

# THE AFTERMATH PROJECT

## RECLAIMING THE DEAD

RODRIGO ABD, 2009 AFTERMATH PROJECT GRANT FINALIST

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### EXHUME THE BODY

A forensic anthropologist works to exhume the body of a peasant killed by the Guatemalan Army in 1982 during the civil war. Chucalibal, Quiche, 130 km west of Guatemala City. The Guatemalan Foundation for Forensic Anthropology oversaw the exhumation, which was visited by family members of victims of violence from around the world, including relatives of victims of the September 11 attacks in the US. May 17, 2005.



- In this image, we are witnessing the exhumation of a grave—one of the first steps in the reburial process. What details of color and composition in this photograph stand out to you?
  - Photographer Rodrigo Abd notes that “there is still a void to be filled in terms of how these communities were affected by violence and what effect the exhumations [have] had on the daily life of the villagers.” How do you think such a process would affect daily life throughout the nation? How might the resulting challenges be addressed?
  - Why do you think the photographer explains that the exhumations were “visited by family members of victims of violence from around the world, including relatives of victims of the September 11 attacks in the United States”? Why might those visits have mattered? What impact might those visits have had? On whom?
  - By looking at the photographs, have we become witnesses to the exhumation? If so, what responsibilities, if any, come with that witnessing?
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## SKELETON

A skeleton is seen next to Mayan traditional clothing in a mass grave where 12 persons were buried after they were massacred by the Guatemalan Army in 1982 in “El Adelanto” village. August 31, 2007.



- Once they uncover the burial sites, forensic anthropologists discover graves such as this littered with the fragments of an individual life. What questions come to mind as you view this image? What details stand out to you?
- The skull is surrounded by color from scraps of clothing. What do you make of the juxtaposition of these bright colors with the remains of a skull? How does it impact the way you understand the image?

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## RELATIVES

Relatives of 179 villagers killed by the Guatemalan Army during the period of 1981-1984 pray during a mass in a former military base in Comalapa. November 2, 2004.



- What do you notice about the way the picture is framed? Why do you think the photographer did not include the faces of the relatives?
- Study the picture closely. What clues does it contain about the identities of the relatives?
- Notice the bright colors in the photograph. Among the flowers are black-and-white images of victims of the violence. Together, what story do these elements tell?
- What role do rituals such as prayer, the creation of collective altars for lost loved ones, and the holding of community gatherings play in the aftermath of violence and genocide?

## VICTIM'S PICTURE

Lorenzo Cuxil and Felicita Oligaria look at a picture of a victim killed by the Guatemalan Army in a former military base in Comalapa, 80 km west of Guatemala City. Guatemalans honor their deceased loved ones on November 1 and 2. November 2, 2004.



- The large image of a skull shown in this photograph was taken by forensic anthropologists. For what possible reasons do you think it was placed in this field? Who are the individuals studying the image, and what brought them to this site?
- What thoughts, feelings, and questions does this photograph generate?
- What larger stories can be discerned from the photograph about this community's response in the aftermath of genocide?

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## COFFIN

A man carries the coffin of a villager killed during a massacre by the Guatemalan Army in 1981, in Cocop, Nebaj, about 300 km northwest of Guatemala City. After the exhumation of 76 villagers killed on April 16, 1981, in Cocop, a team of forensic anthropologists made a scientific study of the bones and clothes of the massacred villagers to identify their remains. After more than 2 years of study, the anthropologists gave the remains to their relatives for burial. June 10, 2008.



- Photographer Rodrigo Abd says that “relief can be found in the simple acts of closing the cycle of mourning, giving a proper burial, and honoring those who were wronged.” What is your response to his statement?
- As you view this photograph, take note of the hat and its relationship to the rest of the image. It is not placed on the head of a living person; rather, it is held alongside the coffin. What might this communicate about the untold story of genocide in Guatemala and its aftermath?

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See the full project: <http://dev.uncharteddigital.com/project/reclaiming-dead>