games' involved warm up activities and exercises but also increasingly the exploration of past moments through 'image theatre'. This technique (frequently used in 'Theatre of the Oppressed', Boal 1979) consists of silent motionless images created either as an individual or as a group. Specific word, concepts, or an entire moment from memory are being expressed through 'frozen images' or 'statues'. The young participants were encouraged to ask older members of their family (grandparents, granduncles, and aunts but also friends and neighbours) about specific

¹³² See pp.111ff. and glossaryp.235 for more information about this group.

¹³³ An example frequently invoked here is the town of Nueva Libertad El Colorado, also situated in La Trinitaria (Chiapas) which shares a similar historical background (founded by Akateko-speaking refugees from Guatemala), however nowadays the community's young people hardly make use of the Akateko language and prefer Spanish.

moments they remembered either from the civil war or from the flight to Chiapas. By creating individual and group images based on these anecdotes and stories, the group was able to reflect on the image's content and alter them (adding speech here and there), which formed the groundwork for most of the play's scenes. The participants started to get a sense of what was going to be shown on stage. We developed a number of scenes and it was only a matter of deciding their order and the play's structure before the play was ready to be shown. We sat together in two groups talking about the order of scenes, which we then tried to integrate with each other. It was a given that the play would involve scenes representing the persecution during the *conflicto armado*, the early years of *el refugio*, the massacre of *el Chupadero* and the foundation of La Gloria. Surprisingly one of the groups came back with a new idea. They proposed to include the appearance of San Miguel in the way it was told to us by Don Matias a couple of weeks before.

The content of the scene was specifically delicate since it contains elements of religious symbolism. The proportions of religious affiliation in La Gloria are quite well represented among the Jocox-members. The vast majority comes from families that self-identify as Roman Catholic, some young people are regular church-attendees, Yenni for example was the leader of the catholic youth-group in 2018, while others are less active. Two group-members come from families that are part of La Gloria's evangelical charismatic church congregations: Pentecostal and Apostolic. Linda Green provides an interesting historical background to the spread of charismatic evangelism and conversion in the region by linking it to the violence during the civil war. She argues that 'protestant evangelism was uniquely situated [...] to offer a social and religious alternative to people whose lives had been shaken by unimaginable atrocities as the result of political violence' (Green L. 1999, 150). In La Gloria, the relationship between the catholic majority and the growing evangelic congregations is relatively relaxed, very much in contrast to other parts of Chiapas¹³⁴. Throughout fieldwork I did not observe any direct confrontations or conflicts according to religious lines of separation. Rather fundamental theological differences however do exist between catholic and evangelic teachings, which manifest themselves in quotidian life. Both of La Gloria's evangelical churches preach abstention from adoring saints, a crucial element of the catholic faith, especially in its syncretic variation¹³⁵. The idolism of San Miguel combined with the story that tells the origin of the people of San Miguel Acatán (how the saint appeared to a young woman called *María*) are integral to the making of *Miguelero*, as an ethno-linguistic label. The 'ethnogenesis' of the *Migueleros* represents a historic and geographic reference once more removed from the contemporaneity of the young research participants. The *feria de San Miguel* precisely celebrates these ethno-linguistic origins and without a doubt is the highlight of La

¹³⁴ As we can see for example in the expulsion of evangelicals from San Juan Chamula (Cortez et. al., 2012).

¹³⁵ For a deeper discussion of syncretism in Mesoamerica in history and present see Millan 2001, Markman & Markman 1989 (especially chapter 11) among others.

Gloria's annual event-calendar¹³⁶. The minority evangelical population in town find themselves in a difficult position during these days of celebration. While they linguistically and historically are tied closely to being *Migueleros*, they are at the same time unable to express these ties during *la feria* without compromising their evangelical beliefs of not adoring saints.



4.5 Cristy standing outside the circle during first rehearsal of the Saint Michael adoration scene – woods close to La Gloria May 2018.

It is a weekday afternoon in late May. The first public showing of the play is less than two weeks away, so we are spending as much time as we can up here in the cool shade of the woods to rehearse. We are just done with some warm-ups and are revisiting the structure of the play. The process of integrating two different proposals made by the

groups was rather easy since they mostly overlapped thematically. There is a scene however that we have never tried out. Mike invites the young participants to show what they envision the San Miguel scene to look like. A sudden silence falls over the group and everybody looks at each other. Finally Ivan and Cristy are the first to volunteer. Cristy is a bit reluctant but then joins in while Yenni who has recently become the leader of the catholic youth group, is helping Mike and me directing. They start with the initial dialogue between Cristy (in her role as *Maria* who has come to the river to wash clothes) and Ivan, in his role as San Miguel who lets *Maria* (Cristy) know that he is the *patrón* ('owner' my translation) of these lands and encourages her to spread his message. Cristy (as *Maria*) does a couple of rounds to symbolise walking back to town and then plays a scene where she convinces the others to come and see this 'mysterious man'. The stage-movements look quite stiff, the dialogue is still very rough and gets stuck a couple of times. Mike intervenes and suggests that the second bit of the scene should not contain dialogue but rather silent movements. Yenni explains to everyone that the people of town went back to the river but instead of finding the man himself, they found his image carved in a piece of wood, which is when they realised that this person actually was their saint and decided to adore (pray to) him. Yenni sits down and tells the others to form a circle while leading them in prayers; Ivan, in his role as Sab Miguel's image, is standing a bit awkwardly in the middle, laughter erupts every now and then about Ivan being *Mekel* (as the saint is known in

¹³⁶ The *feria* to a certain degree marks the beginning of a new year since the town's administrative *autoridades* are swapped annually right after the *feria* at the beginning of October.

Akateko). I can tell this is not the first time Yenni is saying these words (praising the Archangel Saint Michael to be a warrior for God against Satan's army) and learn later that they have done similar dramatizations with the church group before. I turn around and realise that Cristy is now standing outside of the circle, watching the others. I am surprised since she usually is one of the most active members of the group; my initial instinct is to go and talk to her but then I remember that her family are members of the Pentecostal church and that this might be the reason for her reluctance to participate. I decide to leave it for the time being. The adoration scene is over and Cristy quickly jumps back into the circle (still in character) saying 'So while you guys were praying, I have already prepared some coffee and *tamales* for the celebration' (Fieldnotes 22nd of May 2018).

Both young people that come from evangelically affiliated families and were involved in the play, have told me that their congregations observe the days linked to their *Miguelero* origins. They do so however by holding their own commemorative services on the 30th of April (*Masacre del Chupadero*) and in early June (foundation of La Gloria) and special services during the four days of *la feria* in September. Members of these congregations however are discouraged from participating in other activities of *la feria* (or the other celebrations), such as the coronation ceremony, sport tournaments or dance & drink. In this way evangelical Migueleros / Akatekos in La Gloria maintain historic and linguistic identification with their town and its population. Linda Green points out that the 'assumption that conversion to Pentecostalism is inevitably a step towards loss of Mayan identity cannot be fully sustained' (Green L. 1999, 151). Samson equally draws our attention to the co-existence of symbols and practices: 'Maya evangelicals continue to identify with their language and cultural communities even as they also identify with particular denominations or more broadly conceived religious currents such as Pentecostalism' (Samson 2017, 36).

As exemplified in the vignette, Cristy manages to playfully get around compromising her (family's) religiously inspired rules and norms, while still maintaining to play an active part in the rehearsal; very similar to the everyday negotiations that followers of evangelical churches carry out while continuing to form part of La Gloria. Samson again suggests that in the long run we are looking at a process 'wherein *costumbre* is traded for a new *costumbre* [...] Such a new *costumbre* may well incorporate new content in terms of both cosmovision and practice, but it will also reflect continuity with lifeways associated with Maya communities and local ways of adapting to outside influence evident in the Maya cultural tradition for at least two millennia' (Ibid., 37). The play here again functions as a vehicle, displaying macro-dynamics, conflicts and relationships that exist in La Gloria and beyond, which are

rarely vocalised however shape La Gloria's social tapestry and are well known to younger and older residents.

This incident further speaks to the existence of different understandings and imaginations of where 'history' starts, crucial to the young participants sense-making of the past. Many in the group deemed it important to start with the 'true origins' or 'our roots' in form of the appearance of San Miguel, potentially inspired by Matias' narration of the La Gloria-story. These events and stories seemed rather unrelated to other group members who considered 'history' of the represent and perform-worthy kind, to start with the subsequent events of the *conflicto armado* and the exodus from Guatemala to Chiapas. This marks a crucial point in the ways young people conceptualise the past; it shows the group-members creative negotiations about what is considered 'memorable', informed by wider religiously inspired regimes of remembering.

A day after the first rehearsal of the San Miguel scene, Mike and I are sitting in front of two laptop-computers in Comitán talking about the scene. I can see that Mike has been looking at a video that I am familiar with; a one-hour tour through San Miguel Acatán recorded for an online media outlet called 'TV-Maya', which tells the history of the region in detail. 'Well look I know that the Saint is really important to them and all that, but I think we need to dig deeper into the history; like they need to think about what happened before the *conquista*' says Mike. I am a bit baffled and ask him what he means exactly. 'You know there is so much knowledge that has been forgotten, pre-Hispanic knowledge, knowledge from before the catholic church came to Latin-America - I think that should be reflected in the play. I am talking about ancestral knowledge. Right now, the only real pre-Hispanic element of the play is the *marimba*. The whole focus on the saint is just too colonial'. He goes on to show me the results of his online research about what he refers to as 'the real history' of San Miguel Acatán, including pre-conquest migrations that led to the first known settlements, nowadays an unofficial ruin-site called *Tenan* and how the city later was incorporated into the religious-administrative colonial system (from fieldnotes 23rd of May 2018).

Mike's intervention here adds another dimension to the contested imaginations of where history and memory start. He strongly identifies with political and artistic projects that promote solidarity with 'Pan-Mayaness'¹³⁷. Mike acknowledges that he himself did not grow up as part of what he calls the 'Mayan world' but that he is proud of his 'roots' which have been taken away from him through *mestizaje*. He strongly opposes the ruling political and social system that he sees as an extension of colonial rule (i.e., neo-colonialism). Based on his worldview it makes sense for Mike to appeal to the

¹³⁷ For a more in-depth discussion of the Pan-Mayan movement see Fisher & McKenna Brown 1996, Beyette 2017.

inclusion of information into the play that refers to a specific imagination of pre-colonial ‘purity’ of knowledge, spirituality and *cosmovisión*. During our conversation in May I intervened reminding Mike of the agreed principle of maximising young people’s decision-making in our creative process and pointing out that the inclusion of what Mike called ‘pre-Hispanic’ or ‘Mayan’ symbols, had never played a role in our group discussions. A rather heated debate emerged between the two of us debating the meaning and influence of ‘authentic’ representations of the past; the anti-colonial artist in solidarity with Pan-Mayanness insisting that there is a pure form of pre-conquest history that needs to be recovered and the critical, research-focused anthropologist arguing that it is not our place to impose ideas taken from online research into a play that is intended to be about the young participant’s imagination of the past.

Looking at the two examples of Cristy and Mike, we see how wider cosmological and ontological regimes influence the postmemorial repertoire and its staging. I want to be clear here about the terms I use. ‘Cosmology’ I understand as the ways in which we humans make sense of the metaphysical world and our own existence. ‘Ontology’ I use to describe how cosmological beliefs manifest themselves in everyday acts. I believe it is not the anthropologists’ task to question interlocutors’ worldviews and their everyday acts against some form of generally accepted epistemology but rather I am interested here in how different cosmologies interact within the dynamics of ontological negotiation¹³⁸. In Cristy’s case evangelic ontologies contest, complicate, and mediate the seemingly canonical ‘creation myth’ and its links to catholic institutions. In the same way the postulates of the political project of ‘anti-colonial resistance’, invoked by Mike, clash with the self-understanding of young group members around the question where ‘their history’ starts and with my ideas of how research and youth work should be conducted in a participatory way. Postmemorial work and performative repertoires are mediated not only by the young people’s performances but also involve wider ontologies and cosmologies, deriving from larger projects of identification (in this case religion and politics). Postmemory thus is located exactly within what Ortnner describes as the ‘dialectical synthesis of the opposition between ‘structure’ (or the social world as constituted) and ‘agency’ (or the interested practices of real people)’ (2006, 16-17); it describes the individual and collective (inter-subjective) negotiation of diverging imaginations and registers of the past which are informed by wider political or social structures (often promoted and governed by adults) as well as by the individual creative processes of fusing and mediating. The repertoire of postmemorial performances is influenced by information that presents itself in ‘archival’ form, as is the case in both the charismatic

¹³⁸ I am aware of the discipline’s lengthy discourses in regard to cosmology and ontology and decided to relinquish a wider engagement with the theoretical debates described in-depth by for example: DaCosta 2002 and Hoolbrad & Pedersen 2017. My goal here is to engage with the terminology briefly to further the discussion of political and religious ideologies and how they influenced the production of the postmemorial play, instead of answering fundamental questions about truth and being.

evangelical imagination that bases its claim on the bible as the sole source of explanation and the anti-colonial resistance that cosmologically and ontologically departs from a specific reading of the colonial encounter.

Back to the play we see how these frictions and negotiations played an important part in the creative process. In the script however (the process' 'final product' so to speak), we neither find Cristy's line pointing towards the creative negotiation of being an evangelical *Miguelista*, nor did Mike's idea of including a pre-Hispanic scene before the San Miguel appearance find any reflection. Mike due to his powerful position as an adult facilitator managed to secure the inclusion of certain elements related to his political beliefs. The music starting scene six for example was Mike's choice. The title of the music file is 'Mayan children's choir', very much reflecting the idea of Pan-Mayaness, this choice was never debated with the rest of the group and I do not remember ever being told in which language the song is sung.

To sum up: the contestations around where collective, memorable and 'display-worthy' history and memory start, surfaced through the postmemorial work of the play's development. It is important to look at the process itself to see how wider religious and political discourses and their implied cosmologies and ontologies frame and influence young people's active participation within postmemorial negotiations. The young participants make sense of the past also through larger discourses, that are being contested and negotiated when postmemorial repertoires enter a collective process.

Violence, Trauma & Laughter (Scenes 4 & 5).

The play's fourth and fifth scenes must be considered together since they are very similar in terms of content and on-stage action. In both scenes the young actors portray the violence inflicted on their grandparents, first in Guatemala and afterwards in the *el Chupadero* camp. Both scenes follow a similar format; the *pueblo*¹³⁹ engaged in everyday activities 'not aware of what would happen to them' (from script), when suddenly the 'death-machine' (i.e., Guatemalan military) enters their idyll persecuting, assaulting, torturing, and finally killing them. Matias' narration of both the civil war violence as well as the *Chupadero* massacre contains detailed descriptions in comparison to the poetic and abstract way of telling he used for prior scenes. Starting from the first appearance of violence, Matias tells the audience concrete dates of the events and in the case of the *el Chupadero* massacre even the time of day. The details make this bit of history stand out and highlight it as important and memorable events of the La Gloria-story. It almost feels like history is getting closer and closer

¹³⁹ 'Town' or 'People' – my translation

throughout the play until the action has finally caught up with its own telling. In fact, the narration of these scenes (fourth and fifth) works retrospectively i.e., Matias describes the events after they have already been portrayed as action on stage, instead of ‘preparing’ the audience for what they are about to see (as it is the case in scenes two-four). This artistic device developed rather accidentally. It made practical sense for Matias’ narration to happen in moments when the stage remains empty. Scenes three (San Miguel’s appearance) and four (the *conflicto armado*) flow into each other uninterrupted despite their chronological distance¹⁴⁰. The decision to leave Matias’ narration until after this scene was based on practical considerations. Any other type of structure would have involved actors leaving and re-entering the stage. The practical stage decisions created an interesting change in trajectory, the narration from this moment on (beginning of the violence) follows the action. This practicality-informed decision is not without a metaphorical dimension; the first (unexpected) occurrence of violence in scene four creates a rupture of the entire play’s order. The young people’s postmemorial acts (displaying the ‘unspeakable’) take the front stage, followed by the commonly known narration of the La Gloria-story.



4.6 Cristy and Marce creating an image representing ‘Guatemala’ during second rehearsal 04/05/2018.



4.7 Ivan, Azza and Nayeli creating an image representing ‘Huehuetenango’ during third rehearsal 08/05/2018.

¹⁴⁰ More than 300 years lay between the foundation of *San Miguel Acatán* in the 17th / 18th century and beginning of *la violencia* in 1980.



4.9 Facebook-post from 30/04/2018 about the *el Chupadero* massacre published in one of the public La Gloria groups. Interestingly the complete text (of which only the beginning and end is displayed here) is almost word for word the story that is being re-told annually during the Feria as well as Matias' narration in our play.



4.8 Azza, Marco, Aracely, Mike and Yenni creating an image representing 'violence' during fourth rehearsal 12/05/2018.

Trauma and the Aftermath of Violence.

Closely linked to violence is the topic of trauma. As we have seen earlier in this thesis (chapter 2 pp.99ff.) trauma deeply influences the remembering for survivors of violence (Zur 2001) and reaches into the here and now influencing newer generations' everyday lives (Dickson-Gómez 2004). Marianne Hirsch makes the point that postmemory only becomes necessary through 'multiple ruptures and radical breaks introduced by [...] traumatic interruption, exile and diaspora' (2008, 111). Family archives, she continues, have lost their direct link to the past, a loss which the post-generation is trying to counteract. This work seems to consist in the re-lived and embodied practice of the post-generation who relate to the past in both, physical and symbolic ways. Once more I am reminded of the link Diana Taylor describes between trauma and performance (Taylor 2011); how through the re-lived and embodied practice of memory, trauma is brought from the past into the present.

The young participants' performances of the traumatic events that turned their grandparents into refugees and influenced their own lives deeply (the reason why the young people were born and raised in Chiapas), was a crucial part in the process of creating the play. From the very first drama sessions and workshops, scenes were created using 'image theatre' and 'machines'¹⁴¹ to express and

¹⁴¹ A theatre technique for both exploration of a theme as well as staging purposes; one person starts with a repetitive movement and sound to which the other actors 'add' with their own movements and sounds bit by bit creating a thematical machine (i.e., choreography).

display the ways young people understand and imagine what their grandparents lived through. This first happened in an abstract way; Barry encouraging the participants to create images and ‘machines’ around places; for example: ‘Guatemala’, ‘El Chupadero’ or ‘Huehuetenango’. The young people’s association with these places often resulted in their bodies taking on postures that displayed violence, persecution, and fear (see images 4.6, 4.7 and 4.8). These exercises, all based on the concept of spontaneous (dis)association, led some young people quite ‘naturally’ to assume the roles of perpetrators (colonels and soldiers), while others assumed the roles of victims (*campesinos* being persecuted, tortured, and killed). The second step was family-research where young people asked relatives or friends for anecdotes, stories, and memories from these traumatic years. We worked with this information during workshops in form of frozen images and ‘machines’, adding words and sounds that corresponded to the actors’ postures. These ‘machines’ formed the groundwork for what was later presented on stage however, the final shape of the scenes only developed in the last week of rehearsals.

The initial anecdotes that young people came back with were quite brutal and included a witnessed mass-execution in Guatemala, women almost breaking down while carrying their babies during the flight and a scene that is well known in town from the *el Chupadero* massacre. When the refugee camp was attacked in 1984 a soldier from the Guatemalan army carved a baby out of a pregnant woman’s womb with his knife. This horrific scene (among other atrocities) is recorded in the only newspaper account of the events that unfolded on April 30th, 1984 in *el Chupadero* camp (Revista Proceso 1984). Apart from the dreadful reality of the happenings, this specific event and its re-telling represents something profound to the making of La Gloria-specific localised identifications. In some way we are dealing here with the first and most direct example of what Zur calls ‘counter-memory’ (2001, 132); a collective account of trauma that is being transmitted over time through re-telling in the private and familial space as well as publicly. Matias makes sure to include details of the *Chupadero* massacre in the annual re-telling of the La Gloria-story in September (often mentioning the names of the seven people that were killed by the Guatemalan military). Other informal forms of commemoration are being shared online via social media annually on the 30th of April (see Facebook post 4.9 on previous page). This traumatic remembrance is the first shared memory of people in La Gloria and an integral (if not the crucial) part of the town’s very own ‘origin story’. Refugee anecdotes and memories often vary from the time before the flight since the population of the UNHCR-administrated camps originated from distinct localities in north-western Guatemala with its own particularities of the *conflicto armado*. However, virtually all families in La Gloria share the intra-family memories and stories of grandparents that lived through the experience of *el Chupadero*. Remembering and re-telling the massacre and particularly this scene of immense brutality is more than just a symbolic tool

of La Gloria residents to reassure outsiders (or late-born La Gloria residents) of the cruelty and culpability of the civil-war perpetrators (the Guatemalan military). The remembering and (re-)telling of this story serve internally as an initiation of shared and collective memory. These memories distinguish *Ja'eb a Gloria* ('us from La Gloria'¹⁴²) from a wide scale of other refugee-trajectories (i.e., refugees that did not live the *el Chupadero*-experience) and contribute to the making of La Gloria-specific identifications which differentiate oneself from others.

Laughter and 'Sacred Theatre'.



4.10 Young People creating an image representing 'El Chupadero' during third rehearsal 08/05/2018.

It is one of the earlier rehearsals, there are still three weeks left until the first showing so we are taking our time to discuss the anecdotes and stories the young people brought from their family-research. Barry asks the group to create images. Ivan is keen on working with an anecdote from the *Chupadero* camp that his dad told him. Barry and I look at each other knowing about the quite graphic violence that this could trigger (as mentioned before the horrific scene of a soldier carving a baby out of a pregnant woman's womb is one of the traumatic memories burned into La Gloria's collective memory). Barry nods at me quickly and we silently agree to go ahead. Ivan looks at Cristy hoping she will agree to play the part of the pregnant woman, however she just shakes her head. Yenni steps forward and says: 'I'll do it'. There is some slight laughter about the comic way in which she agreed. Yenni prepares herself and lies down on the floor in front of Carlos who volunteers to play the part of the soldier; four other young people hold Yenni's arms and legs. 'Hold on' says Ivan, 'people won't understand she is pregnant, we need something to show that'. He goes to the side where we have stored today's snacks and quickly wraps together a couple of plastic bags that Yenni quickly stuffs under her shirt, while a couple of the other group-members start giggling from the back. Barry gives them a look that unmistakably says: 'Stop that'. The frozen scene is complete and stays still and in silence for a couple of moments. A bit of wind comes up suddenly and the plastic bags under Yenni's shirt start to slip out bit by bit and one is actually sailing in the wind. This time there is some audible laughter coming from the back. Yenni and the other actors can't hold it any longer and burst out laughing too. 'Stop' says Barry and the participants start moving again and we get back together in a circle. Barry addresses them in a rather annoyed voice; 'You guys are representing something horrible here, something terrible

¹⁴² This is a widely used idiom to describe people from La Gloria and also the name of one of the largest public Facebook groups in town see chapter 1 (p.87).

that happened to your grandparents, do you really think this is funny?’ After some moments of awkward silence Claudia is the first one to speak: ‘We are sorry for laughing, it just looked too funny with the plastic bags coming out of her shirt and all that’ (from fieldnotes 07/05/2018 2018).

Laughter formed part of the entire process of working together as a group. On many occasions, laughter functioned as a bonding experience (‘sharing a laugh’) however it also occurred in instances as described above when dealing with the ‘heavy’ content of traumatic pasts. What does it mean when rehearsing a scene whose content is so unquestionably horrendous causes laughter among the young participants? How can we understand the young people’s reaction to the telling of atrocities that happened to their grandparents?

Different readings are possible; one explanatory framework could be a version of ‘laughing in the face of adversity’ (in this case ‘atrocities’ might be the more accurate term). It could be assumed that the unbearable content of this brutal scene, so closely tied to the young people’s personal and familial history, pre-empted any other physical reaction; the void left by the inability to react was thus filled with laughter. Laughter in this reading takes the form of a defence-mechanism, a cathartic strategy to avoid re-traumatisation and uphold some social ‘normality’ in the intersubjective ‘here and now’. While this reading does some work towards explaining the dynamics at play, there certainly are other aspects that must be considered. The young people had very different reasons and motivations to take part in the youth group. Some joined the theatre project to learn more about the history, reflect, share, and express memories that are intrinsically important to being and belonging in La Gloria. However other motivations that facilitated young people’s participation also span more general aspects of youth group-activities. The desire to interact with peers in a different, less controlled environment, (different from other places of youth interaction such as school, *plaza*, or home, see discussion of young people’s places in chapter 1) played a role for many young people to join the group. The workshops also provided a new space for mixed-gender interaction outside of parental supervision and generally participants were motivated by the desire to feel part of something new and exciting.

These intermingled motivations influence the reading of the situation since it is equally possible to understand young people’s laughter during the *Chupadero* scene as an expression of group building and the establishment of social relations and friendships that were taking place specifically in these early stages of our process. Laughter as an expression of the young participants’ need to take advantage of a seemingly less restricted, new, and exciting space which invited them to interact, joke,

and share a laugh with each other. It also speaks to dynamics of a new group where each member is still finding their place. Joking, especially when reciprocated with laughter, is a common way of establishing roles within newly built groups. This reading is not offered here as a mutually exclusive opposition to understanding laughter as a reaction to the pressures of postmemorial trauma-transmission, it rather shifts our perspective and invokes young people's needs and stakes in the 'here and now', in the social reality of their group dynamics rather than in the symbolic and metaphorical representations that display postmemorial meaning.

Barry's reaction adds to the complex postmemorial negotiations. Exploring trauma and one's own psyche are two of the most important reasons for Barry to practice theatre. He is a strong believer in the 'therapeutic' effects of embodiment, where a different state of sensorial consciousness allows to explore sensitive and traumatic topics. This conviction leads him to treat the playful space of theatre, drama exercises, and rehearsals as 'sacred'. What takes place within this space equally become sacrosanct acts which discredits laughter as 'out of place' when rehearsing horrific and traumatic content. Again, I am drawn to the different actors involved and how their divergent agendas are negotiated within the creative process of postmemory. Barry signifies the rehearsal space and the performances within it as sacred, meaning that there are inviolable rules regarding what is appropriate and what is not. The sanctity that Barry attaches to practising theatre is closely linked to ideas from tradition and ritual. As early as 1977, Maurice Bloch pointed to the difference of two cognitive systems of what he calls 'ritual communication' and everyday communication, to which he adds the aspect of temporality, therefore distinguishing 'ritual time' as fundamentally distinct from the everyday experience of time. He criticises a simplistic focus on rituals in order to explain 'an imaginary world which we call social structure' (Bloch 1977, 289). In a way Bloch describes aspects of ritualistic processes similar to Turner (1969, 1982), however he is more critical of its transformative potential. Bloch's description of a specific 'ritual time' or 'sacred time' that is fundamentally distinct, adds another dimension to the multitude of temporalities that surfaced in the production of the play. The idea of tradition and ritual being 'resistant to change' (Taylor 2003, 19) is displayed in the La Gloria-story and its annual re-telling which despite changing in practice are expected to happen in the exact same way each time. Tradition and 'ritual time' were felt in form of town-wide expectations towards the young people's performances however, Barry's specific treatment of the theatre space as 'sacred' reinforced expectations of a different kind but equally was present in the form of ritual and tradition to which the young participants responded. Barry's proposal to the young participants was to explore collective memory and trauma by practicing embodiment and performing. The young group members willingly participated in this exploration however, they also re-signified the space momentarily through their own agendas and interactions, thus contested the implicit ritualistic form of the

workshop space. Laughter then can be understood as participation, as a way for young people to signify our shared space with their own needs and stakes and to participate in postmemorial negotiation. In this case Barry’s ritualistic and sacrosanct understanding of our workshop and performance space momentarily clashed with the young participants’ agendas, needs, and stakes. However, in other instances the young people’s and the facilitators’ stakes and needs were more aligned.

Postmemorial Activation.

Laughter was present frequently during rehearsals, such reactions however were completely absent on stage. Ivan talking about his experience of performing the play in La Gloria for the first time said:

‘In the moment of expressing everything that happened before [the past] through theatre it was just about listening to the history and imagining what it felt like and then do the movements, do them right. But you do them right because you are actually feeling what it was like and in this way, you connect with others. It was not until I was on stage that I started to think about everything that I went through – and everything my parents, grandparents and others went through. I was actually imagining and feeling all that and I think this is what theatre demands from you. You imagine, and you feel because you are part of it [...] as if you were living it yourself, as if you were there’ (Interview 04/09/2018).

Cristy talking about her experience on stage said:

‘We were representing our abuelitos which was cool because we were acting as if we were them; we suffered like they did, we worked and we fought for the water like they did and at the end we got to this place and we named it La Gloria because just like them, that is where we felt peace [...] it felt almost as if it was real, as if I was there’ (Interview 24/08/2018).

Cristy and Ivan’s statements point to another aspect of the postmemorial process; the ways in which postmemorial repertoires are momentarily activated. Cristy and Ivan ultimately felt a direct connection to their parents’ and grandparents’ memories in the moment of performing them in front of others. Interestingly both frame their experience in almost identical language, while acting on stage they felt a sense of ‘being there’ in the past with their parents and grandparents. In Cristy’s account past and present fuse and it is difficult at times to distinguish when she actually is talking about her *abuelitos* in the 1980’s and when she is talking about herself and the other actors on stage in 2018 (‘we got to this place and named it La Gloria’). During rehearsals young people sometimes participated through laughter, stressing social aspects and needs of the ‘here and now’ (social and group dynamics,

relationships, having fun together, establishing oneself within the group) perceived by Barry as a 'distraction' from postmemorial connections and an interruption of the sacred theatre space. However, Cristy and Ivan describe a special moment of performing in front of a wider public, where they felt a direct connection to their family's memories and that they were actually 'living the past'. I want to refer back here to the ideas of the 'magic of the stage' and its transformative potential, as mentioned earlier in the chapter by young participants who felt that the experience of acting on stage caused changes on an individual and collective level. Cristy and Ivan both mentioned how acting changed the group dynamics and their relationships to others in the present (pp.142ff.). They go a step further here where they describe a metaphysical connectivity with their ancestors established through performance, fusing past and present. In a similar fashion we can detect a transformative moment where memory and performance come together to do exactly the postmemorial work that Hirsch talks about; a moment in which the past is being activated by young people in the 'here and now', creating potentialities for its embodiment. Cristy and Ivan describe moments of re-living and activating the past (in form of their parents' and grandparents' memories) through postmemorial embodiment and performance. The traumatic past continues to live in the body but is now expressed in its mediated, augmented and negotiated form through movements, words, and gestures on stage for others to see. Postmemorial repertoires find performative expression in the interaction between actors and audience. Victor Turner was one of the earliest anthropologists to describe the link between performance, ritual, and transformation. Bloch's critique of the transformative potential of ritual is significant here. 'Ritual communication' and 'ritual time' being separate domains from everyday acts means that they reconfirm a social order rather than changing it, manifest a given structure rather than transforming it. Theatre as an emancipatory act that reveals otherwise hidden feelings and opinions and bears the potential to transform individuals and collectives is what I am interested discussing in this next paragraph.

'Magic of the Stage'? – Theatre between liberation and oppression.

The 'magic of the stage' paradigm and its underlying assumption of theatre being an emancipatory and subversive act *per se* (especially for younger participants) cannot be left uncritically. Cristy and Ivan describe an experience where the act of public performance led to an activation of postmemorial repertoires. Victor Turner describes a dialectic relationship between 'acting in everyday-life and everyday-life in acting' (1982, 102). For him 'cultural performances' (rituals) and 'social drama' (everyday acts) are interrelated in form of a 'lying figure eight' (Ibid., 107) where everyday-acts, sociality, and roles influence ritualistic practice which then in turn inform and transform everyday social orders. Turner would have seen the young people's play as a transformative act of performance,

a 'rite of passage' with liminal, subversive, and innovative capacities that fuse past and present in ritualistic agency, that will impact the social order and transform the individuals and their relationships to each other. Maurice Bloch is more critical of the transformative potential of rituals ('cultural performance) and would point to the fact that the young people's 'ritual communication' and 'ritual time' is a sacred and therefore part of a separated cognitive system / domain that tends to confirm the social order rather than challenging it. The question regarding the origin of social change was of specific concern for debates around 'structural functionalism'. It is not my intent here to summarise or engage with these long and lasting debates on a deeper level, it does however pose some interesting questions regarding 'theatre as transformation' and 'the magic of the stage'. The young participants describe moments of postmemorial activation and transformation of themselves and their relationship to others, however this discussion would be incomplete if we simply ascribed monolithic effects to theatrical practice without accounting for its critiques. On an individual level theatre and drama activities (from Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed or other approaches) produce a very specific type of interaction and subsequently create very specific spaces which bear potentialities for both; liberation and oppression. The performance-spaces that were created throughout fieldwork were at the same time inclusive (i.e., designed for any young person to participate regardless of who they are or where they are from) and exclusive, for example by requiring a very specific type of expressive behaviour. The assumption that 'everything is possible in theatre' (often claimed by theatre practitioners and activists) finds its limitations when taking into account specific expectations towards behaviour that happened within our workshop and rehearsal spaces, subsequently side-lining and excluding other types of behaviour (for example quieter or more introverted forms of expressing oneself). Barry, Mike, and I as powerful adults in these instances functioned as different types of 'gate-keepers' outlining what was to be considered acceptable (and welcomed) within this space and what not. Both Turner and Bloch's ideas are simultaneously at work here in contrasting but compatible ways. The young interlocutors are challenging the elders' views that the young do not care about tradition, while also reinscribing a local ritualised genesis narrative. While the ideas seem oppositional, they in fact are both change and status quo at the same time, confirming and transforming the social order while being parts, clarifications, and nuances of the same whole.

It should be noted here once more that the play itself forms part of La Gloria's postmemorial process. The creative interactions between the young participants, Matias, Mike, Barry, and I, is registered and lives on as tradition and memory in the collective repertoires of La Gloria. The play within this chapter functions as a framing device, an expressive tool and a vehicle for the many aspects, layers, and temporalities inherent in its production and public displays. It must be stressed that the play and its mediated negotiated and augmented 'product' and process were significantly influenced by us

outsider-adults, who for different reasons had a stake in La Gloria's history and its telling. We ourselves became part of postmemory in La Gloria. Not only did Barry, Mike and I design the process beforehand, we were also part of collective decision making within the group. As mentioned, the collective decisions about what to perform on stage did contain a lot of information coming from the young group members, however when deciding how this would be displayed on stage it was often Barry and Mike (whom I introduced to the young participants as 'theatre experts') and sometimes myself, that would design and direct the action on stage. This is significant for the play's analysis since a critical engagement with the supposedly liberating methods of theatre and drama, as well as an ethnographically 'sincere' (Jackson Jr. 2010) contextualisation of the play itself are necessary for this chapter's critical exploration. The encounters and interactions are written (sometimes more sometimes less explicit) all over the play. Taking these into account I do not conclude to dismiss the play and its transformative potential but rather encourage the reader to focus on the play in its context i.e., a creative process of negotiation with points of momentary postmemorial meaning. Momentary acts constitute ephemeral meaning within the process of negotiation falling on different parts of binary spectra between agency and structure, transformation and conservation, emancipation and oppression.

How to display Violence? – Creative and Postmemorial Negotiations.

The negotiations between adult-facilitators, the wider community and the young participants are specifically visible when we look at how trauma and violence were performed as postmemory in the play. The concrete scenes developed during rehearsals were significantly altered and modified for the public showing. The initial images were meant as 'inspirations' (Barry's words) that eased the young participants to think and imagine what they would present and how they would move their bodies on stage. It was decided that the violence inflicted by the Guatemalan military would be displayed in form of a 'destruction-machine', which became one of the central elements of both scenes (four & five). This resulted from a machine-exercise around violence during which Barry asked four participants to stand in a circle with their backs to each other which created an outwards-facing circle shape. He asked each of them to perform a different violent gesture and sound while the circle rotates. In the play this 'machine' appeared as a spinning circle of violence and destruction that attacks and persecutes the town's population. The decision to use these rather abstract depictions of violence resulted from considerations and concerns during the last week of rehearsals.

It was here where Barry and Mike's artistic interventions came into play. While 'image theatre' was used as an exploratory method during the development it was also applied as a framework for the scenes to be displayed. The direct display of violence from the early 1980's involved gun and rifle

shooting among other direct or self-explanatory gestures, which reflect how violence is portrayed for example in school performances during the Day of the Mexican Revolution (see chapter 2 pp.91ff.). It was during the last week of rehearsals that details of gestures and bodily expressions were refined. When rehearsing the two violence / massacre scenes (four and five) the young actors frequently formed rifles or guns with their hands or asked whether they should bring actual rifles as props, as it is common for these types of theatrical representations in La Gloria (see Marco on p.90 and his rifle during the *desfile*). Using rifles as props or other types of direct / self-explanatory gestures and acting were felt as disruptions by Barry and Mike. They were keen on creating an overall atmosphere of the play relying on symbolic representation rather than ‘authentic’ re-enactment. Precisely these were the aspects that Don González took issue with when he lamented the play’s lack of authenticity (see pp.103ff.). Barry and Mike felt that gestures of rifle and gun shooting would look odd and disruptive and would potentially remind people of school-plays or other common frames of acting and bodily expression. Barry and Mike both subscribe to artistic ideals of constantly striving for innovation and complexity. They considered self-explanatory acting and bodily expression (such as forming guns and rifles with bare hands or using props) as too simplistic and overused. Barry and Mike were envisioning metaphorical acting where the ‘true’ meaning is hidden behind abstract stage-interactions and where messages are not ‘handed on a silver platter’ to members of the audience. Instead, their goal was to make the audience think. I myself had an interest in the theatre play looking different from the historic re-enactments common at the CoBaCh as well as the postmemorial displays common during La Gloria’s ‘sociocultural events’ (Matias’ words). I set out with the idea that my youth work intervention would provide the participants with a new and fresh perspective and a deeper engagement with their town’s history and the topic of memory. This change, I assumed, would be visible in the ways postmemory was staged in the play. I was interested in the creative negotiations but also, I felt it was important to bring something new to La Gloria and to expose its residents to alternative ways of artistic interpretations and mediations of memory.

In the last rehearsals before the first showing Barry proposed to explore the term violence further and reminded the participants of the machine-exercises we had practiced a couple of weeks earlier. Machine-exercises are often used in youth theatre for this specific reason; to diversify the participants’ acting repertoire and make young people think and act in ways potentially unknown to them. The spontaneous disassociation inherent in improvisation and reduction (actors only use one sound / word and one gesture / action which they repeat over and over), created exactly the type of metaphorical acting that Barry, Mike, and I were after. The choice of stage attire (all dressed in black) must be seen in the same vein; a type of abstraction that is applied to make the audience think. Don González took issue exactly with these aspects. The clash here on the one hand can be understood as postmemorial

friction embedded in conflictive intergenerational dynamics about the 'correct way of remembering' and memory. On the other hand, Don González's claim to authenticity of memory can also be understood as taking issue with the artistic interventions of metropolitan outsiders who implement foreign, 'non-native' or remote ideas into the display of La Gloria's collective memory, thus intervene with the postmemorial flow of intergenerational transmission. The 'invention of tradition' (Hobsbawn & Ranger 1983) is multi-layered but constantly moulds different temporalities together under the banner of 'authenticity' and 'continuation'; a process seemingly reluctant to rupture and change. Who is 'allowed' to make changes says a lot about La Gloria's collective and changing identities.

In the play the most graphic and direct expressions of violence can be found right after the machine's entrance. Three of the four elements (actors) of the destruction machine 'pair up' with one of the trapped villagers, torture them using 'invisible' strings and finally kill them, while the fourth actor is shouting out orders in the role of a military coronel. It is here where the abstract violence inflicted by the destruction machine turns into individualised brutality of a graphic sort, the military salute that concludes the scenes leaves no doubt who or what is being displayed. No laughter could be heard during these scenes from the audience and the isolated display of death clearly is one of the most powerful moments of the entire play.

Disconnection or 'It was so much fun; I have never been able to scream this loud before'.

During the creation of 'violent' images some young people quite naturally assumed the role of perpetrators. Deciding who would form part of the 'destruction-machine' was based on whom of the young actors was able to best project their voice since the repetitive shouting and exclaiming was an integral part of the scene. A couple of changes were made during the last week. Azza was one of the young people that had been keen on playing dominant roles representing the Guatemalan military from the beginning¹⁴³. In an interview towards the end of my time in La Gloria he said that he specifically enjoyed playing these parts since they were 'strong scenes' and that he was considering enlisting for the Mexican military as a future job (Interview with Andres 19/10/2018). The four young actors and actresses rehearsed the machine separately with Mike before playing it with the whole group. During these rehearsals Mike cheered them on to enhance their voice projection, something the four actors seemed to enjoy thoroughly, with much fun and laughter. Eduvigis, a rather quiet member of the group, mentioned afterwards that 'it was so much fun – I have never been able to scream this loud before' (from fieldnotes 22/05/2018).

¹⁴³ And ended up playing the role of a 'coronel' whom the other elements of the death-machine salute in the end.

A certain disconnection was felt between the sensorial experience of the young actors and the content of the metaphors and images they displayed. The postmemorial connection to the content was interrupted by the here and now in a very similar way to the laughter during rehearsals of the *Chupadero* scene. New bodily and sensorial experiences of drama exercises and social dynamics momentarily disassociated the movements and interactions from its metaphorical content. These disconnections (laughter and enjoyment while rehearsing intense and traumatic content) functioned as part of young people's strategies to cope with the distressing and personal content from their (grand) parents' memory. On the other side they were also reactions to the metaphorical acting and abstract artistic exercises which Barry and Mike exposed the young people to. The novel ways of behaving, (inter-) acting and displaying collective memories introduced by the facilitators represented an intervention into young participants' habitual behaviours (their 'comfort zone') which required a response. Of course, the young Jocox members' reactions here differed drastically from one participant to the other.

In Cristy and Ivan's case we can see how a connection to the postmemorial content is re-established through the moment of on-stage performance and the implicit reciprocal interactions between actors and audience (acting – reaction – acting). The moment of publicly displaying these acts of 'twice behaved behaviour' (Schechner 1985, 36) bears the potential of re-associating movements, gestures, and words with postmemorial meaning thus re-activating the postmemorial repertoire. To sum up; the violence and trauma visible in the play's fourth and fifth scene reveal a multi-faceted process behind its development which highlights a variety of aspects related to memory. We have seen how young participants actively participate in the creation and transmission of collective memory-repertoires by telling and re-telling the La Gloria-story and its traumatic events. We have also seen how the young people's active participation is framed by male-adult facilitators and their own stakes and agendas as well as wider intergenerational expectations, all of which find their expression in the theatre play itself. We have seen how the embodied performances of such events during rehearsals have led to momentary disassociations expressed through laughter. In some cases, the performances were re-associated with postmemorial (and traumatic) content through public display (interaction between actor and audience). Young people actively participate in the processes that display, express, and alter the trauma their parents and grandparents suffered. The young participants' relationship to violent (post)memories differs from the one their (grand)parents have as eyewitnesses. Further the embodiment of collective traumas brings the complex negotiations and the different actors and agendas involved in postmemorial processes to the fore. Young people are active participants in intergenerational transmission (since they will be the ones telling these stories to generations after

them) but in the same way their own participation is framed by wider expectations, agendas, and relationships.

'Fight for the Water' & Contemporary Divisions (scenes six and seven).

The last parts of the play (scenes six and seven), even though divided in the script, technically function as one large scene since the characters do not leave the stage at any point. Thematically this long succession of actions deals with everything that happened after La Gloria's foundation in 1984. It is this last part (together with the frame-story) that shows a divergence to the La Gloria-story. While the historic part of the narration during the coronation ceremony ends with La Gloria's foundation (often accompanied with singing paeans to the people of Chiapas and the Mexican government), the young participants were keen on showing the hardship of the years following the foundation and the internal divisions and conflicts that dominate La Gloria's public life today. The scene is accompanied by music which picks up in speed as the action develops.

The images in scene six are choreographed to music and represent technological and developmental advances that were brought to La Gloria in the 1990's; namely education (the establishment of the town's schools), health (the foundation of the local clinic) and infrastructure (in this case represented by electricity i.e., the installation of a light-bulb). These images resulted from the research undertaken during the *Yetu - Nanik - Satajtoj* phase of the project. A group had specifically investigated the history of technological and other infrastructural advances that had taken place in town after the foundation in 1984¹⁴⁴. The music that accompanies the scene ('Mayan Children Choir') gives it an atmosphere of ease and the action on stage is filled with hopeful gestures of care and union. After the sorrow and fear displayed in the scenes before, the action now is full of hugs and *jelq'ab*¹⁴⁵. The succession of images reflects a historical imagination of the 'golden years' of collaboration, unity and infrastructural progress. Despite the fact that the infrastructural achievements do not necessarily form part of the annual narration of the La Gloria-story, these are very much reflected in the way residents present their town to outsiders. 'The community came together *para levantar a La Gloria*¹⁴⁶ is the general undertone of how this part of the history is talked about i.e., late 1980's and early 1990's. In La Gloria's collective memory (Zur would call it 'countermemory' 2001, 132) these years melt together to form a period of its own. For the young group-members who have been born after (or just at the end) of this period the 'golden years'-narrative means a constant projecting of positive community-interaction to the past while the present (filled with division and mistrust) will never live up to the ideal climate of cooperation and solidarity. The young people's imagining and mediating as well as their analysis of

¹⁴⁴ Unfortunately, a short film with interviews conducted by the young people about the same topic never made it to completion.

¹⁴⁵ See chapter 3 (page 133) for further explanation of this concept.

¹⁴⁶ 'To lift up La Gloria' my translation.

the present are hugely influenced by this narration, which they frequently re-tell often in connection with criticising contemporary La Gloria.

The music changes to a rapid drumbeat after all the actors sit down to eat in scene six and equally the action on stage picks up in speed. The scene that follows now (seven) is titled 'the fight for the water' and represents the struggle of residents in the early years to obtain sufficient water for their daily needs. It is yet another reference to water as the overarching theme that accompanies the entire play, to a certain extent this is the play's peak or final twist. The idyll of cooperation and unity is destroyed by the need for water which creates a 'every woman / man for her / himself' situation. The scene developed after the initial conversation between Don Matias and the group. Several young people had heard from their grandparents that the scarcity of water had destructive effects for the unity in town. Up until 1988 when the first water-well was built, La Gloria residents had to find creative and desperate means to obtain water. Matias explained that this was everybody's biggest concern and a daily struggle, 'oftentimes people would exchange a day's (agricultural) labour at the *ranchos* nearby for a couple of *cantaros*¹⁴⁷ of water' (Fieldnotes 18/05/2018). The scene ends with the inauguration of the first *pozo*, represented by the actors standing in a circle after the music stops, each drinking a glass of water. The succession of events here is not quite accurate chronologically (the *pozo* was inaugurated long before the schools or the clinic), however the young actors' strong message is that the individualisation of labour (characters on stage as well as in history) initiated the first ruptures to La Gloria's social tapestry; leading to separation and division as we can see in the final scene.

Despite its short duration the division-scene is one of the most impactful parts of the play, by looking at its development we will once again see the complex postmemorial negotiations that led to its development. The scene has already been discussed earlier in chapter 2 of the thesis (pp.107ff.) where I explore how young people 'couch' their concerns and opinions within commonly accepted narratives, thus attaching themselves (and their voices) to a type of ancestral authority through storytelling. At this point I am more interested in the scene's development. During the last phase of our history-research project, we spoke about 'present' and 'future'. Prior exploration and research laid the groundwork for much of the play's content. Division and separation are felt in contemporary La Gloria on many different levels since they form part of everyday social interactions. I can hardly think of a resident that would not agree that La Gloria is divided according to political, religious, social, or economic lines. This spans from older residents who think that the new generations are letting everything 'go down the drain' (pp.42ff.) to younger residents who have grown up in an environment of mistrust and rupture but have also been told stories praising the unity of the 'golden years' (see

¹⁴⁷ Plastic jugs holding around 6 litres that are used to carry water.

p.133). These felt divisions occasionally materialise into concrete acts, for example when the organizing committee abstained from holding the *feria* in 2016 due to internal conflicts or when the antecedent campaigns leading up to the national elections of 2018 caused threats, accusations, and even physical altercations between different fractions. The fact that the imagination of ‘idyllic first years of unity vs. contemporary internal divisions and conflicts’ almost has canonical features, speaks to a self-understanding of being a divided community.

On stage the young actors finish drinking their water from the invisible *pozo* and everything seems to be calm (after the fight for the water) however one of them steps forward loudly exclaiming the word ‘politics’ while pulling invisible strings that move all the other actors in uncomfortable and separating ways, this is followed by another young actor exclaiming ‘economy’ again forcefully moving the others around the stage, followed by the same procedure for ‘religion’, ‘society’, ‘lack of communication’ and ‘*costumbre*’. This scene stems from numerous conversations we were having as a group about the contemporary situation of La Gloria. From the very beginning of workshops, it was clear that divisions were some of the most characterising elements of contemporary community relations. After deciding on the play’s topic and talking to Don Matias about the past we were trying to decide how to end the play. Mike, Barry, and I were guiding the conversation towards the topic of a take-away message. ‘What would you like people to know about La Gloria? With which thought would you like to leave them?’. The young Jocox members were looking at each other for a while in silence. I broke the silence by saying: ‘Do you remember the initial workshops? What was the most important thing you all mentioned about La Gloria nowadays?’. Quickly the young people came back mentioning aspects of the divisions, which at the time (May 2018) were felt specifically intense since the general national elections were in full-swing and animosities and confrontation between different fractions were out in the open. Barry and Mike went on to facilitate one of their common exercises to explore the concept of division in an embodied way through image-theatre and machines, the result of which was the scene mentioned above. Barry, Mike, and I all had an interest in developing this scene since it reflected conversations, we had with the young participants collectively and individually. On the other hand, the scene also added depth in form of an extra dimension to the ‘La Gloria-story’ which was well received as an artistic device. It was also in my interest to give young people means and space to ‘express their ideas, opinions, and feelings’ as part of my youth-work intervention which meant that the three of us had a shared interest in creating the division-scene. Our interest is clearly present in the decision-making process described above. The young people were quickly on board with the idea and a discussion developed about whether it was appropriate to add these critical contemporary observations to the telling of La Gloria’s history and whether it would offend older residents. Ivan quickly dismissed this by saying: ‘No way! They [La Gloria’s adults] won’t care about it. Everybody

knows about the divisions, so it makes sense to put them into the play. It's part of the history too' (from fieldnotes 29/05/2018).

The young participants' postmemorial repertoire is enlarged by their own analysis of the contemporary as well as by the intentions of us male-adult facilitators. The young participants' claims, and perspectives change slightly and no longer seem to be tied solely to postmemorial work; they speak as eyewitnesses themselves, shifting the focus on what *they* (as agents of the present and future) see 'with *their* own eyes' and what is important (and complicated) to *them* in their contemporary lives. Equally it reflects what is important to the male-adult facilitators and their keen interest in providing the play with a take-away message (to include young people's voices and to amplify the play's depth and impact). Being the last scene (before the framing story wraps the play up) it certainly functions as delivering the message that the young actors and adult facilitators want the audience to take away. The message however needed to be embedded in a wider postmemorial context to gain relevance and authority.

'[S]hared stories assume new meanings in the uses to which each individual puts them [...] It is in this two-way transformation of private into public personae and shared worldviews into personal allegories, that narratives attain their power – their seeming ability to fuse the Then and Now, Here and There, the One and the Many' (Jackson 2002, 231).

Again, young people's active participation is present as well as the stakes of the facilitators and wider pressures all of which form part of the telling and re-telling of the La Gloria-story and the making and re-making of history and memory. Memory is not only referring here to the transmission of narratives from the past but rather takes the shape of a live-memory that is being created and transmitted at the time of occurrence, in the negotiation between different actors and agendas, in the constant flux of contemporary life.

Reflections on theatre-play.

To sum up: the play here functions as the point of departure when looking at the ways young people in La Gloria tell stories from the past i.e., how they activate, embody, and perform their postmemorial repertoire, always in relation and negotiation with other (more powerful) adults (older residents, family-members, and adult facilitators). We have seen how the young people's postmemorial performances at times stand in contrast and clash with eye-witness accounts of the *conflicto armado* and *el refugio*; however also how young people constantly connect their postmemorial repertoire to the uniformly told La Gloria-story, thus 'authenticating' their mediated and imagined version through the authority of eyewitnesses and ancestors. We have seen how young people were engaged

constantly in creative negotiations with us male adult-facilitators and how our agendas and interventions find their expression in the play forming part of the young people's postmemorial work and process.

These performances are connected to and partly informed by religious and political cosmologies and ontologies (especially over the question where history and memory start), deriving from wider projects of identification which influence and mediate the postmemorial repertoire; as we have seen in the examples of evangelical and political ideologies (Pentecostalism and 'Pan-Mayan solidarity / anti-colonial resistance). Trauma and its postmemorial mediation and adaptation manage to situationally eradicate separations to open up potentialities of collective identification through memory, which reach much farther than the twelve young members of the Jocox' theatre troupe. Throughout the process the young participants momentarily disassociated and disconnected from postmemorial trauma through laughter and social interaction during rehearsals. However, in other moments postmemorial repertoires and meanings were re-associated and activated momentarily through staged public performances. The play itself represents a vehicle containing information about the creative negotiations as well as the actors which form part of it. The play showcases the many ways in which postmemory and storytelling influence young people's being and belonging and their social positioning within La Gloria. Young people are active participants in the narrative-acts of postmemorial telling & re-telling, signifying & re-signifying, augmenting, interpreting, and disseminating, which enables them to negotiate their position within La Gloria's social tapestry. Their active participation in the making and re-making of memory supports their positioning within local social settings.

Different forms of sociality and interrelation are created through the play and its development, while existing conversations and clashes are highlighted and visualised. We get an insight into young people's intergenerational positioning and learn more about how the project of mediating, negotiating, and performing postmemorial repertoires is crucial to the young people's making of self and how it forms part of their registers of being and belonging.

Throughout this section (chapters 1-4) we have seen how young people inhabit, remake, and claim unexpected spaces within La Gloria's social tapestry. We have seen how they momentarily transform physical places through the creation of non-geographically anchored spaces that they carry in the intersubjectivity among peers. We have seen how young people inhabit, remake, and claim memory and how they creatively and aesthetically express their postmemorial process (by the example of photography and theatre) which is always framed by powerful adult agendas. The young people's making of self is closely tied to their active participation in the making of memory and space, both memory and space re-shape in the constant flux of sociality, narrative, and storytelling. Space and

memory are interrelated (De Nardi et. al. 2020) and work together to influence the ways young people make sense of themselves, their surroundings, and the past. 'Memory in flux' is not limited to the postmemorial adaption of past events but rather spans also into the present and subsequently the future. The next section precisely deals with futures and mobilities and spans imaginations and aspirations for the future always in connection to migration-narratives.

Chapter 5: Anticipatory Memory-in-the-making: Migration-gossip, Storytelling and Future Aspirations.

The young people's making of space and their postmemorial performances have been discussed at length throughout the last section (chapters 1-4). This chapter is the beginning of a new section that explores the link between young people's postmemorial repertoire and their imaginations and aspiration for the future in the context of mobility. The spaces my young interlocutors claim and remake locally (physical space and memory) are not necessarily expected taking into account the supposedly marginal position the young people occupy in local hierarchies. When it comes to young people's aspirations for the future we can detect certain expectations that are inseparable from the domain of migration and shape their contemporary lives and future-plans in both material and symbolic ways. The young people that participated in the theatre play occupy the liminal space between two layers and temporalities of migration, while maintaining an indirect connection to both through imaginative investment. They embody and activate the intergenerationally transferred postmemorial information from the past, as well as they anticipate and aspire to futures that are inseparably intermingled with leaving La Gloria and creating futures elsewhere.

I am standing in front of the *Dirección* (head-teachers office) at the CoBaCh on an early afternoon in May waiting for the teachers to leave a meeting. I need to talk to one of them about a room change however my experience tells me that it is almost impossible to guess how long they will be in there for. I decide to join Marco and Francisco who are sitting in the shade just on the side of the *Dire*'s office. It is one of their last weeks here at the CoBaCh since both are graduating in July. Even though they are not required to attend classes anymore, Marco and Francisco have been coming to school almost every day to have a chat with their friends, hang out or use the (incredibly slow) satellite Wi-Fi. They are looking at old photos on their phones and show me one of a group of kids in school uniforms from probably a decade ago (back then uniform meant simply to wear a white shirt), standing in front of one of the old wooden primary-school classrooms. 'This is from when we were in the first year of *Primaria*, when we first started going to school' explains Marco. 'Well let's see if you can guess who is who on these pictures *güero?*' says Francisco in his typical cheeky but friendly way. They hand me the phone and I zoom in and out and find it a bit hard to guess since the photo was taken about twelve years ago so the quality is not great and people have changed quite a bit. I do recognise some of the students with recognisable features. 'This must be *Mofle* right?', they both nod 'aaaaand that one must be you Marco' I say pointing at the tallest kid on the picture, they both laugh again and give each other a high-five. 'But the other ones I really don't recognise', Francisco grabs the

phone. ‘Well, this is Juan, but you probably didn’t meet him he’s – you know – up there in *el Norte*’, I nod. ‘Oh, and this one here is *Fulano*¹⁴⁸ what was his name again he has also been gone for a long time, didn’t he marry so and so and then he had to make money to maintain her and the baby? Oh, and here is...’. Francisco stops for a second and has to laugh, ‘thinking about it you probably don’t know many of the ones from back then. We were sixty-eight students in the first year. Out of those there are only about thirty here at the CoBaCh right now getting their high-school degree’. ‘And the rest?’ I want to know, and Francisco explains: ‘Well the girls mostly *se juntaron*¹⁴⁹ and are now at home with their kids and many the boys left and now hardly come back to visit, either they are in the States or at *Playas*¹⁵⁰, but we hear very little from them, also some of the girls left’ (from fieldnotes 02/05/2018).

Migration is a trope of daily conversations in La Gloria where friends, relatives, neighbours and *conocidos*¹⁵¹ regularly debate who just left and who came back, who is sending money from *el Norte* and who just lost their job, who is doing well and *a quien le va mal*¹⁵². Older people who came to Chiapas as refugees in the 1980’s relate to migration-narratives and stories through their very own experience. Younger La Gloria residents, most of whom reckon with leaving at one point or another, are exposed to and invested in the narratives and expectations from the domain of migration, however rather in form of a future prospect; trying to learn from successes and mistakes of the ones who left before them. Possibilities of intergenerational identification emerge when older residents compare the struggles of those leaving to the US (often undocumented) with their own flight from Guatemala in the 1980’s and the hardship they suffered during the first years in Chiapas. On the other side La Gloria-born Akatekos living in the US find different ways of connecting to what I have described as postmemorial repertoire in the previous chapters, resulting from their own migration-experience. The need to go elsewhere in order to support one’s family and the tales and stories that accompany migration can be seen as uniting elements that people in La Gloria share and agree on, despite the multiple divisions discussed earlier in the thesis (chapter 3 pp.133ff. and chapter 4 pp.174ff.). Migration sometimes manifests itself in concrete ways; for example in form of remittances symbolised by the construction of two (or more)-storey houses or the purchase of large (and expensive) *trocas*¹⁵³; however it also manifests itself in rather pliable or ephemeral ways in form of storytelling. Both manifestations play a significant role throughout this chapter where I examine young people’s

¹⁴⁸ Word replacing anybody’s name – mostly used when one cannot remember the name of a specific person.

¹⁴⁹ ‘Got engaged / married’ – my translation.

¹⁵⁰ Referring to Playa del Carmen in Quintana Roo but meaning the entire touristic region called ‘Riviera Maya’.

¹⁵¹ ‘Acquaintances’ – my translation.

¹⁵² ‘Who is not doing good’ – my translation.

¹⁵³ Spanglish for ‘pick-up truck’ or any other type of SUV, used in Mexico particularly for large, new and expensive looking models.

retrospective and anticipative imagination of migration in the form of storytelling, i.e., the anticipative telling of migratory desires, imaginations, and aspirations.

The constant telling and re-telling of narratives around a specific trope constitutes something that could be called 'memory'. As we have seen in chapters 2, 3, and 4; young people are engaged actors in the process of creating memory through retrospective and postmemorial storytelling. However far from being static, unchangeable, or 'archival', memories are in constant creation and re-formation, engaged in the flux of real-life trajectories through which a form of quotidian contemporary memory emerges that finds its expression and meaning in the play through the interaction between actors and audience, through telling and listening. The young research-participants find themselves in an interesting position; they are situated between different layers and temporalities of migration since they neither have come to Chiapas as refugees in the 1980's nor have they left La Gloria in order to find better futures elsewhere (yet)¹⁵⁴. They are situated in between their grandparents' refugee experiences in form of stories and anecdotes which they have been told, triggering postmemorial imagining and repertoire, while their own future-aspirations are continually shaped by the tales and stories that circulate about migration. Pasts and futures are inherently linked; we use information from the past when imagining our future, subsequently these imaginations themselves become memories in narrative acts when we remember our anticipations; 'imagining the future is a kind of nostalgia' (The Atlantic 2017). Similar to postmemory these acts of remembrance are not anchored in eye-witnessed lived experience but rather find their cognitive origin in imagination and intersubjective narrative acts. Young people imagine retrospectively (pasts that they did not live themselves - postmemory) as well as anticipatory when they aspire to yet-to-be-lived futures (and talk about them) within a continuum of migration as the principal source of their own and their family's subsistence. Young people playfully mediate the stories from the past and include them in their own project of self, while they at the same time partake in the creation of new forms of memory through storytelling; the memory of migration with all its inherent expectations and possibilities. The ambivalent notions and emotions attached to migration narratives have to be seen as embedded in a wider system of economic necessity however develop a dynamic and importance of their own through consistent re-telling.

Michelle Bellino describes young people in Guatemala as 'stuck' in a situation of 'wait-hood' in the 'liminal condition between *Guatemala at war* and *Guatemala after war*' (2017 10). In this context, quotidian decisions of 'embracing or avoiding risk [...] when to act and when to withdraw' (2017, 12) as well as different forms of violence become expressions of their active participation. Young research-

¹⁵⁴ At least that was the case at the end of fieldwork in 2018; since then (as of May 2021) most of the 12 young people involved in the theatre play have left La Gloria.

participants in La Gloria experience waithood similarly in between different temporalities of migration; being neither refugees from the 1980's (like their grandparents) nor senders of remittances from the US (like their older siblings, friends and peers). However far from passive, the liminal space of waithood is filled with young people who actively engage in the telling and mediation of the past which makes them civic actors and social and cultural creators on the community level. The concerns about the future due to a lack of opportunities and hope is felt by young people in Guatemala and in the Guatemalan diaspora alike; the desires and expectations to counteract precarity by ways of migration specifically stems from growing up in a situation of waithood.

Migration and Storytelling.

'Our lives are stories. Were it not for stories, our lives would be unimaginable. Stories make it possible to overcome our separateness, to find common ground and common cause. To relate a story is to retrace one's steps going over the ground of one's life again, reworking reality to render it more bearable. A story enables us to fuse the world within and the world without. In this way we gain some purchase over events that confounded us, humbled us, and left us helpless. In telling a story we renew our faith that the world is within our grasp' (Jackson 2002, 245).

At this point I want to give the reader an idea of how migration is perceived locally and how these perceptions and the related stories are framed within global dynamics and hierarchies. The discourse follows the different phases of migratory movements themselves (before, during and after) which enables me to show how local narrative-acts are embedded within wider contexts and how they contribute to the making of anticipatory memory in La Gloria. By telling stories the young people gain ownership over an extremely divergent and divisive domain that deeply affects their lives. It is not my intention to cover the entire spectrum of young people's storytelling, but I rather want to focus on specific aspects along the migrants' journeys that show the complex picture containing divergent understandings of what going to *el Norte* means to different individuals in La Gloria (and subsequently in the US). Migration is not only a constant trope of conversation but deeply affects the material and social tapestry of La Gloria; individuals negotiate its significance differently according to their own experience (first or second-hand) and the context within which it is talked about. The complexity of these processes means that migration narratives can take many forms; among the ones discussed here are anticipatory stories that point to rites-of-passage, memory as a collectivising feature in the diaspora and post-migration stories of warning and adventure. These aspects resonate with the young people's postmemorial processes described in chapter 2, 3, and 4 in terms of their imaginative and mediated investment.

This chapter is structured by the different phases of migration and their subsequent reproduction in narrative acts. Jackson reminds us that ‘stories have a habit of generating stories’ (2002, 233), so I intend to follow the cycles of migration storytelling starting from the migration experience itself to the aftermath where people reflect about their own (and others’) migration experiences which in turn influence the anticipation of future mobilities imagined by those who have not left (yet).

Retrospection: Internal and external meanings of migration, social re-production, and collective identification through ‘migration-memory’.

The ways in which migration is imagined and conceptualised locally in La Gloria are complex. Migration and anticipatory memory (telling and re-telling of migration tales) affect local relations and identifications. Under the conditions of economic hardship in rural marginality ‘sending’ a young male relative to *el Norte* (or *Playas*) often appears as the only option to ensure the livelihood of the rest of the family. This makes young people the ‘bearers of hope’ for their loved ones in the South of Mexico, as well as potential leaders for the entire community.

During one of my first weeks in Chiapas I am walking down to the ‘bus terminal’ in Comitán to catch a van to La Gloria. ‘Bus terminal’ refers to a parking lot by the side of Comitán’s large municipal market on the southern end of the city from where ‘short distance’ transport departs. While long-distance transport to the Guatemalan border leaves from further up in the town-centre the *combis* waiting on this parking-lot serve a lot of the marginal towns throughout the border region. This is also where the La Gloria-*combi* arrives and leaves about four times daily, mostly for La Gloria residents to do their shopping on the large *Central de Abastos* (municipal market) or to run other errands in Comitán (bureaucratic paperwork, bank-visits, send or receive mail etc.), CoBaCh, *Secundaria*, and *Primaria* teachers use these busses to travel to La Gloria in the morning and back in the afternoon. As soon as I enter the parking-lot, I realise that it will be a while until the La Gloria-*combi* leaves. Juan (the owner of La Gloria’s *combi* business) and one of the drivers (also named Juan) are sitting in the otherwise empty van with all the doors and windows open and the seats in lying-down position. They are drinking soda and chatting away. ‘Hey *güero* how is it going? We are leaving in just one second’, Juan (boss) is giving me a cheeky smile, we both know that this is not true. I reciprocate the laughter and the joke by saying: ‘Oh, so I better reserve my seat straight away’. He laughs and we are both aware that the *combi* will only leave when all seats are taken. Juan (boss) excuses himself and says that he must take care of something, but says I should stick around and entertain Juan (driver) while he is waiting for more passengers. I sit down in the co-pilot seat and start talking about this and that with Juan; the life of a *combi*-driver, people we know in La Gloria, nice places in

Chiapas. I tell him that I lived in Guatemala for many years and that I have a girlfriend there. 'In Guatemala?', Juan seems surprised, 'I've only been there a couple of times, to San Miguel Acatán with my dad. He showed me this piece of land by the side of a steep slope and said: "Look son, this could be yours for the future" and I was like: "How on earth am I going to feed my family off a ravine like that?". He was a bit upset back then but a couple of months later we spoke again and decided that it was best for me to go up there *pa'l Norte* to help our family down here, I was only 22'. I listen to his story and ask him how he felt about going. 'You know *güero*, it wasn't really all about what I wanted or not, it's the necessity you know? I had to do it for my family so that they could have a better life'. I nod knowingly even though my own migration experience has mostly been driven by choice. What his experience in the US was like I want to know. 'Oh *güero*, there is just so many vices out there so much temptation, drinking and all those other things. It wasn't for me, so I came back. Oh, also the *gringos*¹⁵⁵ are not very happy about us being there, I tell you that', Juan laughs which makes me think that he is saying this last sentence in a euphemistic way (from fieldnotes 26/10/2017).

The locally anchored prestige of La Gloria's 'bearers of hope' (the ones who emigrate to support their family / community) and its attached appreciations and expectations quickly shift along the migration route. A certain transformation takes place in the way young migrants are being seen and evaluated. They set off from their hometown as 'bearers of hope' however are quickly turned into symbols of danger and fear while moving through the 'migration region' (Jonas & Rodriguez 2014, 1). Jonas & Rodriguez describe how the constant flow of migratory movements from Central America to the US has transformed the towns along the migrant trail thus the geography and the discourses within it; constituting a region of its own which is profoundly influenced and inevitably shaped by migration:

'Bus companies provided transportation for the migrants [...] local police developed routines to inspect or shake down the migrants who might be carrying money (or to abuse the migrant women); commercial establishments and safe houses offered special arrangements for fast-moving migrants [...] small employers provided temporary work for those who run out of money in the passage; political leaders debated policy responses to the migrant stream; and religious and human rights workers acted to lessen the misery and vulnerability of the human flow in places long the migrant trail' (2014, 42).

Migration has become the primary aspect that characterises the region economically, socially, and politically establishing itself as a constant trope of conversation, being debated among a multitude of people whose lives are fundamentally shaped by migration. Anti-migrant sentiments are just as

¹⁵⁵ Common (slightly derogatory) term for US-Americans throughout Latin America.

common as acts of solidarity, both react to what is being perceived as a phenomenon, always within the framework of 'migration as a problem'. Whether people display hostility towards migrants or empathise with their plight, the young people who have been sent on their way as 'bearers of hope' are seen differently once on the migration journey. They become carriers of danger and fear¹⁵⁶, either in the xenophobic way of fearing a stranger or in the compassionate way of 'fearing for' the migrants' safety and wellbeing. In both cases it is the migrants' presence that disrupts a supposedly quotidian normality. The presence of migrants in towns along the Central-North-American migration routes however precisely is an integral part of everyday-normalcy for their social and economic tapestry. Young people from La Gloria have grown up in the migrant-region. The Pan-American Highway as well as the Guatemala-Mexico border are 'hotspots' of Central America-US migration, both in immediate proximity to La Gloria. In Mexico (specifically in the North) an increase of anti-migration sentiments and their expression in acts of public protest could be noted as a response to the emergence of (and media attention to) large migrant caravans in 2018. Large groups of Central Americans set off from their home countries (mostly Honduras and El Salvador) travelling together (mostly on foot) northwards with the goal of reaching the US. This led the Trump-administration to toughen controls at the US-Mexico border as well as negotiate so called 'safe third-country agreements' with other Central American governments (most importantly Mexico and Guatemala, New York Times 2019). This means that migrants passing through either Mexico or Guatemala were obliged to apply for asylum there and ceased to be eligible for asylum-visas in the US i.e., they became immediately deportable back to these 'safe third countries'. As a result of these political decisions, large groups of migrants got stuck on the Mexico-US border (most prominently in Tijuana) as well as on the Guatemalan-Mexico border most prominently in Tapachula, Chiapas. The reaction from the local population was mixed, many initiatives sparked to support migrants, however also largely attended public protests surged promoting slogans such as 'Tijuana first', harassing migrants, and calling for them to 'go home' (The Guardian 2018).

These Mexico and Central America-wide discourses are significant to the ways migration is conceptualised and narrated in La Gloria and by people residing elsewhere. Emigrants from La Gloria are Mexican citizens (see the federal state's large-scale naturalisation campaigns for Guatemalan refugees in 2004, Ruiz-Lagier 2013a, 228) and therefore could be considered exempt from these forms of moral panic, at least within Mexico. In fact however, migrants from La Gloria (or elsewhere in Chiapas) run danger of being subsumed in such imaginaries due to being strangers from Mexico's

¹⁵⁶ Or also as threats that can pollute an imagined 'national hygiene', an aspect that has been highlighted and intensified worldwide during the recent sanitary crisis due to Covid-19 (2020-2021). I have decided not to expand on the many influences that the pandemic and its implications have had on La Gloria and the sentiments towards migrants since my ethnographic data is more centred around the time prior (2017-2019).

indigenous South and due to their Guatemalan family origins. The Mexico-wide discourses of xenophobic attitudes to anyone from the South (manifested in the slur *sudacas*¹⁵⁷) and the discrimination towards symbols of indigeneity are implicit in these attitudes. The moral panic discourse is amplified when these travellers reach the US where anti-migration rhetoric has been part of public debates for a long time (for the history of these discourses in the US see DeGenova & Peutz 2010 among others) and where Mexican and Central American citizens alike face backlash and stereotyping. Especially in the past two decades border and migration policies have become some of the most divisive issues of US media-debates almost immediately dividing the public into pro- and anti-migration camps. US-politicians either ‘tread carefully’ around the topic to avoid antagonising either of the two fractions or try to win over one specific side by strongly positioning themselves. With the election of Donald Trump as US-president in 2016 anti-migration rhetoric entered the federal government’s official discourse, especially present in debates around the project of building a concrete wall along the entire length of the US-Mexican border, a form of visual separation that to a certain extent symbolises the entire debate. 2020 saw an intensification of these debates and a reinforcement of nationality and borders in the wake of the sanitary crisis due to Covid-19.

As we can see the processes of migration-memory constituted through telling and re-telling are not isolated from wider public and transnational discourses around migration. Juan’s euphemistic understatement of Americans not being ‘very happy’ about the presence of migrants shows a high awareness of being the implicit targets of public anti-migration rhetoric and everyday xenophobic attitudes in the US and Mexico. Juan’s narrative spans the entire spectrum from Guatemala to the US, first dismissing the land in San Miguel Acatán as a potential way of generating income and finally travelling north to the US, strongly stressing that this happened out of ‘necessity’ not out of ‘choice’. These aspects are common within the domain of what I call ‘migration memory’ throughout this chapter and strongly influences the ways in which young listeners of these stories imagine their own futures and aspirations. Young migrants (and pre-migrants) are aware of the hopes and expectations towards them in La Gloria. They equally are aware of the ways in which their presence is problematized throughout their (anticipated) migration trajectory. The ambivalence is eminent here when young travellers are ‘being positioned’ and find themselves in between the hopeful expectations of their family and community in Chiapas and the sometimes hostile, sometimes empathetic problematisation of their presence in the US and Mexico. They are at the same time the ‘bearers of hope’ and aspirations for a better future, as well as dangerous and endangered elements disrupting contemporary peace and stability and causing division. Migration-related storytelling and memory develops in between these two extremes of perception. Migrant performativity and the young

¹⁵⁷ Derogatory term describing people originating from further south i.e., Mexican-South (Chiapas) or Central America.

people's aspirations and imaginations of potential futures occur exactly inside these binaries where notions of self and futurity are constantly negotiated in between being admired and being feared, between bearing the hopes of family and friends back home and being made into problematic subjects as migrants, between feeling taken into account in their home communities and feeling excluded and out-of-place in their migratory surroundings. This stark contrast impacts the telling of 'first-hand' as well as 'second-hand' experiences, the young research participants' futurity is strongly informed by listening to migration-memory narratives. Elsewhere I have expanded on the 'everyday surrealism' that young post-migrants experience (Gembus 2017, 9) which I find equally applicable here for the situation of my young interlocutors who are trying to make sense of their present and future through the narratives of other peoples' stories from the past.

The 'hostile environment' created for Mexicans and Central Americans in the US (and elsewhere) forms part of most stories told by returnees and subsequently by others in La Gloria. Migration-experiences usually were not the first topics that came up in my conversations with La Gloria residents, maybe partly due to an attempt of avoiding causing offense to me as a white foreigner who potentially could be a *gringo* himself. However, people's own or others' migration experience often did form part of conversations that continued over time and where relationships started to emerge. Migrant performativity and migrant-storytelling (two of the central aspects constituting migrant-memory) are influenced and shaped by the expectations and necessities of people in La Gloria. The moral panic promoted by anti-migration protesters, media-outlets, politicians, and others who form part of the anonymous structures further frame these migration-narratives.

Social Re-production and collective identification through memory.

The young people's strategies of navigating the symbolic and practical complexities of migration are framed by the ways in which they are positioned as migrant-subjects, however migration also has lasting impacts on collective processes in La Gloria. The constant departure of young people has effects on the system of social re-production. As discussed in the introduction of this thesis, definitions of being 'young' are also shaped by where one is positioned on the 'migration-spectrum' (migrant / non-migrant, returnee, etc.). Being a young person in La Gloria is connoted with migratory aspirations and the act of migrating itself is intertwined with the transition to adulthood (coming of age) as we have seen (pp.42ff.). When walking around with Matias on one of my first days in town he made me aware of a number of initiatives (cultural and educational projects, football teams, entrepreneurial endeavours etc.) that used to exist and ceased to operate due to the leaders moving away to make money elsewhere. The absence of young adults of a certain age (early twenties-mid-thirties), particularly men can clearly be felt in La Gloria's streets, and is quantified in Óscar Gil-García's work

on the 'Prospera Cash Transfer Program' in La Gloria (Gil-García 2015). He notes a 'reshape of the demographic makeup of the community' where 'women outnumber boys and men, particularly among the working age population' (15-44 years of age, Gil-García 2015, 6-7), which he refers back to age- and gender-specific migration patterns. My observation is that women who migrate usually also fall within the same age group, all female Jocox-members for example have left La Gloria permanently at the time of writing (May 2021). The absence of adults of a certain age impedes the development of local initiatives. Be it a youth football team captained and trained by a talented player who recently graduated high-school, a youth group dedicated to folkloric expression (dance), a homework-help group or an internet-café; these are examples of youth organising initiatives and collaborations which eventually stopped due to the leaders (and large parts of the participants) emigrating. Especially when visiting La Gloria in 2019 and 2020 after fieldwork had officially ended, I noticed the changing face of the youth population. Most young people that belonged to the CoBaCh graduating class of 2018 or 2019 were not to be seen in the streets anymore however I noticed several adults (in their forties) who were unknown to me. In September 2019, a recent returnee of this age-group was appointed *Agente Municipal* (La Gloria's local representative), he had been in the US for at least the last ten years. Out of the twelve young people that formed part of the Jocox youth and theatre group only four remained in La Gloria as of March 2020, at the time of writing in May 2021 only one former group-member continues to reside there. In 2019 and 2020 the few remaining members (most of whom were part of the younger cohort and still hadn't graduated from high school) made an effort to continue the youth-group's activities. They reached out to fellow CoBaCh students and those from the *Secundaria* to recruit new members, however with limited success. The activities of the Jocox group that started as part of my research involvement basically ceased after a last performance in March 2020.

What does all of this tell us for the process of storytelling and memory? Migration is disruptive on many different levels specifically felt in ruptures of social reproduction but also in ruptures of intergenerational transmission. Both the social reproduction of town (in form of the mentioned youth initiatives) as well as the collective memory (in form of the uniformly told La Gloria-story) are threatened by the disrupting implications of migration. The efforts of establishing continuity in both of these domains (social reproduction and collective memory) are promoted by a group of older La Gloria residents who fear for the future of their town which they try to counteract by encouraging the appointment of recent returnees to important administrative roles within the community, organising the annual events linked to ancestral (Akateko) tradition such as the coronation ceremony and the retelling of the La Gloria-story and arranging for young people to participate in folkloric dance presentations to represent 'Akateko culture' and their town elsewhere. Despite these efforts the

problems of continuity remain visible and tangible in both domains. The young people's supposed 'loss of their history and culture' is counteracted by the efforts of community leaders such as Matias in his role as *promotor cultural*. During our first recorded conversation he elaborated on his work: 'I am constantly trying to explain this to the young people; oftentimes we want to compare ourselves to other people from other countries and places. But that should not happen because we have our own roots which we must conserve and practice. It is also good to share other people's ideas and cultures, but you should never separate yourself from the things that will forever make you who you are, and I think that is what has affected many young people that go to the United States' (Interview 20/11/2017). The individual rupturing effects mentioned here by Matias have further implications for the creation of collective belonging in La Gloria. Apart from collectivising forms of memory and cultural symbols of continuity (which are partly being rejected by young people), migration-memory surges as an emerging form of memory with further implications for collectivity and local identification.

La Gloria is part of the flows and vicissitudes of transnational migration networks, which means that information, money, and bodies circulate in ways that are far from the unidirectional linearity often assumed. Instead, there is a constant multidirectional flow depending on events and changing circumstances in all the localities that form part of the network. The population of La Gloria and the social tapestry of town changes in sometimes unprecedented ways for example when large groups embark on organised migration journeys or when equally large groups return all at once due to deportation. As it is common in other parts of the region some of these return-migratory movements are linked to the town's annual patron-saint celebration (Burrell 2005). In this complex and constantly changing social landscape migration-talk (migration-memory) emerges as a persistent element, providing a specific form of continuity (and unity) within La Gloria and among transnationally connected La Glorians residing elsewhere. The telling and re-telling of migration tales is one of the continuities that *Ja'eb a Gloria* ('Those from La Gloria' my translation) share; an act that is legible to anybody who has some connection to and investment in it as a place. In this way the colloquial, ephemeral narrative-acts of migration-talk and migration-memory are similar to and exist alongside the publicly told and uniformly stylised acts of remembrance (such as the *feria de San Miguel* and the *baile del venado*) which intent purposefully to create continuity in memory.

Tales of Warning and Adventure.

The collective implications of migration-talk and the link to collective forms of identification establish migration-memory as a socially meaningful practice. I want to focus here on how the collectively told stories about migration make their way back to La Gloria (through the multiple connections and channels of communication) and how these take form when being reproduced locally. These stories

take a variety of different forms and genres; I am specifically interested here in stories with undertones of warning and adventure.

I get dropped off by the Pan-American highway crossing (*el desvio* discussed in chapter 1 pp.80ff.) and sit down in front of one of two shops alongside the five-kilometre dirt-road that leads to La Gloria's town-centre. A group of drunks from La Gloria have made it a daily habit to walk the five kilometres to the highway crossing and spend most of their days here either drinking or trying to get money together for the next bottle of *Charrito* (which costs about 10 pesos = £ 0.50). The *desvio* is also a place of traffic since anybody travelling either to the Guatemala-Mexico border (in the South) or to Comitán (towards the North) passes by here. I wait to get picked up by one of La Gloria's communal taxis when suddenly one of the drunks, known by the name of *el Terror*, sits down next to me. It is hard to tell his age, but I have been told he is in his early twenties. He looks at me through glassy eyes and asks: 'Do you know what happens after death?'. His question takes me by surprise, and I have no idea how to respond. *El Terror* does not seem to be bothered and continues: 'It's just that one of my *compadres*¹⁵⁸ died walking in the desert and I want to know what happened to him'. I know even less what to tell him now and just reply by saying 'I am sorry'. One of his drinking-buddies leaves the shop right this second and bursts out laughing when he sees the two of us sitting there. 'Don't listen to that fool' he yells in my direction while pointing at *el Terror*. He hands him the plastic bottle of *Charrito* and turns back to me 'everybody knows this dude's crazy' (from fieldnotes 12/12/2017).

The quite real possibility of death and other existential threats form part of the journeys that migrants embark on to get to *el Norte*. The dangers that specifically undocumented migrants are facing on their journey towards the US have been widely portrayed in documentary films, news reports, feature articles and other types of media publications. Images (moved or still) of migrants riding on top of the *la bestia*-trains¹⁵⁹ as well as the more recent pictures of large groups of people walking together in migrant-caravans have come to symbolise much more than just the journeys of desperate people from Central America trying to reach the US. These images have become iconic representations of the entire phenomenon and domain of migration. This is reflected in the narratives that circulate among La Gloria residents. Emigration from La Gloria has several patterns; labour-migration to other places within Mexico is just as common¹⁶⁰ as migration to the US. Despite being only one of many migration-patterns, the act of crossing the border to the US certainly is the most talked about. The crossing of

¹⁵⁸ Buddies or Friends – my translation.

¹⁵⁹ Cargo trains that run from Chiapas to the north of Mexico (border with the US) and are used frequently by undocumented migrants as means of transport, often riding on top of the train.

¹⁶⁰ For example, to the *Riviera Maya* in Quintana Roo or to the agriculturally rich states in the north such as Tijuana.

Mexico's northern border to the United States has attained a type of symbolic meaning countrywide; it is reproduced in various genres of popular-culture such as music (especially within the genre of *corridos* which has a long history of implementing migrant-stories as one of their most frequently reoccurring themes, Chew-Sánchez 2006) as well as in the more middle and upper-class associated 'fine-arts'. In La Gloria, these wide and generally disseminated narratives mix with the concrete stories and accounts of relatives, friends, and acquaintances who have undertaken the journey northwards. The crossing itself is often invoked as a synecdoche for the entire domain of migration, within which euphemisms such as 'walking in the desert' become self-sufficient buzzwords and reproducible figures of speech masking the very real and lethal dangers that extra-legal border-crossing between the US and Mexico contains.

El Terror makes use of one of these euphemisms ('walking in the desert') when telling me about his friend dying in a border-crossing attempt, his overall account however is not euphemised by this in the least; to the contrary the intensity and depth of his grief and suffering are rather amplified by the existential questions in his narrative. 'Walking in the desert' might seem a mild substitute for the actual dangers of extra-legal border crossing however the threatening and warning undertones of such narratives are not lost on the listener, especially when invoked among a group of people where first-hand experiences and second-hand reproduction is frequent and 'migration-talk' normalised. I do not think that *el Terror* has actually been 'walking in the desert' himself, however he is regularly exposed to the telling of such narratives and participates actively in their reproduction thus in the making of migration-memory. Rather than individually anchored, memory here seems to exist in a collective manner, being constructed in the intersubjective narrative-acts between interlocutors. These narrative-acts remind me of Connerton's 'commemorative ceremonies' discussed in chapter 2 (pp.93ff.). Engaging in local migration-talk indicates belonging to La Gloria's collective self no matter where one is located. In La Gloria migration-talk is so frequent in quotidian conversational practice that it is transmitted and expressed in and as memory and these modalities of belonging span transnationally. On a local level the collectivising narratives manage to include even those who do not directly form part of the first-hand experienced but rather stretch to anyone who has an emotional investment in the stories and their protagonists (even if the storytellers have not migrated themselves). Migration narratives exist almost in the form of a general 'pool', a collective repertoire that anybody can engage in regardless of whether these narratives are portraying themselves, their friends, relatives, or others. It is this collective repertoire which constitutes migration-memory, a memory that in *el Terror's* case is invoked to warn others of the lethal dangers of border-crossing as well as an outlet for his grief and sorrow. Memory practised in this way finds itself in a constant flux

of recreation just like migration itself exists in the constant flux of people's movement and their social and psychological implications.

The lethal potentialities inherent in *el Terror's* narrative represent an underlying theme which reoccurs in many accounts and resonates with the stressing of sufferings and lethality present in the first- and second-hand accounts of the *conflicto armado, el refugio* and the La Gloria-story. Any type of collective and public re-telling of La Gloria's past as well as accounts being shared in the private space include brutalities, often in graphic detail. Emphasising the real possibility of death during 'those days' (i.e., the 1980's and 1990's) is often juxtaposed with the tranquillity and safety of 'nowadays', a meaning that extends also to La Gloria as a 'safe-space'. The construction of La Gloria as a 'safe space' has been discussed in chapter 1 (pp.65ff.) in regard to the young people's making of space, the same aspect is implicit here in spatiotemporal form i.e., La Gloria as a space becomes synonymous with the safe present. This rhetoric construction of La Gloria is recurrent in both postmemorial as well as migration narratives. As I intend to show migration-narratives do not appear as separate categories or taxonomies but rather as interconnected genres and connotations of migration-accounts that influence and shape each other and at times appear together.

It is a Saturday late morning, and I am in the centre of the regional capital of Comitán buying paint for a mural project with the youth group. One of the *combi* drivers from La Gloria known by the name of *Botas*¹⁶¹ is doing me a favour by adding an extra stop to the usual route so that I can pick the paint up and bring it back with me to La Gloria. We have become quite good friends throughout the many *combi*-rides I have undertaken in the past couple of months. *Botas* likes a chat especially at 11 am on a Saturday when the minivan is half-empty. We talk about this and that; sooner or later the topic usually comes to what I secretly started calling 'migration-gossip'. I haven't seen one of his fellow-drivers for a couple of weeks and *Botas* tells me that he left for the US, again. 'He got there in the end but *poca madre*¹⁶² it took them 13 days of walking through the desert – 13 days imagine!!! - it wasn't that long when I went many years ago. *Dios mio*¹⁶³ his feet must've hurt like hell with the heat and everything' he says all of this with a rather serious face but then suddenly starts laughing. 'He told me that there were some bits where they had to climb on rocks, and he almost fell and died and then there were snakes and other dangerous animals. I'm telling you – all the things that can happen on these journeys it's crazy; but hey that's what you risk for trying to provide a better life for your family right?' I am listening to *Botas'* excitement while we drive through the idyll rural monotony of

¹⁶¹ Meaning 'boots', a nickname he gained by wearing boots at a very young age which has stuck with him until today.

¹⁶² Mexican slang expressing any kind of astonishment.

¹⁶³ 'My god' used in the same way as in English.

the Southern-Mexican border region when he says: 'it's not like down here. *aqui no pasa nada*¹⁶⁴' (from fieldnotes 15/03/2018).

The complexities of what going to *el Norte* means for different individuals in La Gloria are clearly exemplified here. *Botas*, a US-migration veteran, emphasises the dangerous aspects of the 'journey through the desert' just as *el Terror* does. His account however calls on notions of personal involvement when he compares his friend's experience with his own from some years ago. The story *Botas* tells me in the *combi* is full of danger, exhaustion, and pain however his perspective is not one simply reproducing somebody else's account, but rather a story of events and happenings that he experienced himself in person and that continue to be experienced by many people in his surroundings. Rather than personalising the narrative, *Botas'* account invokes distance to the events that are happening to his friend and colleague more than 3000 kilometres further north. He retrospectively mixes danger and humour, which reminded me of the ways older people talk about their 'wild pasts'. Listening to him it did not feel like *Botas* was 'warning' me or anybody who was listening (*el Terror's* account above is much more likely to be read as such). I was rather reminded of adventure-tales that mix danger, excitement, and humour. *Botas* seems to enjoy talking about migration, especially to an outsider like myself, since these stories are of wide popular interest, connoted with the 'exciting' appeal of life and death. *Botas* here 'dips' into the aforementioned collective pool of migration-memory. By telling the story of his colleague's migration journey he engages the repertoire of migration-narratives which in this example function as his conversational currency, emphasising the richness of his own experience and potentially appealing to a wide range of listeners, including me as a European white foreigner. By telling the tales of border-crossings, *Botas* establishes himself as a person who has seen things and knows about the wider world and how it works. The casual and humorous telling of migration-tales allows him to position himself as a person of interest, and as a way of relating to his foreign counterpart (me), creating a situation where the two of us 'find common ground and common cause' (Jackson 2002, 245) through storytelling and create a connection through by talking about the topic of border-crossing.

Botas' account has further implications for La Gloria as a space and the way it is talked about. The distance he portrays to the dangerous and adventurous border-crossing tales from the North of Mexico, is amplified when juxtaposed with the ways La Gloria residents talk about living in the Southern border-region. Life in the sparsely inhabited South-East of Mexico is often connoted with monotony, stressing the non-eventful humbleness of life in marginal rurality. *Botas* says: *aqui no pasa nada*, while others might say: *aqui está todo tranquilo*¹⁶⁵. I have heard these phrases regularly when

¹⁶⁴ 'Nothing ever happens here' – my translation.

¹⁶⁵ 'Everything is calm here' – my translation.

asking people to describe the place in which they live and noticed that it is particularly invoked when comparing current quotidian life in La Gloria with the dangerous and chaotic past of civil-war and refugee narratives or with migration-narratives like *Botas*'. In his narrative, dangers and excitements mix and create the adventurous notions of migration; arguably the aspect of 'migration as adventure' becomes more exciting taking the quite real possibility of death (from the *el Terror* vignette) into account. These notions of excitement are generally absent from narratives of the past however there is a certain 'pride' that many La Gloria residents take in their history. I remember that it did not take longer than five minutes during my first visit that the town's history was mentioned and told to me as something that distinguishes La Gloria from other places. Again, my obvious foreignness ('out-of-placeness') is most likely to have played a role here; my interlocutors second-guessing that the town's history was one of my study-interests. Sufferings from the past are treated as common knowledge and among the first things that many La Gloria residents want an outsider to know, instead of being silenced or hidden behind the doors of private trauma. Pride is present in the telling of past accounts as well as in the stories about present migrations. *Botas* takes pride in the story he tells from the collective repertoire of migration-memory. The telling and re-telling of the dangerous and traumatic past and the exciting (and equally dangerous) present are crucial notions in the making of local identifications; they are being portrayed by residents as distinguishing features that make La Gloria the place it is, especially when presented to outsiders. Both retrospective as well as anticipatory memory play an important role in the making of local and collective identifications, contributing to the feeling of La Gloria being an exciting place connected to a transnational past and transnational futures.

We have seen how the telling and re-telling of narratives from the domain of migration-memory has collectivising effects on those involved. The young research participants feel inclined to engage in migration-talk and create intersubjectivity with others and with their community through the collective 'pool' of migration-memory. Migration becomes present in their imagination even before they embark on migratory journeys through these communicative acts. The intersubjective narrative acts themselves become memory and are being remembered and activated by young people when anticipating future potentialities. 'Imagining the future is a kind of nostalgia' (The Atlantic 2017) when young research participants' anticipate their future by remembering conversations and stories told by peers and older community members from the collective 'pool' of migration-memory. This process is what I refer to as 'anticipatory memory'.

Anticipation: Rites-of-Passage and Expectations.

It is a weekday in March, the commemorative event and the first public showing of the theatre play are still at least eight weeks away. I am sitting on the *plaza* with Marco who has been one

of the most regular participants in the creative workshops. He is the first to arrive, so we kill time until the others arrive by doing a bit of chit-chat and cutting papers in preparation for the workshop. Marco's face suddenly turns serious when he says: 'Malte I have to tell you something.' I put the scissors down and look at him. He continues: 'I might not be able to participate in the event after all. It's not because I don't like what we do or anything it's more that I don't think I will be here – like – I will soon leave *al otro lado*¹⁶⁶, maybe already after the vacations.' I am a bit disappointed since Marco has been an integral part of the group so far but also, I do not want to make him feel bad so I say: 'Well the school-holidays start in June, after the event, so you could still take part.' 'Noooo' Marco exclaims 'not the end of term holidays I am talking about theese holidays, right now after Easter. You know both of my siblings have asthma and the medication is expensive and well, we have a *conocido* who is reliable and organises these journeys, but he is leaving very soon so this my chance.' I realise that Marco looks worried and am not quite sure what to do with the situation; do I tell him about the dangers of the journey (things I have only heard but not seen for myself)? Do I remind him of the importance of finishing his high-school degree? Or do I abstain from giving him any advice at all? I ask him how he feels about leaving. His face changes immediately, he smiles at me and now looks almost enthusiastic. 'Well, I don't know what is going to happen, but I've heard so much about that place and I want to see it, go there to see, and experience different things, you know? But yeah, at the same time I am sad about leaving everybody behind here; my family, friends and all the other people in town' (from fieldnotes 12/03/2018).

Excitement plays a role in the way Marco talks about his anticipated journey however mixed with nervousness. Nervous-excitement seems not an unusual feeling for a young man in his last year of high-school who is reckoning with different options for the future. In Marco's case his transition to life after graduation occurs within a framework of inter-family and town-wide pressures and expectations. Marco is the first-born of his family which means that his desire to leave is initially driven by economic necessity. Being in a position where leaving becomes a real possibility now invokes emotions of nervous-excitement which make us think of general sentiments related to young people leaving home for the first time. I could relate to his words thinking about my personal journey when I was Marco's age, leaving my family-home in Germany to work for an NGO in Guatemala, even though my decision happened under drastically different circumstances.

Migration manifests itself in La Gloria in both concrete and pliable ways which are inter-connected; two (or more)-storey houses and large (and expensive) *trocas* stand as material manifestations of

¹⁶⁶ 'to the other side' – another synonym for the US similar to *el Norte*.

remittances; fuelling the 'successful migrant' narratives that circulate in town. The re-telling of these stories together with the concrete material symbols are connoted with expectations towards young people growing up here. For many adults in La Gloria a young person's departure represents a certain *prueba de fuego*¹⁶⁷ which shows the capability of a family- and community-member to provide for others. This is specifically true for young men who are often seen as responsible to provide economically and materially, however young women also migrate especially when they have family 'on the other side'. Young men and young women are more likely to be taken serious as full and active members of their families (and community¹⁶⁸) once they manage to send money via remittances. As seen earlier in the thesis (pp.187ff.) migration can take on meanings that relate to 'rites of passage' and 'coming of age'. The expectations and pressures to migrate as the first step of becoming a 'full' member of the family / community are strongly felt by young people, but they also are accompanied by seemingly exciting opportunities of escaping the controlled and limiting *pueblo*-life as an adolescent. This ambivalence gives us an insight into the complex world of Marco's emotions, in between the extremes of apprehensiveness and exhilaration. In La Gloria, northward migration is conceptualised and experienced as one way for young men to become adults. The telling of stories that invoke migration as 'rites of passage' or 'coming of age' confirm the practice as locally and socially meaningful. Young people's strategies to be heard generally seem to relate to the past as we have seen when the young actors in the theatre-play ground their own contemporary opinions within a continuum of past-narratives (the La Gloria-story, see pp.109ff.). Equally, young people migrate to counteract precarity which is recognised by older generations who are reminded of their own journey. In both cases young people engage with frames from the past intelligible to former generations, in order to manifest their own position in local hierarchies.

Storytelling in form of retrospective and anticipatory memory in combination with the physical act of migration gives us an insight into young people's 'strategies' to make their voices heard i.e., the symbolic-ephemeral and physical-concrete ways in which my young interlocutors claim and inhabit an active role and place in local hierarchies. In the play the young actors situate themselves within the continuum of ancestral storytelling thus building on the authority of past narratives to make their own voices heard. At the same time, they engage in narratives around migration and migrate (which most of them have done as of May 2021), to be recognised as full and active community-members. The young people's active participation in form of storytelling is framed by structures of family and genealogical hierarchies and expectations (i.e. migration as coming of age), however more than a simple reaction to these structural boundaries I want the reader to understand these strategies and

¹⁶⁷ Literally 'fire-proof' used to describe an indicative and decisive test, similar to the way 'litmus test' is used in English.

¹⁶⁸ As is evidenced by the recent appointment of early / mid-30-year-old returnees from the US as local representatives.

narrative-acts as participation in their own right; constituted in what Ortner describes as the ‘dialectical synthesis of the opposition between “structure” (or the social world as constituted) and “agency” (or the interested practices of real people)’ (2006, 16-17).

Summary: Giving meaning to memory through narration and storytelling.

As we have seen throughout this chapter narration and storytelling are crucial in the process of creating memory and linking different temporalities of migration. Young people participate in retrospective storytelling when performing postmemorial repertoires about the *conflicto armado* and *el refugio* (on and off-stage) as well as anticipatory memory where their contemporary lives (and future aspirations) are continuously shaped by migration and its attached narratives. Young people are subject to and actors in the telling of the stories about migration; their lives are profoundly shaped by the omnipresent migration narratives that create expectations, fears as well as possibilities. They playfully partake in the creation of new and contemporary forms of memory through storytelling. As we have seen (in chapter 2, 3, and 4) memory is flexible and created in the constant flux of negotiation and mediation. Marco’s (and other young people’s) aspirations and anticipations of future mobilities are informed by implicit and explicit storytelling from the past; refugee- as well as contemporary US-migration-narratives, which sometimes come in the form of warning or adventure stories. The collectivising effects of communal storytelling about migration trigger ambivalent notions and emotions for those reckoning with possibilities of future mobility, located somewhere between excitement and fear. The ‘genres’ of migrant-stories are interconnected and give us an insight into the complex picture of what migration means to different individuals in La Gloria: the exciting possibilities inherent in adventure and coming-of-age tales constantly shaped by warnings of the journey’s fatal danger and town-wide expectations towards young people. These aspects are not singular to migration tales and link in with the postmemorial processes of young people’s ‘past-making’; through consistent re-telling narratives develop a dynamic and social importance of their own. Both modalities of memory; the telling and re-telling of past as well as the narrative dynamics of migration-stories, create possibilities of collective identification through a shared past and a shared future and influence aspirations and anticipations for the future.

The young participants in the theatre process have neither come to Chiapas as refugees in the 1980’s nor had they embarked on a migration-journey to the United States or elsewhere at the time of fieldwork (2017 and 2018). The lack of first-hand experiences does not prevent them from actively taking part in the telling of both, retrospective and anticipatory memory. These processes of memory and identification always seem to be happening elsewhere. For young people, La Gloria appears as a transitional but at the same time safe space; the core aspects of their future-selves however are

formed elsewhere; rooted in a past shaped by the accounts of the 'refugee-generation' and their anticipations inspired by the collective telling of migration. La Gloria as a place is key in giving continuity between the imaginations of past and future. The 'transitional' young people (the ones who have neither come nor left) bear the task of bridging the ruptures (caused by migration and other divisions) which is reiterated by the active role they play in the making of memories and identities in town.

Chapter 6: Guatemala-journey; 'Zooming Out' and New Contexts

'Things come apart', momentary questioning, imagining alternative futures and more storytelling.

In October 2018, the Jocox theatre troupe was invited to participate in an international film and communications festival called *FicMayab'* ('for and by the indigenous and native people of the Americas', *FicMayab'* 2018, my translation). The festival took place in different locations in Guatemala during which our theatre-play was shown twice; once in the north-western town of Totonicapán and another time in Guatemala-City on the USAC's (Universidad de San Carlos, Guatemala's only autonomous university) central campus. I had initially gotten in touch with *FicMayab'* through a personal contact of mine who was part of the organisational team. The young people were excited about being able to travel to another country, show what they had been working on to a wider public and represent their hometown. We started a crowdfunding campaign for which the young people recorded a video¹⁶⁹ and were able to raise sufficient funds to cover the van-rental and gasoline costs, among others.

This chapter is based on our journey to Guatemala specifically emphasising how it relates to mobility and futurity, both concepts which have been explored throughout the last chapter. The ways in which local storytelling and 'migration-memory' shape and influence my young interlocutors' aspirations for the future is expanded in this chapter by looking at how future-anticipations and negotiations play out differently when happening in a different context. The journey to Guatemala triggered imaginations of alternative futures for the young people and our group, which partly deconstruct partly amplify the discourse laid out in chapter 5.

The day before the festival was going to start, I went to Antigua (Guatemala) to rent a van with Guatemalan license-plates (which will become important later) and drove 300 kilometres across the country to meet the young people at the border-town of La Mesilla. The next seven days would become a unique experience for me as an ethnographer as well as for the young participants and for all of us together as a group. Matias accompanied us in his capacity as cultural promoter as well as Pascual who is the father of one of the young actors as well as our driver. Our journey was full of unexpected encounters and occurrences; both of the pleasant and of the worrisome kind.

It is the first day of our journey. We are on our way from the border (La Mesilla) to Xela, Guatemala's second biggest city located in the northwest, where we will stay the night and hopefully attend the festival's opening ceremony. We are already a bit late, the border crossing took some time but there is still a chance that we make it to Xela for 7 pm on time for the

¹⁶⁹ The video is available here <https://vimeo.com/286443925>

opening ceremony. It is getting dark and I try to keep the group's good mood up by telling them all kinds of things about Huehuetenango and Xela, some young people are asleep in the back while others chat away. Suddenly a loud bang shakes the van and wakes the ones asleep in the back up. We stop, 'is everyone ok?' I turn around and can see that some of them look a bit startled, but everyone seems fine. Pascual (our driver) looks at me and I think I can hear him say 'that's no good'. I get out and realise we are standing on a pitch-dark empty highway curve, just where you want to be when travelling with a group of young people. Pascual, Matias, and I have a look at the damage and realise that the car is fine but that actually both tires on the right-hand-side have popped in a massive pothole behind us. This is a bit of a 'worst case scenario' because it means we won't be able to fix this by ourselves since we only have one spare tire. I see some lights ahead and we carefully drive the car forward and find a small *tienda*. 'Oh, you popped your tire he?' the woman behind the counter seems to know before I even say anything 'this happens about three to four times a day here, they should really come and fix it'. I buy some snacks for everyone since I have a feeling that it will be some time until we'll eat dinner. The woman points to a phone number written on the wall and says that this is the guy to fix tires around here, his name is *el canche*, or Guatemalan vernacular for 'white guy'. *El canche* makes it after about 40 minutes, looking sleepy but saying that it'll only take him a couple of minutes to change both tires. The young people joke around among themselves in the meantime about his nickname. We settle payment and are on our way. It is late now, and I am certain that we will miss the opening ceremony. We only make it as far as Chiquival when we see a massive line of cars. We get talking to a family on the back of a pick-up truck in front of us they seem to have more information and tell us that there has been a massive accident some kilometres ahead and that they are waiting for the *Ministerio Público* to arrive until they release the road, which usually indicates fatalities and sounds like we will be here all night. The family tells us about an alternative route that they will take but point out that it includes quite some steep mountain roads with no pavement. We decide to give it a go and follow the pick-up through a number of tiny towns in the mountains between the departments of Huehuetenango and Totonicapán. Our 15-passenger van is not made for the roads here and we have to leave the car at least twice to help pushing it up an elevation. We finally make it back to the highway and arrive in Xela long after midnight, everybody is exhausted but happy we made it in the end.

On the next day we still get up early. It is the first day where we fully participate in the festival's activities. It is also a travelling day, *FicMayab'* organisational form is described to me as 'nomadic' by the organisers i.e., the activities are only held in the same town for two or three days, after which the core team travels to the next location where it is met and supported by

local organisers. Today we are travelling to (San Miguel) Totonicapán which luckily is less than an hour away. I am happy about the short distance since everybody is still tired from the strains of yesterday's journey. Today everything goes smoothly, and we quickly find Totonicapán's *Teatro Municipal* where we get a first glimpse of the beautiful building in which the event will take place and have lunch together with the rest of the festival's participants. This is also where the young people meet Andrea Ixchiu for the first time, who is a well-known indigenous activist and one of the organisers of *FicMayab'* (it was through a conversation with my wife who suggested to contact her that the idea of participating in the festival first emerged). Andrea comes to our table and greets us in a friendly way. She tells us that they were worried about us last night and that the whole team is very glad that we made it in the end. She gets handed a microphone and makes some general welcomes and announcements for everybody in the room. She explains who is who, and welcomes each group of participants separately; she is specifically keen on a warm welcome for the family-members of the 2012 *Cumbre de Alaska*-massacre victims (Prensa Libre 2016) who are sitting at the table next to us. We also learn that our play will be the first act today, right after the opening ritual, which is held in each location where the festival takes place. We hurry back to the hotel to get ready and manage to come back in time to see a growing number of people gather in front of the Municipal Theatre. It is



6.1 Opening ceremony / ritual of the *FicMayab'* festival in Totonicapán 04/10/2018.

raining so the ritualistic circle of flowers is set up under the front balcony; flowers in four different colours are being laid down by the organisers (and other participants) and everybody standing in a human circle around them is being given a small candle. A woman in *traje* steps forward and is being announced by Andrea Ixchiu as our ceremony's guide; she welcomes everybody warmly and explains the meaning of the different colours (white, red purple and yellow flowers representing the four cardinal points). She takes a step closer to the circle and positions her candle on the floor ('gluing' it to the concrete with its own wax) while making a wish to the *antepasados* (some of them mentioned with first name) to be present and to grant this group of people

permission to carry out their activities and to protect them from harm. She specifically mentions to protect everybody in their travels here and back home which I think is noticed by some of our group's members. Everybody is now invited to do the same and several people step closer to the circle and put their candles in the middle to make a wish to the *antepasados*, either pronouncing their wishes loudly for everybody to hear or silently in their own mind. I look over to see how the seven Jocox-members are reacting to all of this and see them blending in with the general group positioning their candles in the middle of the flower circle and walking back in silence (I do the same). When the ceremony is over Andrea Ixchiu announces our play and invites everybody to walk with us to a smaller building by the side of the theatre where this part of the activity will be held. Almost everybody who participated in the ritual comes with us; Danny one of the young actors walks next to me. 'Are you ready for the play?' I ask him to which he responds: 'Sure should be no problem'. We walk a bit further when Danny suddenly says: 'That ritual was really interesting. I have never really formed part of anything like that; you know we don't really practice all this *antepasados* stuff in La Gloria' (from fieldnotes 04/05/2018 & 05/10/2018).

For the members of the Jocox-group participating in *FicMayab'* was their first exposure to the activities of a cultural and political domain known in Guatemala as the 'Pan-Mayan movement' (Fischer & McKenna Brown 1996, Beyyette & LeCount 2017). Some had participated in the *baile de venado* performances at 'indigenous' events in Chiapas, for example those organised by the CDI¹⁷⁰ (the National [Mexican] Commission for the Development of Indigenous People). These events usually emphasise folkloric forms of expression, presenting dances and music considered 'traditional' (read pre-Hispanic), which often times felt to me like a type of 'indigenous talent show'. Acts of collective spirituality or any form of political positioning about contemporary issues however were mostly absent. The involvement of state-institutions (such as the CDI) in the planning and execution of these events is another aspect that reinforces this impression. *FicMayab'* was different; organised by young indigenous activists and supported by NGOs with a strong emphasis on social change and creative expression gave the event a different feel. The films that were shown throughout *FicMayab'* were almost exclusively focused on contemporary struggles of indigenous groups in Guatemala and the rest of the Americas; namely land-right struggles, protests against mining projects, police brutality, the effects of climate change on indigenous communities and more generally the struggles of political, cultural and economic self-determination and autonomy. It was precisely this focus on contemporary indigenous struggles and issues which placed the event in the here and now however grounded in ancestral connectivity (as invoked during the opening-ritual). The folkloric endeavour of reproducing

¹⁷⁰ Abbreviation according to its letters in Spanish

an authentic pre-Hispanic cultural past was replaced here with the present-day struggles for the rights, recognition, and autonomy of contemporary indigenous people; in a way stressing a political understanding of being *indígena* in addition to cultural forms of self-identification. *FicMayab'* was an entirely new experience for the young members of the Jocox-group which opened up a space to experience (and participate in) novel and contemporary expressions of indigeneity.

The theatre presentation goes well, despite the relatively small audience and the less glamorous space (we present it in a type of sports-hall next to the beautiful baroque-inspired theatre where the main event will take place). After the final bow and the last applause, a crew from a local TV station asks to interview the young actors while the spectators (a lot of them family members of the *Cumbre de Alaska* massacre victims) are looking at a photo exhibition about the history of La Gloria that we brought along to accompany the play. Then it is time to get changed; the young actors are full of energy and chat and yell animatedly on our walk back to the hotel. About thirty minutes later we head back up to the theatre where the main event of the evening is already in full swing. There are various music and dance acts planned before the showing of the films will commence. The entire event is envisioned to be a 'diverse space to show film productions about indigenous themes [...] a space of participation and learning about cultural identity, the struggles to defend mother-earth, memory and the communicative challenges of native and indigenous people' (FicMayab' 2018, my translation). A group of children are just done with their traditional dance performance when we walk in. While some of the acts perform traditional music and dance such as *marimba*, others use rather contemporary forms; a singer-songwriter sings melancholic and revolutionary songs which is followed by a local Hip-Hop group that perform their raps in *K'iche'*, the predominant indigenous language of the region. Some of the Jocox-members are surprised; Azza looks over to me and says: 'Wow I never thought that was possible, there was a group in La Gloria that used to produce rap-songs and put them on Youtube, but mostly in Spanish also a bit in English but never really in Akateko'. The last act of the evening (before the films) is Rebecca Lane a well-known Guatemalan female-MC who has performed in different parts of Latin-America as well as Europe and the US. Her raps are mostly concerned with the social struggles in Guatemala, Rebecca is an outspoken supporter of the feminist as well as the indigenous movements (clearly self-identifying as *mestiza* for example in her song *Mestiza Soul / Alma Mestiza*¹⁷¹). Her commitment to activism is reflected in her music. Today Rebecca performs various of her songs; among them *La Cumbia de la Memoria* which supports the cause of internationally recognising the civil-war atrocities as genocide against the indigenous population, but also others in which

¹⁷¹ Song and video available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P8Y0BB7kh2c>

she talks about street harassment and the role of women in Guatemalan society. I look around and realise that some of the young Jocox-members have left the main hall since cups of hot chocolate, coffee and *champurradas*¹⁷² are being given out to the festival participants. I see the young people watching from upstairs where the theatre has a little gallery. I am wondering what they make of Rebecca’s music; Are they listening to the lyrics and what do they think of the gender discourse that Rebecca is presenting? I walk up the stairs to have a hot chocolate myself and chat to the group. I am surprised when Pascual (our driver) is the first one to bring the gender theme up; ‘Yep lads you heard what the rapper-girl said, you better start respecting women’ he says directed at the male group-members but also clearly audible for the girls who are present. ‘She said don’t stare at me in the streets and keep your hands to yourself – I think that is a really strong message’ (from fieldnotes 05/10/2018).

The new experiences my young interlocutors (as well as myself) made during *FicMayab’* were multi-faceted. The performance of Hip-Hop songs in pre-Hispanic / Mayan languages was a novelty which together with the presence of activist and political registers of Mayanness exposed the young Jocox-members to new practices of indigeneity. These practices rather than attempting to reproduce or recreate an authentic version of a pre-Hispanic past and cultural tradition, are concerned with the situation of Mayans in the present as well as with imaginations of indigenous futures. A contemporary youthful artform (subculture) with roots in the urban centres of the US mixes with a language that originated long before the conquest of the Americas. Mayan activists invoke indigeneity as a fundament of mobilisation for social change; it is here where activists and artists contribute to the collective imagining of futures that go beyond the confines and inequalities of present-day ‘coloniality’ in Guatemala, and actively promote the imagination of indigenous futures. These activists and artists represent a type of indigenous metropolitanism which through their (artistic and activist) practices blur the lines between assumed clear-cut binaries of indigenous-tradition and western-modernity. The Jocox-members were exposed to a group of young social actors who strive to participate as *indígenas* in the making of modern Guatemala which led to a momentary reckoning with alternative futures.

More new experiences: The Ritual in Guatemala-City

A couple of days later we leave Tonicapán and travel to Guatemala-City where the whole group will stay at Barry’s house (who came to La Gloria to facilitate the theatre workshops). It is dark already and we are just done eating a delicious eggs and beans dinner that we improvised. Barry’s place is located in Zone 2 within walking distance from the capital’s old city-centre with its colonial architecture. The house we are in looks like it was built in the 1970’s and

¹⁷² Typical Guatemalan sesame cookies often served with coffee, hot chocolate, or tea.

is very spacious. It is one of those houses once built for an aspiring middle class spreading over two stories, with a pool area and a large garden in the back. However, time has passed and the large bushes and grass, the crumbling cement and the mould clearly tell the story of the residents' economic decline over the past couple of decades, which is representative for both; the old city-centre and the urban Guatemalan middle-class. A once pompous and influential part of town which is now characterised by scarcity and decline. The group's journey around Guatemala has been eventful, involving lots of travelling and two presentations of the theatre-play already. Barry invited the group to stay a night at his place to get to know some of his friends and theatre-colleagues; the idea being to engage in an open workshop to get to know each other through theatre. The activities went well so far but Barry and I have not had a lot of time to communicate about what is going to happen next. During a phone-conversation the day before he told me that one of the guys living with him is a spiritual guide trained by Mayan-shamans in Momostenango. Oscar (his housemate's name) and Barry had come up with the idea of organising a ritual for the group, in order to bond ('connect' as Barry calls it) and to explore a 'deeper level of consciousness' together. I have my reservations about all of this since I do not know Oscar personally and am generally apprehensive about encouraging 'Mayan' spirituality on the young people (from fieldnotes 05/10/2018).

'Mayan-spirituality' is a complicated terrain in La Gloria where *costumbre* rituals are seldomly practiced and the simple mentioning of anything related to *cosmovision Maya* has been met with criticism by some people in town. I was not surprised hearing especially evangelical-leaning residents dismissing any symbols of 'Mayaness' or *cosmovision Maya* as 'things from the past that we should leave behind' as a strictly observant Pentecostal taxi driver told me at some point (Fieldnotes 14/06/2018). I expected this rejection since it was very much in line with the literature I had read in preparation of my fieldwork-stay, what surprised me was that most rejections were not explained on grounds of cosmologies and rituals being unreal or superstitious but rather of these practices being 'too powerful' and potentially dangerous when practised in the wrong way. When going from door to door to ask parents and guardians to grant permission for their children to participate in a *baile de venado* presentation for example, I received at least two negative answers (out of 12-15 families that I visited) with parents indicating that this was a 'dangerous' practice and that putting on the *trajes*¹⁷³ can cause harm in form of a curse-spell (Fieldnotes 26/04/2018).

Back to Barry's house in Guatemala-City; Barry's friends are saying goodbye to our group and we (the Jocox-group) are invited to come down to the fire pitch, which ironically is located underneath a fake waterfall that once was installed to enhance the pool-area's atmosphere.

¹⁷³ In this case referring to the costumes used for the traditional dance; representing different animals as well as historic characters, more details can be found in the glossary (Appendix 1).

Nowadays it all looks quite abandoned with nature doing its thing in and outside the pool. It is impossible to tell when water had streamed down the fake waterfall for the last time or when the pool was last filled; I am almost certain it hasn't been in use for at least two decades. Barry has bought loads of materials and I am quite curious but also worried about what is going to happen. We gather in the tiny space and Oscar starts a small bonfire that will grow over the course of the next couple of hours. Oscar welcomes everybody to what he calls 'a spiritual journey' and explains that we will be exploring many things with our hearts and memories and that it is important to come with an open mind in order to participate; the young people seem to be listening. The first activity consists in Oscar calculating everybody's *nahual* and reading their meaning. Barry had asked me earlier for everybody's date of birth (and an approximate time of day) to prepare this part. I am familiar with the information I receive since spiritually minded friends of mine had calculated my *nahual* according to the *Ch'umilal Wuj – El Libro del Destino* (The Book of Destiny, Barrios 2004) and that also seems to be where Oscar is getting his information from. Oscar does all of this in an informal way, using colloquial language and slang to describe the *nahuales*, very much in line of what I am used to from non-indigenous urban Guatemalans interested in Mayan-spirituality, in a way creating an ontological connection between the spirituality of the *antepasados* and our contemporary lives. Oscar starts calling upon the different spiritual-ancestors by name to ask them to join us today here in this ritual. A specific number of different coloured candles (the same colours as in the ritual in Totonicapán; red, white, yellow, and purple representing the four cardinal points) are thrown into the fire each time to invoke the ancestors' presence. I look around to get a sense of what the young people are thinking about all of this, but it is impossible to know. Oscar asks us to step forward one by one to toss candles into the fire according to the 'intensity' of our *nahual*, measured in numbers between 1 and 13. I can see that Cristy is having some doubts regarding her participation and they grow even bigger when Oscar asks us to do a second round of tossing now having friends or family members in mind that are not with us anymore. I know that participating in the ritual is already conflicting with Cristy's family's evangelical faith, on top of that she has lost one of her brothers four years ago which still is on her mind constantly. I sit down and talk to her, trying to express that nobody is obliged to participate in the ritual and that if she is feeling uncomfortable with anything she can just sit and watch. I regret not having done this talk with the whole group, so I take the next opportunity after Oscar is done performing a spiritual cleanse of each person with a twig of pine-tree, incense, and the fire. I say that nobody is forced to participate in everything and that they don't have to explain but can just sit on the side-lines if they prefer that. Cristy decides not to join in with this bit and I

especially look out for Edu since I expect her to have similar conflictive thoughts (her family is part of the Apostolic Church). Edu however seems to be keen on participating until the end. The ritual continues with some 'technical issues' for example the number of candles is not quite correct each time and Oscar cannot find the natural chocolate that we are supposed to throw in the fire every now and then *para endulzarlo* ('to make it sweeter' my translation). He uses sugar instead (the refined sugar out of a plastic bag), until we find the cacao. I can't help but finding this a bit absurd; Oscar to me is just 'some guy playing with fire, candles and sugar' and I am struggling to 'accept' what he is doing as 'real'. I remind myself not to judge everything with my own idea of rationality and to keep an open mind. I can see that the young people are taken by the ritual, most of them in a good way but also Cristy who clearly still feels uncomfortable. The next part of our 'spiritual journey' (which has been going on for over an hour and a half) is the ritual of *Maximón*, a folk-saint specifically known for loving liquor and cigars¹⁷⁴. I am quite happy when Oscar says that this is only for the adults, the boys in the group however are keen on participating and each have a sip of the aguardiente (again I struggle to see the spirituality in drinking cheap liquor bought from the *tienda*, it's the stuff me and my friends used to mix with fake Coca-Cola to get drunk without spending a lot of money). Ivan even smokes a whole cigar, Matias and Pascual (who now is very keen on participating) also take sips and we all give some aguardiente to the fire (which almost explodes every time) and throw the cigars in while Oscar tells us the history of San Simón / *Maximón*. Among the many existing myths Oscar chooses to tell us the one of this folk-saint having been a Mayan rebel against the Spanish conquest and that the Spaniards tried to kill him not once, not twice, but three times and that he always managed to escape and that this is why he became a deity. There is a lot of resemblance with the historical / mythical figure of Tecún Uman and I remember reading that the stories of many historical and fictional characters have been projected into the *Maximón*-cult, but I am also quite tired at this point and only want the ritual to end which I hope will be soon judged by the fire going down. Oscar however has one last bit planned which works like a Q&A where everybody can present their questions to the fire while he is spinning circles with a stick inside the flames to see the fire's 'response'. Pascual is the first to ask a question about our difficulties on the journey so far (popped tires, getting lost etc.) and whether this is a bad omen. He wants to know why challenging things keep on happening to us when travelling. Oscar does some mystical gesture and then responds that we must ask the *antepasados* for permission (something that I hear constantly), before doing anything. He insists that this is specifically important when representing the history of 'your' people, family-members, and

¹⁷⁴For a more thorough discussion of *Maximón* / San Simón, see Pieper 2002.

other ancestors who have passed away. I look at the young people's faces and can't help but realising that this is better than any of the motivational things I could ever say to get them fired up before their performances. There is a bit of mumbling, then Pascual says: 'but are we going to get home alright?' Cristy and a couple of the others intervene saying that they don't want to know. Oscar stays silent for a second which even creates more anxiety until he finally says: 'You all have good intentions so you will be fine but you need to ask for permission'. That is the end of the ritual and Oscar tells us that he learned this craft in Momostenango and that they had to travel a lot and that things happened on the way but believing in the *antepasados*' protection and his good intentions he was always able to get out of bad situations. He then says that in a community like La Gloria there is a 'vacuum of energy', a lack of knowledge since all the right things are in place but people have stopped paying tribute to the ancestors. He offers to help filling that void in order to be 'one people and gain unity and strength' He finishes by saying; 'If you are interested, we can connect through Barry and Malte to organise for some of you to come to Momostenango to meet some of the shamans and learn from them'. I am quite surprised and can't help but think of how this makes the ritual seem a bit like a taster session, with the intention of a follow-up. We conclude the ritual by putting the fire out with buckets of water and go back to the house where everybody is asleep quickly – it has been a long day.

The next morning, I talk to Matias and Pascual about what happened the night before. Matias mentions that we should have a chat with the young people about what they will tell when they get home; some things can be misunderstood, and we want to avoid conflicts with their families in La Gloria. Matias and Pascual tell me that Edu's mum comes from a long line of *comadronas* (doulas or midwives¹⁷⁵) and that her grandmother used to lead ritualistic practices around birth; this is why Edu has a special connection to rituals like the one we saw last night, says Pascual. They both seem to be impressed with Oscar's shamanic abilities, not at all critical about him being 'indigenous' or not. They say it was a good reminder that we should be more conscious about connecting with the *antepasados* and ask them for permission; 'we should have that in mind for the journey back'. Matias says that his wife had a nightmare before we left about us having an accident during the trip; 'All I could tell her to calm down is that I was going to pray to my God and hope that nothing bad will happen' (from fieldnotes 05/10/2018 & 06/10/2018).

While in Totonicapán the young Jcox-members were exposed to indigenous activists and artists involved in movements towards social change; the visit to Barry's place involved interacting with a

¹⁷⁵ For a more in-depth discussion of the role of *comadronas* in indigenous communities see Chaudry et. al. 2018 or Cominsky 2010 among many others.

different scene invested in Mayan *cosmovisión* and other forms of spirituality. Barry's friendship circles are mostly made up of *ladino* urban artists, often with an inclination towards the exploration of different forms of spirituality, specifically *cosmovisión Maya*. Oscar's interest went further than a simply esoteric connection to indigenous cosmologies and he decided to dedicate a significant part of his life to learning from shamans in Momostenango, exploring / investigating his own indigenous heritage and incorporating *costumbre*-rituals and knowledge in his daily life. Oscar's connection with Mayan cosmology is one of a student acquiring knowledge. He went on a personal quest in order to establish this connection, since growing up in the capital meant he was not naturally exposed to ritualistic practice or epistemologies based on ancestral connectivity. This connection is reflected towards the end of the ritual where Oscar invited the young people (and Matias and Pascual) to keep on exploring the 'ancestral ways' and mentioned the possibility of visiting the shamans he learned from in Momostenango. *Cosmovisión Maya* here is treated as a subject which can be learned; as knowledge which can be acquired through individual quest and study and in a way as an object which can be passed on from person to person. This stands in somewhat of a contrast to the origin of the word *costumbre* which translates to 'custom'. Custom is usually described as a traditional and widely accepted way of behaving or doing something that is specific to a particular society, place or time which insinuates a different kind of learning that happens automatically and is absorbed (in the familial space) by forming part of a 'particular society, place or time' rather than by a personal quest of purposeful investigation. It should be mentioned that the term *cosmovisión Maya* spans a wide range of ideas, rituals, and stories which in no way should be understood to be uniform or monolithic. The predominant documents that are used for the study of Mayan cosmologies in Guatemala stem from the K'iche' (such as the Popol Vuh which is the most comprehensive written account of mythology and history that exists for any of Guatemala's ethno-linguistic groups) or from the Kaqchikel tradition. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that Oscar studied with K'iche' speaking *Ajq'ijab'* or *guías espirituales*¹⁷⁶ in Momostenango. The ritual of *Maximón* as well as *El Libro del Destino* (*Ch'umilal Wuj*), both of which Oscar referred to during the ritual, are equally informed in large parts by the traditions stemming from these two predominant ethno-linguistic groups, which are also the most populous groups in Guatemala. Other *costumbre* practices originating from other regions are much less known or recorded and therefore much less present in the general study of what is understood as Mayan cosmology.

The ritual Oscar performed with us was a new experience for the young people, who in La Gloria had not been exposed much to any form of ritualistic practice (neither from a non-indigenous perspective

¹⁷⁶ K'iche and Spanish terms for 'shaman' for a more detailed analysis of the terms and roles of these 'spiritual guides' see Croles Fitjar 2014 (especially chapter 1).

of study nor from a generationally transmitted one). Maria de los Angeles later described it like this: ‘We did the ritual; it was Mayan right? Yes, we participated in the ritual, and it was a bit weird for me because I had never practised any of these things. I had never even seen anything like that, and it impacted me and also made me a bit uncomfortable. But at the same time, it was incredible to get to know new things like that’ (Maria de los Angeles interview 18/10/2018). The identification with being *Akatekos* or *Migueleros* is strong among the young research-participants, as is evidenced from a workshop I held around identity in June 2018 (pp.50ff.). Identifying with the label ‘Maya’ however is only fragmented and uncommon. Registers of strong Pan-Mayan identification were present at several stages of the journey; most immediately during *FicMayab*’ but also within the spirituality as practised by Oscar (the *Libro del Destino* [Barrios 2004] for example hardly mentions differences between ethno-linguistic groups but refers to history and practices generally as Mayan). Being exposed to Pan-Mayan registers of identification was new to the young people (partly because it is quite unique to the Guatemalan context), it was however only one of a variety of new experiences. The novelty of experiences made throughout the trip was stressed by the Jocox-members in conversations after we returned to Chiapas. The ritual of course was no exception in this regard and represented exposure to new (and at times uncomfortable) ways of thinking and acting. The metaphysical dimension of the interaction appealed to young people’s cosmologies and momentarily troubled some of their ontological fundamentals which is expressed as unease or discomfort. These momentarily uncomfortable experiences in retrospective were registered as enrichment and learning, as we can see in the statement made by Maria de los Angeles.

The ritual was just one among a multitude of experiences which momentarily troubled the young people’s ideas of themselves and the world around them. The rapid exposure to new people, new ways of thinking and acting, and new ways of connecting to metaphysics led to momentary questioning of ideas about the past (represented by a sensorial experience of the before abstract place ‘Guatemala’) and what the future might look like. The imagining of alternative futures was ever-present when the young people witnessed how indigenous activists intend to shape future and more equal societies or how urban-*ladinos* go on spiritual quests to connect to the *antepasados*. A variety of experiences blended in the act of travelling and remembering; loosely tied together by their novel nature these experiences became its own set of memories in the retrospective remembering of the trip’s experience. Nayeli described it like this during one of our reflection sessions: ‘All of this is completely new to me. It’s the first time I am in a different country and it’s the first time I go away like this by myself, travelling with a group and all that’ (Recording of reflection session 06/10/2018). The new experiences of Pan-Mayan activism and rituals of ancestral cosmologies blend in with the general novelty of travelling (i.e., seemingly trivial experiences such as travelling without parents for the first

time or Maria de los Angeles mentioning that she had never tried vegetarian food etc.), which become stories and memories in retrospective. It is important to stress the momentary nature of these experiences, I do not argue that participating in the trip led to a general questioning of fundamental assumptions on the side of the young people, but rather that the novel experiences opened up spaces for momentary questioning and re-imagining. For example, after performing on the USAC campus in Guatemala-City one of the young actors (Maria de los Angeles) asked me whether she would be entitled to study at this university. 'I have always just looked at places in Mexico and never given much thought to Guatemala, but this university looks nice, and I could see myself studying here' (from fieldnotes 07/10/2018). Mary ended up moving (northwards) to a bigger city in Mexico to pursue higher education, however for a moment during our visit she reckoned with the idea of looking for a future in Guatemala. Similarly, during our visit of the touristic town of Antigua (famous for its colonial architecture) one of the young people mentioned that she had never been travelling as a tourist before but that she was really enjoying the experience and hoped 'to make a lot of money in the future in order to travel and get to know places like this' (from fieldnotes 08/10/2018). Rather than wide-ranging changes of opinions and *Weltanschauungen*, the young people's reactions to these novel experiences were momentary flashes of imagination, loose dreams about how to place oneself into a new environment in an undefined alternative future without concrete plans of following this up. These momentary flashes are the stuff that stories are made of; the experiences made during the trip live on in the young people's (as well as my own and others') mediation and re-telling. The abstract affordance of imagining and dreaming (in contrast to meticulous forms of envisioning) are important since they highlight the momentary nature of these acts on the one side and provide the groundwork for future storytelling. It is often in the moment of experiencing that we already start thinking about how the events of the here-and-now will be reproduced later as stories for the consumptions of others.

The novel nature of the trip's experiences led to a momentary questioning and imagining of alternative futures. The futures imagined in La Gloria often allude to forms of US-migration-inspired modernity manifested in form of material symbols such as the two-storey houses, *trocas* and expensive cell phones discussed in chapter 6. The act of making money elsewhere in order to build large houses and buy status symbols back home, is the drive that underpins the migratory movements northwards; both to the US as well as to the *Riviera Maya*. Moving to larger cities in Mexico to pursue higher education (equally involving migration northwards) is another aspect of La Gloria's repertoire of future imaginations and aspirations. The assumption that the future for most young people in La Gloria lies in the North was momentarily challenged by our trip's experiences where they were exposed to the making of other modalities of future beyond the conventional migrant-dreams; an alternative form of

imagining southward-futures linked to La Gloria's past. Our trip southwards however eventually came to an end and it was time to get back on the Pan-American highway to return to La Gloria. The journey back northwards however involved several new experiences which further questioned assumptions specifically in relation to borders.

'Wow I never thought Guatemala would be more advanced than Mexico, but this is some CIA shit' says Danny while pushing our white 15-passenger van back towards the invisible border-line between Guatemala and Mexico. Our driver Pascual laughs: 'Really *güero* when you told me that we were going to have an adventure I knew it was going to be interesting, but this..' What had happened? On the morning of the trip's last day, we wake up early since we have a long journey ahead. The drive from Guatemala-City to La Gloria is about 500 kilometres long (along the Pan-American highway) and involves the border-crossing at La Mesilla, our aim is to get the young people home before dark, as I had promised to their parents. The journey goes rather smoothly for the most part in comparison to the many hick-ups we experienced when entering Guatemala seven days earlier. The young people are tired after seven days of adventure and are asleep for most of the duration, we also do not run into major traffic problems today. Arriving at La Mesilla we are thinking through different options of how to cross the border, the major problem being that the van we are travelling in was rented in Guatemala and has Guatemalan license plates. Passing the official border-crossing in this vehicle would involve a number of rather time-consuming bureaucratic processes, or another bribe. Our driver Pascual however has an idea; 'It's easy *güero* I know a place where we can pass without being checked, it's this tiny dirt-road right next to La Mesilla, this is where everyone crosses the border; Mexican license plates - Guatemalan license plates, Mexican passport – Guatemalan passport or no passport at all it doesn't matter, it's just a bunch of *campesinos*¹⁷⁷ living there and nobody cares about who or what crosses the border; you don't even know if you are in Mexico or Guatemala'. I check with the rest of the group and they are all on board with Pascual's idea agreeing that it is safe to go this way because 'La Gloria is only an hour or so from there and it's mostly small dirt-roads, so we don't run the risk of being stopped.' Pascual adds that: 'either way, we are all Mexican citizens so the police can't say anything even if our car is from Guatemala'. I have my doubts but also realise that this might be the only option of getting the entire group back to La Gloria before dark as promised. Pascual takes a turn from the main highway into a little entrance that looks like nothing more than an unpaved driveway. I can see two or three humble houses on each side of the road but after a couple of metres there is just a multitude of green; large trees and bushes flank the road, it is the height of this year's rainy-

¹⁷⁷ Farmers – my translation.

season so nature is in its maximum splendour. Pascual was completely right; it is impossible to tell which side of the border we are on. The road is so narrow that we must make way for cars coming the other way on several occasions; some with Guatemalan, some with Mexican-license plates and at least one without any license plates at all. Time seems to be moving slowly here in comparison with the busy market-like border crossing at La Mesilla where the road between the two countries is flanked with shops and street-vendors selling all kinds of products that are cheaper on either side of the border. Here in the liminal border-space I see two older men with *sombreros* sitting on plastic chairs in front of a house; they wave as we pass by.

I look at my phone to see which side of the technological border (mobile-phone networks) we are on; it still says 'Tigo Guatemala' on the upper left corner of my screen when suddenly our car stops. 'What happened?' I ask Pascual. He shrugs his shoulders and gives me a look that unmistakably says, 'I've got no idea'. 'It must be the battery because the whole car just shut down suddenly'. My phone rings at this point (the hardly coincidental nature of these two things happening immediately after each other will only become apparent to me much later); it is the guy from the rental company in Antigua (Guatemala) who attended me two weeks earlier when I came in to rent this 15-passenger van. I had used the same company many times before, so we know each other and have a friendly agent-customer relationship, today however he sounds startled. 'Malte where are you?' he asks without any introduction. 'Ehm just by the border here in Huehuetenango' I say slightly lying slightly making the truth sound more favourably. 'I just had an emergency notification from our GPS-system saying that you crossed the national border on a blind-spot, Malte this is no joke you cannot cross national borders with this car under any circumstances'. I feel my heart skipping a beat and realise in what kind of a mess I have gotten everybody in; I immediately try to fix it. 'No look we are literally by the border and just took a turn from the main highway to drop a couple of people off but there are no marked border-lines here, so I don't know whether we are in Mexico or Guatemala' I say again not completely lying but neither saying the complete truth. I hear silence on the other line so I try again 'so the car also stopped running what can we do to get back to the main highway'. He gets angrier now; 'So you are in Mexico, you must be, our GPS satellite system immediately turns your car off when you cross international borders, look Malte this can get you in big trouble and me as well, we have lost a couple of cars exactly on that border-crossing so I need you to be honest with me; are you in Guatemala or in Mexico?'. I reply with honesty: 'I really don't know', again there is silence on the other side so I continue: 'I mean you called me on a Guatemalan number and we are talking through a Guatemalan phone network, so that makes me think we are in Guatemala but I don't know if maybe we have crossed an invisible line here according to your

GPS. Just tell me what I need to do to get the car back running’. Again, there is a moment of silence on the other end of the line, the young people and everybody else (including my wife and my dog who have been accompanying me on this journey) have left the van in the meantime and are standing in the shade of a tree on the side of the road listening to all of this in disbelief. Finally, the agent from the rental company starts speaking again: ‘Ok listen Malte I just spoke to my superiors and I put a word in for you, what you need to do is push the car back as far as you can so that our GPS can detect you on Guatemalan territory, then call me so that I can re-start your car’. I can’t believe it; neither can the Joco-members. I will have to ask this group of young people for whom the border has played an important role throughout their entire life (being children and grand-children of Guatemalan refugees that grew up in the Chiapan borderland), to help me push a Guatemalan car back over the borderline. The irony of the situation is not lost on anybody; Azza says: ‘Cool it really doesn’t matter which way we go, either way is home’ we all laugh and start pushing. Danny cannot get over the technology behind what just happened which is when he makes his statement about Guatemala’s technological superiority over Mexico (and compares it to the CIA). We push for 15-20 minutes when suddenly I see two of the white stone obelisks that are lined up in some distance to each other along the length of the borderline to mark it, we push a little bit further into Guatemala then I call the rental company.



6.2 White stone obelisks marking the border between Mexico and Guatemala.

About 30 minutes later we get to the border town of La Mesilla, park our van on the Guatemalan side and walk over into Mexican territory looking for a mini-van driver who can bring the young people, Matias, and Pascual to La Gloria. We are negotiating with a group of Mexican *combi* drivers, but it is already past 5 pm and getting dark so none of them is too keen on taking the

journey (and therefore give us exorbitant prices). Luckily, Pascual recognises a guy he knows from the drivers-*sindicato*¹⁷⁸ and quickly manages to convince him. I had an emotional speech prepared for this moment with deep thoughts about heritage and the generations of resilience and suffering that came from Guatemala to Chiapas, however everybody (including me) is really tired, so we keep it to a simple ‘thank you for everything and goodbye’. Matias and Pascual laugh, and Pascual says: ‘thank you for organising the trip *güero* we definitely have some stories to tell now’, the young people wave and board the Mexican minivan. I wave them goodbye and go back to the Guatemalan side of the border to pick the van up and find a dog-friendly hotel for the night, before returning the vehicle to the rental company in Antigua the day after (from fieldnotes 09/10/2018).

This eventful border-crossing odyssey marked the end of my permanent fieldwork involvement with the members of the Jocox-group. While I did return multiple times to La Gloria throughout 2019 and at the beginning of 2020¹⁷⁹ the presentations in Guatemala and the attached journey were the last and probably most intense moments that we lived through as a regular group. Many of the rather analytical thoughts I was having permanently during fieldwork as well as considerations regarding my relationships to the young research-participants, were present during our journey to Guatemala and especially when getting stuck in between two national borders. As stressed before the entire journey involved novel encounters and in the end we even experienced the permanently present border in a new way. The Guatemala-Mexico border and its implicit liminality are ever-present in the lives of La Gloria-residents; for older people the border represents an important territorial demarcation that played a significant role in saving their lives when they crossed over into Chiapas to flee persecution and potential death in Guatemala. The specific act of the refugees’ border-crossing in the early 1980’s has attained symbolic meaning within La Gloria; as we have seen throughout the thesis stories around this particular past circulate in the private as well as the public space and form part of localised identities, especially in form of the annually told La Gloria-story. Younger La Gloria-residents experience the border in its symbolic dimension when listening to the stories from the past which they mediate and incorporate in their own project of self. However young people also experience the border in concrete and contemporary forms. A weekly shopping trip to the border town of La Mesilla (on the Guatemalan side) is organised by a group of local residents who own spacious vans. Young people frequently take part in these trips either to help their parents with heavy purchases or to do their own shopping, mostly buying clothing or electronic gadgets. In many cases these are the only experiences that young La Gloria-residents draw on when conceptualising and imagining Guatemala,

¹⁷⁸ Workers-union my translation.

¹⁷⁹ A couple of planned visits in 2020 had to be cancelled due to the Covid-19 sanitary crisis.

a place that is so central to the making of La Gloria; literally as well as symbolically. Many families in La Gloria maintain communication and relationships to relatives in Guatemala however actual visits were rare in 2018. Out of the twelve Jocox-participants only two had been to Guatemala for longer periods, which partly was due to having relatives that living on the Guatemalan-side of the border-



6.3 Picture painted by Marco in 2018 as part of the collective mural in La Gloria's *Salon Municipal*; it also became the logo for the June event and was printed on T-shirts and flyers.

region and therefore in relatively close distance to La Gloria. Only one of the Jocox members had been to San Miguel Acatán, the place described by most La Gloria-residents as the 'true root of the Akatekos' (Matias interview 20/11/2017). Despite this supposed disconnection many young people do feel attachment to the however abstract national-idea of 'Guatemala', evidenced by the identity-workshop held after

the first theatre presentation (pp.50ff.), during which most participants mentioned that they feel a relationship to both nationalities. Azza's reaction to getting stuck in the liminal border-space; 'It doesn't matter [...] either way is home', can be read in a similar way. Despite the playful undertone intended to lift the group's mood, it is telling that Azza's joke referenced the complex processes of collective memory and collective identification. Collective identification through memory in La Gloria is partly established through national registers; Matias for example made this very clear during our first interview when he said that: 'we are Mexicans by passport but Guatemalans by blood' (Interview Matias 20/11/2017). However, collectiveness is also established through ancestral connectivity as we have seen when engaging with memory (chapters 2, 3, and 4). The La Gloria-story is full of identifying registers of Akateko-ness (such as the shared story of Akateko-ethnogenesis) as well as aspects relating to the refugee generation's experiences and their changed nationalities. The Guatemalan as well as the Mexican flags are displayed on top of the municipal building while the story is publicly told during the annual patron-saint festivities which reiterates how ancestral and national registers are intertwined and fused in these memory-narratives.

Reading through my notes from the border-odyssey I was reminded of many aspects that form the core of the thesis' overall arguments; the young people being stuck in the liminality of the borderland facing implicit obstacles however developing strategies of active participation to counteract these (in

this case by pushing a van). The situation itself exemplifies many parts of the entire thesis. These aspects are more than just metaphorical illustrations of the thesis' analytical framework but rather events and interactions in their own right. The young people's active participation in local processes of identification has been stressed throughout, emphasising how young interlocutors inhabit and make spaces and places (chapter 1), as well as their active and conscious contributions to the making of memory (chapters 2-5). However, it were the intense experiences during the Guatemala-journey and the act of pushing a van together through the borderland that drew my attention to the wider implications and frames of young people's agency and storytelling which made me reconsider assumptions I developed during fifteen months of fieldwork. My attention during the trip was drawn to the ways in which the young Jocox-members represented themselves, their town, and their history / memory to a mostly unknown audience.

Our journey to Guatemala was full of symbolic and metaphorical meaning, the movement of bodies in between different nationalised territories (the young people's as well as my own) simultaneous to the movement of stories that circulated with and around us, provided the backdrop for different layers of meaning. The young people's postmemorial storytelling and mediation of the La Gloria-story travelled with us and found its public display in Guatemala, however the lived instances in and around our presentations; the acts of moving from place to place and the random intersubjective moments that were created through our travels, became their own set of stories and memories in retrospective. Jackson writes that 'stories have a habit of generating other stories' (2002, 233) and Pascual points out that after accompanying the group to tell their story in Guatemala 'we definitely have stories to tell now' (Fieldnotes 09/10/2018). As mentioned earlier it is in the moment of experiencing that we think about how events will be told and re-told as stories; just moments after experiencing our border-odyssey Pascual was already thinking about the stories he would tell after returning to La Gloria. The distance between eye-witnessing and storytelling (memory and postmemory) fades while the two (at times conflictive) processes blend into each other. In chapter 2 (pp.103ff.) we have seen how Don Gonzales takes issue with the result of the young actors' telling of the La Gloria-story; the locally and collectively significant historic account according to him requires 'authenticity'. In Pascual's case we can see the immediacy of how events turn into stories (and subsequently into memories); immediately after (or in the moment of) experiencing. Our minds work like stories and frame the ways we perceive past and future in the present. The momentary imagining of alternative futures triggered by the novelty of experiences during the trip is being registered as a type of memory, as a story to be told which blends in with collective repertoires of what I have called 'anticipatory memory'. To a certain degree the momentary imagining and anticipation becomes part of the act of remembering (the journey) itself. It is precisely here where the anticipation of narratives connects past, present and

future in this modality of narrative-agency. In chapter 5 I stress how bodies and stories circulate simultaneously (movement) in the act of migration. In a more abstract / metaphorical sense similar movements can be described about our Guatemala-journey; the Jocox-group travelling to Guatemala carrying their own version of the La Gloria-story as luggage (as well as objects with postmemorial meaning such as the photo-exhibition). Large parts of the La Gloria-story and the play are based on events that happened in Guatemala; our journey now brought the story in its embodied and mediated form back into immediate proximity to the places from where it originated (despite the fact that we were not able to perform the play in San Miguel Acatán itself). In a way it was a journey into the past i.e., to the country the young people's (grand)parents had to abandon. The purpose of portraying their postmemorial theatrical production adds further dimensions to the symbolic meaning-making. The past was continuously present during our journey and liminal spaces (most directly in between borders) opened up, while our bodies and stories moved from place to place. 'Guatemala' changed from being an abstract concept that we tried to envision and embody during theatre activities and rehearsals to a shared collective experience which lives on in each of our individual and collective memories and in the stories we tell. The young actors reworked their experiences in form of individual stories but also collectively when they reproduce stories as 'second-hand' experiences. The fact that a group from La Gloria travelled to Guatemala to present a theatre play about their history is a story in itself that will live on in the individual memory of its participants as well as in the collective memory of second-hand telling. The story of the local *Mayaonbej'* folkloric dance-troupe that travelled to Mexico-City in the early 2000's to participate in a dance presentation for example nowadays is common knowledge in La Gloria and has been told to me multiple times.

The journey as a whole blurred many of the spatio-temporal binaries of prior conversations between the young interlocutors and me; it complicated the young people's and my own conceptualisation of 'here' (Mexico) and 'there' (Guatemala) as well as our imagination of 'now' and 'then'. As it often is the case lived-sensorial experiences put generalisable assumptions (of how a place is or how a past was) and conceptualisations into question in an epistemic negotiation. After speaking and acting for several months about memory, Guatemala as a place and refugee-pasts, we now experienced the act of travelling together through this historically meaningful landscape. The young actors actively participated in the journey's interactions and performances (most notably when pushing a van through the borderland) and continue to do so when telling stories about them. The momentary imagining of alternative futures that occurred through the interaction with a new environment is ephemeral, however lives on as a part of memory, as a story about how the future was anticipated in that moment. The stories of our journey add layers to the young participants' relationships to past and present; in memory the telling of the Guatemala-journey appears alongside historic accounts (La

Gloria-story), as well as migration-memory story, thus becomes part of La Gloria's memory repertoire, as a brief moment where alternative futures were imagined.

Conclusions.

I set out to do fieldwork in 2017 with ideas in mind about identity and history; about performativity and how diasporic young people make sense of the past and how it affects their current being and belonging. I would have never imagined ending my fieldwork by travelling to Guatemala with a group of dedicated young people (with roots in the Guatemalan diaspora) interested in both, theatre, and the past. I would have never imagined that we would show a collaboratively produced theatre-play in the country of their (grand-) parents and even less would I have imagined having to ask them to push a van back over into Guatemala because a rental-car company reinforced a national border. In a way the border serves here as a sharp reminder of the limitations and boundaries which shape the young participants' being and belonging in the diaspora. It should be mentioned that the novel nature of the journey was partly due to my own involvement and connections that I brought with me, which created an entirely new situation reflecting the consequences of my involvement as well as the young people's reaction to it.

The mediation of past and memory affects contemporary lives in form of narrative-agency and storytelling, which makes young people active participants in the making of La Gloria in its internal and external representation, however their agency occurs within a framework of borders and other limitations and exclusions i.e., economic disadvantages and stereotypes of 'indigeneity' (racism). Despite the experience of getting stuck in between two borders being novel as well as potentially frightening it did not lead to panic among the young people who willingly (and calmly) helped pushing the van back to solve the problem. It seems that developing (spontaneous) strategies to counteract precarity was not particularly new to the young people, who despite their young age displayed many forms of active resilience responding to marginalisation and uncertainty in order to 'renew our faith that the world is within our grasp' (Jackson 2002, 245). Agency can take many forms here and happens on multiple levels: shaping youth-specific places and spaces locally (chapter 1), mediating stories from the past (postmemory chapter 2) and actively participating in postmemorial storytelling by exhibiting photos (chapter 3) and publicly performing a postmemorial theatre play (chapter 4), the act of migrating and sending remittances and the telling of stories about it in the private and public space (chapter 5) and finally pushing a van back over the border-line (chapter 6). All of these are moments in which the young people actively deployed strategies which helped to navigate the uncertain landscape of young diasporic being shaped by border-regimes, racial exclusion, and intergenerational structures of hierarchy.

What I hope to have shown is how memory and space interact when my young interlocutors inhabit and make spaces through peer-intersubjectivity. I further hope to have shown how the processes of

retrospective and anticipatory memory do not necessarily rely on eye-witnessed accounts but rather are collectively negotiated repertoires that connect temporalities in narrative-action. These processes are grounded in their differing contexts and framed by structural limitations, as well as negotiated through the narrative-agency of young people. As described in chapter 4 the process of postmemory involves multiple forms of agency and negotiation, with older generations but in this case also with two adult facilitators and me as an ethnographer. The young people inherit legacies of remembrance from older generations as well as silences and hidden narratives that do not form part of public retelling. The young people's narrative agency consists in engaging with these stories (told and untold), mediating and negotiating them in order to adapt them to their lived reality in the present. Narrative agency constitutes collective identification and belonging; these registers are fragmented, complicated, and renegotiated when brought into a different context for example through migration.

The questions around being and belonging of diasporic youths seem unresolved, betwixt and between and far from clear-cut for a digestible conclusion, which precisely reflects the multiple liminalities young people in La Gloria experience and negotiate. What 'improvement' means looks different from generation to generation especially in a fragmented context where four generations live across three countries. One could argue that the contemporary local forms of La Gloria's organisation actually resemble ideals of 'autonomy' set out by subversive *guerrilla* fighters in the 1980's (some of whom were involved in founding La Gloria). This cultural and social autonomy however is paired with economic scarcity and marginalisation which leads to different sets of expectations arising for young people growing up nowadays. Youths' 'sacrifice' in the 1980's in Guatemala was phrased in terms of fighting for a system-change, in Chiapas in the 2010's and 2020's young people (often men but not exclusively) sacrifice when they embark on dangerous journeys and send money home in form of remittances. Expectations change as time passes however young people continue to respond to these by claiming and inhabiting expected and unexpected spaces, reformulating temporalities, and local forms of being and belonging. They are key actors in the social making of La Gloria since they are the only residents that have neither come nor gone, giving continuity by fusing and embodying the entirety of temporal and social ambiguities produced since the civil war (and beyond). While older generations often bemoan younger generations for losing traditions and fear the loss of social memory, as we can see in this thesis the process of remembering and postmemory is an ongoing project linked to aspirations for the future. I want the reader to engage with these ambiguities to understand that this thesis is only the beginning of an ongoing process that reaches much further. At the time of writing (June 2021) I am regularly in touch with research participants now residing in the US or elsewhere in Mexico. The constant moments of transition do not allow us to fix conclusions in space and time, however the ongoing engagement with these ambiguities is where knowledge is co-produced and from where this ongoing process of learning departs. I hope the reader will appreciate

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the unique contributions the thesis makes and the many discussions and points of connections it creates for future engagement with diasporic young people and their processes.

Coda: Zooming in and ‘things come together’; momentary belonging through storytelling and making sense in a fragmented world.

Ambiguities arose when categories and assumptions were troubled during our journey to Guatemala; this was the case for the young participants whose observations and experiences clashed with some of their earlier ideas and imaginations and created new meaning through momentary questioning. Additionally, my own assumptions (analytical as well as personal) were questioned and troubled by our collective journey-experiences and brought fundamental questions to the fore, for example regarding the impossibility of making definite statements about belonging, memory, and storytelling. A couple of weeks after saying goodbye to the Jocox-group in the liminal border space I flew to the United States where I had an experience that at least for a moment brought about some form of coherent meaning; this is what I want to end this thesis on.

On a cold and rainy afternoon in December 2018 I am standing in front of a white trailer-home somewhere in the middle of rural Alabama. A week earlier I flew from Guatemala-City to Atlanta with the idea in mind of visiting friends from Guatemala who now live in the Southeast of the United States before taking my flight back to London (the eventual end of my fieldwork-stay in the Americas). One of the initial Jocox-members called Gaby left La Gloria eight months earlier together with her mother and two siblings to reunite with her father in Alabama who had been there for over ten years. Gaby’s cousin Claudia continued to be part of the youth group in La Gloria and one day I told her about going to the US. We quickly realised that I was going to be rather close to where Gaby and her family live in the US, so I included Alabama to my travel itinerary to visit Gaby and bring her some ‘presents from home’.

Now in the rain of rural Alabama I am almost certain to have found the white trailer-home in which Gaby and her family live in Alabama, thankfully GPS-pins on a digital map resolve a lot of the issues that locating a marginal place like this would have involved a couple of years ago. I am nervous since I really don’t want to knock on the wrong door and explain that I am actually looking for the family of a girl called Gabriela that I know from Chiapas in Mexico. The rain is getting heavier, and I am carrying two large bags of presents that I brought all the way from Gaby’s family-home in La Gloria to this tiny town south of the Appalachian-mountains. I knock on the door and indeed Gaby is the first to open, she smiles when she sees me. We haven’t seen each other in eight months, but she hasn’t changed a bit. She invites me to come in and I see her sister and her little brother sitting at the kitchen-table, they also recognise me and seem

happy. Her mum comes out of the room in the back saying: ‘*Güero*, I’m so glad you made it. Are these the bags that my sister was talking about?’. She points at the bags on her kitchen table. I nod and she gives her three children a sign that says ‘open’ while she turns to the kitchen-niche and continues cooking a delicious *chile relleno* (Mexican style). ‘It’s a bit like Christmas’, Gaby’s sister jokes while she unpacks the sweets and crisps that her cousins bought and wrapped for her back in La Gloria. Gaby’s mother is more interested in the large bag of black beans harvested from her family’s plot; ‘you can’t find them like that anywhere here’.

A while later Gaby’s dad (who had been asleep until now since he works nightshifts) comes out of the room and looks at me. ‘So, you are the *güero* that they were all talking about, I thought it was a joke when my wife told me that there was a German guy that worked in La Gloria who is coming to visit us here in Alabama, but here you are’. He sits down and I can sense his reluctance to engage in conversation with me which is understandable since we have never met before in person (unlike Gaby, her siblings and her mum who would see me almost every day in La Gloria). I am sure that his undocumented migration status also does not encourage him to engage in conversation with strangers. He mostly sits and observes while I show Gaby and her siblings some photos of the events they missed in La Gloria in the past eight months. I also hand them some letters written by their peers from school. Gaby’s mum looks over to her husband at the kitchen table ‘This *güero* knows everybody in La Gloria you know? Ask him you’ll see he knows all the gossip’. Gaby’s dad turns around to me and says ‘Really? Tell me what’s new?’ and out of a general reflex I start telling them about all the people I know that recently made the journey to the US: who managed to cross and who didn’t, who came back (deported) recently and who is thinking of going. I can see Gaby’s dad now looking at me directly and nodding after some of my sentences, he must be in touch with many of these people. ‘*Botas* is also thinking about coming back up here’ I say, ‘looks like him and his wife are having another baby and he needs to make “real” money, that’s what he told me’. Gaby’s dad laughs at this point and says ‘Good old *Botas*, I did not know he was planning on coming here – did you know that he lived here in this very house when he first came to the US? I’m sure he even sat on that chair you are sitting on right now’ he smiles and looks at me directly, ‘you really are from La Gloria, are you?’. He laughs and I can sense his reluctance fading away. We spend the next couple of hours talking about all the different people in La Gloria and what they are up to, and I have probably never felt more part of the transnational La Gloria community than at this point.

The complex picture of La Gloria as a town and the young people within it should have become clear to the reader throughout the thesis. In La Gloria remembering the past as well as imagining the future

are acts which produce unity as well as division, continuity as well as rupture. The social reproduction of the town's communal hierarchy as well as the collectivising forces of public memory are severely disrupted by migration among a multitude of other divisions which put the collective essence of La Gloria into question. Such circumstances inhibit the formation of localised and collective forms of identification which was one of the main aspects named by the young people who consider La Gloria to be a 'divided community' (as is evidenced by the list of contemporary divisions created for the theatre play and its manifestation in the play itself, see pp.133ff.). In this divided social landscape, it seems that the reproduction of a collective self is lastingly problematic. However even I as an obvious outsider was (semi) identified as a person with significant ties to La Gloria by Gaby's dad in Alabama, through the simple act of engaging in storytelling. Even in the highly complex and fragmented circumstances of (double-) diasporic existence; even taking the complexities of relationships between privileged white foreigners and marginalised indigenous migrants in the US into account; it was the telling and re-telling of stories and the manifestation of shared personal relations which created a momentary atmosphere of interrelatedness. The telling and re-telling of narratives (in this case migration-memory however also collective and past-oriented memory) i.e., the engagement with memory can be understood as an act of participation in the reproduction of a collective self. I have similarly received respectful looks from sceptical older residents in La Gloria when they realised that I could 'recite' the La Gloria-story in all its details. Despite my limitations to prove other and more general dimensions of belonging to La Gloria's collectivity (for example speaking Akateko fluently or having an Akateko name) my claim of investment in La Gloria was somewhat accepted by Gaby's dad in the moment of realising that I was an equal partner in the telling of migration-stories. I am not trying to say here that this equals a full-swing acceptance of my own belonging to La Gloria however it did ease Gaby's dad's concerns and suspicions about my presence and created a momentary bond of trust between us and made me feel connected to Gaby's family as well as to the transnational La Gloria network.

Momentarily this encounter produced some form of coherent meaning and I returned to my rented room in Alabama with ideas in mind about how sentiments of belonging travel with people wherever they go and how they are manifested in conversational (intersubjective) narrative practice. Even in a deconstructed and complex setting like the (double) diaspora of Alabama; the act of sharing a story can create a (collective) bond between people, make them feel connected and create momentary sentiments of continuity, before lived experience questions and deconstructs the momentary coherence again in the never-ending cycle of sense-making.

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Appendix 1: Glossary

Agente Municipal: Local representative of La Gloria - an intermediate administrator between the General Assembly and the Municipal administration of La Trinitaria. This position first came about in 2001 (Ruiz-Lagier 2013a, 119) and rotates annually, chosen from a list.

Akateko: Pre-Hispanic language spoken in La Gloria. The Akateko language originates from San Miguel Acatán in Huehuetenango, Guatemala. The term Akateko was introduced only in the year 2000 by linguists from the ALMG (Guatemalan Academy for Mayan Languages) who deemed the way residents of San Miguel Acatán speak sufficiently distinct from the Q'anjob'al language spoken in the entire region. The two languages however are mutually intelligible in large parts. Akateko has also been used as an ethno-linguistic label which is widely used by La Gloria-residents to describe themselves.

Asamblea General: General Assembly – monthly forum for La Gloria residents to discuss and vote on pressing issues in town.

Baile de Venado: Folk dance of pre-Hispanic origin referencing the deer-hunt. The dance originates from the *Cuchumatán* highlands (in Guatemala) and can feature up to 26 dancers, with a single marimba providing the music. It represents the struggle between humans and animals for meat. During the dance, groups of young men with dogs must fight off lions and tigers to claim the deer for their own. During the colonial period as well as in the 19th and 20th century several new human characters were introduced such as: 'the Spaniard', 'the Cowboy', *la Malinche*, *la Chichimita*, and in some regions even 'the Mexican'. In La Gloria the dance stopped was not practised after the exodus until it was reintroduced through the initiative of the local *Mayaonbej'* cultural association in the late 1990's, who with the financial help of a Swiss developmental programme send a delegation to Guatemala to buy the costumes and learn about the dance. Since then the dance is shown regularly during cultural festivities.

Campesino: Meaning: 'farmer'. A term often used to describe people who carry out

small-plot farming, very frequently used when describing farmers as a political entity (i.e., *campesino* movement).

CoBaCh: *Colegio de Bachilleres de Chiapas* – government run system of high-school education. The acronym describes the entire nation-wide system it is used by La Gloria-residents to refer to the local high-school.

Conflicto Armado (Interno): Guatemala-wide way of referring to the Guatemalan civil war (1960 – 1996) also very frequent among refugees and their descendants in Mexico.

Costumbre: literally customs; a term frequently used by La Gloria residents close to the meaning of tradition (*tradicción*) meaning ‘the way we do things’. *Costumbre* is also used to describe any elements of prehispanic (often syncretic) ritualistic practice, mythology, and cosmology.

Ejido: In the Mexican system of government an *ejido* is an area of communal land used for agriculture, on which community members individually farm designated parcels and collectively maintain communal holdings. *Ejid*os are registered with Mexico's National Agrarian Registry (*Registro Agrario Nacional*). The *ejido* system was introduced as an important component of the agrarian land reform in Mexico (1910 – 1940) that followed the Mexican Revolution.

Elección / Coronación de la Reina Indígena Akateka / Migueleña / de la Feria de San Miguel: Beauty pageant organised every year where 4 female candidates (usually between 16 and 20 years of age) compete against each other for votes (i.e. sums of money) from anybody in the community throughout 4 successive Sundays in August. Each year this culminates in the coronation ceremony held on the first day of the *Feria de San Miguel* on September 26th.

Feria de San Miguel: Annual patron saint celebration for the people of *San Miguel Acatán* (*Huehuetenango*) celebrated in September – the residents of *La Gloria* celebrate it each year between the 26th and 29th of September with a funfair that includes music concerts, sports competitions, a torch-run, and the coronation of a beauty pageant.

Güero: Mexico-wide slang meaning ‘blondie’ or more generally ‘white person’.

INI: *Instituto Nacional Indigenista* – Federal decentralised government agency that

carried out applied social science research in the indigenous regions of Chiapas (and other Mexican states). It was established in 1948 in Chiapas with the goal of integrating indigenous people into the national culture and carried out health and education campaigns. The institute was renamed in 2003 and its ideas and structures live on in the work of the CDI ('National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples', until 2018) and INPI ('National Institute of Indigenous Peoples', since 2018).

Ja'eb a Gloria: Literally 'Us from La Gloria' – Public Facebook group / page administrated by internet- café owner Tzey, where public announcements are being shared as well as photos from public events and La Gloria inside-jokes. The name is also an idiom used by people in town to say 'La Glorians'.

Jocox theatre troupe: The youth-group that resulted from the creative youth work process between February-June 2018 in La Gloria. After the initial showing of the theatre-play in La Gloria the group decided to continue which led to further showings in Chiapas and Guatemala. A couple of the initial members continued to run workshops for younger community-members up until 2019. 'Jocox' is the Akateko word for a regionally specific type of the Atta-ant which only appears once a year after the first heavy rainfalls. The appearance of these ants marks the beginning of the rainy season and leads to groups of children and young people collecting large amounts of them to be fried and eaten.

La Gloria-story: I refer to the 'La Gloria-story' as the exact sequence in the way the town's history is annually told during the patron-saint celebration. The narration starts with the appearance of Saint Michael to a young woman called Maria by the river Acatán, which is the generally accepted story of the Akateko-ethnogenesis. The narration further tells the story of violent persecution that the Akatekos suffered during the 1980's in Guatemala (*la violencia*) and their flight to Mexico (*el refugio*). It tells the story of the refugees' plight during the first year in Chiapas and the Chupadero-massacre which then subsequently led to the foundation of La Gloria. The narration usually stops with the infrastructural advances of La Gloria during the early 1990's (schools, clinic, electricity and the water- well).

Marimba: Wooden percussion instrument similar to a xylophone, strongly associated with highland indigenous folk music in Guatemala as well as in Chiapas.

Nahual: Alternative spelling ‘nagual’ or ‘nawal’ – Energy spirits, beings or elements specific to Mesoamerican *costumbre*. In *cosmovisión Maya* they are used as symbols that represent and connect people to nature, animals, or other parts of the ecosystem function as the human’s guardians. The meanings and names change from region to region, the most common one in Guatemala is based on K’iche names and traditions and can be calculated for each person according to the Mayan calendar.

El Massacre del Chupadero: An attack carried out by the Guatemalan military on April 30th 1984 during which 7 people were killed in the UNHCR-run refugee camp *El Chupadero* <https://www.proceso.com.mx/138569/los-refugiados-relatan-la-agresion-a-el-chupadero>

Mestizaje: The noun *mestizaje* is a term for racial mixing that was used retrospectively to describe the process of intermarriage common in the colonial era. However, it only came into usage in the twentieth century. *Mestizaje* specifically in colonial discourses is often used to describe the eradication of indigenous symbols in favour of European and ‘modern’ modes of existence.

Panamericana / Interamericana: Pan-American-highway, network of roads stretching across the American continents, measuring about 30 000 kilometres. La Gloria is located only 5 kilometres from the Mexican part of the highway which connects Guatemala with Mexico and further Chiapas with Central- and Northern-Mexico.

PRI: Institutional Revolutionary Party – political party founded as the ‘Party of the Mexican Revolution’ in Mexico in 1929 and held uninterrupted power for 71 years (1929-2000).

Promotor de Educación: A program initiated by the Diocese of *San Cristobal de las Casas* in the UNHCR camps of the early 1980’s and later carried on in *La Gloria* until the early 2000’s – it saw primary-school educated men from the refugee population being trained to become teachers for the camp schools

Promotor Cultural / Promotor de Salud / Promotor de Educación: Informal positions for community- leaders in small rural towns in Mexico who work on culture, health, or education. These positions are sometimes recognised or supported (recompensated) by government or non-government agencies. In the refugee camps in Chiapas of the

1980's an official programme for these positions was created by Comar / UNHCR and continued to operate until the organisations completed their mission in the early 2000's. See Ruiz-Lagier 2013b for a deeper analysis and context.

El refugio: Literally 'the refuge' is a frequently used term in *La Gloria* to describe the time roughly between 1980 and 1984 – the initial flight of *Akateko* people from Guatemala as well as the early years of living in UNHCR camps in Chiapas.

Riviera Maya: Stretch of Caribbean coastline on Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula (mostly in the state of Quintana Roo), known for its numerous all-inclusive holiday resorts and generally an area frequented by tourists.

Salon Municipal: Large concrete space on La Gloria's central square used for all types of meetings and events, open to the sides and covered with a metal ceiling.

Secu(ndaria): Secondary school covering grades 7, 8, and 9.

Tallerista: Workshop-artist.

Traje (tipico) or chané: Traditional clothing worn by indigenous women, mostly consisting of a *huipil* (blouse), *faja* (belt) and *corte* (long skirt) in specific colour-combinations that indicate belonging to a specific region / ethno-linguistic group.