

RECONSTRUCTING *DISRUPTED LIVES*: THE CANADIAN EXHIBITION OF
CHILDREN'S ART FROM REFUGEE CAMPS

by

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Abstract

During the 1980s International Observers from Canadian churches and development organizations went to Central American refugees living in Honduras and México who fled from conflict zones in El Salvador and Guatemala, respectively. While there the observers commissioned and collected drawings by children living in the refugee camps. Shortly after this, the drawings were exhibited across Canada from 1986-1987 as part of the exhibition *Disrupted Lives: Children's Drawings from Central America*. In this paper I argue that the exhibition of children's drawings gave voice to a silenced aspect of Latin American history – the experiences of children living abroad in refugee camps displaced by the violence and civil wars in their home nations Guatemala and El Salvador. The “unsilencing” (Michel-Rolph Trouillot; 1995) of their histories also positions the drawings as illustrated examples of *testimonio* as defined by John Beverley (2004).

Preface

The UBC Behavioral Research Ethics Board (BREB) approved this research on February 16, 2011 under the category of minimal risk. One Ethics Certificate was received by the primary investigator Dr. John Barker and secondary investigator Meredith Diane Mantooth with Certificate Number H11-00059.

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Dedication

To those who worked and continue to work in refugee camps as international observers – may you be the change you wish to see in the world

To curators working with the art of children and other marginalized groups – may you continue to allow space for the silenced to speak.

Chapter 1: Introduction

During the early 1980s, three international observers from a Canadian church-run development organization travelled to refugee camps in Honduras and México to help those who fled from conflict zones in El Salvador and Guatemala. While visiting the camps, they commissioned and collected drawings from refugee children. The international observers gave the children crayons, pencils, and paper, then asked them to illustrate their homes in the moments before fleeing and arriving at the refugee camps. In total, approximately 700 drawings were collected. Upon returning to Canada the observers organized, “small displays of these pictures, which upon being used in development education programs in British Columbia and Ontario, proved to be remarkably effective in communicating the refugee experience” (Anonymous 1986a). The success of the first small displays prompted the group to organize a larger, more comprehensive exhibition of 63 drawings to circulate throughout Canada (Linda Dale; Interview May 2011). The *Disrupted Lives* exhibition, which toured across the country from 1986 through 1987, was “a step inside the world of war as experienced by the children of Central America” (Anonymous 1986a). Upon the close of the exhibition, curator Linda Dale, and the original collectors—Wes Maultsaid, Don Robertson, and Marta de la Vega Torres—returned the drawings from *Disrupted Lives* to the Guatemalan refugees who were then still living in México and to non-profit and nongovernmental organizations in San Salvador on behalf of the Salvadoran refugees who had by that time returned to their country. In 2010, Maultsaid’s ex-wife donated 143 pictures from the remaining collection to the Museum of Anthropology (MOA) at the University of British Columbia along with a set of photographs of children making the drawings in the camps.

The 143 drawings from the MOA collection reflect the individual and collective experiences of children in war torn countries. The images show people fleeing from their homes and villages, buildings and garden plots ablaze, bodies floating lifeless in rivers and lying in fields. Some drawings show people inside burning buildings. Others depict uniformed soldiers spraying crowds with bullets. Some drawings include captions describing the scenes, telling stories of persecution and massacre.

Drawing upon interviews with the original collectors and curator, this thesis presents an analysis of refugee children's drawings in the MOA collection. Specifically, I provide background on how the pictures came to be solicited and compare them to those drawings that were selected to be displayed in the *Disruptive Lives* exhibition. I then turn to an appraisal of the pictures themselves. Understood as forms of *testimonio*, the pictures reveal much about the potential for the material culture to illuminate the silenced voices of history and the process of representation that occurs in museums (and museum-like settings) that provide the space for such voices to speak and be heard.

Chapter 2: Methodology

To begin analyzing the drawings, I will describe the research methods I used to acquire information from the people involved and to analyze the material characteristics of the drawings. I will then lay a theoretical foundation to support my argument that the drawings incorporate silenced voices into the historical record as testimonials of personal experience. In gathering the research data upon which this thesis is based, I employed three methods: interviews with the people who collected and exhibited the drawings, systematic analysis of the drawings themselves, and a theoretical framework to support analysis of the drawings' roles in museums and history.

2.1 Interviews

I conducted one semi-structured group interview with three former international observers who collected the drawings—both some of those used in *Disrupted Lives* and those in the Museum of Anthropology collection. The collectors interviewed collected all of the drawings at MOA but not all of the drawings included in *Disrupted Lives*. Semi-structured interviews help the researcher guide the conversation without forcing it in any particular direction. Ideally this results in research participants opening up about their past and current experiences on a particular topic. I met in early May of 2011 with Wes Maultsaid, Don Robertson, and Marta de la Torres at the Museum of Anthropology to discuss the drawings and their experiences collecting them. We reviewed how they came to be international observers, their experiences in the refugee camps, and their collecting of drawings from the

children. I documented the group interview on a digital voice recorder with the permission of the participants. The interview lasted around two and a half hours.

I also interviewed Linda Dale, the curator of the *Disrupted Lives* exhibition, about her experiences and goals working with the children's art. I followed a semi-structured format with this interview as well; however, we spoke on the phone rather than in person because she lives in another province. During the 1980s exhibitions of this type were uncommon and in many ways ground breaking. We spoke at length about *Disrupted Lives*, for nearly two hours. I also recorded this interview digitally.

Rather than transcribing the two interviews, I made a list of topics and themes discussed which I drew upon for this thesis.

2.2 Analysis of the Drawings in the MOA Collection

My analysis focuses upon the 143 drawings donated to the MOA in 2011. The analysis included two steps: first, the translation of written *testimonio* which appear on some of the drawings; and second, the construction of a database systematically listing key traits and elements (e.g., use of color, appearance of objects such as helicopters, depiction of violence, presence of soldiers and civilians, and so forth). The database allows a rough statistical overview of the MOA collection, lending support to the overall interpretation I advance in the Data Analysis section of this thesis.

During my phone interview with Linda Dale I learned that a catalogue had been produced of the original *Disrupted Lives* exhibition (Dale et al 1986). The catalogue includes descriptions of all 63 drawings, reproducing images of 14. Given the small number of images

and since I was not able to secure a copy at the time I was analyzing the MOA drawings. I have not tried to systematically incorporate the catalogue drawings into my main analysis. All the same, I refer to the catalogue drawings from time to time in what follows as they suggest that the key themes present in the MOA collection were also present in those selected for the exhibition. (One can only speculate about the nearly 500 other drawings collected from Central American refugee children.) Differences between the two sets of drawings also provide important clues as to curatorial selection in the original exhibition.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation for my analysis of the drawings is based upon Michel Rolph Trouillot's work on historical silences and John Beverley's work on *testimonio*.

2.3.1 Historical Silences

In a powerful critique of historical scholarship, Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot identifies and interrogates a number of important "master narratives"—foundational myths—of "Western" history, and suggests that putting forward "counter-narratives" is the first obligation of serious scholars. In this way scholars aim to be increasingly responsible to the contemporary implications of their historical work by highlighting the lesser known aspects of historical records overshadowed by these grand myths such as a romantic narrative

of progress.¹ Furthermore, Trouillot shows that such master narratives often trivialize, make banal, and/or silence aspects of the past. Consequently, in the construction of successful counter-narratives, social scientists must take care to see how the seemingly trivial or banal may be important and how what is silent may be helped to speak. The lives and voices of children, particularly those in rural Latin America, are prime examples of historical records trivialized and obscured by the emphasis put on other sources – primarily adult political and international actors.

It is crucial to unpack how Trouillot explains the processes involved in "silencing the past" before we can successfully discuss how these drawings work to "unsilence" it. Sources outside of academia and history as a discipline are critical elements to "unsilencing" the past. Trouillot maintains his commitment to the use of non-canonical sources by incorporating material manifestations of history, such as palatial ruins, along with more traditional archival sources, such as military communications. Trouillot attempts to clarify the relationship between sources and "silencing" by delineating key entry points.

Silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of sources); the moment of fact assembly (the making of narratives); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance) (1995:26).

Incorporating alternative sources is an important method to shed light on obscured and silenced histories. The drawings examined in this thesis are examples of material manifestations of history which incorporate the silenced perspectives and stories of the past.

¹ For challenges to this particular meta-narrative see David Scott's *Conscripts of Modernity* (2004) and Jeremy D. Popkin's *You are all Free* (2010).

Their previous and ongoing displays introduce otherwise silenced voices into the public and archival realm through museum exhibitions and gallery records.

Importantly, Trioullot includes museums as alternative sites of historical preservation and dissemination of silenced voices. Historical sources ought to include “not only the libraries or depositories sponsored by states and foundations, but less visible institutions that also sort sources to organize facts, according to themes or periods, into documents to be used and monuments to be explored” (1995:52). To clarify, silencing as a process is more about overlooking or trivializing alternative histories rather than a purposeful act by scholars, political actors, or adults in general. Trouillot himself writes only about the historical significance of adults. Although he does hint at the importance of history during a person’s formative years: “long before average citizens read the historians who set the standards of the day for colleagues and students, they access history through celebrations, site and museum visits, movies, national holidays, and primary school books” (1995:20). Like the traditional source canon, museums organize their collections into the seen and unseen, the voiced and voice-less, into hierarchical levels of accessibility.² *Disrupted Lives* as an exhibition also functioned in this way.

Opening up historical sources by using the museum as an archival source allows space for silenced voices to speak. Museums incorporate a wider range of historical sources to include material culture and associated intangible traditions such as the making or using of material culture. Historically, the voices of children are rarely recorded, especially first-hand

² While the MOA is a remarkably transparent institution where 60-70% of their collections are available to the public (typically museums display 10-20%) there are still many barriers to access for the general public such as hours, language, entrance fees, and location.

accounts with limited adult influence. Tobias Hecht, author of one of the few volumes dedicated to the history and historical records of children in Latin America, writes

First-hand historical records of children's lives in Latin America... are exceedingly rare. What is more, where children's writings have been used by historians, the records tend to say as much about what adults expected and taught children to write as they do about the everyday lives of their young authors (2002:3).

The silencing of children's history and perspectives doesn't necessarily mean a complete dismissal of their role in the historical record; rather, it refers to the way historians, anthropologists, and other adults have co-opted children for their own purposes – political, historical, and religious. Hecht describes the situation for Latin America by succinctly arguing “the absence, until recently, of virtually any consideration of children in the history of Latin America is...a reflection more of the concerns and preoccupations of those writing history than a lack of material worthy of scrutiny” (2002:8-9). There is definitely a wealth of material directly related to the lives and perspectives of children worthy of scholarship, and the drawings associated with *Disrupted Lives* is a prime example.

Finally, it is important to consider the demographic aspects of studying children. In 1996 one third of Latin America's population was under the age of fourteen and in 1974 forty eight percent of the Honduran population was fourteen or younger and fifty nine percent were nineteen or younger (Hecht 2002:12). Children played an integral role in the workings of the region and the nation, as laborers, militants, students, and victims just like their adult contemporaries. The sheer magnitude of the population juxtaposed against the lack of scholarship on children illustrates the powerful silencing that can occur in historical work.

Ironically, incorporating children's voices into the historical record generally involves the mediation of adults. With this collection of drawings we see Dale's intermediary position as curator. She sought to emphasize the perspective of the children but despite her best efforts even this exhibit and collection includes adult mediation. My own research itself is an adult mediation of children's experiences. The concept of *testimonio* can help us understanding the role of adult involvement in the un-silencing of children's voices in history.

2.3.2 *Testimonio*

Testimonio, as a literary genre, transforms oral narratives by authors from non-literate backgrounds or deeply oral cultures into written text through the interlocation of a mediator who transcribes and translates the narrative for a wider audience. As a result, the genre helps make otherwise obscure and suppressed accounts of historical events accessible to a general public. This thesis demonstrates how the exhibition of the drawings simultaneously brings the children's stories to an even broader public while also introducing *testimonio* as a method of incorporating silenced voices. While largely a movement in Latin American literature, it also involves authors and experiences from Egypt, the United States, and India.

The book I, Rigoberta Menchú (1984) is a key yet controversial text in the genre of *testimonio*. It sheds light on the role of authority over truth in the giving and receiving of *testimonio* as a genre. Narrated by the Mayan woman Rigoberta Menchú and transcribed, edited, and translated by anthropologist Elizabeth Burgos-Debray, the book tells the story of Menchú's experiences during the civil war in Guatemala from 1960-1996. When

anthropologist David Stoll investigated the experiences and events described by Menchú, he found many inconsistencies between Menchú's recounting and that of other people.

However, proponents of the concept of *testimonio* defend Menchú's story because the importance of a *testimonio* lies not in the precision and accuracy of the story told. Unlike court testimony in a Napoleonic or Common Law system where precision and accuracy reign supreme, with *testimonio* the significance of the statements depends on one's authority to speak and often draw on communal experience as a source of that authority.

Leading Latin American subaltern studies and literary scholar John Beverley argues – similarly to Trouillot – for a broader incorporation of disenfranchised, obscured, and trivialized sources in history. His work with the genre of *testimonio* reflects a commitment to these sources. *Testimonio*, according to Beverley, must be “told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a ‘life’ or significant life experience” (2004:31). Further, with *testimonio* “it is the intentionality of the narrator that is paramount” (2004:32).

Beverley states that *testimonio* incorporates but is not subsumed by: “autobiography, autobiographical novel, oral history, memoir, confession, diary, interview, eyewitness report, life history, *novella-testimonio*, nonfiction novel, or “factographic” literature” (Beverley 2004:31). He also describes the *testimonio* as “representing in particular those subjects – the child, the ‘native,’ the woman, the insane, the criminal, the proletarian – excluded from authorized representation when it was a question of speaking and writing for themselves rather than being spoken for” (*ibid*:31). One of the most common characteristics of *testimonio* is that the author, the one giving their testament, is illiterate or insufficiently

literate to write their experiences. Beverly makes this statement less as a prescriptive argument and more as a description of how *testimonios* generally come to be. This characteristic reflects the marginalization of the author and of oral traditions within the western canon. As a result an intermediary is required.

In what follows, I argue that the children's drawings investigated in this thesis qualify as *testimonio*. The drawings and their creators have the authority to tell their stories despite youth and marginalization as refugees and rural people. The drawings are autobiographical eyewitness reports which tell the life histories of children as they were expelled from their homes by paramilitary groups. Further, they were created in the form of *testimonio*, through the actions of intermediaries. However, the drawings also complicate this characteristic of *testimonio*. It is unlikely the young artists would be able to effectively write extensively of their experiences for more than a few sentences.³ Because the drawings are visual representations of historical events as they witnessed them, the children did not require an intermediary to write their *testimonio* for them, at least in the traditional sense exemplified by the partnership between Rigoberta Menchú and Elizabeth Burgos-Debray. During her collaboration with Menchú, Debray worked not only to record and transcribe Menchu's story but also to transform the oral narrative to a written text. While inevitably interpreted in innumerable ways by viewers, the individual drawings do not require formal interpretation to understand the events that befell the children as they fled their homes. The exhibition of the drawings, however, moves more clearly into the genre of *testimonio*. Curators and museum

³ In fact, the writing that does accompany the drawings is often riddled with spelling and grammatical errors which make translation difficult.

professionals function like intermediaries and inevitably influence and alter the messages of the testimonial drawings through a variety of methods, including, advertising, lighting, wall text, and physical arrangements.

To sum up, the power of the drawings lies in their role as *testimonios*. I argue that while scholars typically engage with the genre of *testimonio* in literary term, artistic works also qualify as *testimonio*. *Testimonios*, in both literary and graphic forms, function in several key ways. They relate life experiences of the authors or artists, involve mediators who translate or transcribe the *testimonio*, and incorporate silenced voices into the historical record. *Testimonio* is a narrative genre which incorporates the voice of people and groups typically made voiceless through oppression and violence.

Chapter 3: Historical Context

Political unrest is a common theme throughout the history of Central America, particularly during the tumultuous 1980s. This decade brought civil war to four of the eight countries in the region: Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. The political tension was connected directly to the relationship of each country with their influential northern neighbor – the United States. The United States’ political and economic interventions in Central America came up frequently in the interviews I conducted for this thesis, in particular the role of the United States in El Salvador’s recent civil war that turned rural peasants into refugees and created the conditions for the drawings analyzed here.

Prior to European arrival in Central America, the Lempa River separated what is now El Salvador from the dominance of the Mayan City-State system of south eastern México, Guatemala, and Honduras. An Oxfam report by Kevin Murray states “Mayan influence did not extend across the [Lempa] river, thus creating the cultural distinction that has been a recurrent theme in Salvadoran history” (Murray 1997:6). The Lempa River also played a crucial role in the experiences of the refugees fleeing persecution in El Salvador who created the drawings in the collection at the UBC Museum of Anthropology (MOA).

Spanish conquistadors arrived in what is now El Salvador in 1524 (Murray 1997:5). From the beginning of the Spanish occupation until independence from Spain in 1821, the coastal nation operated under an export focused economy that served the goals of the Spanish Crown rather than fostering local independence or self-sufficiency. For the Spanish colonists extraction of resources was the primary goal. During Spanish rule mono-cropping of indigo for European and North American export dominated the agricultural and economic structure

of El Salvador. Emphasis on an export economy was and is common throughout Latin America and other former colonial regions. Independence from Spain did little to change this system. To this day “coffee plantations, the primary source of El Salvador’s wealth for the century and a half before the [civil] war, blanket large areas of the steep volcanic slopes” (Murray 1997:4). The foundation of El Salvador’s economy was structured to serve the interests of an external state. As a result, disparity in wealth, particularly in terms of access to land, plagued El Salvador throughout its time as a colony and after independence from Spanish rule.

Since the late nineteenth century the people of El Salvador have struggled with issues of landlessness and the ability of rural, impoverished people to grow food for their families and earn a living. Throughout El Salvador’s history landlessness contributed significantly to revolutionary ideologies and civil war. “Legislation between 1879 and 1882 resulted in the abolition of collective village landholding. As world coffee prices doubled in the 1880s, large estates dedicated to this crop became the basis of the wealth of the famous ‘fourteen families,’ a new oligarchy whose control over Salvadoran life later contributed substantially to the development of revolutionary conditions” (Ucles 1996:10). During this time, the foundations of structural inequality and rural poverty--a fundamental issue of the civil war from 1980 through 1992--were laid. Popular resistance to the oligarchy and military dictatorships developed slowly in El Salvador. In January of 1932 around 30,000 people participating in peaceful labor protests against coffee worker wage cuts were massacred by

the military. Simultaneously the military used the resistance movement as a pretext to stage a coup against the civilian government. This event is often referred to as “*La Matanza*”.⁴

According to Kevin Murray, “the northern mountains, always populated by poor farmers living at the margins of the nation’s economic life, were the main battleground in the civil war” (1997: 4). The uneven distribution of wealth resulting from elite families monopolizing access to land triggered the rebellion of groups against the military government in 1980. These guerilla groups were collectively referred to as the *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* or Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (the FMLN).⁵ The Salvadoran government enacted a “scorched earth” policy that sought to eliminate entire civilian populations from the regions occupied by the FMLN. Paramilitary groups, largely trained and supported by the US government aid, massacred entire villages and displaced thousands of people in the mountains of western El Salvador. The military killed or forced out everyone in the area, regardless of their relation to the FMLN or the government. Death toll estimates for this period hover around 70-80,000 people, with the majority composed of civilian deaths (Gibb 2002). People were displaced internally and across international borders. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees documented 350,000 Salvadorian refugees; El Salvador church officials estimate 500,000 (Anonymous 1986b). The United Nations High commission on Refugees (UNHCR) formed camps in Honduras for Salvadorans fleeing across the border from paramilitary groups. The

⁴ *La Matanza* literally means “the killing” but connotes a more systematic and ordered level of killing than a massacre.

⁵ The FMLN was a coalition of five revolutionary guerrilla organizations, for more information on the specifics of how the groups worked together see Mario Lungo Ucles El Salvador in the Eighties: Counterinsurgency and Revolution (1996)

resulting refugee camps became the new homes for the children who drew the pictures featured in *Disrupted Lives* and the collection at MOA analyzed for this research.

Throughout the course of the conflict the military government of El Salvador received enormous financial and strategic support from the United States. Journalist Tom Gibb wrote about the US involvement: “to defeat the rebels, the US equipped and trained an army which kidnapped and disappeared more than 30,000 people, and carried out large-scale massacres of thousands of old people, women and children” (Gibb 2002). A review of the exhibition *Disrupted Lives* also references the huge amount of military aid given by the United States to the military dictatorship in El Salvador. A journalist reporting on *Disrupted Lives* told children visiting the exhibition that the United States provided a million dollars a day in aid to the Salvadoran military. After further research the journal found that “it isn't a million dollars a day. It's more like a million and a half” (Sinclair 1987). “[President] Carter gave El Salvador fifteen million dollars of war-related aid in 1980, an amount that was more than quintupled the following year. Over the next decade, 1981-1990, U.S. aid to El Salvador totaled close to four billion dollars, more than 70 percent of which was made up of war-related funds” (Schmidt 1996:18). El Salvador received huge amounts of support from the United States, financially and logistically in the training of soldiers. Despite the US support given to the military government of El Salvador the FMLN continued the revolution for twelve years.

On January 16, 1992 after more than ten years of massacres, disappearances, and massive upheaval throughout the country, the Salvadoran civil war ended when the FMLN rebels and the military signed peace accords at the Chapultepec Castle of Mexico City. The

end of the civil war occurred primarily because of a shift in US foreign policy towards El Salvador. The influential northern neighbor changed its position on Central America and pushed the military government towards a peace talk process beginning with a mutual cease fire. The FMLN agreed and peace accord talks commenced in 1991. The primary demands of the FMLN were to be enfranchised as a political party and for the military government to hold democratic elections. Peace negotiations continued until 1992 when both sides signed peace accords. In accordance with the agreement, the FMLN became enfranchised as a political party and democratic elections began. The FMLN continues to participate in politics to this day and national elections occur regularly. Refugee camps across international borders were disbanded by the UNHCR. Beyond this the fate of the refugees at Mesa Grande camp is unknown to my research participants. Landlessness and government corruption, however, continue to plague the country.

Chapter 4: The Collection

4.1 The Collecting Process

Wes Maultsaid began his career as an Anglican minister in British Columbia only to find himself playing a role in the daily lives of Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees living in Honduras and México during the 1980s. He and other like-minded social activists formed the Christian Task Force (CTF) [now called the Ecumenical Task Force for Justice in the Americas] because of their desire to express solidarity with the people suffering in Central America and to help in whatever way they could. As Kathryn Anderson describes, they sought to provide active support to the refugees: “When the Christian Task Force on Central America (CTF) formed in 1984, refugee solidarity became a pillar of its work. Delegations returned to the camps yearly until the early 1990s” (Anderson 2003:39). The CTF engaged in long term activities with refugees in Central America, which continue to this day through interpersonal relationships with former refugees and the ongoing activities of the group.

The CTF members found that a global perspective was too large for the group and concentrated their efforts on Central America. Members of the group travelled to refugee camps in Honduras and Mexico as international observers to work alongside the people there providing whatever services they could. They worked in community gardens, brought school supplies from Canada, and provided religious services during the visits (typically two weeks for each observer). After one or two observers travelled to the refugee camps they would meet with new arrivals to debrief them on the situation, what was needed, and how to achieve their goals. This process provided continual presence from international observers, from the CTF and other international organizations.

Much of the CTF's commitment to the cause in Central America stemmed from their mutual belief in liberation theology. Liberation theology is an intrinsically religious philosophy with foundations in the teachings of Jesus Christ on social justice and inequality. As Phillip Berryman describes "people do not happen to be poor; their poverty is largely a product of the way society is organized. Hence, liberation theology is a critique of economic structures that enable some Latin Americans to jet to Miami or London to shop, while most of their fellow citizens do not have safe drinking water" (Berryman 1987:5). Peruvian priest Gustavo Gutierrez coined the term Liberation Theology in his book on the subject *A Theology of Liberation* (1973). Liberation theology is strongly associated with the Second Vatican Council or "Vatican II". The Vatican II conference encouraged a growing interest in social justice among Roman Catholic priests in Latin America. Today, liberation theology is a religious movement beyond Latin America and even beyond Roman Catholicism with interdenominational adherents across the globe.

Archbishop Óscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdámez, known as Óscar Romero, exemplified the values of liberation theology in El Salvador's particular political and economic climate. Romero was the fourth Bishop of San Salvador, the country's capital city. He publicly denounced military actions against the citizens of El Salvador and called upon soldiers to disobey any orders to kill (Berryman 1987:3). His powerful influence throughout all levels of Salvadoran society marked him as a prime target for the government. The military government assassinated Bishop Romero while saying mass in San Salvador for his outspoken criticisms of war and persecution of the rural poor on March 24, 1980.

Don Robertson, during the interview with fellow former CTF members, provided an excellent example of the importance of liberation theology to both the international observers and the refugees in Mesa Grande Refugee Camp. He recounted his experience attending a 1983 Bible study with people at Mesa Grande who fled paramilitary groups in El Salvador. He described the environment of the camp as a “God forsaken place”. It was bare, with no vegetation, and surrounded by Honduran military. According to Robertson, people would disappear from the camp, never to be seen again. Despite the hardships and uncertainty of life, the people continued to come together to practice their religion. The group was studying the Good Samaritan story.⁶ The people of the camp surprised the observer with their interpretation of the events in the story. Their point was not to glorify the Good Samaritan or who he was as a person or philanthropist. Nor was the emphasis on how important it was to help others suffering and struggling. For the people in Mesa Grande camp it was most important to understand, in Don’s words, “who put this guy on the side of the road; why was this guy on the side of the road. I never thought of the good Samaritan story from that point of view before” (Don Robertson; Interview March 2011). This take on the Good Samaritan story resonated with Don’s perspectives on religion and social justice. This experience reinforced his commitment to both, as a church member and humanitarian. Further, the Bible study’s message clearly reflects the perspective and influence of liberation theology. This

⁶ The Good Samaritan tells the story of a man abandoned and near death on the side of the road. Nearly every traveler ignores the man on the side of the road until the titular Good Samaritan stops to give him a drink of water. The story is typically understood and taught as an argument for importance of charity and goodwill towards all human beings among Christians.

also explains the goals and philosophies of the CTF organization as described by the founding members interviewed.

As part of their mission, the international observers brought crayons and paper to the camps for the children. The resulting art works often dealt directly with the children's experiences of paramilitary attacks on their villages and fleeing from these attacks across the Lempa River into Honduras. The observers I interviewed initiated the collection of the drawings but by no means were the only participants. Other groups of Canadian international observers working in Central America also collected drawings. Including the contributions of non-CTF members, over 700 drawings were collected during the 1980s. Only 63 of these would come to be displayed in *Disrupted Lives*. Later, 143 drawings were donated to the Museum of Anthropology (none of which had been part of *Disrupted Lives*).

4.2 Curating *Disrupted Lives*

The exhibition *Disrupted Lives* travelled across Canada beginning in Halifax, Nova Scotia on January 10, 1986 and ending in Nanaimo, British Columbia in September 1987.⁷ The schedule reflects the diversity of display locations across Canada and the power of this exhibition to speak to museums, art galleries, and audiences across Canada. Throughout this

⁷ Other locations include: Mount Saint Vincent Art Gallery in Halifax, Nova Scotia; the Art Gallery of Windsor in Windsor, Ontario; the Harbourfront Art Gallery in Toronto, Ontario; the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, Alberta; the Dunlop Art Gallery in Regina, Saskatchewan; the Confederation Art Gallery in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island; the Mendel Art Gallery in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan; the Thunder Bay National Exhibition Centre and Centre for Indian Art in Thunder Bay, Ontario; Gallery III at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, Manitoba; and the Madrona Centre in Nanaimo, British Columbia. The longest display period occurred in Regina, Saskatchewan for three months in 1986. The shortest display period was in Toronto, Ontario for 24 days from May 5 to May 29, 1986.

paper I argue that this exhibition gave voice to a silenced aspect of Latin American history – the experiences of children living abroad in refugee camps displaced by the violence in their home nations. The extent of the exhibit’s travels and multiple venues allowed the experiences of children (normally unknown) to be heard by the Canadian public and become incorporated into the historical record and into popular awareness.

A description written in 1986 by the funding organizations Inter Pares and Canadian University Service Overseas (CUSO) about the drawings and *Disrupted Lives* deserves to be quoted at length because it aptly describes the background and intent behind the exhibition:

“The project to obtain these drawings began partly by accident. Canadian visitors to a refugee camp in Honduras brought along art supplies for the children. When invited to draw pictures of their home villages, the children responded with simple drawings and written testimonies of their personal experiences of war. From this first encounter, the idea of an exhibit began. The children communicate both hope and despair. The human dimensions of family and community, of a child’s love for animals, stand side by side with images of violence and murder and death. The vulnerability of anyone who is not a soldier and the unpredictability of life in a war zone give rise to images that mingle grotesquely with the more usual ones of attending to the daily requirements of planting, cooking, and carrying water. What the children have drawn, and what they now say to us, expresses their struggle to hold what remains of their world” (Inter Pares/CUSO 1986: 80).

The curator of the exhibition sought to provide visitors and the Canadian public at large a glimpse into the worlds of children living with war. The drawings provided an excellent medium to express solidarity with the refugee’s struggle while also bringing greater awareness to underappreciated aspects of history – children.

As *Disrupted Lives* travelled across Canada newspaper reviews of the exhibit followed. Robert Everett-Green wrote that one of the exhibition's most powerful aspects is the "natural juxtaposition of features common to every child's environment with the privations and brutal interventions of war. The simplicity and directness of the drawings and of the accompanying texts bring home the damnable familiarity of bloody conflict in these children's lives," (Everett-Green 1986). Furthermore, "*Disrupted Lives* is a show that, should it tour forever, could never have enough viewers. The aid agencies that have supported the exhibition (Inter Pares, CUSO and others) deserve thanks for their part in helping to put flesh on the bones of abstract headlines" (Everett-Green 1986). Another journalist wrote that "dominant themes in the crude drawings include mountains, fire, helicopters and a single soldier killing many people. While the imagery is far from vivid, the display is surprisingly powerful because it concerns the artistic feelings of displaced and often abused children." (Wang 1986). Another reviewer wrote about her experience taking a group of school children through the exhibition.

"We go on to another panel of pictures. ... We figure out that the soldiers are destroying the corn so the people wanting land will have nothing to eat. Here is one of a cow, startled and fleeing - but not escaping - from the sound of gunfire. Here, again, are the omnipresent dots that stand for bullets. For some reason, that picture makes my little group especially angry." (Sinclair 1987). These reviews provide insight into the perspective of outsiders visiting the exhibition. It also helps the reader understand the dominant Canadian reception to the exhibition, both politically and visually. They also highlight the impact of drawings by children on other children who live very different lives.

Interviews with the curator, Linda Dale, bring the newspaper descriptions together with insider knowledge of the curatorial intentions and goals of the exhibit. Dale worked as a public programmer and curator for the Newfoundland Museum in Fredericton, New Brunswick, prior to curating the exhibition *Disrupted Lives*. Her position there came together largely through her own initiatives to combine social activism and passion for education in a public venue with access to resources and an audience – the museum. While there she frequently worked with topics of women’s history and children’s issues. Through her work she wanted to shed light on these lesser known histories and stories. It was during her time in this position that she first worked with children’s art for the exhibition *Children of the Wind*. Additionally, Dale served on the local board of Oxfam. Working with Oxfam in particular opened doors for the opportunity to curate *Disrupted Lives*; this sphere of people offered her the position to curate an exhibition of children’s drawings from refugee camps in Central America because of her background with children’s history and her museology. Her experience with differing communities such as activists, churches, and artists provided an ideal background to curate an exhibition of the drawings because exactly these groups were part of the collecting and exhibition of the drawings.

The veteran curator and organizer found herself pleasantly surprised at the success of the fund raising process for the exhibition. Funding sources came from non-profit and non-governmental organizations, many of them with religious connections or backgrounds. Official documentation for the exhibition includes donors and supporting institutions: INTER PARES, the Anglican Primates Fund, CANSAVE, Catholic Organization for D&P, Canadian University Service Overseas (CUSO), the Jesuit Apostolic Fund, Lutheran World Relief, the

Mennonite Central Committee, Oxfam, the United Church, and the United Church Observer (Anonymous 1986a). While the main funding bodies of the exhibition were religious organizations, the exhibition itself emphasized the personal experiences of the children who drew the pictures. As such, none of the reviews published of the exhibition mention or incorporate religious messages. It is difficult to infer beyond these sources and the interviews with those closest to the exhibition that religious overtones were present in *Disrupted Lives*. Liberation Theology played an important role in the motivations for the collectors and refugees living in the camps but neither the exhibition itself nor the reviews made direct reference to this philosophy.

All curated exhibitions involve some form of selection. No exhibition can display all works relevant or important to the themes and goals intended to be represented. *Disrupted Lives* is no exception to this. Dale had to choose from over 700 drawings submitted by international observers working in Central America. Selective criteria implemented by the curator included: not using adult aesthetic values, not adhering to story line narrative structure in display, and rejecting drawings that demonstrate adult influence in content or style. She also decided to only include drawings from Guatemalan and Salvadoran children. Dale actively worked to limit and exclude pieces she thought reflected adult interference and influence in the drawings. For Dale:

A very critical thing in terms of creating the collection was limiting adult influence because people were telling the children what to draw. It was important as a curator that there had been no direction given, one thing we agreed to was to limit adult influence. There were for example a lot of drawings about the killing of Romero, even though they had not witnessed it

themselves, had not experienced it. Was it because they had been told to draw that or was it so permeated into the culture that they almost feel as if they were there? (Linda Dale; Interview May 2011)

To illustrate Dale's selection process she provided a specific instance of a category of drawings removed from the pool for potential use in the exhibition. She described this herself as metaphorically setting them to one side. Many of the children drew pictures of events they could not have witnessed themselves. One such instance is the assassination of Salvadoran Archbishop and liberation theology leader Óscar Romero. Their physical remoteness in western El Salvador and young ages when the assassination occurred supports this position. While she accepts that this event was thoroughly part of the consciousness of Salvadorans, it would only be part of children's understandings because of adult transmission of the facts. Consequently, she decided to limit the selections to events directly experienced by the children. Ironically, Dale's curatorial decision, which is itself a form of adult intervention, also reflects the overarching message conveyed by the exhibition: children's perspectives of war.

Furthermore, including the illustrations of Romero's murder would emphasize the specifics of civil war in El Salvador, which was something Dale wished to minimize. Dale wanted to create an exhibition that would address a child's perspective of war and violence more generally. Including images of the Archbishop would create an exhibition of the particularities of war. It is important to note that with 700 submissions of drawings collected by observers like Maultsaid, Roberts, and Torres, many of the drawings not selected by Dale fit into her curatorial criteria but were not selected because of space limitations.

The form and structure of the exhibition space also speaks to Dale's goal to limit – not erase – adult influences in terms of content, aesthetics, and exhibition. Little interpretive information existed in the exhibition space. The booklets available held transcriptions and translations of the statements accompanying the drawings displayed. While the organization of the exhibition space itself was minimal, interactions between audience members and the exhibit were dynamic and productive. During an interview with Dale she described how one school created a week long program around *Disrupted Lives* and had their students produce art and poetry in response. According to Dale, “they responded with a high level of empathy. One thing that made the exhibit strong was the uniqueness because children's art was not a common subject for exhibition then.” She also mentioned now it's more common to see exhibitions incorporating children as subjects and audience members. This also helped connect it to young people who weren't normally audience members for galleries and museums. By not having much interpretive text for audience members and by highlighting the stand alone ability of the drawings to tell their own stories Dale upheld her curatorial commitment to the artists and their history.

Dale's concern with the role of adult influence in the drawings displayed in *Disrupted Lives* also arose during interviews with collectors Marta Torres de la Vega and Wes Maultsaid. While speaking with Wes Maultsaid, he described the story of a psychologist in the Mesa Grande camp who encouraged the children to draw pictures of more positive things rather than more of their experiences fleeing for their lives from their homes. According to the participants, this person exerted significant influence throughout the camp, both among residents and international observers. After the psychologist urged adults to encourage

children to draw happier memories, the children drew them. This example shows that while Dale sought to limit adult influence in the children's artworks, her selection goals had more to do with limiting works illustrating experiences outside the lives of the children. The more positive drawings were images of village life before the massacres or of life in the refugee camps after exile in Honduras. The attempt by both collectors and the curator to highlight the experiences of the children through their art and to minimize the influence of outsiders, of adults, reflects their commitment to helping the children tell their stories in their way.

During the summer of 2010 a CTF international observer's former wife donated 143 drawings by young refugees to MOA. These drawings were not selected for *Disrupted Lives* by Linda Dale; instead, they were returned to the CTF member who donated them. The donor tried to give the drawings to Inter Pares and several other organizations originally involved with the exhibition. These groups were unable to take such a large influx of artwork and care for them appropriately. The donor eventually sought to give the drawings to MOA. MOA is well equipped to preserve and exhibit such a collection, and so accepted the donation and acquired the pieces.

Chapter 5: Data Analysis

For this analysis I examined 143 drawings in the MOA collection. Fifteen of the drawings in the MOA collection are on blue laminated paper while the remaining 128 are on legal size off-white paper. In order to systematically organize and analyze the drawings I created a database of the drawings, initially working just with the MOA collection. I used fourteen categories: the number of human figures present, the number of civilians or soldiers present, the number of buildings present, the number of any animals depicted, the number of helicopters, if any plants or landscape are depicted, if an image depicts a river (without a label), if a written statement is included, if the artist's name is on the drawing, if the sides of the river are labeled as El Salvador and Honduras, if the Lempa River is labeled, if the drawing is in color or black and white, if both sides of the paper were used, and if any fire is shown. I counted the number of times each of these categories appeared in each drawing from the MOA collection as well as the drawings from the *Disrupted Lives* catalog. Further, interviews with three of the collectors helped to clarify these categories with first-hand information about the MOA collection.

In May 2011 I spoke with former international observers Marta de la Vega, Don Robertson, and Wes Maultsaid. They recounted how they brought school supplies of paper, pencils, and crayons to the refugee camps in Honduras. However there was not enough for each child to have their own set leading to the supplies being held communally. This story corresponds well to the ratio of drawings in color compared to those in black and white – around eight percent, or 12 drawings, lack color – due to the low supply of colors. Also, the limited supply of coloring implements is likely behind much of the unusual use of color in

the drawings where blues, reds, browns, and pinks abound. A few examples of this unusual coloring are illustrations of bright red villagers, purple rivers, pink helicopters, and multicolored houses. In summary, crayons were used the most in these drawings, perhaps due to more crayons being present at the camp.

During our conversation at MOA Wes, Don, Marta, and I looked through the 143 drawings donated to the institution. We commented and agreed that helicopters, the Lempa River (which forms the border between El Salvador and Honduras crossed by the refugees), armed soldiers, and prostrate (assumedly dead) bodies are the most common features repeated throughout all of the drawings. Over two thirds of the illustrations feature at least two, if not all, of these elements. The drawings in the MOA collection, according to the interview participants, were drawn by Salvadorans living in Honduran refugee camps. After further research, it turns out that two of the drawings from the MOA collection (catalogue numbers 48123 and 48124) are by Nicaraguan children. The MOA collection also includes photographs of some of the children drawing their pictures by candle light on straw mats and roughly constructed shelters in the refugee camp, along with other photos taken by the observers during their time in the camps. Slides of the drawings now in the MOA collection were included in the donation to MOA as well. The photographs and slides provided context for the creation of the drawings that supports the information from interview participants.

As mentioned in the Methods section of this thesis, I received the catalogue for the original *Disrupted Lives* exhibition too late to incorporate into my analysis. The catalogue reproduces images of only 14 of the drawings, but includes descriptions of all 63 (Dale et al. 1986). From an examination of the catalogue, however, it appears that the common elements

within the MOA collection also extend to the images from *Disrupted Lives*. The similarities between the MOA and *Disrupted Lives* drawings extend beyond visual features. The *testimonios* associated with the drawings from both collections are also similar. They describe people running from villages and homes to escape from armed soldiers shooting automatic weapons and helicopters dropping bombs. Many of the personal experiences described by the children mention the deaths of family members: mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers. They also refer to their new living situations in Honduras and the continuing fearful presence of the Salvadoran and the Honduran militaries.

Returning to the MOA drawings, the violence portrayed in the drawings is astounding, especially considering the youth of the artists. Of the 141 drawings in the collection from El Salvador (to repeat, two are by children from Nicaragua) 106 include illustrations of military helicopters. A total of 154 helicopters appear in the drawings, with one drawing portraying eight of the military aircraft. These helicopters rain bullets down upon people where the ammunition is represented by simple dots extending from the helicopters and the humans are stick figures fleeing or lying on the ground, presumably wounded or dead.

The helicopters are not the only perpetrators of violence in the drawings: soldiers with machine guns are another common element. Representations of human figures appear in 139 of the drawings in the MOA collection. Some of these are detailed and realistic portrayals of people while some illustrate only heads above the water in the Lempa River. Soldiers are represented in 87 of the drawings or 61 percent of the MOA collection. I distinguished the soldiers from other human figures, or civilians, because they hold firearms,

wear uniforms, or because they are located inside the cockpits of the helicopters. The soldiers frequently aim their weapons towards unarmed figures. Similarly to the illustrations of helicopters, small dots representing bullets strike their civilian targets. Soldiers are often shown surrounding houses in the drawings and described as doing such in the accompanying statements. Furthermore, in most drawings with both soldiers and civilians, the civilians outnumber the soldiers. It would take very few soldiers armed with heavy machine guns and flanked by armored aircraft to eliminate rural villages of unsuspecting, unarmed civilians.

The reality of the civil war and the illustrations parallel one another in other ways. While only four drawings depict burning houses –with red, orange, and yellow lines protruding from the tops of homes and churches - several drawings include *testimonios* that mention the burning of houses and garden plots. For instance, on drawing catalogue number 47990 the *testimonio* on the back of the drawing reads: “*en el rio lempa los soldados hicieron una massacre y mataron muchos niños hancianos y mujeres nos quemaron las casas donde viviamos.*” In English this translates as “in the Lempa River the soldiers made a massacre and killed many children and women, they burned the houses where we lived”. This correlates with official military “scorched earth” tactics to eliminate rural villages and supposed support

El el vio tiempo
los soldados hicieron
una masacre y mataron muchos
niños hancianos y mujeres nos
quemaron las casas donde viviamos

Figure 5.1 Drawing 47990 with Testimonio (back)

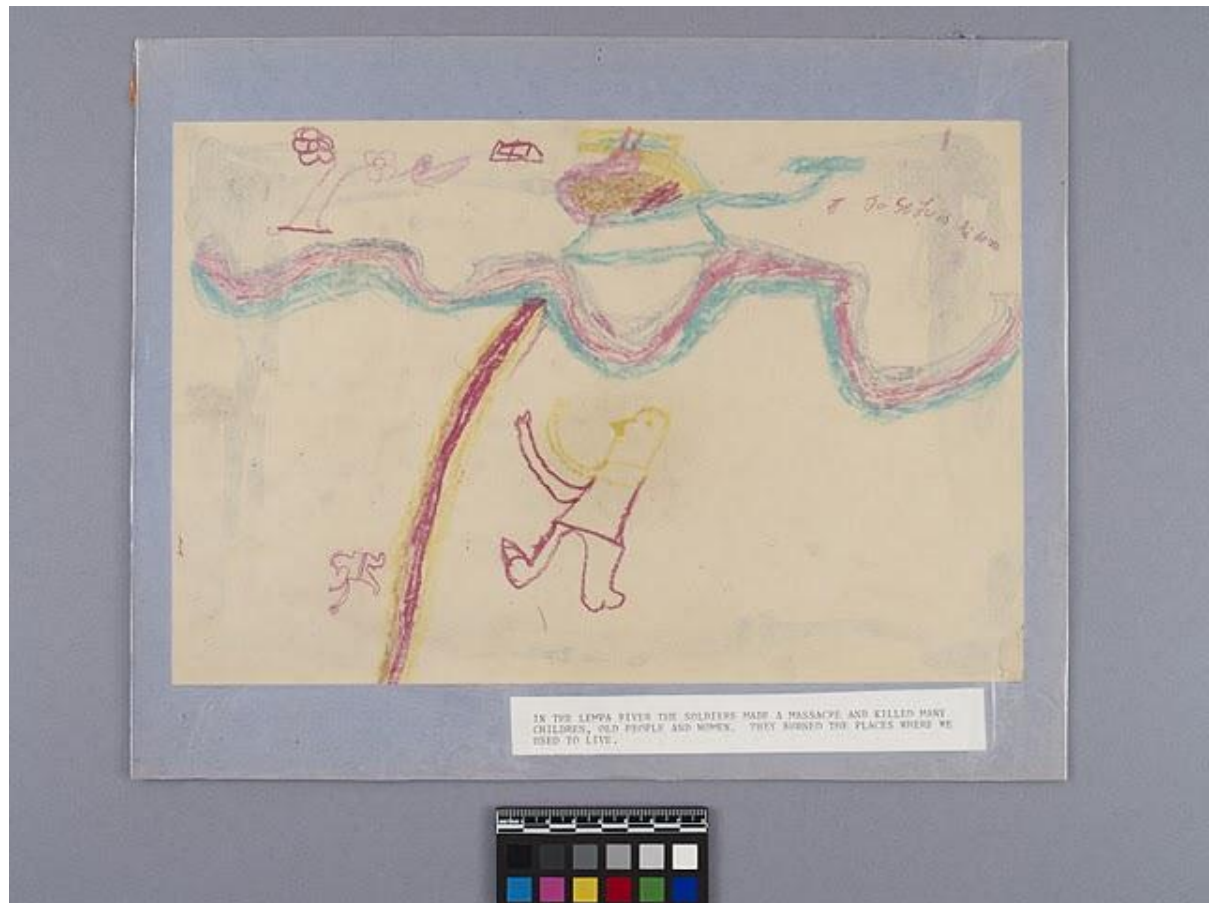


Figure 5.2 Drawing 47990 Human Forms with Helicopter (front)

Examples of *testimonios* abound in the MOA collection and in the drawings exhibited in *Disrupted Lives*. According to the drawing and *testimonio* by Maria Aide Moreno a refugee from El Salvador living in Honduras:

We ran to hide. We left. We were walking holding hands, we were all afraid because the soldiers were chasing us. There were a lot of them. Later they came up to two children and asked them some questions. And then they killed them and left them. ...we saw them dropping bombs from the airplanes (Inter Pares/CUSO 1986: 87).

Another Salvadoran child, Maria del Carmen Juarez, wrote

I am an orphan because the soldiers killed my papa and mama. ... They burned down my house. We used to have three sugar cane fields. Papa was beginning to grind corn when they saw him and killed him. Then they killed my mama (Inter Pares/CUSO 1986: 87).

An anonymous drawing and statement describes the airborne attacks on rural villages in detail: “this helicopter machine guns the people who were crossing the Lempa River. The sad people threw themselves into the river where many children and old people drowned” (Inter Pares/CUSO 1986: 88). *Testimonios* such as these appear on many of the drawings in the exhibition and the MOA collection.

Of the 143 drawings in the MOA collection, 23 have *testimonios*. This results in roughly 16 percent of the total collection having written testimony of the personal experiences of the artists. Of the 23 drawings with *testimonios*, nine are on blue laminated paper with English translations of the Spanish writing. As a result, around 39 percent of the drawings with testimonials are on blue paper and laminated with English translations on the front. This suggests that they were part of another exhibition apart from *Disrupted Lives*, although research into the history of these drawings was inconclusive. However, the importance of this aspect of the collection at MOA lies in its proof of the continuing relevance of the pieces to public education and exhibition, particularly with youths and schools. The drawings are currently on display as part of MOA’s exhibit *A Green Dress: Objects, Memory, and the Museum* (September 27, 2011—April 8, 2012).

All of the *testimonios* in both collections are hand written in Spanish, some on the front directly next to the illustrations and some on the back of the drawings. Many of these testimonies also include a name, date, and location of the artist written in a child's handwriting and often including misspelling, a testament to the drawing's authenticity. Approximately 34 percent (49 drawings) of the two collections include a name on the drawing. All of the drawings with the testimony translated (those on laminated paper) have a name included.

I found translating the writing of children in the remaining pictures to be an arduous task. I translated the Spanish writing for the entire MOA collection – even the laminated drawings that were translated previously. Spelling errors and improper spacing between words caused confusion. Often part of one word runs into the subsequent word, creating what seems like two incoherent words. For example, on drawing catalogue number 47976 the *testimonio* of a young 13 year old girl appears on the paper as: “mie dades 13 años”. Although the unusual spacing of the words renders this statement illegible at first glance, a more thorough reading reveals that it is meant to say “mi edad es 13 años” or “my age is 13 years”.



Figure 5.3 Drawing 47976 Young Girl Feeding Chickens

Another of the most common errors is children interchanging phonetically similar words or letters, such as substituting B for V or S and substituting Z or I for E. Only through experience and practice do children come to differentiate these letters appropriately. The drawings that accompany the *testimonios* help clarify the intended meanings. Without the drawings to add context to the written statements, translations would be nearly impossible. For instance, an error I encountered translating the *testimonio* of drawing catalogue number 47981 was a child who wrote "caza rodiada de soldados". The Spanish word for house is

“casa” which is assumed to be what the child most likely meant to write. Further, the literal English translation of “radiada” is radium, an alkaline earth metal. It is highly unlikely the child was describing a “radium house of soldiers” since the word radium is typically beyond the language level of an eight to fourteen year old rural campesino. However, the Spanish word for surrounded - “rodeada” - is phonetically similar to the word for radium. This inference is supported by the drawing itself which depicts two soldiers with guns around a house with some people inside. The careful analysis of the common errors in the phonetics along with the content of the drawing led to a better and more contextual translation.



Figure 5.4 Drawing 47981 Human Forms Surrounding a House

Interestingly, none of the drawings mention the other side of the civil war: the revolutionary guerillas. Furthermore, none of the *testimonios* mention guerillas or the civil war itself. The children only reference acts of violence perpetrated by the Salvadoran or Honduran militaries. This absence could be interpreted in two ways. First, it could simply mean that the children did not see guerilla forces associated with the FMLN when they fled their homes across the Lempa River into Honduras. Most of the drawings represent this very

specific moment in time during 1983. (Those drawings that depict other times either reach further into the past before the flight across the border or illustrate current living experiences in the refugee camps themselves.) Second, the absence could be the result of adult influence whereby children came to see only governmental forces as frightening, dangerous, or violent. This results in drawings that reflect violence from the government specifically and not violence in general. Most likely it is a combination of the two factors: children may have viewed the government as violent to begin with only to have this seemingly confirmed because during the exodus from El Salvador the government was the only military force present.

Although not always a cut and dry process, it was often simple to tell the difference between soldiers and civilians in the images. To begin with, any human figure wearing a dress is clearly a civilian because women did not serve in the Salvadoran military during this time. The children drew civilians inside houses, tending gardens, walking in lines toward and away from the Lempa River. Most often civilians, or the villagers, are portrayed lying prostrate on the ground – presumably dead – as their living counterparts flee. Some of the human figures in more detailed drawings wear traditional clothing of the area. The women have pieces of cloth folded below the loads balanced atop their heads and wear brightly colored skirts and sandals. The men wear thick fabric belts around their waists over short pants and sandals. The drawings with such elaborate details, however, are few; roughly five show this kind of specificity and skill.

Not all the images reflect the violence and oppression directly experienced by the young artists. Roughly ten percent (15 of 143 drawings) of the images and *testimonios* focus

on the quotidian experiences of the children before their flight from the villages or after their attempted settlement into their new life in the Honduran refugee camps. The first image in the MOA collection (catalogue number 47976) depicts a girl in a purple dress feeding chickens. The written statement reads “*cuando mi madre cuidabasas gallinas en el Salvador poreso lo recuerdo. Mi nombre es Alejandra Reyes, mi edad es 13 años, mi direccion es campamento 6 mesa grande.*” The English translation along the bottom of the drawing reads, “When my mother used to take care of the hens in El Salvador that is what I remember. My name is Alejandra Reyes, my age is 13, and my address is camp 6 Mesa Grande”. Mesa Grande was the refugee camp in Honduras where the majority of the refugees lived after fleeing El Salvador and was the camp visited frequently by members of the CTF such as Wes, Marta, and Don. There are also other drawings which show people playing soccer (number 47987) or garden plots (number 47982, 47985, and 47987).

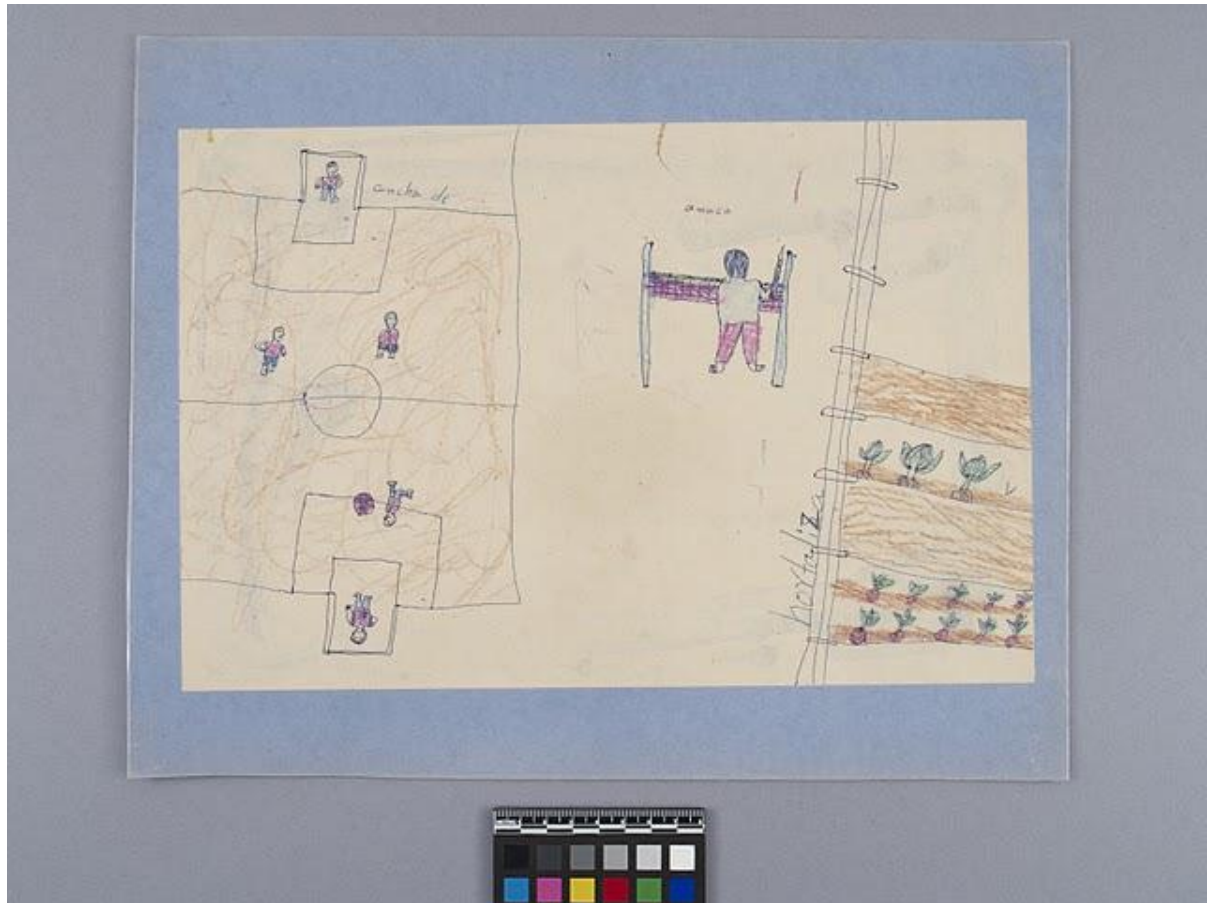


Figure 5.5 Drawing 47987 Soccer Field and Garden Plot

It is difficult to quantify the number of drawings which do not include violence and oppression, particularly because interpreting what some of the drawings depict is problematic. Some of the drawings (such as catalogue number 47984) are incomprehensible

in terms of discernible themes and spatial composition.

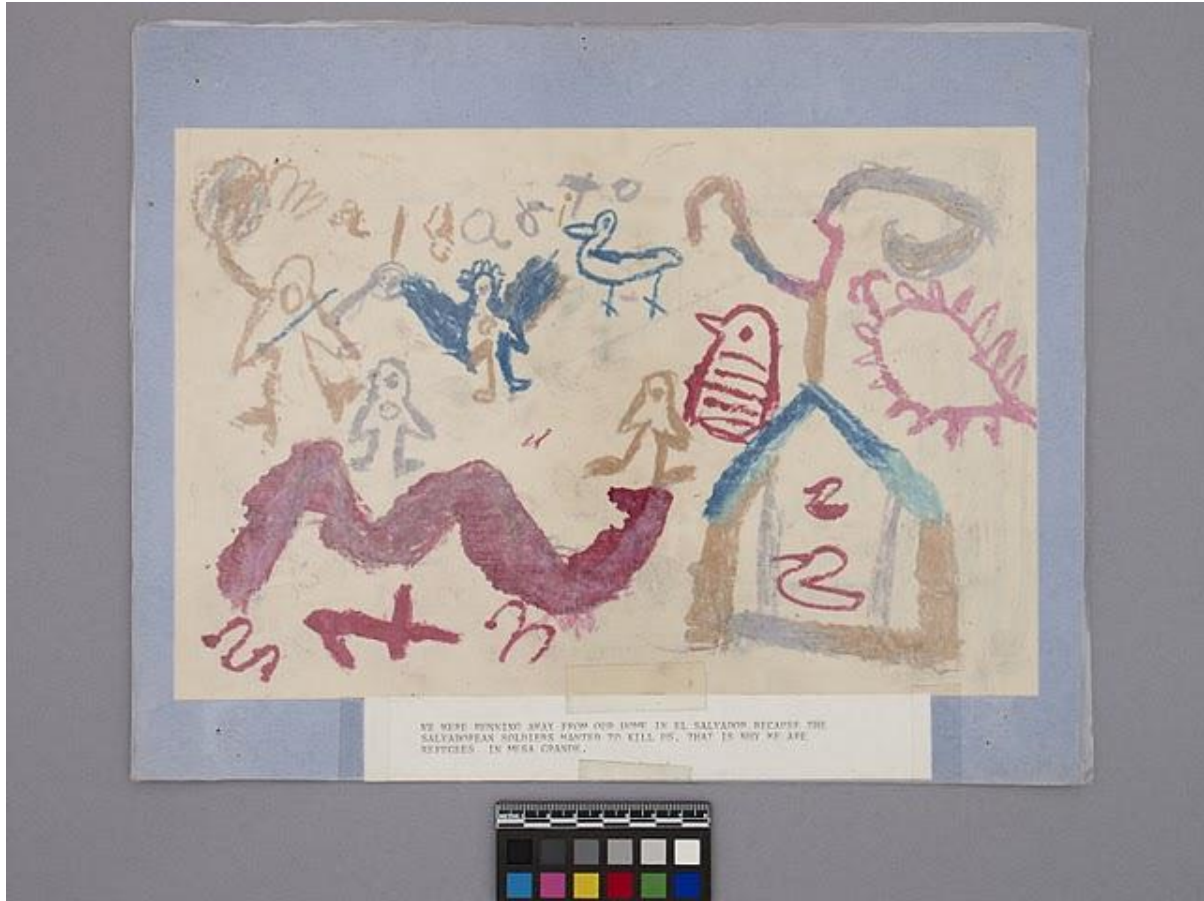


Figure 5.6 Drawing 47984 Difficult Composition to Interpret

Despite the difficulties, it's interesting to compare rough statistics between the MOA drawings and those making up the original *Disrupted Lives* exhibition as reproduced or described in the catalogue (Dale et al. 1986). Around 33 % of the catalogue drawings and/or their associated *testimonios* do not portray clear instances of violence – such as dead bodies, soldiers, helicopters, bullets, or burning buildings. This is significantly higher than the ten percent of the drawings in the MOA collection lacking any clear indication of violence in the

images or associated *testimonios*. The statistical difference suggests that including nonviolent drawings was part of the curatorial selection process.

The curatorial selection process, which limited the collection to include only drawings illustrating events within the direct experiences of the artists, speaks directly to Tobias Hecht's perspective regarding adult influence on the historical perspectives of children in his edited volume *Minor Omissions: Children in Latin American History and Society* (2002). According to Hecht, adult work and goals typically subsume the particular perspectives of children. By working towards limiting – although not erasing or removing completely – adult influence, adult aesthetic criteria, and adult interpretation Dale provided room for the drawings to stand as they are, to speak their own stories as imbued by their creators. By highlighting the drawings potential to tell children's stories the curator intended to oppose the more common practice described by Tobias Hecht (2002) to assimilate their voices into the larger history of adults. She sought, as Trouillot (1995) also argues for, to let the silenced voices speak through their *testimonios*.

Even the young refugees recognized their own marginalization on the international scale. The children in the Puerto Rico Camp in Mexico were “astonished that Canadian children knew of their plight. ‘You mean the children in Canada know we are here. How do they know? We are deep in the jungle and only a few people visit us’ ” (Wes Maultsaid's journals cited in Anderson 2003: xii). The concept of *testimonio* aids in understanding their agency, by agency I mean their ability to voice their experiences, because it provides a framework to understand the significance of telling direct individual and collective experiences in order to incorporate a multitude of voices in history.

Chapter 6: Legacy

The lasting legacy of *Disrupted Lives* stems from the relationships between collectors, artists, curators, and researchers created through the exhibition, a legacy that continues through the donation of 143 drawings to the MOA. The children's drawings are connected to a multiplicity of social actors: international observers, refugees, curators, educators, and student researchers. By tracing connections between people, I illuminate the relationships between the objects as a collection and the voice of the refugee children. Because of this thesis we can now see even more networks of actors connected through these drawings. The networks mentioned above are just the beginning to the growing multiplicity of actors connecting and yet to be connected.

By combining two forms of communication – illustration and text – the *Disrupted Lives* and MOA collections speak to the life experiences of children in Latin America, an underrepresented group historically and museologically. Furthermore, the children's voices continue to speak, continue to be relevant today, because of their new connection to the Museum of Anthropology (MOA). The drawings, and their authors, continue to speak to diverse audiences in their new role as part of the collection at a research and teaching institution such as MOA. Each connection formed between each actor is thus a rich resource for the continuing relevancy of museums as purveyors of knowledge and authority.

The connection to MOA assures the future relevance of the drawings for various reasons. In the twenty-first century museums continually move towards digitization of

collections, social networking endeavors, interactive web 2.0 platforms⁸ and other means to incorporate new technologies into research and connecting with audiences. MOA integrates each of these new forms of engagement: the entire collection (aside from culturally sensitive materials) are available online via the Collections Access Terminal (CAT) system,⁹ the museum has a social networking presence on twitter and Facebook along with a blog, and the groundbreaking Reciprocal Research Network (RRN)¹⁰ connects the collections of museums from Canada, the United States, and even the United Kingdom to originating communities and scholars alike on a highly interactive and customizable software platform designed by a team at MOA. As a result, the MOA collection, while only including a small subset of the 700 drawings originally collected, enters into the digital domain of museum works. The drawings are available online to people around the world via the CAT and the RRN. Online links between the social networking aspects of MOA and the digitized collection materials on the CAT and RRN buttress the accessibility of the collection to wider and wider audiences. Combining the virtual endeavors of social networking and digital collections access places the drawings now in MOA's custody in a key position for further research and continued relevance to all actors touched by the drawings.

The significance of the drawings also endures through MOA's role as a teaching and research institute. For instance, a seminal class in museum studies offered at the University

⁸ MOA's Reciprocal Research Network (<http://www.rrnpilot.org/>) is a prime example of integrating digital collections and interactive web portals.

⁹ Online Collections Access Terminal (CAT) available through the MOA website: <http://collection-online.moa.ubc.ca/>

¹⁰Only MOA's global collections – including Latin America – are available on the RRN. Every other participating institution includes only their Northwest Coast collections.

of British Columbia is Anthropology 431 – a practicum course in museology centered on learning opportunities at the museum. This class used the drawings at MOA to practice acquisition techniques learned in the classroom. The students completed this project and the museum incorporated their work into the collections database. Without MOA acquiring the drawings the drawings might still be in the donor's basement collecting dust rather than emerging into academic and virtual webs of significance.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The *Disrupted Lives* drawings engage the power of the literary genre of *testimonio* in order to incorporate the silenced voices of children into the historical record. The display of the drawings throughout Canada during the 1980s as part of the *Disrupted Lives* exhibition and their continuing relevance as part of the MOA collection also contribute to their role in the historical record.

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