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Forensic Anthropology Foundation of Guatemala: Truth from the graves, the power of identification, and history clarified

For over 23 years, we – Forensic Anthropology Foundation of Guatemala (FAFG) – have applied forensic sciences to the investigation of crimes against humanity suffered in Guatemala. Each identification adds and clarifies the historical record, which would have remained unresolved for the families of the victims and restricted justice without these investigations. This presentation will explore the FAFG’s Multidisciplinary Human Identification System and explore a few significant cases which had immense impact on disentangling the complex and contested history regarding Guatemala’s internal armed conflict. Some of these cases include the immense exhumation and investigation at La Verbena cemetery searching for victims of enforced disappearance, solving the ambiguous fates of the victims in the Military Diary and cracking its codes, and the case of the former military base, now CREOMPAZ. These cases extend our understanding of violence through time and space through the discovery and excavation of clandestine graves, thus illuminating strategies and disproportionate responses executed by successive military governments.

We, the FAFG, utilize interdisciplinary methods from criminology, social anthropology, forensic anthropology, archaeology, and forensic genetics. The founding of the FAFG was an answer to the request of family members to uncover hidden truths. We work to identify the disappeared, promote justice, and clarify history. Unearthing the truth, recovering the remains of families’ loved one(s), and re-burying them with dignity in accordance to cultural traditions brings real impact to the lives of the families and generates progress towards transitional justice.