

LIVING, LAUGHING, AND LOVING IN GUATEMALA CITY: A PRACTICAL
THEOLOGY OF PEACEBUILDING

By

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Summary

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Guatemala City is a city of contrasts, a city that meshes beauty and affliction. The beauty is reflected in the landscape and its people; affliction, however, is woven throughout Guatemalan history and expressed through the *collective woundedness* of Guatemalan society. After more than five hundred years of colonialism and coloniality, and twenty-four years after the signing of the peace accords between the army and the revolutionary movement in 1996, Guatemalans still carry their collective woundedness into all areas of personal and public life. For that reason, this dissertation responds to the question, what will a practical theology of peacebuilding look like in Guatemala City in response to the collective woundedness of Guatemalan society?

In order to respond to the question presented above, I use the paradigms of practical theology, liberation theology, and mimetic theory in dialogue with each other to provide a relevant, contextual, and liberative response. In the search for an answer, I interviewed fourteen grassroots leaders from the CMT Guatemala network, and I explored their faith practices in relation to the Guatemalan collective woundedness. The process follows three steps. Firstly, I provide a description of the Guatemalan context, and the theory-laden practices of the interviewed grassroots

leaders. Secondly, I framed the dissertation within contextual theology in order to develop a practical theology of liberation that is contextually relevant and cross-contextually applicable. Finally, the theory-laden practices that the interviews and focus groups called forth helped me propose a practical theology of liberation that responds to the Guatemalan collective woundedness through the ethics of what I call *Human Catechism*. *Human Catechism* is a term conceived in community, though proposed for the first time in this dissertation. *Human Catechism* begins with the ethics of love. It is the process of developing faith practices that help us reimagine each other's humanity in the midst of global sacrificial theology. In this dissertation, I propose that *Human Catechism* is a practical theology of peacebuilding and liberation that seeks to heal the collective woundedness of not only the Guatemalan context, but also other environments around the world.

This dissertation contributes in three ways to the field of practical theology. Firstly, it applies René Girard's mimetic theory to field of practical theology. Secondly, it provides a tool that could be used for contextual analysis. I developed interdependent categories for contextual analysis that can easily be translated to other developing countries of the global south. Finally, it contributes at the local level empowering grassroots leaders to begin conversations that will allow them to decolonise their faith practices, and hermeneutics.

Key Concepts

- Mimetic Theory
- Scapegoat Mechanism
- Non-Sacrificial
- Collective Woundedness
- Violence
- Non-Violent Hermeneutics
- Liberation Theology
- Practical Theologian of Liberation
- Ontology of the Victim
- Human Catechism

Declaration

I, Joel David Aguilar Ramírez, student number 16400926, hereby declare that this dissertation, “Living, Laughing, and Loving in Guatemala City: A Practical Theology of Peacebuilding”, is my own work and has not been previously submitted to any other institution of higher learning. All sources cited or quoted in this research paper are indicated and acknowledged with a comprehensive list of references.

I declare that I have obtained, for the research described in this work, the applicable research ethics approval. This approval is found in Appendix 2

I declare that I have observed the ethical standards required in terms of the University of Pretoria’s code of ethics for researchers and the policy guidelines for responsible research.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joel David Aguilar Ramirez', with a stylized, overlapping script.

Joel David Aguilar Ramírez

April 2020

Dedication

I want to dedicate this work to all of those who live their lives from below, loving and seeking peace for their cities.

“The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there” (Zechariah 8:5).

Acknowledgements

I believe that humanity is fully achieved in community. It is in community that I become who I am; for that reason, it is imperative that I acknowledge that the work presented here was achieved with the support of a group of people who cheered me on and challenged me in the process of writing this dissertation. Subsequently, I want to thank:

God for calling me through the voice of my local missional community. The consecrated truth of being one of God's children, and the fact that God not only loves me but also likes me, is what has sustained me through life and through this endeavour.

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To my parents, Jeremias and Elsa Aguilar (both deceased), for planting the seeds in my heart to work, walk, be in solidarity with, and learn from people who live at the margins of society.

I am constantly thankful for all of you and the gift you are in my life. Each of you calls forth a very unique response to life from me.

Joel David Aguilar Ramirez

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Guatemala is a country possessing some of the most beautiful landscapes in the world. It is so beautiful that some consider one of its volcanic lakes, Lake Atitlán, as one of the most astonishing sceneries on earth. The beauty in Guatemala, however, does not come without hardships that make this country and its capital city a difficult place to learn how to live, laugh, and love. Guatemala comes with two facets that complement each other through the painful meshing of beauty and affliction. Perhaps this tangling is why Guatemalans are so spiritually and religiously oriented. In the words of Kris Rocke and Joel Van Dyke (2012: 267), in their interpretation of the understanding and philosophy of life of Simone Weil, “beauty and affliction are two things that awaken our heart towards God.”

For the last ten years, I have worked with grassroots leaders trying to understand these two sides of Guatemala City. I have had theological conversations that have helped me see God from a perspective of abundance. Grassroots leaders from all over the city are walking with me and helping me understand how to celebrate God’s work in the beautiful and afflictive realities that we share with each other. The following pages will present the context for this research, a context in which grassroots leaders live missionally loving the most vulnerable and marginalised of Guatemalan Society.

Beauty and affliction are two realities that Guatemalans live daily. Guatemalans can wake up with a colourful sunrise reflecting the sunlight on the three, out of twenty-two, volcanoes that rest in the outskirts of the central valley of *La Hermita*, and then go to bed with a violent death toll of thirty deaths for every hundred thousand inhabitants (Gagne, 2016). There is an average of 15 violent deaths per day in Guatemala City (Contreras, 2015). Needless to say, Guatemala is a

country with immense pain, and Guatemala City is the place where the collective woundedness of Guatemalan society is most visible.

1.1 Background of Study

Guatemalan history is bloody, violent, and has had many victims. Since colonial times, the voices of those who have been the innocent victims of colonialism and oppression have been shunned, covering the many wounds of Guatemalan society at a surface level. The lack of healing has created a distrusting, violent culture with a scapegoating mentality that has spread out through every sphere of society. For this reason, it is important to understand that an underlying lens to interpret, read and explain Guatemalan history is through the Mimetic Theory of René Girard. As Wolfgang Palaver (2013: 35) has eloquently explained it, Girard's anthropological mimetic theory postulates that humans do not know what to desire on their own accord. Therefore, humans imitate their desires from others, and when the desired object is not sharable, rivalry happens and that leads to violence.

The reader will notice that what has happened in Guatemala is the fierce clashing of shared desires to possess the same object, Guatemala itself. It is in this understanding of violence that mimetic theory will be explained and evaluated in more depth in chapters to follow. For now, however, it is important to keep in mind that the search for non-violent hermeneutics and a practical theology of peace building will also be intrinsically connected to René Girard's work.

In order to have a contextual view of Guatemala City that can shed light on other contexts, the present research will attempt to enter the collective woundedness of Guatemalan society. Each one of the hurts presented in this dissertation will provide a bird's eye view of Guatemalan history, economics, culture, and social issues. It is important for the reader to understand that this is not an exhaustive social-historical account of everything that has happened in Guatemala City and the

rest of the country. This is an attempt to set the background for the following research. With that said, this dissertation will focus on the ways Guatemalan collective woundedness is expressed: racially, socio-economically, religiously, in gender violence and inequality, and in terms of the neo-colonial intrusion of The United States; and, it will focus on how this context is calling forth new ways of developing a practical theology of peacebuilding that deconstructs and reconstructs the faith practices of Guatemalan grassroots leaders.

1.2 Research Problem

One could argue that Guatemala City is a hard place to live, laugh, and love. However, Guatemalans go through the day by day knowing that there is hope for a better future. It is important, though, to understand that, despite this hope, a context filled with racism, social and economic inequality, and violence is a difficult one to read the Bible and walk the Christian life in a way that subverts the status quo through sustainable peacebuilding faith practices. This reflective and pragmatic task is even more important as Guatemala reached over twenty years after the signing of the peace accords between the revolutionary forces and the Guatemalan army in December 1996, with no reconciliation achieved.

The tendency is to fall into colonizing and violent readings of scripture through hermeneutical lenses that make Christian theological praxis irrelevant to the context. It is easy to replicate a theology that does not allow a space for suffering, social action, and justice. It is very common to mimic a way of practicing Christian life that creates more dissension within the Church. It is in the context of a city wounded by colonization and violence that it is important to explore the possibility of a non-violent way of living and practicing the Christian faith that calls justice forth amid inequality and violence. The collective woundedness, beauty and affliction, is calling

forth new ways of thinking and exploring faith practices and making a practical theology of peacebuilding possible.

In the context of Guatemala City, grassroots leaders have opened their hearts to those living in communities marked by poverty and violence. However, there are groups of people and communities in Guatemala City that grassroots leaders are not willing to engage with in conversation. It seems as if there is a theology of inclusion that has become exclusive for certain leaders. In some cases, this exclusion is expressed towards other marginalized groups (LGBTQ groups, Maya spirituality groups, indigenous communities, Catholic faith communities, etc.) and even the institutional forms of the church, propelling grassroots leaders to create their own versions of local churches. Interestingly, these churches have become a direct reflection of the manner of being church that grassroots leaders wanted to flee: a legalist, exclusive, discriminative, and violent church.

Grassroots leaders have developed faith practices that use exclusion and violence as a way of garnering control over who can or cannot help in the process of city transformation, which is a direct consequence of colonial evangelisation methods. In other words, those who once felt excluded now exclude others in the name of righteousness. Morality/legalism trumps grace and collaboration because there is a colonial theology of perfection that comes out of the fear of being contaminated by the sinful-other. Thus, the other is not the bearer of the image of God, but the sinful sub-human that needs to be saved from hell, to be made whole. In the words of Miroslav Volf (1996: 72–78):

An advantage of conceiving sin as the practice of exclusion is that it names as sin what often passes as virtue, especially in religious circles...We exclude because we are uncomfortable with anything that blurs accepted boundaries, disturbs our identities, and disarranges our symbolic cultural maps...We exclude because we want to be at the centre and be there alone, single handedly controlling the land ...

Engaging in conversations about a practical theology of peacebuilding could be a tool for grassroots leaders to decolonize their faith practices since exclusion is part of colonial separatism and segregation (Fanon, 2004: 51). Practical theology as a way of deconstructing and reconstructing faith practices could be a way for grassroots leaders to move from impossibility to responsibility, creating new theological narratives that allow them to be the church and part of a church in a responsible, non-violent way (Alison, 2010a: 6). In other words, a practical theology of peacebuilding could be the means to develop faith practices that would not allow grassroots leaders to find themselves forming a “virtuous” unanimity against the sinful-other (Ibid.).

The Guatemalan context is inviting grassroots leaders to re-think Christian faith practices in an inclusive non-violent way. It is important that this process is accompanied by different voices. Dialogue, in a Habermasian understanding, could be a way to call forth grassroots theologies of peacebuilding. However, it is important to understand that in the end, it is a matter of whether grassroots leaders will respond to the call that their city is making. I want to engage grassroots leaders as they decide whether or not they answer favourably to this calling.

In exploring non-violent hermeneutics and a practical theology of peacebuilding, I will enter a dialogue with the Street Psalms Community’s¹ way of understanding a movement towards peace-making through transforming one’s mentality through three mental paradigm shifts: from scarcity to abundance, from rules to relationships, and from rivalry to peace-making. The Street Psalms community is a community of grassroots leaders, theologians, and practitioners around the world that has been doing theology from below for over twenty-five years, and they have a very interesting way of entering deep contextual theological conversations with grassroots leaders in communities marked by violence and poverty. It is important, however, to note that the theological

¹ Visit www.streetpsalms.org for more information. In addition, see, Rocke and Van Dyke *Geography of Grace* published on 2012 as an introduction to contextual-from-below theology.

exploration and research presented in this dissertation aims to move beyond the limitations of the language provided by the Street Psalms community and the Incarnational Training Framework (ITF). The ITF will be introduced in later chapters for a better understanding of its content. For Roche and Van Dyke (2012: 299), two of the main missiologists of the Street Psalms community, a community of peacemaking understands violence and how to unplug from it. Unplugging means to avoid rivalistic tendencies that lead to violence. This dissertation will extend beyond unplugging; peacebuilding will be understood from the Spanish concept of *Construcción de Cultura de Paz* (peacebuilding culture), which implies the capacity building process of a people to deal with conflict in a non-violent way through the strengthening of their communal institutions in order to create a culture that seeks justice in non-violent ways, not only the avoidance of rivalistic tendencies. If what Hauerwas and Wilimon (1993: 84) state is true, that “we can only act within a world we can see”, then the question that arises after discerning the context is: What will a practical theology of peacebuilding look like in response to the collective woundedness of Guatemala City?

This question does not stand in isolation. Guatemala City is a place where people display their best and worst potential. Guatemala City works as a magnifying glass for humanity (Roche & Van Dyke, 2012: 64). In the case of Guatemala City, the good, the bad, and the ugly are magnified and intrinsically related to the history of colonial and neo-colonial oppression and rivalry.

1.3 Research Question and Sub-question

The question of a practical theology of peacebuilding also raises a series of sub-questions: How is the collective woundedness of Guatemala City expressed in terms of racial, socioeconomic, religious, and other spheres/relationships? How can the Bible be read with grassroots Christian

leaders using a contextual hermeneutic from below that creates a practical theology of peacebuilding? Can Girard's anthropological lens be a tool for interpreting and reimagining Guatemala City from below?

1.3.1 Research Question

What will a practical theology of peacebuilding look like in Guatemala City in response to the collective woundedness of Guatemalan society?

1.3.2 Sub-questions

1. How is the collective woundedness of Guatemala City expressed in terms of racial, socioeconomic, religious and other spheres/relationships?
2. How can the Bible be read with grassroots Christian leaders using a contextual hermeneutic from below that creates a practical theology of peacebuilding in this context?
3. How can Girard's anthropological lens be a tool for interpreting and reimagining Guatemala City from below?

1.4 Research Objectives

One of the main interests behind this research lies within the practical theology of peacebuilding aspect of the main question presented above. From the perspective of somebody who has lived in between the United States and Guatemala for many years, it is important to explore if a non-violent practical theology is possible without the direct intervention of people with what Peggy McIntosh (1990) calls the "invisible knapsack of white privilege". It seems as if people leading non-violent movements for social change and theology in the circles in which I move are usually white, which makes me wonder whether or not peacebuilding and non-violence are privileges. For that reason,

it is important to explore if non-violence and a practical theology of peacebuilding are possible from the perspective of the collective woundedness of Guatemala City.

The wounds all Guatemalans share are at the core of the identity of who Guatemalans are. It is important to get a better understanding of the implications of the ways Guatemalan collective woundedness is expressed. For that reason, I will explore the hurts that Guatemalans carry as the baggage of the colonial and neo-colonial internalization of violence. One of the objectives will be to find ways of understanding and criticizing the colonial and neo-colonial ideology that still permeates different spheres/relationships in Guatemalan society.

I also want to engage in the direct act of doing theology with grassroots leaders through the development of a series of conversations that will allow us to explore the three paradigm shifts presented above through the lens of Girardian anthropology. These conversations will help to identify possible non-violent theologies emerging from the praxis of grassroots leaders in Guatemala City through the non-violent social and biblical hermeneutics. In addition, the co-researchers of this dissertation will be exposed to the findings of the exploration of the collective woundedness of Guatemala City as they find ways to develop non-violent hermeneutics. The conversations will be done with the purpose of benefiting the extended global network of the Urban Training Collaborative² to hopefully replicate the conversations in other contexts.

Another objective is to explore if the anthropology presented by the Franco-American literary critic René Girard is applicable to the process of practical theology in Guatemala. I want to explore if the anthropology and concepts presented in Girard's interpretation of humanity are

² The Urban Training Collaborative (UTC) is a global training collaborative that equips the head, heart and hands of urban leaders and organizations, who seek the social and spiritual renewal of cities. Our vision is drawn from Jesus' first public address in Luke 4:18-19, which speaks of good news and liberation for the poor. There are training hubs in the following cities: USA: Tacoma, WA; Minneapolis, MN; Fresno, CA; Latin America: Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic; Guatemala City, Guatemala; Africa: Nairobi, Kenya; Pretoria, South Africa; Asia: New Delhi, India.

truly universal. I am interested in hearing grassroots leaders deal with a practical theology that promotes peacebuilding in the middle of a context plagued with violence and poverty through the possibilities that the Girardian anthropology offers as a different set of lenses to interpret one's context.

The concrete results of this research will be:

1. A contextual analysis of Guatemala City's collective woundedness.
2. A critical reading, interpretation, and evaluation of René Girard's anthropology and practical theological implications of his thought in the Guatemalan context.
3. Documentation of the possible non-violent theologies emerging from the praxis of grassroots leaders in Guatemala City.
4. The design, development, and delivery of questions to facilitate the process of non-violent readings of the Bible and the development of a practical theology of peacebuilding in community through the possibilities offered by Girardian anthropology.
5. Documentation of the conversations and dialogues developed with grassroots leaders.
6. The systematic documentation of the local grassroots' practical theological proposal for peacebuilding.

1.5 Research Paradigms

It is imperative to understand that “practical theological research is not only about description and interpretation of experience, but it is also about deconstruction and emancipation” (Müller, 2004). It is with this in mind that the paradigms to serve as the background of this research have been carefully chosen. Firstly, post-foundationalism as proposed by Wentzel Van Huyssteen (Van Huyssteen, 1998) will be key for an interdisciplinary conversation in the process of this research. This approach will allow the freedom to enter a pluralist and interdisciplinary conversation with the personal and religious convictions intact. Post-foundationalism will empower the search for local knowledge (Van Huyssteen, 1998: 20) to step beyond the limitations and boundaries of the strict, theistic, colonial, and isolationist theological inquiry that is characteristic of the Guatemalan religious experience. In this way, one will be empowered to criticize and deconstruct one’s own traditions while consciously standing on them. In a way, the non-violent hermeneutics for a practical theology of peacebuilding that will be explored below will be the post-foundational lever to examine Guatemala City’s grassroots leaders’ religious traditions and collective woundedness with the attempt of not perpetuating the wounds. This process will allow one’s present practices to be reshaped in the light of a practical theology of peacebuilding that will allow grassroots leaders to reconstruct their faith practices along the lines of what their traditions truly stand for (Ibid.).

Post-foundationalism will guide the process of understanding Guatemalan religious experience. This, of course, will not only guide oneself with other grassroots leaders in attempting to find one of the ultimate meanings of Christian life, peace, but also to connect the religious quest for understanding the experience of God with the more general quest to understand one’s context and the world in rational terms (Van Huyssteen, 1999: 96).

It is at this point that the crossing of paradigms presented by Julian Müller will be helpful. For Müller (2004), post-foundationalism requires the cross-fertilization of other ways of understanding rational development. Post-foundationalism can offer even more when it is combined with a narrative or social-constructionist approach. Müller proposes the combination of paradigms to develop a contextual practical theology because in accepting the fact that identity and rationality are socially constructed one is liberated from the temptation to defend one's theological rationality over scientific or other religious rationalities. As a result, that realization helps the theologian to understand that reality and theology are a communal products/constructs (Ibid.). "One is not conscious that the various texts (actions, experiences, phenomena) are embedded within a particular context that gives these texts meaning, value and identity, as it is the silent speaking of language. The silent speaking of language is where things (texts) carry out a world (context) and world (context) grant[s] place to things (texts)" (Meylahn, 2014b: 4). Müller's proposal will be enriched with the interdisciplinary dialogue with the social-constructionism and sociology of knowledge proposed by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman (1967), and the proposal of what Benigno Beltrand calls the symbolic universe (Beltrand, 1987).

The paradigms presented above raise deep, contextual questions. Since the post-foundational approach is the proposal of a third way between foundationalism and non-foundationalism (Van Huyssteen, 1998, 1999), how could a context where both of the paradigms that post-foundationalism is a third way from have a true post-foundational theology when the arrival of both previous paradigms (foundationalism and non-foundationalism) in Guatemala was simultaneous? The colonial context of Guatemala received both ways of understanding at the same time. Guatemalans did not go through the industrial and scientific revolution; they just received, by imposition, the modern standards that came out as a result of it. Guatemalans did not go through

a technological revolution, but they had to catch up with the postmodern challenges. Thus, Guatemalans have not had the time and resources to explore their own ways of thinking and epistemologies because of the struggle of being the neo-colonial means to sustain the economy of a global super-power like the United States.

The questions presented in the previous paragraph require the cross-fertilization of other approaches to make of this research a relevant contribution. A liberationist theological paradigm will be one approach to understand and facilitate the post-foundational theological involvement of those in poverty in the construction of communal local knowledge for this research. In a sense, since theology is a rational knowledge enterprise (Gutierrez, 2009: 60) one could see this process as a post-foundational practical theology of liberation. In other words, in liberating from the colonizing ways of doing theology, the oppressed can deconstruct the foundations of the faith given to them in order to emancipate themselves from an oppressive and colonial religious discourse. In this way, a true post-foundational practical theology of liberation paves the way towards liberation.

Without a minimum of “suffering with”, the suffering that affects the vast majority of humanity liberation theology can neither exist nor be understood (Boff & Boff, 1987: 3). In the case of this research, there will be an underlying prophetic and conscious commitment to the life, cause, and struggle of millions of devalued and marginalized human beings not only in Guatemala, but also around the world (Boff & Boff, 1987: 3). As Gustavo Gutierrez (2003: 38) eloquently states:

Theological reflection takes on its full meaning only within the church and in the service of the life of the church and its action in the world. That is what many Christians are now learning in Latin America. To be followers of Jesus requires that they walk with and be committed to the poor; when they do, they experience an encounter with the Lord who is simultaneously revealed and hidden in the faces of the poor.

Since practical theology is about deconstruction and emancipation, it is important to understand that, in working with grassroots leaders who work with people living poverty and violence, we are dealing with the historical continuation of the suffering servant of God. Jon Sobrino (1994: 26) quoted Ignacio Ellacuría and Archbishop Oscar Romero in one paragraph creating a powerful image for the liberationist paradigm proposed here: “In Ignacio Ellacuría’s theological words, ‘this crucified people is the historical continuation of the suffering servant of Yahweh.’ In the pastoral words of Archbishop Romero to peasants terrified after a massacre, ‘you are the image of the pierced God.’”

Sobrino (1994: 34) proposed that in the liberationist paradigm the situation of those living in poverty requires the theologian to see theology as an *intellectus amoris* [the understanding of love], not in rivalry against, but in distinction to the *intellectus fidei* [the understanding of faith]. One must see theology as *intellectus misericordiae* [the understanding of mercy], *iustitiae* [justice], *et liberationis* [and liberation]. This will take the present research to a deeper ethical level in both paradigm and methodology. Those who live in poverty and violence and at the margins of society that compel people to reflect on how they achieved theological understanding, not only if its product is liberating or oppressive, but also if its methodology is assisting liberation or encouraging oppression (Ibid.).

Finally, the mimetic theory presented by René Girard will serve as a paradigm behind the interpretation of the theory-laden practices of both the researcher and co-researchers (the grassroots leaders) of this dissertation. Girard’s mimetic theory postulates that humans do not know what to desire on their own accord. As a consequence, humans imitate their desires from others, and when the desired object is not sharable, rivalry happens, and that leads to violence (Palaver, 2013: 35). Mimetic theory allows for an understanding of humanity that attempts to

understand how violence happens. Girard's intention is not to degrade all human phenomena to a violent instinct. What Girard's mimetic theory attempts to do is to call forth a central dimension of human nature and phenomena, mimetic desire, which can help to explain humankind's proneness to crisis, conflict, and violence (Palaver, 2013: 38). This paradigm will be key to construct local communal knowledge as the Guatemalan context is a conflict-driven society since colonial times. Girard's mimetic theory will be the basis for a hermeneutical process that takes violence as a key component of colonial ways of Theologising.

Up to this point it might appear as if the paradigms presented above are items on a menu instead of ingredients of the main course. It is important to note that a liberationist paradigm is not necessarily in contention with a Girardian anthropological approach, even though the starting points of each paradigm is fundamentally different. On the one hand, liberation theology starts with the current condition of humans under poverty, oppression, and injustice, which is the social-analytical mediation proposed by the Boff brothers (1987), whereas Girardian anthropology explores the root of all forms of violence, including oppression and injustice, which is misplaced desire. One could try to bring together these paradigms in the following statement: *In order to develop a practical theology of peacebuilding, one needs to liberate one's mind from oppressive faith practices. This is possible through a liberating theology with a post-foundational epistemology that grasps an understanding of violence as a consequence of misplaced, imitated desires that lead to rivalry, oppression, and other forms of violence as a part of the evolution and shaping of human rationality.*

1.6 Research Methodology

1.6.1 Research Methodology

The paradigms presented above will allow for a methodology that becomes a liberating process for those involved in this research. In order to fulfil objectives two, three, four, and five in the previous section, the gathering of information will occur through qualitative research. It is important, though, that the participants of this research are able to discover ways of understanding their world in order to change it (McIntyre, 2008: ix); in the case of this research, the participants explore their theology in the light of the three paradigm shifts that will take them to view their world with abundance, through relationships, and through the lens of peace-making, in order to then move on into a practical theology of peacebuilding.

The methodology utilized will be dialogical in nature and it will be guided by the participatory engagement of those involved. There will be a commitment to changing and transforming with the participants, instead of offering or depositing knowledge in them (Freire, 2003: 97). The research done with the grassroots leaders will be understood as participatory action research as presented by McIntyre (2008) and supported by the understanding of Paulo Freire (2000: 110) in the search of generative words and themes that make sense to the participants in order to interpret and transform their own way of doing theology and interacting with their city. For Freire, participatory action research has two aspects that make it liberating. Firstly, the research process includes ongoing dialogue between the facilitator/researchers and the participants in the research process. “The Second key point in Freire’s address is that understanding community relationships and social problems requires a rigorous, iterative, and cyclical process of discovery and realization. Researchers need to always be working from the perspective that they may not actually understand what they think they understand” (Glassman & Erdem, 2014: 209).

Glassman and Erdem (2014) propose that presenting the words that participants see as co-occurring concepts and processes—Participation/*vivencia*, action/*praxis*, and research/*conscientization*, as developed in the 1960's, better captures the unique quality of PAR. First, *vivencia*, for Glassman and Erdem, can be defined as a full experience of an event with all its possibilities, lived through direct participation. Therefore, in PAR the researchers must find ways to participate in the experiences of those they work with, or they must recruit members who live the experience as part of everyday life to be partners in the research team, or a combination of the two (Glassman & Erdem, 2014: 209). It is at this point that this research will be pushed by the liberationist paradigm. The process to follow will not be limited to the experiencing with, but it will be pushed to act and stand in solidarity with the co-researchers (Boff & Boff, 1987: 3)

Secondly, *praxis* contains elements of dynamism and change, reshaping ideas into actions. Glassman and Erdem (2014) suggest that PAR uses Freire's concept of praxis— "the process of acting upon the conditions one faces in order to change them." In Freire's (2000: 125) pedagogy, praxis refers to the actions taken by the oppressed in the processes of the transformation of their world towards a path to freedom. Thereby, praxis must be translated into day-to-day actions and steps that take those involved in the educational/research process closer to free their minds. "The goal of PAR is not to change individual or even collective action trajectories but to give the oppressed members of a community or social group the capabilities of critiquing their own praxis of the immediate" (Glassman & Erdem, 2014: 212).

Finally, research/*conscientization* is "the process in which men, not as recipients, but as knowing subjects achieve a deepening awareness both of the socio-cultural reality which shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform reality" (Glassman & Erdem, 2014: 214). This process

then leads to “disindoctrination”, which is a recognition that information imposed by the larger social system serves as a way of maintaining the status quo.

In addition, the practice-theory-practice model of practical theological interpretation presented by Don Browning (1996: 9) will inform the methodology of choice, as this model understands theology as a hermeneutical process. It is important that the whole process of this dissertation aims to describe the contemporary theory-laden practices that give rise to the practical questions of non-violent hermeneutics to develop a practical theology of peacebuilding in the Guatemalan context. The praxis of the processes presented in this dissertation will attempt to analyse the horizon of cultural and religious meanings that surround the religious faith practices of grassroots leaders (Browning, 1996: 47).

At this point, it is important to note that what is being proposed for this research goes along the lines of social science research, which implies the engagement in a dialogical praxis. Browning (1996: 91) defines social science praxis as a “dialogue between the religious horizons of researchers and the religious horizons of the subjects of research.” In this case I opted to change the word “subject” for the word “co-researchers” or “participants”. Browning (1996: 94) has also suggested that the task of descriptive theology, as one of the three movements in fundamental practical theology, is to describe a question in all its situated richness. For that reason, the research approaches will be phenomenological in nature, but as a grounded theory research approach in practice. This research will try to describe and interpret the experiences of those involved in it while simultaneously discovering existing theologies to generate a contextual practical theology of liberation that emerges from the theological data found in and through grassroots leaders (Mertler & Charles, 2011: 205).

1.6.2 Research Methods

In order to have methods that are liberating and empowering, this research will be conducted considering parts of the methodology used by Julian Müller. Müller (2004: 300) presents a post-foundational practical theology with two movements. First, it acknowledges contextuality, the role of interpreted experience, and how tradition shapes epistemic and non-epistemic values. Secondly, post-foundational practical theology points beyond the confines of the local community and its culture. These movements reinforce the previously explored paradigm of liberation theology since Müller's approach is inconclusive and always changing in its practicality. In the same way, liberation theology is never ending as it "starts from action and leads to action" (Boff & Boff, 1987: 39) in a continuous contextual engagement that brings the faith of those living in marginalisation to the front of one's reflection. Müller's post-foundational theology and liberation theology—in connection and cross-fertilisation—have the capacity to empower people to be transformed through the continual conquest of their liberation at an existential and historical level (Gutierrez, 2009: 14). In addition, liberation theology and Müller's post-foundational theology heavily rely on the local context for theological reflection that has global application.

In acknowledging the context, experience, and traditions, there will be a series of interviews with grassroots leaders from the network of the Centre for Transforming Mission of Guatemala (CMT by its initials in Spanish)³. The Centre for Transforming Mission is an organization that provides incarnational training, inspiration, and organizational structure towards a collective urban transformation. They do this because they believe that the social and spiritual renewal of Guatemala is possible. In addition, they want to see people and organizations working together for a city where wounds become joy and hope (CMT Guatemala, 2017). It is imperative

³For more information visit: www.cmtguatemala.org

to hear the voice of the grassroots leaders in this process. It will be the way to discover the traditions of interpretation that these leaders have to understand their context and way of doing theology. Thirteen leaders will be selected from the CMT database, having a representation of seven male leaders and six female leaders. The leaders will be selected based on their years of interaction with the CMT network, giving preference to those who have been engaged with the CMT network the longest. These interviews will take place during the second and third quarter of 2017 and extend through 2018 and the first quarter of 2019.

Part of surfacing local theologies involves challenging grassroots leaders through the understanding of non-violent or violent behaviour. Thus, there will be a series of conversations that will be simultaneously used as a focus group and as a case study. The conversations will present to the grassroots leaders different groups of people that are marginalized by mainstream evangelical Guatemalan theology that represent the collective woundedness of Guatemala City (LGBTQ groups, Catholics, indigenous movements, pro-choice groups, etc.). The reactions of grassroots leaders will be documented as an ethnographic narrative of grassroots leaders' behaviour when facing the other, and then used as a case study.

Thirty grassroots leaders and volunteers will be part of these ethnographic conversations, and will serve as co-researchers that will engage in the research process guided by the question: How do Christian grassroots leaders feel and react when faced with the idea of including the other as a part of their work? The conversations will also be focused around the question: how does beauty and affliction, the collective woundedness of Guatemala City, call forth new ways of reading scripture and making a practical theology of peacebuilding? The grassroots leaders selected for this part of the research are part of the ongoing trainings that CMT Guatemala offers every year. These conversations and the ethnographic study will serve to answer the main question

of this research: What will a practical theology of peace building look like in Guatemala City in response to the collective woundedness of Guatemalan society? The answer to this question will be the documentation of the process that later will be shared with the UTC network. The conversations will happen during 2017 and 2018.

Finally, there is going to be a literature study that will engage Girard's mimetic theory, postcolonial controversy in Latin America⁴, contextual theologies, practical theology, liberation theology, anthropology, and sociology to give a backbone and strengthen the process to find a local practical theology of peacebuilding. This study will help to craft the subsequent questions that will guide the conversations with the co-researchers of this project. In addition, it will assist with the definition of terms and vocabulary to use in the conversations.

1.7 Literature Survey and Contribution of this Research

The context of grassroots leaders serving in Guatemala City has been briefly exposed at the beginning of this introduction. It is important, however, to remind the reader that there are five representations of the collective woundedness of Guatemala City, provoking a distrusting violent culture that has emerged and permeated the different sectors of Guatemalan society. These representations of suffering and pain will be explored with more depth in chapter four. Guatemala City is a violent place, making it imperative to understand how violence happens even before starting to develop non-violent hermeneutics for a practical theology of peacebuilding. In the next pages, I will briefly survey literature that can help the understanding of a practical theology of peacebuilding that responds to Guatemalan City's collective woundedness.

⁴ Some scholars see postcolonial discourse as another form of colonization of thought in Latin America. Part of the exploration of this topic in this dissertation will engage postcolonial and decolonizing discourses.

1.7.1 Resources for the Understanding of Guatemalan Collective Woundedness

There are not many scholars who have tried to explore the complexity of the Guatemalan collective woundedness. For the purpose of this dissertation, the voices that will be in dialogue with a practical theology of peacebuilding will come from various disciplines. Guzmán-Böckler and Herbert (1974) will be the starting point for a historic and social approach. Guzmán-Böckler and Herbert reinterpreted Guatemalan society criticizing the colonial system and its consequences in the racialization of Guatemalan society. Santiago Bastos (2010), Martha Casaús Arzú (2000, 2007) and others have delved into the racial tension and the politics of exclusion in Guatemalan society. Casaús Arzú has proposed that racism in Guatemalan society is the ethos of the colonial system and starts with the self-definition of the Guatemalan elite as European. Thus, as Bastos (2010) proposed, this self-definition has created “Inferiorised sectors” in Guatemalan society and the racialization of Guatemalan social esteem.

Bendaña Perdomo (2010, 2014) brings a historical perspective that provides a better understanding of the involvement of the church in the colonial process. For Bendaña Perdomo, the Church played a key role in the development of the colonial mindset and the understanding of the indigenous peoples in Guatemalan. In addition, Schlesinger and Kinzer (1990), Perera (1993) and others will be key to understanding the development of the neo-colonial intrusion of the United States in Guatemala and the wounds of thirty-six years of armed conflict. For these authors, the vested interest and intrusion of the United States in Guatemala and other countries in the region has created the perfect soil for the politics of fear, violence, and inequality to flourish.

Guatemalan collective woundedness is intrinsically linked to the urban reality of Latin American cities. It is important, however, to note that there is little research on the specificity of urban development and justice issues in Latin America. It is at this point that this dissertation will

take another cross-disciplinary approach to the exploration of Guatemala City's collective woundedness. Edward Soja (1996) has proposed the idea of what he calls the "thirdspace", which is the area where everything comes together, the abstract and concrete, the real and imagined, mind and body, structure and agency, and other concepts that have been boxed into binary categories within social critical theory. Soja's (1989, 2000) ideas of post-modern geographies and postmetropolis will be cross-fertilized with Susan Fainstein's (2010) idea of the Just City, Chris Shannahan's (2014) urban liberation theology, Dave Hillis' (2014) concept of the city as playground, and Roche and Van Dyke's (2012) concepts of the city as classroom and parish.

1.7.2 A Brief Overview of Mimetic Theory Through Current Literature

Girard's first discoveries on mimetic theory happened in his literary analysis of the great universal literature classics. In *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, Girard lays the foundations of mimetic theory through the analysis of the great novelists Cervantes, Flaubert, Stendhal, Proust, and Dostoyevsky. Girard (1965: 2) opens a conversation of *Desire* in the human sciences proposing what he calls a triangular model of desire, which has different formulations throughout his work: desire according to another (1965: 4), imitated desire (1965: 21), and mimetic desire and mimesis (1977: 146–148). Summarizing Girard's theory, humans imitate each other's desire for an object. When they cannot achieve the desired object, rivalry emerges, and rivalry leads to violence.

In the last stages of the development of his ideas, Girard (1986) saw the way out of violence through the understanding of the scapegoat mechanism, which is vital to his understanding of violence. This mechanism is fuelled by the contagion of violence towards a single victim, which, after it is sacrificed, appeases the religious mimetic crisis and restores order to the community (Girard, 1986: 12–23). This takes Girard (1977: 31,58,241) to define the sacred as the element that hides, contains, violence. Thereby, violence is sacred, and the sacred is violent, meaning that

archaic religion is violent, and possibly modern ideas of religion are violent as well. For now, these concepts will serve the purpose of introducing some key ideas of Girard's anthropology. There will be a more in-depth exploration of Girard's mimetic theory in further chapters.

After Girard, one can see three groups of scholars who have developed Girard's ideas and the implications of mimetic theory. The first group has worked on distilling Girard's ideas in a very intelligible way; the second cluster has taken Girard's ideas into the realm of practical reasoning; the third set of scholars has taken the direct application of Girard's mimetic theory to the development of non-violent readings of The Bible.

In the first set of authors, it is necessary to explore the work of Wolfgang Palaver (2013), Michael Kirwan (2005), and James Warren (2013). Palaver has argued that Girard's mimetic theory's intention is not to reduce all human phenomena to a violent instinct; instead, what Girard's mimetic theory attempts to do is to highlight a central dimension of human nature, mimetic desire, which can help to explain man's propensity toward crisis and conflict (Palaver, 2013: 38). Likewise, Michael Kirwan has developed a distilled version of Girard's mimetic theory. In his book *Discovering Girard*, Kirwan (2005) proposes a simplified, though not simple, approach to Girard's Anthropology. Kirwan's method starts with the exploration of mimetic theory to lay the foundations for the understanding of the scapegoat mechanism, to then explore the way the Gospels subvert the violence created by the scapegoating process. It is important, however, to note that Kirwan is not blindly following or interpreting Girard's ideas. He is critically evaluating Girard's method and the objections to his understanding of humanity. Kirwan's method, however, seems to develop an apologetics of Girardian mimetic theory. James Warren has also written an introductory book to René Girard's thought. Warren (2013) takes on a more Christian/Biblical

approach in his book *Compassion or Apocalypse*, which is an introductory text to non-violent hermeneutics through Girard's mimetic theory

After exploring the first group of scholars, the focus turns to those who have taken Girard's ideas into the realm of practical reasoning. These scholars have explored the implications of Girardian anthropology in contemporary institutions. Such is the case of Jean-Pierre Dupuy (2013, 2014), Paul Dumouchel (2014, 2015), Stefano Tomelleri (2015), Martha Reineke (2014) and others. Dupuy (Dupuy, 2013: xii) finds what he calls "the mark of the sacred" in contemporary societies because all the systems in place emanate from reason, and, like all human institutions, reason has its source in religion. Dupuy (2013: 1) takes Girard's ideas one step further in interpreting contemporary societies as machines for manufacturing, thus perpetuating the sacred. For Dupuy (2013: 147), political, economic, and contemporary religious systems bare the mark of the sacred as they are violent in their essence.

Along a similar trajectory as Dupuy, Paul Dumouchel (2015: xii) engages the impact of political violence through the lens of mimetic theory. Dumouchel explores the transfer of individual violence to the state as the entity that is supposed to protect its citizens from violence itself. Dumouchel's (2015: xv) approach extends the Girardian analysis of the sacred kingship to the modern state. Still along the lines of social interpretation, Stefano Tomelleri (2015) has contributed with the development of a sociology of *ressentiment* from a Girardian perspective. Tomelleri enters in dialogue with Nietzsche's ideas of resentment in the *Genealogy of Morals* to start a dialogue that sees resentment at the core of the process of democratization of modern societies. Martha J. Reineke (2014) has proposed that mimetic theory is not only at the level of societal interactions, but also at the micro level. Mimetic theory enters into what Reineke calls the intimate domain which encompasses the realm of family relationships and dynamics. Reineke goes

back to the Greek tragedians to draw on the implications of family relationships as micro-cosmos of imitation.

Finally, the third set of scholars has taken the direct application of Girard's mimetic theory to the development of non-violent readings of The Bible. In this cluster, this dissertation will place emphasis on the work of James Alison. Alison (Alison, 2010a,b, 2013) has written in depth from a Girardian perspective. In his book of essays, *Jesus the Forgiving Victim*, Alison develops a hermeneutical method to understand and interpret both the Old and New Testament through the eyes of Jesus. For Alison (2013: 72), the key to interpret the Scriptures from a non-violent perspective is Jesus himself.

1.7.3 Other Approaches to Violence

In addition to the views on violence presented by Girard and his followers, it is critical to explore other approaches to violence, especially Slavoj Žižek (2008a). Žižek proposed an interesting interpretation of violence even though he is more influenced by Lacan, not Girard. In his work *Violence*, Žižek (2008a: 2–39) takes a step back to better understand violence as not only the actions of what he calls “subjective” violence, but also as the violence that is inherent in human systems as language and totalitarian regimes. A dialogue between Žižek, Dumouchel, Tomelleri and Dupuy will bring one to understand that violence is part of being human. Even though Žižek is not a Girardian, so to speak, his understanding of violence and criticism of contemporary Christianity will illuminate the exploration of violence presented in this dissertation.

Furthermore, scholars like Frantz Fanon (2004), Aimé Césaire (2000), and Hannah Arendt (1969) provide an understanding of violence from different perspectives. Arendt brings a perspective of violence as the consequence of totalitarianism as it struggles to keep its power. In the case of Fanon and Césaire, violence is explored from a postcolonial perspective. Without a

postcolonial theory/perspective, non-violence would be just a way out of the outrage, anger, and oppression that the colonized have endured.

1.7.4 Liberation Theology as a Sounding Board

Finally, the elements of this dissertation, Guatemalan collective woundedness, mimetic theory, and concepts like thirdspace, the just city, city as playground, city as classroom, city as parish, and even practical theologians like Browning and Osmer will be juxtaposed with the ideas of Latin American liberation theologians. As Jon Sobrino (1994) proposed, one must ask the question of whether or not the process to follow is one of liberation or oppression. In this process, Gustavo Gutierrez (2003, 2009) suggested the importance of a spirituality that can sustain the process of emancipation and freedom in a way that the reflective process of liberation becomes a rational enterprise that is true to the suffering of those who have been cut off from society. Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff (1987) have proposed that liberation theology can exist only when one takes the place of suffering with the people; that is why liberation theology has to be informed by the academic (socio-analytical), pastoral (hermeneutical), and popular (practical) mediations. The ideas of suffering, injustice, violence, and structural sin presented by Gutierrez (2003, 2009), Boff and Boff (1987), Elsa Tamez (1982), Sobrino (1994), Cone (2013), Petrella (2017) and others will be key to understanding that a practical theology of peacebuilding can only exist if those who have been excluded from society are invited to be a part of the conversation.

1.7.5 Contribution

The main contributions of this dissertation will be:

1. The exploration, incorporation, and application of Girard's anthropology to the field of practical theology.

2. The local and global impact of the findings of the research for the CMT Guatemala network, and the UTC Global network.
3. The empowerment of local grassroots leaders to develop their own non-violent hermeneutics for non-violent, inclusive, and decolonized faith practices that deal with the issues of the Guatemalan collective woundedness (such as: racism, machismo, patriarchal social structures, gender roles, sexual diversity, and many more).

1.8 Definition of Terms

Conservative: When this term is used through this dissertation, it is referring to the concept of conservative evangelical used in the United States and Latin America, or a political and theological posture that is founded in fundamentalist theology, the literal interpretation of The Bible, support of traditional values, the opposition to sexual diversity, and resistance to include other kinds of diversity.

Grassroots Leaders: This term refers to leaders who work and serve in communities marked by poverty and violence.

Incarnational Training Framework: The Incarnational Training Framework (ITF) is a book published by the Street Psalm Press. It was designed to be a training framework for the network of the Urban Training Collaborative. The Incarnational Training Framework is a diagnostic tool that helps leaders and organizations examine their own approach to urban transformation in light of the Incarnation. It is designed to free the messengers to love their city and seek its peace.

Mimesis, mimetic, mimetism: Mimesis is an important term within this dissertation. It describes René Girard's understanding of human dynamics in the process of the coming to being of humanity. Girard uses the word *mimesis* because the word *imitation* is normally used to refer to an exterior and conscious type of imitation. Mimesis involves both this kind of imitation and the less

visible ways humans imitate each other, including the imitation of gestures, language, culture and so on. Consequently, James Alison (1998: 12) posits that Girard's use of *mimesis* is: "Mimesis is therefore interior to the constitution of humans and not merely something external added onto an already independent being."

Urban Training Collaborative (UTC): The UTC is an initiative of Street Psalms, an organisation committed to seeing and celebrating good news in hard places. Through the UTC, Street Psalms connects and gathers a global network of city-serving organizations committed to developing incarnational leaders in vulnerable urban communities. The CMT Guatemala network has been in close contact with the UTC initiative for the last five years.

1.9 Scope of Study

The present research and dissertation will be developed within the limits of Guatemala City. The Centre for Transforming Mission has a network of 25 organizations and leaders that work at the grassroots level. The leaders who will be interviewed are spread out in the different districts of Guatemala City's metropolitan area. Two of the leaders who will be interviewed are in the outskirts of Guatemala City; however, since they are part of the CMT network and work in communities plagued by poverty and violence, they will also be interviewed to have their input and wisdom included in the construction of communal knowledge.

As a work within the field of practical theology, this research and dissertation will follow a qualitative interpretative approach. It will be guided by a fusion of different approaches to practical theology, the five dimensions of theological practical reasoning proposed by Don Browning (1996), the four tasks of practical theology presented by Richard Osmer (2008), and the three mediations presented by the Boff (1987) brothers in their introduction to liberation theology. While Osmer and Browning do not necessarily fit methodologically side by side with the Boff

brothers, the way all these approaches see theology brings to the table a practical theology of liberation that can be helpful to the Guatemalan context. This fusion of approaches and understandings is done through the freedom of the post-foundational paradigm. These approaches come from a practice-theory-practice approach and will allow for a creative, innovative, and organic way of theologising in the urban context of Guatemala City's collective woundedness.

This fusion calls three elements to the hermeneutical process of a practical theology of peacebuilding that responds to the collective woundedness of Guatemala. First, "Living", a descriptive progression will take the context and interpreted experience to discern patterns and dynamics relevant to the co-researchers. The specific context and experiences will be described and interpreted by the co-researchers and the writer of this dissertation. This stage fits the socio-analytical mediation of liberation theology, Osmer's descriptive task, and Browning's visional level. Secondly, "Laughing", in this phase of analysis, the traditions of interpretation will draw on theories of human sciences to better develop a contextual theology to challenge the patterns and faith practices that come from colonising ways of doing theology. This movement fits the hermeneutical mediation of liberation theology, the obligatory level and anthropological dimension proposed by Browning, and Osmer's interpretative and normative task. Thirdly, "Loving", this hermeneutical movement will use theological concepts to construct a communal ethic to guide the leaders' responses and questions and develop a practical theology of peacebuilding. This phase fits in the practical mediation proposed by the Boff brothers, with the rule-role dimension presented by Browning, and the pragmatic task proposed by Osmer. All of this will be done through the strengthening of interdisciplinary investigation and dialogue.

1.10 Limitations and Challenges

In April 30, 2018, The Centre for Transforming Mission started a transitioning process. After ten years of work, it became evident that the initiatives and relationships were unsustainable at an organisational level. The organisation became unsustainable in two ways. Firstly, the donors who supported CMT's work realised that they did not need the services provided by CMT. Secondly, the leaders and organisations of the network became sustainable to the point where they did not necessitate the intervention of CMT as an organisation to broker the relationships.

The transitioning process, however, did not happen as smoothly as needed to keep the organisation running, and all the organisations as a part of the network. Many rivalries came to the surface and some relationships were damaged in the process. As a result, it became difficult to engage the different members of the network for the interview process. This circumstance extended the intended interview timeframe to eighteen months, when it was proposed to be done in six to twelve months. The focus group was delayed for almost a full year, even though the theological training and conversations kept happening through 2017 and 2018. The temporary ceasing of operations of CMT will delay the presentation of the dissertation and the interpretation of the interviews to the network as many relationships are still recovering.

Personally, I was able to see and experience first-hand the unfolding of rivalries and scapegoating in contemporary relationships. That experience alone has been extremely valuable as I have had to directly apply the peacebuilding principles contained in this dissertation to the reality of the microcosm of the CMT Guatemala network. As a result, the dissertation has become a challenge as I am sensing a call to implement all the learning through innovative ways that keep benefiting the CMT network, but also in expanding the theological, social, and peacebuilding horizons beyond the relationships of the network.

In Conclusion, the present dissertation is the result of human interactions amid rivalries and violence. It is the theological articulation resulting of the challenges that raise to the surface when relationships are broken. It is the result of broken people who transmit their suffering amid a collectively wounded context. This project is the mapping of a journey into the belly of the beast where hidden forms of violence can tear one's soul apart. The writings in this paper are the attempt to connect the ideas of the academic world with the reality of the streets of Guatemala City.

1.11 Chapter Layout

1.11.1 Chapter One

This chapter will introduce the methodology for the present research and the scope of this study.

1.11.2 Part One: living

I have decided to divide this dissertation in four parts that are representative of the methodologies I use throughout this study. Part one is composed by chapters two and three. In chapter two, I take the space to introduce and explore mimetic theory. I engage with René Girard's ideas and other authors to develop a comprehensive view of mimetic theory. I do this with the intention of using mimetic theory as a lens to interpret *Living*, which is the first movement of this dissertation. In other words, *Living* is the context where the grassroots leaders and I experience everyday life. Chapter three will engage Liberation Theology as a non-sacrificial theology. I will analyse the conversations that happened between René Girard and various liberation theologians who engaged Girard's work to find possible epistemological connections and convergences between both bodies of thought. The purpose behind this exploration is to bring into dialogue two seemingly different epistemologies which are central to my theological development and exploration.

1.11.3 Part Two: the Guatemalan context

Part two consists of chapters four and five. In chapter four, I engage the analysis of the Guatemalan context. Chapter four explores the Guatemalan context through the definition, exploration and interpretation of the Guatemalan collective woundedness. The concept of the *collective woundedness* has five representations that make the Guatemalan hurt, heart, and hope tangible. The five representations are racism, the socio-economic divide, sexism, the religious disunion, and the neo-colonial interventions from the United States and Europe. With the context set up, chapter five engages in the exploration of the theory-laden practices of the grassroots leaders of the CMT Guatemala network. I will explore the beauty and affliction that is born out of the lived experience of grassroots leaders in and through the Guatemalan collective woundedness.

1.11.3 Part Three: laughing

Part three comprises chapters six, seven, and eight. Part three enters the second movement of the dissertation. Laughing is an important practice amid the collective woundedness. One of the steps towards healing and peacebuilding is to laugh at oneself, realising that one's exclusionary practices are just plain silly. In that process, chapter six explores the joy of contextual theologising and the importance of contextual theology as a response to postmodernism and its challenges for the project of liberation and emancipation of all peoples. I situate this theological endeavour in the global south urban context to enhance the cross-contextuality of this study. In chapter seven, I engage the metaphorical engagement of the city by grassroots leaders, thus opening a space in the conversation for an enhanced contextual theological approach to spatial justice and inclusion. In chapter eight, I move beyond the metaphorical engagement of the urban environment to engage and apply in *laughing* at exclusionary faith practices through the act of indecent contextual

theology. Here, I engage in ontological hermeneutics that can facilitate the first steps towards a practical theology of peacebuilding that responds to the Guatemalan collective woundedness.

11.1.4 Part Four: loving

Part four is the last movement of this theological endeavour. Part four includes chapters nine to eleven. After the ontological transformation and hermeneutical approach explored in chapter eight, chapter nine revisits the concept of the *collective woundedness*. It is in this chapter that I present ways of categorical engagement within the collective woundedness that allow people to locate themselves in the different representations of the City's pain. In chapter ten, I concretise the crafting process of a practical theology of peacebuilding that responds to the Guatemalan collective woundedness. I propose the term, concept, and practice of *Human Catechism* as the response to the Guatemalan collective woundedness that can be contextually adapted to other cultures of the global south. I explore the Biblical narrative to present the ontological changes explored in chapter eight in response to the elements presented in previous chapters. The dissertation comes to a full circle in chapter ten. Finally, chapter eleven brings the dissertation to an end. In this chapter, I explore the contributions, recommendations and conclusions of the dissertation. In addition, I also propose different possible exploration paths that arise from this theological reflection.

PART ONE

LIVING: MIMETIC THEORY IN DIALOGUE WITH LIBERATION THEOLOGY

CHAPTER TWO

MIMETIC THEORY: A LENS TO INTERPRET LIVING

Before entering the context where Guatemalan grassroots leaders live, laugh, and love, one must explore mimetic theory as a lens to interpret “living” in Guatemala City. This exploration of mimetic theory answers one of the three sub-questions guiding the process of this dissertation: Can Girard’s anthropological lens be a tool for interpreting and reimagining Guatemala City from below? In addition, this chapter finds the common ground between two seemingly different and possibly distant epistemologies, mimetic theory and liberation theology. The next pages will take the space to explore with more detail mimetic theory and the leap that resulted in Girard’s thought moving from anthropology to theological insight. Then, this part will explore the acknowledgement of suffering through liberation theologies as it finds non-sacrificial and non-violent similarities between two epistemologies that seem distant. Thirdly, the rest of this section will explore the differences between self-giving and self-sacrifice as a way of peacebuilding starting from a liberationist paradigm.

2.1 Mimetic Theory Explained

2.1.1 Mimetic Desire

The exploration of the concept of desire in this dissertation is of utmost importance because desire, among the grassroots leaders of the CMT Guatemala network, is key to engage a practical theology of peacebuilding that responds to the Guatemalan collective woundedness. Desire not only leads grassroots leaders into deep rivalries, but also creates deep, strong communities of positive mimesis. Before entering into the exploration of mimetic desire, the reader must acknowledge that

Girard's insights come from an exploration of the great novelists Cervantes, Stendhal, Flaubert, Proust, and Dostoyevsky as explained in *Deceit, Desire, and The Novel* (1965). These five novelists paved the way for Girard to arrive to the understanding that desire is mimetic (imitated), opening a conversation that considers great literature a better guide to human truth than contemporary human and social sciences (Kirwan, 2005: 39–40).

Mimetic theory is a complex anthropological and theological body of thought. Girard's ideas started shaping the discovery of mimetic theory from his understanding of desire, exploring desire as the origin of being, of rivalry, and of violence. Girard uses many terms to refer to mimetic desire, such as: triangular desire (1965: 2), desire according to another (1965: 4), mimesis (1977: 146), and mimetism (1977: 169). For Girard (1977: 169), mimetism, the imitation of desire, "is a source of continual conflict. By making one man's desire into a replica of another man's desire, it invariably leads to rivalry; and rivalry in turn transforms desire into violence."

Girard was not the first academic who engaged with the concept of desire. Before him, there were two scholars whose work is seminal to the understanding of desire that Girard then expanded on. The first one is Freud, with whom Girard interacted directly in *Violence and the Sacred* (1977). The second one is Hegel, whose dialectical approach and concept of desire shaped not only philosophical metaphysics, but also other disciplines (Jenkins, 2009; Kirwan, 2005). In the case of Freud, Girard (1977: 169) understood Freud's approach as linear desire, meaning that desire starts from the ego and is directed at a specific object. Judy Gammelgaard (2011: 968–970) has proposed that for Freud, desire is mostly sexual and is attached to the understanding of the object as exchangeable since sexual desire is born from the ego. Thus, desire is linear and it can be directed at will (Gammelgaard, 2011: 971). In a way, humans are desirous with their own desire.

On the other hand, Hegel's understanding and concept of desire opens a different conversation. Jenkins (2009: 107) has proposed a reading of Hegel's desire as a "relation to objects, not an attitude that the observed consciousness bears to aspects of itself that appear essential but irreconcilable". Jenkins (2009: 114) interprets the transformation of desire into the desire to serve a superior other as Hegel demonstrates in the master and slave dialectic. Even more so, the process of desire in Hegel happens when the "desiring subject comes to bear a recognitive relation to another subject ... Desire 'held in check' by the recognition of another subject implicitly contains the independence, being-for-self, or freedom that constitutes the essence of self-consciousness."

For Michael Kirwan (2005: 31), Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit* deals with two themes of high importance to Girard's understanding of desire, the desire for recognition and the master—slave dialectic, which is also key for Jenkins interpretation of Hegel's work. Kirwan, following Kojève's interpretation of Hegel, proposes that Hegel's statement that the human is self-consciousness requires an exploration of the self that goes beyond the cartesian understanding of the self. In this line of thought, humans are more than thinking subjects. They are desiring subjects. "In order to be able to say 'I', a subject must have desire, and this has to be a desire for a non-natural object" (Ibid.); and for Hegel, the only possible candidate for an object of this kind is the desire of another. In other words, desire for Hegel is reactive; humans are formed for and against the desires of others.

Up to this point, both Freud and Hegel's understanding of desire is based on the understanding of the subject as the starting point of desire. This is why Girard (1977: 169) thought that Freud and Hegel were tapping into something essential with their explorations of desire. Freud, however, fell short in studying the implications of the dynamics of desire. Girard differs

from both Freud and Hegel as he states that mimetic desire “is rooted neither in the subject nor in the object, but in a third party whose desire is imitated by the subject” (Ibid.: 170). As Wolfgang Palaver (2013: 35) proposes, “human desire is not based on the spontaneity of the subject’s desire, but rather the desires that surround the subject”. This is an important differentiation between Girard’s and Hegel’s understanding of desire. Hegel expresses the desire that the other should desire in return. While, Girard’s mimetic theory proposes that one’s desire is in accordance to the desires of others (Kirwan, 2005: 33).

In summary, there are three ways of viewing desire that characterize the evolution of understanding desire. Two are influential previous steps to the comprehension of desire that Girard presents in his work. First, one can see the exploration of desire presented by Freud as linear desire, “I desire the Other”. Secondly, Hegel’s approach to desire is reactive as it expands to the understanding of other subjectivities in relation to one’s desire, “I desire that the other desires me, recognises me”. Finally, Girard introduces a desire in accordance to the desire of the other, “I desire what the other desires, because the other desires it”. The objects people should not desire, but do desire, always belong to the other. It is the neighbour who renders the objects desirable (Girard, 2001: 9).

2.1.2 The Mimetic Crisis and The Scapegoat Mechanism

Mimetic desire is the centre that holds mimetic theory together, and it is through mimetic desire that rivalry and violence happen. However, Girard’s intention is not to reduce all human phenomena to a “violent drive or instinct”. What Girard intended to do was to highlight a central dimension of human nature—mimetic desire, which can be helpful for the interpretation of humanity’s proneness to violence and conflict. (Palaver, 2013: 38). Violence happens when the imitation of desires enters into rivalry for the same object of desire. Desire is, therefore, capable

of transforming the objects of desire into fetishes, which become the basis for competition and rivalry (Palaver, 2013: 125).

Girard posits that humans do not know what to desire on their own. For that reason, they imitate each other's desires (Palaver, 2013: 35). This process of mimesis takes on a triangular shape. There is a subject, a mediator, and an object of desire. The subject is the self that is engaged in the imitation of desire. The mediator is the other from who one borrows, or imitates, desire. The object is the element in contestation due to the imitation of desire. The process of imitation begins when the subject imitates the desire of the mediator for a determined object. The mediator then becomes aware of the object's desirability through the imitation of the other for the object the mediator possesses. It is important to clarify that there are two kinds of mediation. The first one is *external mediation*, which happens when the distance is enough to eliminate the rivalry between the subject and the mediator. This is what happens to advertisement and marketing. People borrow desires from the media to purchase specific objects. The mediators or models are far away, and the only option left is to buy the object of desire from a retailer. As a result, there is no violence or rivalry between the subject and mediator. The second one is *internal mediation*, which happens when the triangular distance between the subject and mediator is sufficiently reduced to allow both parties to penetrate their identities and alter their being-in-the-world through rivalistic tendencies. In this type of mediation, everybody is a subject and mediator at the same time. The example that I believe can explain these dynamics more clearly comes from my daughter and her little friends. They all are between one and a half to three years of age. Every time that one of the toddlers possesses a toy or object, the other children are alerted of the desirability of the object. On one occasion, my daughter was playing with her friends when she was began strumming her toy guitar. One specific child became aware of the little guitar because my daughter was using it. Instantly,

the other girl was interested in the guitar, regardless of the array of different and possibly more interesting toys around her. She came directly to my daughter to take the little guitar away from her. In the process, the mother of this little girl told her that my daughter was playing with the guitar first and that she had to wait to use it. The other girl lost her cool, threw a terrible temper tantrum and tried to take the guitar by the force. Interestingly, in her childlike manner, my daughter was able to understand what was happening and asked me to put the little guitar away. In this case, my daughter was the mediator for the other girl's desire for the little guitar. The guitar was the object of their desire as the other little girl alerted my daughter of the desirability of the toy. My daughter then became more interested in the guitar as the other girl increased in desire towards the little guitar. As a result, the rivalry escalated to the point of conflict because they were too close to each other as mediator and subject, and vice versa, in desiring the guitar.

The distance between the subject and mediator is not necessarily physical. It is spiritual, a metaphysical distance between subjectivities (Girard, 1965: 9). In Girard's (1977: 145) words:

Rivalry does not arise because of the fortuitous convergence of two desires on a single object; rather, the subject desires the object because the rival desires it. In desiring an object, the rival alerts the subject to the desirability of the object. The rival, then, serves as a model for the subject, not only in regard to such secondary matters as style and opinions but also, and more essentially, in regard to desires.

Rivalry and violence begin when one's desire for an object enters in rivalry not only with the desire someone else has for the same object, but also with the essence of the mediator who renders an object desirable. For that reason, Girard states that the superficiality of opinions and style are secondary to the imitation of desire. At this point, both subjects are imitating each other in the desire for the essence of each other, though both have been warned about the object desirability by the other. In this process of mimesis, the imitation is very likely to move the desiring subjects into rivalry as they begin to see each other as an obstacle to attain the objects of desire. When one

person sees the other as an obstacle to achieve the desired object, the other becomes the enemy one needs to defeat in order to obtain the object. This is where violence starts happening. When humans imitate the desire for the same object, they mutually prevent each other from satisfying the common desire and possessing the other. Consequently, resistance grows on both sides of the conflict; thereby, desire becomes strengthened. In triangular desire, the model becomes more disruptive and the relationship builds in frustration, while simultaneously the obstacle, the other, becomes increasingly the model. In the end, desire is both misplaced and focused on that which it opposes (Girard, 1986: 130). The process described above is what Girard sees as the movement from acquisitive mimesis, the imitated desire for an object; to metaphysical desire, where “the value of the object becomes more and more ‘imagined’ until all connection to its original value is lost” (Palaver, 2013: 124). The object of desire, then, becomes secondary and the rivals become fascinated with each other in a battle to be recognised by the other, which has to do more with the subject’s self than any particular object (Kirwan, 2005: 42).

The reality of mimetic desire in rivalry does not stay at the interpersonal realm of one subject and his or her model. Since mimesis is part of the process, desire grows uncontrollable and the imitation of desire moves from the personal realm to the metaphysical state, carrying extreme potential for contagious spread towards others (Palaver, 2013: 136). At the metaphysical stage of desire, violence takes its own momentum and developmental logic. Violence becomes the only means to attain the object in dispute, becoming “the instrument, object, and all-inclusive subject of desire” (Girard, 1977: 144). Even more so, the spatial, social, and mental proximity between humans in these situations of internal mediation transforms mimetic rivalry and violence into an illness that “can spread through a community like a plague” (Palaver, 2013: 136).

Girard explained the spread of the metaphysical stages of desire through the concept of the sacrificial and mimetic crisis. Girard analyses these concepts from the perspective of the Greek tragedies, specifically considering the tragedies written by Sophocles and Euripides. For Girard, these texts go beyond simple mythology and exemplify a human reality that takes on the failure of the sacrificial system as the cornerstone of religion as a human institution. Euripides's *Heracles* and Sophocles' tragedies reveal what happens when a sacrificial rite goes wrong, especially in archaic societies; a chain reaction of rivalry and violence is set in motion (Girard, 1977: 41). The spread of violence occurs at the metaphysical stages of desire and distorts the being-in-the-world of those involved in the mimetic crisis. This affection transforms the understanding of the self and the other creating a need to differentiate from one another.

As rivalry and violence increase and the forms of violence grow more grotesque, those involved in the mimetic crisis transform the other into a monster while concurrently becoming a mirror reflection of the very thing they oppose. This process of distinction is what Girard (1977) calls the "monstrous double". In other words, in the metaphysical stage of violence, the more the rivals "try to establish a difference between each other (by increasingly hostile gestures, for example) the more they in fact imitate one another, therefore becoming identical and even indistinguishable" (Kirwan, 2005: 40). It is at this point, when the belief of the adversaries in their difference produces an exchange of defeats and victories and approaches reciprocity, that a society reaches the closest point to a sacrificial crisis. The group borders on chaos (Girard, 2010: 14). Madness and violence occur because the mimetic crisis can be defined as a "crisis of distinctions", meaning that all involved in the crisis want to differentiate from and defeat the other as they consider the other a monster. Thereby, this crisis affects the cultural order as these distinctions are

used to establish identity and mutual relationships. It becomes an “us” against “them” mentality (Girard, 1977: 49). And as a way of restoring the lost order,

Each member’s hostility, caused by clashing against others, becomes converted from an individual feeling to a communal force unanimously directed against a single individual. The slightest hint, the most groundless accusation, can circulate with vertiginous speed and is transformed into irrefutable proof. The corporate sense of conviction snowballs, each member taking confidence from his neighbour by a rapid process of mimesis. The firm conviction of the group is based on no other evidence than the unshakable unanimity of its own logic ... All the rancors scattered at random among the divergent individuals, all the differing antagonisms now converge on an isolated and unique figure, the *surrogate victim*. (Girard, 1977: 79)

This is where Girard’s Mimetic Theory expands from literary criticism as presented in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (1965) to an anthropology of violence and religion expanded upon in *Violence and the Sacred* (1977), and *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (1987). Girard understood religion to be the institution that controls violence by creating the rituals and prohibitions needed to avoid a brutal carnage within primitive societies. As a result, the sacrifice of an innocent victim becomes the religious institution that serves as a cathartic element to keep violence in check through the execution of the scapegoat in a sacrifice (Girard, 1977). Inasmuch as the mimetic crisis is a crisis of distinctions, sacrifice is the only mechanism that reintroduces difference in a crisis where everybody has become a mirror image of the other (Girard, 2010: ix).

Sacrifice is the result of a mechanism that brings apparent peace to the community that is reaching the climax of a mimetic crisis. Girard (1977, 1986, 1987) calls this *the mechanism of the surrogate victim*. The process of mimesis brings a reconciliatory feeling to all the members of the community who were in rivalry perpetrating violence against each other. All the hate, all violence, that was previously scattered throughout the community in the form of individual rivalries becomes fixated on a single victim. The surrogate victim is held responsible for the emergence of the mimetic crisis and is seen as the incarnation of all the evils of the community (Palaver, 2013:

151–152). The persecutors, who now turn their eyes to blame a single victim, convince themselves that a small group of people, or even one person, regardless of how weak it may be, are extremely detrimental for the whole group. In the process of finding the victim(s) that will relax the rivalries, “all our sacrificial victims ... are invariably distinguishable from the non-sacrificeable beings by one essential characteristic: between these victims and the community a crucial social link is missing, so they can be exposed to violence without fear of reprisal ...” (Girard, 1986: 13)

The mechanism of the surrogate victim, or scapegoat mechanism, is the origin of religion. For that reason, it is important that one does not oversimplify the reading of such phenomena. The scapegoat mechanism goes beyond finding somebody to blame for the misfortunes of a group. In this hidden process, the persecutory group unloads all the rivalries and hate, or the responsibility for the mimetic crisis, onto the scapegoat. This metaphysical transfer of violence and desires does not exclusively belong to archaic societies. It can still be seen today as Girard (1977, 1986, 1987), Palaver (2013: 153), and others⁵ propose.

The sacralization of the scapegoat happens through a process called *double transference*, which marks the scapegoat with both the negative aggression of the mob and positive reconciliation (Girard, 1987: 37). This process veils the eyes of the mob, preventing them from seeing the phenomena at play. The persecutors fail to realize that they are responsible for the birth of the mimetic crisis and its murderous sacrificial resolution. The victim, then, becomes the simultaneous incarnation of absolute “good” and total “evil”. According to Palaver (2013), this monstrosity, the incarnation of good and evil in the victim, corresponds to the archaic sacred.

⁵ See Dupuy *The Mark of the Sacred and Economy and the Future*, and Dumouchel’s *The Ambivalence of Scarcity and Other Essays*, and *The Barren Sacrifice* for a better understanding on the scapegoat mechanism in contemporary institutions.

Those involved in the mimetic crisis see a divine entity in their victim; out of the chaos, and after a sacrifice, a god who restores the peace is born.

Religion is the monumental effort to maintain peace. The sacred, the sacralization of the surrogate victim, is violence, “but if religious man worships violence it is only insofar as the worship of violence is supposed to bring peace; religion is entirely concerned with peace, but the means it has of bringing it about are never free of sacrificial violence” (Girard, 1987: 32). In summary, Girard sees the scapegoat mechanism and archaic religion as a process that is fully capable of bringing a righteous unanimity in a group that was bordering on chaos due to a mimetic crisis. The transformation of the victim into a divinity becomes the creation of the super-natural and religious, and this metamorphosis happens only through a “transcendental violent unanimity” (Girard, 1977: 87).

Girard proposed that all archaic religions find their genesis in the scapegoat mechanism. This allows Girard to find an explanation for all the essential elements of “primary religions”. All the myths, rituals, and prohibitions have their roots in the founding murder. “*Myths* depict the violence of the scapegoat mechanism from the perspective of the persecutors ... *Rites* are the community’s controlled repetition of the scapegoat mechanism ... Taboos or prohibitions have the function of preventing any new outbreak of the social crisis” (Palaver, 2013: 154).

In conclusion, the process that leads a group to find a scapegoat can be summarized as follows: acquisitive mimesis begins when the subjects of a group start imitating each other’s desires; consequently, rivalry is born out of these desires clashing for the same objects. This process, then, moves into violent outbursts from the different subjects trying to attain the same objects. As the parties involved in the mimetic crisis exacerbate their rivalry, violence breaks with uncontrollable force and spreads like a disease. Hence, the need for a scapegoat arises from the

rivalry and spreads through the community, creating a righteous unanimity against a single victim. Once the scapegoat has been found and executed, peace is restored, and the community is unified by the power of apparent peace brought by the elimination of the cause of all evils, the scapegoat.

2.2 The Leap from Anthropology to Theological Insight

While this dissertation is not in the field of biblical studies, the understanding of scripture and hermeneutics used by grassroots leaders defines their faith practices. For that reason, this section will overview Girard's reading of the Judeo-Christian sacred text. The leap from anthropology to theological insight was not rushed for Girard. The development of his thought can be divided in two parts. First, he engaged the anthropological discovery of mimetic theory and the scapegoat mechanism in archaic religions. Then, Girard moved his anthropological approach to test it against the Judeo-Christian Scriptures. It was a progression that took him years of study and reflection. The process he underwent cannot be separated into the categories of spirituality and academic thought. Girard endured a deep conversion process that gave him profound insight into the human condition. In Girard's case, as he referred to other authors, one cannot overlook the existential connections between biography and work. The breakthrough of mimetic theory made Girard aware of his own pride, and he began to see himself as a puppet of his own mimetic desire in relationship to others in both the great novelists as past distant models and his disciples and colleagues as plausible models of internal mediation (Palaver, 2013: 1–5).

2.2.1 The Hebrew Bible

The previous synopsis of Girard's main ideas paves the way to explore and interact with the next part of his thought process. After exploring the onsets of archaic sacrificial religion, Girard turned his focus to answer the question of whether or not the Judeo-Christian religion is also feeding from

mythical elements that make it violent. In this progression, Girard identified three moments that were a common denominator in texts of persecution and the foundations of archaic religion. First, there is “dissolution in conflict, the removal of differences, and hierarchies, which constitute the community in its wholeness”; secondly, there is an all against one collective violence; finally, this creates interdictions and rituals to not fall again in the mimetic crisis. What was interesting about this development is that in Girard’s view of the Bible, the similarities between the Bible and ancient myths was not something to be embarrassed of. Instead, the parallels were part of the revelation in the biblical narrative (Girard, 1987: 144).

The beginning of the journey into the Judeo-Christian scriptures starts with the understanding that the stories of the Bible underwent a process of revelation during the narration of the text. In ancient myths, the expulsion of the hero figure is always justified; contrarily, in the biblical account it never is. Collective violence is completely unjustifiable (Girard, 2001: 109). From the beginning of the founding murder⁶ in the biblical narrative, Girard observed a tendency to side with the victim. In the story of Cain and Abel, God asks Cain “Where is your brother Abel?” (Gen. 4:9). Thus, making sure that the name of the innocent victim is known, and the murder does not remain hidden. Consequently, the Bible is teaching humanity a lesson. The founding myth comes with the affirmation that the victim is innocent and that the culture founded on murder will stay violent and become self-destructive (Girard, 1987: 148–49).

Girard examined and reinterpreted the Hebrew Bible in a way that opened a space for non-mythical and non-violent hermeneutics. The reader who has been altered by the understanding of the scapegoat mechanism cannot fail to see the increasing trend to illuminate the stories of the victims in the biblical text. Therefore, the exposure of the innocent victim in the Hebrew Scriptures

⁶ For Girard, the founding murder in the Bible starts with the story of Cain, which represents the process of founding not only a religion but also a nation see *Things Hidden Since The Foundation of the World Book II*.

is a work of exegesis in progress, not a complete unveiling of the scapegoat mechanism. This tendency, nonetheless, subverts the pillars of archaic religion—myth, sacrifice, and prohibitions—as it progresses through the biblical narrative. As a revelation in process, the Hebrew Bible still has an ambivalent understanding and representation of YHWH. The progressive revelation through the law and the prophets reveals that God’s responsibility in the sacrifice of the suffering servant in Isaiah and other acts of violence in the name of God is implicitly denied (Girard, 1987: 157). As it can be seen in the earlier biblical myths, the story of Cain and Abel, the binding of Isaac, the great flood, the story of Joseph, and other narratives, “the ambiguity in the role of YHWH corresponds to the general conception of the deity in the Old Testament” (Ibid.).

Richard Middleton’s (2005) work is helpful in the expansion of the conception of the deity in the Hebrew Scriptures, specifically in the creation narrative. Middleton proposes a re-imagining of humanity based on the *imago dei* as a starting point to explore the identity of God. This is of great importance in the process of engaging Girard’s thought as Middleton addresses the question of whether or not humans are created in the image of a violent God, without following a reading through the scapegoat mechanism. This question has deep implications for the understanding of humanity and the process of becoming human as the answer will define the ethical backbone of human relations. One of the proposals presented by Middleton establishes that the texts in Genesis 1-2 are an ideological critique in contraposition to the violent creation myths of ancient Mesopotamia. In a way, one could see an agreement between Girard and Middleton as the critique of the idea of god presented in the Jewish creation myth is the beginning of a struggle to understand a god that could be unlike the others, a god that is not necessarily violent.

James Warren (2013: 39–51) presented a similar ideological criticism in his interpretation of Genesis 2-3 as the seminal lesson on mimetic desire presented in the Bible. Warren posits that

the process of desire and rivalry towards God happens when humans believe that God is withholding something from humanity. According to Warren, in the narrative of Genesis 2-3, Eve believes that God is modelling a desire for something, the fruit, in a way that makes it desirable to Eve. Even if God is beyond the rivalistic modelling of desire, Eve's belief is enough to construct a false god in Eve's mind, thereby, humanity. The fruit is a symbol for what humanity eats when men and women become consumers of the desires of others. As a result, the image of God that is born out of this interaction is an idol created in humanity's likeness.

It is necessary to acknowledge that there are diverse perspectives regarding violence in the Bible; there are other scholars who postulate that Christianity worships a paradoxical God who is violent with righteous anger. Thereby, the violence depicted in the Hebrew Bible is not only attributed to God but perpetrated by Godself. This perspective sees God as a judge that uses human violence to execute His⁷ judgement and punishment against the disobedient and evil. In addition, this God gives right to His people to also perpetrate violence in order to achieve His divine plan. M. Daniel Carroll R. (2015: 127) proposes that the "paradoxes within the person of God in the prophets are better understood not by pitting his mercy so starkly against his wrath, but by locating the mystery of the conjunction of Yahweh's compassion and anger of Yahweh in his *pathos*." In a similar fashion, Block (2015: 49) advocates for an understanding of the violence of God as part of the reminder made in Isaiah 55:8-9, which posits that the ways of God are a mystery. In this view, Christianity should rest in the mystery of an ambivalent God instead of searching for a non-violent understanding and interpretation of Godself.

⁷ The understanding of God as a masculine figure permeates the discourse of this view of God. For that reason, the writer of this dissertation takes the liberty to use a masculine pronoun in this sentence. It is a way of portraying the discourse represented by this school of thought.

2.2.2 The Gospels and The Cross

In reading through the Hebrew Bible, Girard (1987: 158) concluded that it is possible to show that the texts of the Gospels can achieve what the Jewish Bible leaves incomplete, the revelation of the scapegoat mechanism and violence. What the Gospels have to offer is a brilliant transparency. Foundational myths, on the other hand, work hard in concealing the reality of mimetic rivalry and expulsion. The Gospels are quite explicit on the issue of mimetic contagion, which begins with rivalry and conflict to then become reconciliatory (Girard, 2001: 104). Consequently, the fundamental nature of the contrast between myth and the Bible suggests that the biblical account is the manifestation of an anti-mythological inspiration. As a confirmation of this movement, the biblical story consistently condemns the tendency myths have to justify collective violence, which is part of the accusatory, vindictive nature of foundational myths. The Bible's character interprets the mimetic war of all against one with objectivity. The Bible, in its historical context, identifies the role played by mimetic contagion in a world that is formed and shaped by foundational myths. The humans portrayed in the world of biblical narratives are as violent as in the mythic worlds. However, what stands against any world of violence is the biblical interpretation of such phenomena (Girard, 2001: 109–15).

In the Gospels, it is in Jesus that mimetic desire is revealed in its fullness. It is Jesus' understanding of rivalry and violence and his nonviolent engagement with it that provide a hermeneutical key for the entire Bible. It could be said that Jesus' ministry was a process of revealing the strength of humanity's bondage to mimetic desire (Warren, 2013: 52). For the writers of the Gospels, this revelation process is intrinsically tied to the concept of "scandal".

There is no space, nor is it the purpose of this dissertation, to enter the exploration of all the passages of Scripture that demonstrate the scandalization of people involved in mimetic rivalry

or the use of this term. With that said, *scandal* is the process of a person becoming the obstacle for the other to achieve the object of his or her desire. In this process of rivalry, the fascination between parties in rivalry increases to the point of *scandalizing* the other and being *scandalized* by the other as humans try to differentiate from each other. The Greek *scandalon* has been translated in recent versions of the Bible as “stumbling block”, which implies the morality of an action and reduces the complexity of the mimetic phenomena presented in the Gospels through the narration of Jesus’ life. Interestingly, contemporary society understands “scandal” as an outrageous event that hurts moral sensibilities. Girard, however, proposes that the New Testament use of the word portrays the dynamics of mimetic desire and rivalry (Girard, 2001: 7–18; Warren, 2013: 55). What the Gospels reveal through the narration of Jesus’ ministry is Jesus’ willingness to disengage from rivalry, even with his supposed enemies. In other words, Jesus refuses to be scandalized by those around him; he is not fascinated by their rivalry and violence.

Jesus’ relationship with Peter is a great example of the intentional disconnection between Jesus and his plausible models. The narrative presented in Matthew 16:20-23 sheds light on the process of mimesis that even Jesus’ disciples entered. In this narrative, Peter rebukes Jesus for following his purpose to be crucified in Jerusalem and submitting to the violence of the Scribes and Pharisees. Jesus’ response to Peter uses the Greek word *scandalon*, which does not mean “one of those ordinary obstacles that we avoid easily after we run into it the first time, but a paradoxical obstacle that is almost impossible to avoid: the more this obstacle, or scandal, repels us, the more it attracts us. Those who are scandalized put all the more ardour in injuring themselves against it because they were injured there before” (Girard, 2001: 16). Through his rejection of Peter as a scandal, Jesus refuses to enter into the double-bind of mimetic rivalry that would take both, Peter and Jesus, to be fascinated by and fastened in rivalry with each other’s reciprocity. Peter is

oblivious to these dynamics. Jesus, however, understands the true nature of scandalization, and the religious system and the scapegoat mechanism.

It is through the understanding of scandal as part of the process of mimetic rivalry that the Gospels reveal the truth of the founding murders. Girard's re-reading of the curses against the Scribes and Pharisees points not only to the scandalization of these groups with Jesus, but also to a cross-trans-generational universal phenomenon. It is cross-trans-generational as the Scribes and Pharisees reject Jesus' teaching and try to distance themselves from the murders of innocent victims from the past, which Jesus refers to in Mathew 23:34-36 as coming from the "blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar." This space in literature and time reflect the Bible as Jesus knew it. In Luke, Girard notes that the text adds even more victims as it reads "since the beginning of the world" (Luke 11:50). This process of interpretation and revelation by Jesus opens the door for the re-reading of all archaic religions as they are founded in the victimizing mechanism that, up to that point, remained hidden since the foundations of the world, or in the Greek, *apo kataboles kosmou*. The words used by Jesus imply the universality of the scapegoat mechanism as the cornerstone of sacrificial archaic societies. The point, however, does not imply a hereditary transmission of guilt. Jesus is ending an intellectual and spiritual solidarity against past and present victims through an unquestionable refusal of this mechanism, bringing to light the responsibility of the Scribes and Pharisees in their participation in a mechanism they are blind to. This repudiation is taken to the extreme as Jesus gives himself to the very system of violence that he came to reveal. This systemic rejection makes of the passion a progression of intolerable revelation, while simultaneously being proof of the unveiling itself. The passion, then, is connected with every ritual and archaic religion

in the planet as it reproduces the founding event of all rituals, the execution of a scapegoat (Girard, 1987: 154–170).

Jesus' teaching is not the only way he intended to reveal the scapegoat mechanism. The story presented in the Gospels and the process of Jesus' engagement in the walk to his death have the power to reveal the system that takes him to the cross. The way Jesus lived his life and the giving of his life are deeply rooted in the revelation process that affirmed to his disciples and those who followed him that his victimization would be different from those before him. The difference of his death rests in the fact that he knew what the mechanism would do; he knew that the same crowd that welcomed him into Jerusalem would be the one asking for his crucifixion. Consequently, Jesus' decision to give his life created a new narrative as the lives of Abel and the prophets all the way to Zechariah had been taken from them (Warren, 2013: 217–18). Therefore, Jesus de-mythologized his own death by giving his life and not entering with violence into a violent encounter with those who were seeking to kill him.

The power of the communal crisis and the unloading of all the rivalries in Jesus is explicitly evidenced through different accounts in the Gospels, always portraying Jesus through a non-violent engagement with those who gathered against him (Luke 4:28-30; Matthew 21:33-43; John 10). However, Jesus constantly reminded them of their responsibility and participation in the hidden mechanism of violence (John 8:39-45). Therefore, “[t]he Gospels only speak of sacrifices in in order to reject them and deny them any validity. Jesus counters the ritualism of the Pharisees with an non-sacrificial quotation from Hosea ...” (Girard, 1987: 180) “But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’” (Mathew 9:13)

The power of the revelation in the Gospels creates a non-mythological reading of Jesus' life. There is no suggestion or association of the death of Jesus as a sacrifice, regardless of the

definition given to it. The passion is, thus, presented as an act of salvation (Girard, 1987: 182). Salvation comes in Jesus unveiling the innocence of the victims that preceded him. Hence, the cross becomes a place of revelation, a place where the falseness of the accusations against Jesus and the countless victims of the sacrificial system becomes evident. The cross in the Gospels contains an explicit revelation of the violent, murderous foundations of all religions. Even more so, the revelation happens in the deep relationship between the Father and Son, in their common non-violent nature, thereby showing a process that happens before the eyes of a non-violent deity—The Father of Jesus (Girard, 1987, 2001). For the Son, Jesus, is the way the truth and the life that reveals not only the violent system that he is giving his life to, but also who the Father is as he is the revelation of the Father (Colossians 1:15-16). It is in this relationship between the Father and the Son that a reinterpretation of the Hebrew Bible's deity can be explored.

The Epistle to the Colossians 2:14-15 offers an interpretation of what happened at the cross through Jesus' passion. For the apostle Paul, the triumph presented at the cross seems as an intentional paradox of the whole process as the Greek *apekdusameno* and *edeigmatisen* have a military connotation. The process of disarming and making a spectacle is as foreign as possible from the intention of the letter to the Colossians. The victory of Christ has nothing to do with military power as Christ is not inflicting violence onto others. It is quite the opposite. The Gospels reveal a process where Jesus submits not only to the violence of the Scribes and Pharisees, but also to the Empire of the time as the crucifixion was a staple of the Romans. In submitting himself to the violence of the system and religion, Jesus paradoxically disarms the authorities and principalities as the Christ unveils their true nature nailing them to the cross with his disfigured body as a sign and exhibition of the scapegoat mechanism (Girard, 2001: 138–40; Warren, 2013: 217–22). I will explore in more depth a way for non-violent hermeneutics in chapter seven

CHAPTER THREE

LIBERATION THEOLOGY AS NON-SACRIFICIAL THEOLOGY

It is critical to understand that the acknowledgement of the victim's suffering does not begin with Girard's anthropology. In fact, the acknowledgement of suffering begins with the outcry of those who are constantly sacrificed by contemporary institutions. It was in the 1990s that the intersect between Girard and liberation theologians led Girard to admit to the political use of his theories (Míguez, Rieger & Sung, 2009: 40). During an encounter in Piracicaba, São Paulo, Brazil in June of 1990, Girard and liberation theologians acknowledged the convergence between the basic theological assumptions of liberation theology and Girard's ideas. The most evident point of convergence between two seemingly distant epistemologies was the rejection of the sacrifice of human lives and the idols that demand them (Assmann, 1991: 14).

In the next pages, the reader will see that Girard's anthropology is quite compatible with other epistemologies that surface diverse understandings of suffering and critique the sacrificial nature of contemporary institutions. In this process, this section will explore how the onset of Latin American liberation theology acknowledged the outcry of the poor in this region of the world. In order to deepen the theological insight, this section will also bring into play more contemporary liberating theologies that give voice to the oppressed and sacrificed of contemporary society as a way to reimagine mimetic theory in a contextual way.

This section will move from a brief exploration of the theological and hermeneutical edifice of liberation theology in Latin America to a broad approach of feminist liberation theologies, then to a structural liberation theology approach, to later enter a brief analysis of practical theologies of liberation. Finally, the transition will be done to a brief analysis of the conversations between René Girard and the liberation theologians in 1990. The purpose of this section is to trace the non-

sacrificial aspects of liberation theologies that can complement Girard's mimetic theory. There is an intentional attempt to comprehend how Girard's insights can be liberating in the process of finding a practical theology of peacebuilding. The exploration of the thoughts of Gutierrez, Sobrino, Tamez, and other early liberation theologians is done with the intent of finding companionship in the commitment of liberation through a practical theology of peacebuilding, not with the intent of finding epistemological approval for the research that follows in the next chapter, nor to be stuck in the nostalgia of their writings in the midst of the liberation struggles in Latin America of the 1960s through the 90s.

The use of Girard's mimetic theory opens the door for a dialogue that can expand the understanding of suffering, oppression and liberation. It is in the light of the scapegoat mechanism that one can begin to see the hidden story of current and past victims of the system. The system in place can be described as a global sacrificial theology as proposed by Miguez et al. (2009) and Aguilar (2018). It is *global* as it has spread through falsely transcendentalized institutions like the market and planetary urbanization. It is *sacrificial* because it is willing to impose suffering and death in the name of progress and development as an offering to the gods of the global market. It is a *theology* because humanity has made of the market and globalization an idol to place humanity's violence outside of the human responsibility. For that reason, a practical theology of peacebuilding that responds to the Guatemalan collective woundedness must be an act of atheism.

In the words of Eleazar Fernandez (2004: 5):

Idolatry, not atheism, is the fundamental enemy of life. Atheism does not demand sacrifice, idolatry does. Idols demand the sacrifice of our souls, bodies, time, and anything that we cherish most ... In the face of these idols of death we need to say with Ernst Block that 'only an atheist can be a good Christian'. This is no mere atheism of the modern secular person, but Christian prophetic atheism. Prophetic atheism was the stance of the early Christians against the idols of the Roman Empire. They faced persecution and death rather than worship the idols of the Empire. Likewise, prophetic atheism must be our stance

against the idols of death that claim ultimate allegiance. In the face of the idols of death of our time, prophetic atheism is a mark of our Christian faithfulness.

The resistance of prophetic atheism must open the space for the naming of pains and suffering so we can reimagine and articulate joy and humanity (Fernandez, 2004: 3).

3.1 Latin American Liberation Theology: acknowledging the suffering of the poor

The suffering of the victims of contemporary institutions was acknowledged in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s by Gustavo Gutierrez, Jon Sobrino, Ignacio Ellacuría, Elsa Tamez, Oscar Romero, and many others who started questioning the oppression suffered by the poor and started a new way of Theologising. Latin American liberation theologians found in the poor an epistemological point to theologise about and acknowledge the claims of those undergoing social, historical, and economic suffering. For Gutierrez, the poor are preferred by God not because they are morally better than others, but because God is God and for God the last shall be first (Gutierrez, 2009: 30).

In order to understand the acknowledgement of suffering voices presented by Latin American liberation theology, one must grasp the importance of geographical, social, and economic allocation for contextual theologising. For Jon Sobrino (1994: 24), the reason for a good articulation of a Christology of liberation and pain was not that Latin America possessed better technical and theological resources for the analysis of a liberationist perspective, but it was because the people of this continent knew well the burden of poverty among the deprived social strata. In addition, Sobrino proposed that God is present in history and God usually shows up in the oppressed. It is in this comprehension of the locale of theology that Sobrino saw the setting of the church as well. If the church is the body of Christ and most of the church is represented by the poor, then the church of the poor is the ecclesial setting for Christology as this world is shaped by the poor. This *world of the poor* opened a Christological conversation that served the development

of liberation theology as it became food for thought, power for thought, and the teaching of thought. It is in that progression that the acknowledgement of suffering must be a starting point for a theology of liberation that gives voice to the stories of the victims. If suffering and oppression as facts of death are not taken seriously, then theology will be accused of complicity with the current systems and of irrelevance. Even more so, the victims of the system, the crucified people, become the best safeguard against the danger of theology becoming ideology (Sobrino, 1994: 28–35).

Liberation theology, in its early stages, cannot be understood outside of the suffering of the poor. This epistemological and spiritual point of departure is the anchor for liberation. In the words of Leonardo and Clodovis Boff (1987: 3), “[w]ithout a minimum of ‘suffering with’ this suffering that affects the great majority of the human race, liberation theology can neither exist nor be understood.” For that reason, the acknowledgement of suffering only occurs when reflection materializes based on practice.

Liberation theologians developed a hermeneutical process that gave voice to the suffering of the victims of global sacrificial theology. First, the hermeneutical process proposed by the Boff brothers and others favoured application rather than explication. Liberationist hermeneutics saw the Bible as a book of life, not as a book of strange stories. Secondly, liberative hermeneutics seeks to discover and activate the energy of biblical texts finding an interpretation that can foster personal change and transformation in history. Finally, it places each text in its historical context in order to build up an appropriate translation to the contemporary historical context (Boff & Boff, 1987: 32–34). In addition, the Boff brothers understood the life and ministry of Jesus as a hermeneutical key to read any book of the Bible, though they favoured specific texts for their pedagogical uses. Nicolás Panotto proposes a slightly different read on this method. Liberation theology has three

central elements in its process, the idea of a liberating God, the poor as a theological subject, and history as the scenario for praxis (Panotto, 2018).

Elsa Tamez (1979) offers a meaningful example of legitimizing the suffering of the oppressed in her book *Bible of the Oppressed*. After exploring oppression in the Hebrew Scriptures, Tamez proposes that liberation is a continuous task. The endeavour of liberation is started through the reading of the Bible in its historical situatedness to see what glimpses of hope can be found for the present circumstances. In doing so, one can find the meaning of history, in Tamez's (1979: 84) case, the meaning of Latin American history.

Even though Girard and liberation theologians start from different epistemologies for the acknowledgement of suffering, one can see the correlation between Girard's ideas and the liberationist paradigm of theologising. Liberation theologians equated the poor in their sufferings with the image of the crucified Christ and the suffering servant of Yahweh in Isaiah. Sobrino (1994: 26) agreed with Ignacio Ellacuría and Oscar Romero as they used the imagery of the suffering servant to refer to the poor and oppressed as they suffered violence and death. If good news is not good news for those who suffer, one could argue that it is not good news. This connection between epistemologies becomes more obvious when one finds Sobrino (1994: 26) quoting Ignacio Ellacuría, stating in reference to the poor, "[t]his crucified people is the historical continuation of the suffering servant of Yahweh." In making the connection between the suffering servant and the poor as his historical continuation, liberation theologians added a sacrificial value to the poor, thus equating them to victims of the current global sacrificial system. One may think that humanity is past its archaic origins and that a connection of current systems with sacred violence is a stretch; however, Jean-Pierre Dupuy thinks differently. For Dupuy (2013: xii), following Durkheim's understanding of religion and reason, "reason, like all human institutions,

has its source in religion”. Thereby, contemporary institutions are in a way religious, thus creating gods that demand the sacrifices that Fernandez (2004) mentions as a result of contemporary idolatry. This comparison has deep theological insight as later liberation theologians equated the capitalist system to a falsely transcendentalized deity that required the sacrifice of those at the margins and those who oppose the system (Míguez *et al.*, 2009).

3.1.1 Feminist Liberation Theologies and the Acknowledgement of Women’s Suffering

To move beyond the Latin American liberation theology’s one approach, the option for the poor, to the non-sacrificial readings of feminist theologians, one must acknowledge that a criticism against Latin American liberation theology is that it was too male oriented in its early days. Gustavo Gutierrez (2009) recognised the need for feminist theologies and theory to enrich liberation theology, and Juan José Tamayo (2017) recently acknowledged the influence of feminist and queer theologies in his process of liberation and theologising. The theology of struggle presented by the Philippine theologian Eleazar Fernandez is of great help in this critique. Fernandez posits that there is not one specific paradigmatic form of oppression. Oppression, hence, needs to be approached from many fronts in contemporary society. For that reason, a liberative methodology needs to include different forms of suffering as interlocking structures of forms of oppression. With this comprehension of oppression, Fernandez (2004) develops a constructive critique of Gutierrez and other early liberation theologians from Latin America for their oversimplification of oppression as poverty.

With that said, this portion of the chapter will focus on three specific feminist theologians, because, in the perspective of the writer of this dissertation, their work acknowledges suffering from a theological-practical approach in a way that encourages non-violent interpretations of God in the Bible towards a practical theology of peacebuilding that responds to the Guatemalan

collective woundedness. This exploration will briefly analyse ideas presented by Phyllis Trible, Kathleen M. O'Connor, and Ivone Gebara.

Phyllis Trible (1984: 3) has proposed a series of readings that discuss the pain, suffering, and violence that women suffer in the biblical text and contemporary contexts. Trible hypothesizes that the stories that have been left aside or ignored have the power to reinterpret Scripture in a way that avoids triumphalism and raises unsettling questions for faith. In Trible's perspective, these *Texts of Terror* portray women, not men, as Christ figures, thus equating women as sacrificial victims of the patriarchal sacrificial system portrayed in the Bible and contemporary society. Even more so, these stories depict the horrors of male power, abuse, and violence while also depicting the vulnerability, abuse, and extermination of women. For that reason, it is crucial to inhabit a world of terror that refuses to let the reader pass to the other side without considering the horrific reality of the text and systems that are justified with it (Ibid.: 65). In portraying women as Christ figures, Trible opened a door to recognise the contemporaneity of the stories of violence against women in the biblical narrative legitimizing the suffering of many unnamed women, from the past and present, who have been "captured, betrayed, raped, tortured, murdered, dismembered, and scattered." In a very liberationist way, Trible (1984: 87) states that "[t]o take to heart this ancient story, then, is to confess its present reality."

There is a clear correlation between Trible's hermeneutical process, and the liberationist hermeneutics proposed by the Boff brothers. Both hermeneutical paradigms read the texts taking into account their context and historical situatedness to then translate the implications and findings to the contemporary context. In addition, the terror packed hermeneutics of Trible can be correlated with analysis of the texts of persecution that Girard (1986) questions in his literary critique and breakdown of *The Scapegoat*. As Trible re-reads the *Texts of Terror*, one can see the feminist

hermeneutical suspicion that could also be elaborated starting from the understanding of the scapegoat. Tribble clearly takes the side of the victims and critiques the hierarchy of the patriarchal system which murdered, raped, and abused women in the Bible, which is a definitive subversion of other readings or omissions of the analysed texts in her writings. Girard, on the other hand, sees the phenomena at play in the Bible as a consequence of the scapegoat mechanism revealed throughout the Bible as the pattern of collective violence crosses all cultures (Girard, 1986: 19). The non-sacrificial connection between Tribble (1984) and Girard (1977, 1986) comes to a closer encounter when the reading of the un-named sex slave of Judges 19 and the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter are seen as the execution of scapegoats, innocent victims, to bring a resolution to crisis attributed to a god. A conversation between Girard's and Tribble's ideas can take a non-sacrificial turn in the hermeneutical lens to read the Hebrew Bible, creating a direct contraposition to theologies that affirm the contemporary systems and propose a discourse that delegitimises the suffering of women, but reinforces the oppression and abuse of women. With this conversation between Girard and Tribble, one could argue that the victimizing mechanism and the origin of culture evolved into the patriarchal culture portrayed in the Hebrew Bible. Even more so, contemporary institutions founded in the patriarchal system are willing to sacrifice women as surrogate victims in the unloading of passionate rivalries in relationships between men that still consider women as the incarnation of evil. The embodiment of evil and suffering in the female body will be analysed later through Gebara's theologising.

In a similar fashion, for Kathleen M. O'Connor, in her study of *Lamentations and the Tears of the World* (2003), it is important to bring the voices of suffering to the front. To legitimise suffering and gain voice in the midst of pain implies to enter the truth of one's story communally and individually. It allows those who suffer to recover their lives and acquire agency by naming

their world. O'Connor invites her readers to a way of theologising that gives space to many views of tragedy. When people experience pain there cannot be a voice that wins out, unifies, or dominates the claims of other voices. Each voice has to be heard in order to legitimise its claims of what suffering is and what it looks like. In a very subtle but assertive way, O'Connor criticizes a way of doing theology that shows no restraint to fix suffering. For that reason, the book of Lamentations communicates the inspired silence of God. In restraining himself, the writer of Lamentations avoids a premature resolution to the mourning expressed in the book of Lamentations, opening the book's capacity to house sorrow. Any voice of God in Lamentations would diminish the expressions of suffering, undercut anger and despair, and give the reader an insignificant glimpse of the real terror of their condition (O'Connor, 2003: 83–86). Like Tribble, O'Connor opens the text for the reader to inhabit the space of terror in the text without looking for short and simple answers to the understanding of God and the perpetration of violence against women.

A way of theologising like O'Connor (2003: 93) proposes does not permit denial of pain to be a hardened way of life. Denying pain would obstruct human growth and would cut the spirit at its roots, silencing the voices of the victims of current systems and blocking the passion for justice. O'Connor's study of Lamentations can also enter a conversation with Girard's insights. In this case, both scholars are paying attention to the voices of the victims in the Hebrew Bible. O'Connor (2003: 99–109) invites her readers to give voice to pain, while Girard (1986) invites his audience to understand the stereotypes of persecution in order to reread the stories in the Bible from the perspective of those who have been scapegoated, and later on through the eyes of Jesus. Both scholars take into account the stories of those who suffer to dismantle the violent systems

and ways of understanding God that claim the lives of those under the oppression of the scapegoat mechanism.

Interestingly, O'Connor's approach to the exploration of a deity that is abusive or not opens the door for a conversation that could enrich the understanding of non-violent hermeneutics that use Girardian mimetic theory as a lens to re-imagine a practical theology of peacebuilding. O'Connor proposes that the book of Lamentations does not offer a new way to imagine God. However, the specific formulation on Lamentations 3:33 does not reinforce God's abusiveness. "For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone". The text hints to God's powerlessness. It opens the possibility that God is not omnipotent and is unable to prevent evil. In O'Connor's (2003: 122) words: "For the time being I look to the God who suffers with the grieved and afflicted, a God whose power and sovereignty are not compromised by human suffering because God cannot prevent it." O'Connor, in conversation with Girard, brings theology down to earth to explore the possibilities of human evil and violence as a result of human interactions, not as the consequence of the wrath of God. In both cases, violence comes from the human experience, and not necessarily from a deity that is punishing with thunder and lightning from the sky. It is important, however, to remember that O'Connor and Girard come from different experiences to elaborate an interpretation of the Bible. O'Connor comes from her experience and embodiment as a woman, while Girard comes from interpreting the world as a man with privilege.

Feminist theologians like Tribble and O'Connor utilize their experience as women as a lens to read Scripture. Their criticism against the patriarchal nature of the text and the hermeneutics of suspicion paved the way for a theologising about the embodiment of suffering and evil in women. Ivone Gebara suggests that the experience of suffering in being a woman is deeper than general understandings of suffering and evil because these categories have been manipulated from the

experience and discourse of men. The evil and suffering that Gebara (2002: Loc. 45) talks about is not the evil one does personally, but the evil that women constantly undergo, suffer, and withstand. This kind of evil is not chosen. It is imposed, as it is present in the institutions and social structures that make space for it, legitimise it, and enable it. The problem with these structures, specifically the Church, is that it has been an institution created and dominated by men. Even more so, it is an institution that has interpreted women's experience of evil in a way that does not take into account what women feel or ask for (Ibid.: Loc. 69).

The embodiment of evil in the experience of women has deep theological implications. Gebara (2002: Loc. 1337) takes her theologising to the utmost consequences to lift a critique of the male centred interpretation of the cross and the soteriology that emanates from it. The very statements of Jesus "the man" who died for all on the cross "highlight the patriarchal tradition of exalting male public suffering and the role of the male as saviour". This creates an androcentric and anthropocentric understanding of suffering, thus minimizing the suffering of women and the violence perpetrated against the ecosystem. Gebara (2002: Loc. 1342-52) believes that a feminist theological perspective looks beyond the crucifixion of one man. It denounces using the cross to maintain the oppression of women and the poor. Thereby, Gebara demythologizes the death of Christ as a sacrifice.

The resurrection, however, is in the collective experience of the cross. The cross and resurrection inhabit the same body. Just like in the Scriptures, Gebara (2002: Loc. 1392) sees women standing around the cross as Jesus' friends taking care of his lifeless body in order to care for the resurrection to come. Gebara's theologising concretizes Tribble's and O'Connor's hermeneutics. In addition, it brings an anthropological perspective of evil that does not put violence outside of human interactions and responsibility. In fact, Gebara argues that the cross is

not greater or lesser than other sufferings perpetrated by humans such as the mass murder of indigenous peoples, Africans, Jews, Arabs, and many more. It is definitely not greater than the suffering of “women who see their children die of hunger because of the greed of those who hold economic power” (2002: Loc. 1404). With this understanding of the body as the place where the cross and resurrection inhabit, Gebara breaks with the embodied dualism of the scapegoat mechanism in the process of the double transference and embodiment of monstrosity in the surrogate victim as the incarnation of total good and absolute evil. The experience of the embodiment of evil in women becomes a non-sacrificial paradigm that refuses to accept that women are just victims of the system without agency.

Gebara demythologizes the “sacrificial” male centred reading of Jesus’ death on the cross, and once more, grounds the violence perpetrated by humans. The process of feminist readings of the Bible and the demythologising of the cross enriches the conversation with the anthropological paradigm presented by Girard’s mimetic theory as women happen to be one of the “easy” scapegoats of contemporary patriarchal institutions justified by the fact of being women. As Fernandez (2004) proposes, women tend to be a good representation of all the interlocking forms of oppression embodied in one being. In the case of Guatemala following the categories presented by Fernandez, the poorest of the poor (classism) happen to be indigenous (racism) women (sexism) who live in in the slums and rural areas (naturism) (Wulffhorst, 2017).

3.1.2 Liberation Theologies: engaging the structures that inflict suffering

Early Latin American liberation theology and feminist liberation theology open the space for a conversation that explores the structures that impose suffering as an offering to the current global economic patriarchal system. It is imperative that in this consideration of liberation theology one recognises the criticism from feminist liberation theologian Nancy Cardoso (2006: 94) to the

current state of Latin American theology: “The theology that we are doing today is sterile, because it attempts to hide behind systematic exegetical generalizations that fail to name, choose, opt, state preferences, take a stand, refute, be outraged, condemn or resist”.

In addition, the structural criticism presented in the process of *Indecent Theologising* by Marcella Althaus-Reid (2005: 15–16) proposes that all theology implies a sexual and political practice based on specific socially accepted codes. Liberation theology has excluded different elements from its theological discourse. It codified a specific type and understanding of poverty that left out of its discourse other experiences of marginalization throughout the Latin American continent. Althaus-Reid criticizes the fact that liberation theology is a rural theology and that the framework presented by rural communities has been favoured at the expense of the urban poor.

In a similar fashion, Nicolás Panotto (2018: 171–73) notes four strong criticisms that come from within the liberation theology discourse, which can be summarized as follows: First, Ivone Gebara and other feminist liberation theologians have criticized the essentialist, anthropocentric, and androcentric discourse that has the image of a male deity as the liberator within liberation theology. Consequently, Hugo Assmann criticized that Liberation Theology did not engage in a deep critique of the classic themes of theology. Secondly, Marcela Althaus-Reid called out the lack of suspicion in the process of not recognizing the fact that there is a difference between poor males and poor females, implying that other ways of oppression have to be identified based on sexuality in order to have a true liberation of human bodies within specific social realities. Thirdly, Panotto suggests that there is still an abstract idea of the poor that does not take into account his or her body, daily life, relationships, and passions. Finally, Panotto states that the critique of the Marxist methodological approach is still valid as it oversimplified the human struggle in its spiritual, social, and cultural dimension.

One can argue that Cardoso is making reference to the same liberationist analysts that Juan José Tamayo (2017: 172) considers stuck in the early writings of liberation theology. Tamayo posits that those who have stayed in the foundational moment of liberation theology, which was briefly explored above, have missed the latest developments in this branch of theology. These developments include feminist liberation theology, eco-theology, indigenous theologies, pan-African theology from Latin America and the Caribbean, economic theology, and the pluri-religious theology (Ibid.), which one may consider theologies that discovered other structural blind spots as they engage colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, and the patriarchal systems in place.

The development of structural liberation theologies has found and criticized the elements of the system that are set to create scapegoats. In this line of thought, Juan José Tamayo (2017: 189) has named a transversal axis that runs through the different liberation theologies. He calls it *teología económica de la liberación* (economic theology of liberation). This theological analysis consists in the exploration, understanding, and critique between the practices and theological discourses and the practices and economic discourses, verifying that neo-liberal economy operates as a belief system that functions through and possesses theological assumptions. The critique of liberation theology at a structural level comes from hermeneutics of suspicion. In this hermeneutical analysis and criticism all the political, economic, cultural, and religious systems are questioned to bring up to light the structures of oppression that emanate from them (Shannaham, 2014: 11). Structural liberation theology goes beyond *teología económica de la liberación* and argues that the oppressive hegemonic structures need to be unmasked; in a very Girardian way, contemporary institutions need to be revealed for what they are, a global sacrificial theology.

The focus of the *teología económica de la liberación* lies in the critique of economic rationality. However, a Girardian reading of the current economic institutions is useful to go

beyond *teología económica de la liberación* and explore the morality behind the theological, political, and religious edifice that supports the current economic structure. The existing economic reasoning has instituted scarcity as the basis of capitalism as this concept is used with an ambivalent meaning. On one hand, scarcity is explained as the source of violence and inequality, thus becoming a threat to the social order. On the other hand, scarcity is understood as an incentive that can power economic growth, thereby making of economic growth a protective shield against violence and social unrest (Dumouchel, 2014: ix).

The institution of scarcity as the cornerstone of the current economic system has deep moral implications as necessity suspends morals. Humans do not choose the lack of resources and the parsimony of nature condemns them to war as men and women become obstacles to each other in the search and exploitation of natural limited resources to produce capital. This process transforms envy, desire, and pride into the driving forces that fuel economic growth; thereby, economic activity transforms authentic rivalries and the seeds of violence into genuine ways of attaining personal peace. Since scarcity is the source of all evils, the links between scarcity, misery, and violence give economic growth and the production of wealth their own moral value. Returning to the understanding of the mimetic crisis presented by Girard, in archaic societies scarcity and lack of resources lead to the mimetic crisis. Following Dumouchel's (2014: 6–49) interpretation of Sahlins' *Stone Age Economics*, in primitive societies scarcity is a form of social organization. Therefore, violence and scarcity are one and the same as the emergence of scarcity can lead to the obliteration of the community. In contemporary societies, however, scarcity fuels from individualism as it becomes a personal issue to be solved. If one does not have enough, one must create to have plenty. Therefore, the system has instituted scarcity by destroying the traditional bonds of solidarity and by creating a dualism between social and individual consequences of

human actions. In other words, scarcity as the breaking of traditional solidarity obligations leaves each person to his or her own demise.

As the reader may remember, Girard (1977, 1986) proposes that resolution of the mimetic crisis happens through the sacrifice of the surrogate victim, initially a human sacrifice. However, in ancient cultures the search for a sacrificial victim was harder than contemporary humanity can imagine. The obligations of solidarity made it difficult to find a surrogate victim without the risk of sparking the cycle of revenge after the sacrifice. For that reason, Girard argues that the scapegoat needed to meet very specific criteria, specifically the missing of a concrete social link between the victim and the rest of the community (Dumouchel, 2014: 49).

In contemporary societies, as the obligations of solidarity have been lost, the exteriority of all the members of society transmutes all individuals into potential sacrificial victims. In the process of abandoning the bonds of solidarity, humans make sure that nobody will avenge those who become the objects of communal violence. In the current system, the spread of violence within a specific group is slower. The distance created between individuals devalues violence between rivals. In addition, there is a modern institution that prevents the appearance of subjective acts of violence, the justice system. This does not mean that violence has disappeared. It means that violence has shifted its form and shape. Even more so, violence has become institutional, transforming itself into resentment (Dumouchel, 2014: 51). Resentment will be explored with more depth in the next chapter.

As everyone becomes a possible sacrificial victim, the victims of the many rivalries that compose scarcity will be undoubtedly sacrificed. It will not be the violence of the enemies that hurts the most, but the indifference of others who have abandoned the obligations of solidarity.

The result of this type of violence does not start with physical perpetrations of violence as mimetic doubles do not necessarily engage in subjective violence. In the words of Dumouchel (2014: 52):

it will not be the relations between rivals, in other words, doubles, that will be the most violent, but the relations of each individual to the others—in other words relations between third parties. They will involve the greatest subjective violence because the blows of our enemies seem more justified than the indifference and disdain of third parties watching our fall without flinching and perhaps even without seeing it, when all they had to do to save us was lift a finger ... Their indifference is much more deadly than the blows delivered by the winner.

Because of the indifference of all members of the society, there is a constant emergence of people living in poverty, excluded, and miserable to whom no one has inflicted or wished direct harm. Sacrificed victims appear all over and “we are the ones who have sacrificed them, by our indifference”. These victims do not belong to specific rivalries and interactions; individuals cannot see the connection between their actions and these consequences or between their indifference and the poor and oppressed (Dumouchel, 2014: 53).

In response to this system based on scarcity and indifference, Nancy Cardoso Pereira (2006) uses an interesting understanding of “hunger” to create a dynamic reading between human bodies and their environment. Hunger is the gateway to contemplation, and it is the yearning for more in this earth. It is not necessarily bad, but a relationship that God saw as good between humanity in creative relationship with other beings and nature. It is in this relationship that the book of Genesis narrates difficult relationships between the physical and its vegetation and human bodies and their hunger. Following this kind of reading, Cardoso re-interprets the story of Cain and Abel, the reason God’s refused Cain’s offering, and the murder of Abel by his brother. In the narrative, Cain represents a specific system of production based on the exploitation of the land and forced labour, very likely in the context of the city-states of Canaan influenced by Egypt. Abel, on the other hand, symbolizes human groups engaged together in different economic activities that

were not under the control of the city-states with their tribute and forced labour systems. Consequently, the rejection of Cain's offering becomes the refusal of a system based on oppression which is imbedded in Cain's offering. "Cain's way of life and production involved denying life to Abel and to other human groups with him." (Cardoso Pereira, 2006: 96)

The critique of the system in the ancient cultures presented in Genesis paves the way for Cardoso's critique of the current economic system. The murder of Able becomes a prototype of the victims of contemporary economies. In the biblical narrative, God is not limited to ask hard questions. In fact, God's question "where is your brother?" implies that God is making sure that Cain knows that what he has done is not hidden. However, Cardoso notes that a reading of this narrative that focuses God's acceptance and discrimination based on the quality of the offering has created a co-opted theology that is not concerned in the asking of difficult questions. Consequently, the practical implication is that Christians do not ask where their brothers and sisters are because they have created NGOs and mission agencies to do the work of charity, but not to ask questions about the system (Cardoso Pereira, 2006).

If one understands the narrative of Cain and Abel as the founding murder of a Judeo-Christian religion, then Cardoso's reading and critique through this narrative can be used as a critique of the current global sacrificial system. The understanding of the body presented by feminist liberation theologians such as Gebara and Cardoso is a demythologization of the idols of the current system. Even more so, the connection between theologies of liberation and Girardian anthropology is not a stretch, even when they have different epistemological points of departure. Miguez *et al.* have approached a Girardian reading of the current system from the liberationist paradigm, as at the heart of empire there "is a sacrificial theology that demands and justifies human

suffering in the name of the realization of impossible desires and objectives through submission to an institution falsely transcendentalized” (Míguez *et al.*, 2009: 130).

3.1.3 Practical Theologies of Liberation: a reimagined theologian

There is no space in this dissertation to explore all the different liberation theologies. For that reason, the choice was to focus on the beginning of liberation theology and feminist liberation theology, then to move to a more general understanding of liberation theology. This progression opens the conversation to practical theologies of liberation, which address the role of practical theologian of liberation as a peacebuilding agent amid the current systems. I have chosen to use this space to concretise a connection between the academic ideas and the practicality of everyday life. Theology, especially non-violent peacebuilding theology, cannot stay in the realm of academic discourse; it ought to have a direct implication on people’s everyday lives and faith practices.

Contrarily, Elina Hankela (2014) has noted that there is a lack of theologians, of Christian intellectuals, who are involved in the struggle of South African people, and there is a silence of the prophetic voice in South Africa. One could argue that Guatemala has a similar deficiency in its collective woundedness and suffering. There are not known Guatemalan theologians who are willing to raise a prophetic voice amid corruption, *machismo*, poverty, and the abuse of nature. For that reason, it is imperative that the Christian intellectual engages with his or her context as a bridge between the academic world and the reality of the street (Shannaham, 2014).

In the process of becoming a peacebuilding agent, the practical theologian of liberation has to enter into a relationship with the context that is not only unplugged from rivalry, but also in a way that works to restore and heal in the midst of the collective woundedness of his or her context. In traditional dominant theologies, the theologian has attained a professional ordained category

that creates distance between the intellectual and the context, especially when it comes to white male professional theologians and missionaries. However, liberation theology as a contextual way of theologising proposes a more egalitarian way of relating between the theologian and the context (Shannaham, 2014: 11). As it was shown before, Boff and Boff, like Gutierrez and others, propose an organic connection between the theologian and the oppressed as there has to be a minimum of suffering with the poor as the theologian stands in solidarity with those who suffer (Boff & Boff, 1987). Even more so, borrowing from Antonio Gramsci's (1971: 10) concept of the "new intellectual," the practical theologian of liberation "can no longer consist in eloquence, which is an exterior and momentary mover of feelings and passions, but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organiser, 'permanent persuader' and not just a simple orator." It is important, nevertheless, to understand that the theologian cannot be minimally involved in the process of liberation and transformation, or marginally engaged with the suffering of others. The theologian needs an incarnational commitment that calls forth a radical presence amid the human reality. The theologian exists in the world to celebrate the incarnate Christ (Rocke & Van Dyke, 2012: 73) in the midst of his historical continuation amongst the crucified people of today.

The invitation that liberation theology extends to the practical theologian of liberation is one of practical engagement. It is a call to enter the suffering of the majority of people in this world. It is a call to be a part of revealing a system that asks for the lives of many in order to fill its never-ending desire for blood. "Idolatry, not atheism, is the fundamental enemy of life. Atheism does not demand sacrifice, idolatry does. Idols demand the sacrifice of our souls, bodies, time, and anything that we cherish most" (Fernandez, 2004: 5).

A practical theologian of liberation becomes conscious of the rivalries and violence insipient in the relationships between colleagues and those in the struggle for liberation. The

process of practical liberation theology entails a process that allows the Christian intellectual to engage directly in the struggles for equality and liberation. As Ivan Petrella (2017: 338) proposes, a practical theology of liberation disentangles liberation from theology. In other words, it integrates the option for the poor and any other oppressed groups with other ways of knowing and practice to have a wider application and impact. The going “undercover” of liberation theologians, is a deliberate strategy that even “rids” itself of the label of “theologian”, to prevent any possible hindrance—such as the baggage “theologian” might carry with it—to the promise of liberation. This is done as liberation is central to liberation theology, and theology merely the vehicle.

3.2 From Self-Sacrifice to *El Don de Sí*: liberation theology in dialogue with René Girard

Regarding the dynamics of mimetic desire, Girard did not extend his theory beyond the analysis of human relations. Consequently, it is the work of scholars to expand on the practicality of his thought; the implications of his ideas for everyday life must be explored and contextualized by those who engage in the analysis and critique of his ideas. For that reason, the previous section took the space to bring the practicality of liberation theology as corollary to the non-sacrificial perspectives of both liberation theology and mimetic theory. At the theoretical level, mimetic theory can indeed be a lens to reimagine Guatemalan society from below. In addition, as it will be shown in chapter five, the union between a Girardian and a liberationist paradigm can impulse a strategic practical theology of peacebuilding that answers with the positive imitation of desire as a way to respond to the Guatemalan collective woundedness. For now, the analysis of mimetic theory and its correlation with liberation theology will turn to the June of 1990 conversations between Girard and liberation theologians.

The analysis of this conversation will be based on the Spanish edition of the compilation made by Hugo Assmann (1991). There are three specific interactions that pertain to this

dissertation in the book *Sobre Ídolos y Sacrificios*. The first one is the analysis presented by Assmann regarding the interests that Girard's thought raised within the theologising of liberation theologians; secondly, the process of sacralization and sacrifices of human lives presented by Julio de Santa Ana; finally, the paradigm shifts and transformation of the sacrifice of human lives explored by Franz J. Hinkelammert. While the Portuguese edition has other themes that can further expand the conversation here presented, there is not enough space in this dissertation to explore each theological proposal and evaluate them with the depth they require.

Before entering the analysis of the theological elements of each interaction, it is important to note three conceptual differentiations and reminders that served as a base to engage in a dialogue between Girard and liberation theologians. Firstly, Franz J. Hinkelammert proposed differentiation between the concepts of self-sacrifice and *el don de sí* (the gifting of one-self). In this differentiation, Hinkelammert explored a conceptual clarification of utmost importance in the process of developing a language that could subvert the sacrificial nature of the systems in place. Self-sacrifice is the *aceptación* (the process of constantly accepting) of being sacrificed. When somebody self-sacrifices, the person is in total agreement with the system and the executioner that ask for the sacrifice (Assmann, 1991: 43). Girard explores this conceptualization in his examination of *Teotihuacán* and the ancient Aztec mythology. In the Aztec creation narrative, *Huitzilopochtli* gladly accepts to be burned alive to become the mighty sun. In this interaction, the Aztec god agrees to be the sacrifice. Thus, *Huitzilopochtli* affirms the sacrificial system and justifies the honouring of the victims that would feed the Aztec thirst of blood (Girard, 1986). Hinkelammert sees *el don de sí* as a totally different understanding of the sacrificial process. In the process of *el don de sí*, one has a reason to give one's life, hence overcoming the system and subverting the sacrifice of one-self. Thereby: "*El auto-sacrificio, que no cuestiona el sacrificio,*

no contribuye a disolverlo. Lo hace más radicalmente sacrificio, lo hace incuestionable” (The self-sacrifice that does not question sacrifice in and of itself does not contribute to dissolve the sacrifice. It radicalizes the sacrifice even more, it makes sacrifice unquestionable) (Assmann, 1991: 43).

Secondly, Leonardo Boff focused on the centrality of the victims for liberation theology. As it was mentioned above, liberation theologians gave a sacrificial category to the poor by equating the poor with the historical continuation of the suffering servant of YWHW. Boff reminded the participants of the epistemological turn proposed by liberation theology by putting the poor as the point of departure to think of and develop the concept of God. This re-centralized the conversation in the epistemology that is so characteristic of liberation theology (Assmann, 1991: 46).

Finally, the other conceptual differentiation that is relevant to the process of this analysis is the distinction between the non-sacrificial and anti-sacrificial logic. Hinkelammert posits that this distinction is imperative in the process of analysing Girard’s ideas from a liberationist perspective. On the one hand, the *anti-sacrificial* logic is one of the most violent perspectives of western Christianity. It is the point of origin of the idea that it is necessary to sacrifice those who sacrificed in the first place. In reading the Epistle to the Hebrews, Girard and Hinkelammert realize that the apostate, the one who goes back to the sacrificial logic, despises Jesus’ blood and *don de sí*. For that reason, the murder of those who practice sacrifice is not seen as a sacrifice *per se*. In addition, in the Latin American continent, the anti-sacrificial logic is intrinsically related to the conquest of the Americas. All the justifications of the conquest are based on the anti-sacrificial logic as the indigenous peoples were seen as cannibals, aka peoples who practiced sacrifice. Thereby, they needed to be sacrificed in order to stop them from sacrificing to their gods. “When

anti-sacrificialism tries to end with sacrifices once and for all, it covers itself with incredible brutality and aggression". And again, those involved in the anti-sacrificial logic do not see themselves as participants of the sacrifice. Thus, the sacrificial system is once again resurrected and in place (Assmann, 1991: 48–50). On the other hand, the non-sacrificial is intrinsically related to the understanding of *el don de sí* as it subverts the system revealing the anti-sacrificial logic as inherently sacrificial.

The conceptual differentiations presented above were revealed during the dialogue between liberation theologians and Girard. The work of editing the conversations into a coherent progression allows the reader to have a better understanding of the connection between Girard's ideas and liberation theology. Likewise, it portrays the context of the criticism that came from liberation theologians to distinct elements of Girard's body of ideas. The pages that follow dedicate time to analysing three specific postures and theological proposals that came from liberation theologians in engagement with Girard's concepts

3.2.1 Hugo Assmann's Analysis of the Differentiated Interests that Arise from Girard's Thought

Hugo Assmann notices that one of the main problems with Girard's theorization is not in his body of thought *per se*; rather, it is in the reception and interpretation that theologians have of Girard's concepts as they selectively engage, taking the parts that best suit their inconformity regarding specific theological themes of historical Christianity. In many cases, the anti-sacrificial reading of the Bible done by Girard helps theologians discard unbearable versions and theories of atonement. Interestingly, Assmann does not ask that theologians blindly ascribe to Girardian anthropology. What he invites scholars to do is to consciously acknowledge their selectivity in the use of Girardian ideas and the parts that are quietly omitted (Assmann, 1991: 97).

As a part of the process of understanding and analysing Girardian thought, one must comprehend the whole of Girard's theoretical framework. Assmann understands Girard's ideas as a theoretical model with the pretense of being general theory of human behaviour and culture. Girard's theory contains interconnected elements that develop into a sequential logic that has to be correctly followed. Assmann proposes a similar progression to the one presented previously in this chapter. Interestingly, one of the criticisms presented is that Girard elevates the understanding of the scapegoat mechanism to the point of confusion in its importance related to mimetic desire as the beginning of the process that leads to the victimage mechanism and sacrificial logic (Assmann, 1991: 101). It is important, nevertheless, to remind the reader that Girard (1986) warns his reader to not oversimplify the reading of the scapegoat mechanism as it is a dynamic process that engages the mimetic transfer of desires and violence.

Assmann posits that Girard's purpose in delivering a general theory has the possibility to be explored as a desire that goes beyond the sacrificial limits of human institutions to long for unlimited humanizing horizons, or a utopian interpretation of Girard's theories. Interestingly, Assmann seems to think that Girard would not necessarily agree with this interpretation of his thought. As a result, there are endless and polemic conceptual formulations that take the dialogue away from the most important application of Girard's work, the translation of Girard's ideas into the historical practice of exploring the tensions between utopic horizons and the institutions that are required to analyse and make history. As a result, the question that remains unsolved in Girard's anthropology is how to explore and confront the reality of human violence in the evolution of human institutions and contemporary societies. This criticism is of high contextual importance because the confrontation of institutional violence is key to liberation theology since violence plays a key role in all forms of oppression. The need to engage human violence arises from necessity of

those who are involved in the critique of oppressive institutions and the struggle of liberation. Practitioners tend to get caught in the cycle of violence, and their counter-violence seems to be powered by the same sacrificial logic. Assmann arrives at the understanding that Girard's concern is not with confronting violence directly, but with revealing the hidden roots of violence as it is the continuation of mimetic desire, thus creating a fruitful space to the use of Girard's ideas by liberation theologians (Assmann, 1991: 101–03).

After developing a healthy critique of Girard's anthropology of violence, the analysis enters into the implications and impact of the non-sacrificial reading of the Bible. In this section, one can find two elements that are relevant to develop a pertinent engagement with Girard's ideas. Firstly, the selectivity of the different Girardian texts in the Bible leaves an evident vacuum of interpretation and historical analysis of the biblical text. In response to that selectivity, Assmann critiques the co-opting process of non-sacrificial readings of Jesus on the cross that leads to a restorative atonement instead of a vicarious one. Assmann seems to be troubled by the possibilities of non-violent, non-vicarious soteriology as it could culminate in something reductionist, as a theology of reconciliation and nothing more. Secondly, the study addresses the criticism Girard (1987) makes of historical Christianity calling it the result of a systemic misunderstanding of the sacrificial religious institutions through a misinterpretation of Jesus' death on the cross (Assmann, 1991: 105–6). This reminder is critical for contemporary readers as it does not allow for the romanticizing of Girard's ideas. The criticism Girard makes of historical and contemporary Christianity sees with suspicion the whole of the teachings of the Church. From an evangelical perspective, Girard's critique undermines the penal substitutionary atonement understanding of Jesus' death and the heavy emphasis that eschatological escapism puts on the apocalyptic literature found in the Bible. Liberation theology also questions the sacrificial logic of authoritarian systems

of domination in the same fashion Girard critiques sacrificial logic. The critique is based in the non-sacrificial and non-idolatrous character of liberation theology. This key element has been present since the beginning of this theological and spiritual stream to the point of criticizing the tendency toward martyrdom that some left-wing groups had during the struggles for liberation in Latin America (Assmann, 1991: 109).

Assmann's preeminent contribution in his analysis is the proposal of the "metamorphosis of sacrifice" concept. Firstly, the idea behind this term reveals an inversion of the present roles within the victimage mechanism. In the name of a sacred duty, the executioner demonizes the victims in the name of faith, civilization, and progress. He presents his victims as the obstacles to his noble mission transforming them into a threat and possible aggression. Secondly, this metamorphosis of sacrifice can be understood as exclusion, the invisible sacrifice of institutional violence through structures of oppression. Exclusion happens through a normalized process and in obedience to the moral imperatives of economic rationality. For that reason, it is hard to believe that contemporary victims are actually sacrificed to the cruel idols of the market and capitalism (Assmann, 1991: 110–16). When studying the conversations between Assmann and Girard, one cannot help to notice the similarities in the conclusions drawn from this interaction with the application that Dumouchel (2014) and Dupuy (2014) make of Girard's mimetic theory, which can be seen throughout this dissertation.

It is with this contribution that Assmann agrees not to a full epistemological point of convergence, but to a generic one, understanding that an epistemological point is the concrete historical location of humans that leads to a reflection regardless of the topics at hand. The intent is not to find a thematic convergence or examples that allude to the same kind of issues. The convergence is in the utopic horizon of Girard's thought and violence as the ultimate concern of

human reality. In the end, there are two options: “we either finally overcome the destructive sacrificialism, or humanity will self-destruct” (Assmann, 1991: 117). The centrality of the agreement between liberation theologians and Girard was based in the non-sacrificial elements of Girardian thought that reject the sacrifice of human lives (Assmann, 1991: 14).

3.2.2 Julio de Santa Ana’s Analysis of Sacrifice and Sacralization in Human Practices

The starting point for this section is a strong critique of the capitalist system that portrays the rationality that is characteristic of the bourgeoisie class as it procures to dominate space and time and sacralise the market through its historical praxis. The approach to the criticism presented is clearly Marxist, which furthers the dialogue in using Girardian thought in the utopian interpretation presented by Assmann in the previous section. In this analysis, de Santa Ana introduces the sacralization process of the capitalist system and the market as falsely transcendentalized institutions. It begins with the political and economic discourse proposed by technocrats which presents the mirage of wealth creation. The illusion lies in the fact that even though there is more accumulation of wealth in contemporary society, poverty and misery increase. As a result, the mirage creates a false sense of possibility that makes the majority believe that someday they will have access to the wealth that the minority of the world possesses. This, however, never happens, and the mirage remains. The false sense of possibility creates the perfect environment to worship the system that could allow for all to access wealth. As the adoration increases, this system proclaims its own autonomy, making of humanity the vassals whose sole purpose is to offer production, consumption, and the circulation of merchandise. As a result, the market becomes a reality that is beyond the human experience and stops being a human creation. The laws of the market undergo a process of social sacralisation and become superior to the point of being untouchable. Just like the laws of nature, they become a taboo that cannot be broken. Even more

so, this ideology constitutes itself as an unconscious hermeneutical key that allows the creation of historical experience at the social and personal level. The interpretation that results from these hermeneutics reads the world and human relations as a space for commercial exchanges where calculations and prudence are more important than generosity and solidarity. Furthermore, subjectivity and identity become intrinsically connected to the market. If people are not in the system, they lack identity. In other words, if people are not in the process of the free market, people do not exist (Assmann, 1991: 119–125).

As a result of the sacralization of the market ideology, theology, and economy become intrinsically connected. The connection, however, did not happen immediately. It was historical process that resulted from the raise of the bourgeoisie class and its desire for freedom. In the beginning of these ideas, theology was seen with scepticism as it protected the economic system and rationality of old, causing a conflict between the seminal ideas of modernity and the theological darkness of the middle ages and the feudal system. The process of deconstructing the theology that legitimised the feudal system allowed the new rising class to go out and conquer the world to make of it a big market. As a result of this evolution, the Reformation became the steppingstone and birthplace of a new theology that emphasized the Christian vocation not only as a religious vocation, but also as a call to make of the world a place to testify about the faith. Consequently, Christians show their faith by the good outcomes of their businesses in the world. De Santa Ana posits that modern thought progressively separated human actuality from the realm of God, which was gradually taken to the back of humanity's bigger picture to the point that God stopped being transcendent to become a part of the market. "For economic thought, God does not exist. In other words, the God of the Bible does not have a place. Divinity (not explicitly recognised, but implicitly accepted) is the mystery that rules the market transforming that field of

contradictory interests in the best possible world". As a result, the birth of a new law, the law of the market, corresponds to the sociological sacralisation of the market (Assmann, 1991: 125–30).

Interestingly, this process transforms market ideology in the hermeneutical key to interpret past and contemporary history. This understanding of the market obscures reality just like the sacred did in archaic societies. The market stops being a social construction with its injustice and games and becomes something beyond the human reach, something untouchable. The market becomes a metaphysical reality. It becomes something abstract and also an idol that asks for sacrifices in order to create wealth and prosperity (Assmann, 1991: 131). It is not a far reach to assume that de Santa Ana refers to the human sacrifices of the current system. In the Marxist interpretation of history, one can see that the same way theology came to support the feudal system and the atrocities of the dark ages, it legitimised the market ideology and sacralised the laws of the market.

De Santa Ana's analysis lies in the historical praxis of examining the sacrificial system as the cornerstone of capitalism and the market. Once the system is in place, it requires a law that creates different roles for the offerings of sacrifices. As a result, the sacrificial law creates the social order that develops social cohesion. There are two kinds of sacrifices in the system. The first kind is the imposed sacrifices that are constantly pushed by those in power and the idols of the system. The second type of sacrifice is the voluntary offering. However, even though there is a positive aspect in the latter kind of sacrifice, it cannot be completely removed from the implicit negativity and violence of the former kind. In the end, de Santa Ana makes connects archaic societies and the contemporary capitalist system. The difference is that, in contemporary society, poor men and women are the ones making the sacrifices imposed on them to realize that it will never be enough. To enter into the experience of the market is a process of constant disappointment

before the multiple offers to achieve something that is virtually impossible. Constant disappointment paves the way for violence as the poor will try to attain what they want by force. This violence from below is not accepted by the dominant religion (Assmann, 1991: 135–39).

There are two important contributions presented in de Santa Ana's analysis. Firstly, the historical, social, and political implications of the rejection of the historical praxis of sacrifice. Refusing to be a part of the system implies to enter into a conflict with the dominant order. This denunciation involves an inevitable dose of violence. It is important, nevertheless, to accept that without this violence one's mentality could not be transformed to understand and distinguish God's will from what is not. Therefore, to confront the dominant system is to make a sacrifice. One has to offer life in order to affirm life. This notion enters into the second category of sacrifices presented above, the accepted, wanted, and willingly offered sacrifice. It is not by obligation but a *don* (gift) that responds to God's grace. It is a will that births out of the eschatological hope that a more just social order is possible and necessary (Assmann, 1991: 142). One could argue that de Santa Ana's proposal still has sacrificial elements within. The notion of a willing sacrifice of oneself in order to reject the system borders in sacrificial logic. However, one could also argue that de Santa Ana is being realistic of the violence that is intrinsically connected to the capitalist system, thus revealing it and rejecting it.

In the second contribution, de Santa Ana brings two analytical paradigms to his theological reflection. His ambidextrous approach takes a clear historical Marxist analysis as it takes the rise of the bourgeoisie class and its rationality as a starting point for this theological and economic formulation. As the analysis moves forward, Girardian anthropology is brought into play to explain the sacralisation process of the system and its rationality. The epistemological convergence presented throughout this theological proposal furthers the application of Girard's ideas and the

expansion of the liberationist paradigm by engaging in an interdisciplinary approach to social criticism. However, the economic and social criticism presented by the use of the Marxist and Girardian paradigm falls short in the acknowledgement of the human lives that are sacrificed in the name of the creation of capital, though it could be due to space limitations. An important concept that could be helpful to expand de Santa Ana's analysis is the human alienation of labour proposed by Marx in his early writings of 1844. In Marx's view, the worker sells his whole being as a product to create capital for the great capitalists. In other words, the worker willingly self-sacrifices for the benefit of his or her employer/owner/master (Marx & Engels, 1966). One could ask, why in Marx's early writings and not in the final work of *The Capital*? The answer is simple but entails a complex analysis. The reason is that, in the early writings of the young Marx, his thought process was rawer. He was beginning his analysis of capitalist society as it unfolded before his eyes; thereby, one is dealing with the seminal ideas that would develop later in *The Capital*, and if one analyses from an idealistic perspective the idea is complete and purer in its rawer stage. To conclude, it is important to be mindful of the beauty of de Santa Ana's exercise, the marriage of two paradigms finding converging epistemological points to develop a pertinent reflection of historical praxis.

3.2.3 Franz J. Hinkelammert's Analysis of the Paradigms and Metamorphosis of the Sacrifice of Human Lives

It is quite interesting to see the progression presented in the selection of essays presented in the abridgement of the dialogues between Girard and liberation theologians. There is a clear progression that moves from the interest liberation theologians have in Girardian thought, then to enter a historical interpretation and criticism of the current economic system, to later explore the paradigms and metamorphosis of human sacrifice. The last part of the progression provides

concise yet profound historical analysis of the metamorphosis of human sacrifice and its ever-evolving discourse.

Hinkelammert presents a progression of the paradigm shifts that explain the metamorphosis of human sacrifice across Christian history. The starting point in this exploration is the pre-Christian paradigm of human sacrifice. This is the era described by Girard in *Violence and the Sacred* and *The Scapegoat*. It is the time of the ancient myths that gave birth to the great civilizations of old based on sacrificial systems that perpetrated violence in the name of archaic deities. Under this paradigm, the victims purified the executioners with their blood. Those who sacrificed became heroes because sacrifice was understood as the other side of victory. It was through the sacrifice of innocent victims that the executioner gained the strength to become a victor, powered by the gods who blessed him in exchange for the spilled blood (Assmann, 1991: 158).

It is in the midst of this era that the origins of Christianity opened the possibility to overcome human sacrifice. The message of the Gospels brought new ethics that demand human relations that go beyond human sacrifice. Interestingly, the option presented in the origins of Christianity is not the abolition of sacrifices, but the possibility of a life that does not require them at all. Hinkelammert presents two elements in his interpretation of the possibilities introduced by early Christians. Firstly, the element of eschatological hope. Hinkelammert does not use this term, but it is a term that describes quite well his proposal and portrays the utopic horizon of early Christianity. Since sacrifices are the evident result of a way of life that is intrinsically connected to the law, the overcoming of such a system involves the process of going beyond the law. As a result, the overcoming of human sacrifices is the overcoming of the legalistic oppressive system that they come from. This is the seminal stage of the eschatological hope of a new heaven and new

earth. It is not the restoration of the lost paradise, but the utopian accomplishment of fulfilling a law. The hope is a new earth without death, sorrow, laws, and sacrifices, a world without prohibitions (Assmann, 1991: 159).

Secondly, love and forgiveness are a subversion of the law and the sacrificial system. Hinkelammert posits that the overcoming of human sacrifice cannot come through the justice of the law. The problem lies in the process of the law itself as sacrifice is the way of fulfilling the law and bringing justice when humans break the law. If justice by the law cannot be used to overcome sacrifice, then the need for a new criterion to discern the law is required. This is where the love of one's neighbour becomes a key teaching of early Christianity as it relativizes the law and it becomes the criteria to discern the full extent of the law. As a result, the law is just, as long as it does not execute an action that is contrary to loving one's neighbour. Forgiveness, then, enters as a direct subversion of the law and its sacrificial resolution. Forgiveness means to abdicate the desire for justice as the fulfilment of the law. In the words of the Lord's Prayer, "to forgive those who are our debtors is to renounce to the fulfilment of the law as the pathway to achieve justice" (Assmann, 1991: 160).

Love and forgiveness are a direct subversion and dissolution of the sacrificial system and the victimage mechanism. It is through loving one's neighbour that forgiveness enters into the equation, thus creating an element that does not require the payment for any debt, offense, or rivalry. This does not imply a society without law, but a different discernment of the law expressed through the love and forgiveness of one's neighbour. This interpretation stems from the hermeneutics of Jesus' death, from a perspective that is born out of freedom, not out of the oppression of the law. Jesus does not give himself to fulfil a law. It is the rejection of the sacrificial system that condemns him to a certain death. In that process, Hinkelammert follows a very

Girardian read stating that “his [Jesus’s] death, therefore, is a revelation of the sin that is committed when seeking justice by the fulfilment of the law” (Assmann, 1991: 161).

Something happened in the process of developing early Christianity’s theology that changed the approach to the eschatological hope and love and forgiveness as subversion of the sacrificial system. Early Christianity broke the sacrificial system with its reading of Jesus’ death. However, in the process of developing its theology, Christianity transformed the subversion of the system into the rejection of sacrifice and considered human sacrifice as a crime. As a result, the love of one’s neighbour was instituted as a law, thus becoming God’s law. This opened the door for the birth of anti-sacrificialism as a new way of fighting sacrifice. Therefore, the law that prohibited sacrifices became sacrificial in and of itself. Hence, it opened the door for Christianity to recover human sacrifices, justifying them as a necessity for a life without sacrifices (Assmann, 1991: 161–63).

The summary above is Hinkelammert’s introduction to the birth of anti-sacrificialism as a sacrificial institution that is born out of the development and theological misunderstanding of historical Christianity. In doing so, he makes a historical connection through the birth of Christianity as an imperial religion that has its genesis in the anti-sacrificial paradigm and transformation of human sacrifice. This metamorphosis came to be the cornerstone of imperial ideology that evolved through the ages and impacted many cultures and peoples around the world. For that reason, one of the conceptual differentiations presented at the beginning of this analysis is the distinction between non-sacrificial and anti-sacrificial understandings. What Christianity failed to see is that that mechanism that fuelled the inquisition and other barbarities perpetrated by Christianity is the same mechanism that later on obscured slavery and the expropriation of indigenous peoples around the world (Assmann, 1991: 164–77).

Hinkelammert concludes accepting that Christian history with its secularisations is a history of abundant human sacrifices, even though the sacrifices have been hidden in an anti-sacrificial fight. It is important, however, to understand that the anti-utopic reaction presented by secularized Christianity is a fact. It claims sacrifice as a better way, but on a journey to nowhere. Without the eschatological hope of a life that does not need sacrifices, the anti-utopian way of secularized sacrifice cleanses the murderous nature of the system making it admirable, transparent and righteous. It takes away the bad conscious and opens unlimited dimensions for sacrifice. The result is the self-destruction of humanity. Hinkelammert finishes with a gloomy utopic invitation that is paraphrased as follows: “the great sacrifice that is on its way cannot be avoided by declaring sacrifices a crime. It requires a different focus to overcome sacrifices, which can be inspired by original Christianity, though there are not already solutions there, either. However, the root must be the affirmation of human dignity in the face of its total denigration” (Assmann, 1991: 179).

3.3 Practical Implications for Peacebuilding

This chapter journeyed through Girard’s thought and liberation theology as tools to develop a practical theology of peacebuilding that responds to the Guatemalan collective woundedness. Now, the question to answer in a more concrete way is: can Girard’s anthropological lens be a tool for interpreting and reimagining Guatemala City from below? As a conclusion, *the leap from anthropology to theological insight* is the hermeneutical turn to use Jesus as an interpretative lens. In simpler words, to read the Bible through the eyes of Jesus allows for the beginning of non-violent hermeneutics that can serve the purpose of a practical theology of peacebuilding that responds to the Guatemalan collective woundedness. It is through the process of re-reading the Bible from a non-violent perspective that one can challenge the faith practices of grassroots leaders who live in the midst of communities marked by poverty and violence. If Girard’s anthropology

is to be a lens to reimagine Guatemalan society from below, then the process will take Guatemalans to find the objects of desire, relationships in rivalry, fascination, and scandals that make everyone stumble and injure themselves at the physical, societal, metaphysical, and spiritual levels.

Mimetic theory can provide a way to move forward in the understanding of social conflicts in Guatemalan society. Using the understandings of internal and external mediation will allow people to discover those who they consider enemies, rivals, or obstacles to achieve their goals and desires. In addition, a mimetic understanding of desire could allow for a communal understanding of positive mimesis. If grassroots leaders let go of the fallacy of individuality presented by the project of modernity, they could create communities of desire that would allow them to seek the common good not only of the CMT network, but also of those who they perceive as the other.

In the process of reinterpreting Guatemala City from below through a Girardian lens, grassroots leaders and theologians must find liberative pathways to engage and criticize the structures of oppression in the Guatemalan context. Firstly, both the Girardian and liberationist paradigm invite people to give voice to the current victims of contemporary institutions. In allowing those who suffer to name their condition, the space opens to find who is responsible for the suffering inflicted on those at the margins of the system. This engagement opens new ethical possibilities that could look back to the love of one's neighbour and forgiveness as contextual ways to liberate those who are under the weight of resentment and the desire for vengeance. However, the heaviness of the sacrificial system in place feeds from the desire of vengeance and retaliation amid economic, social, cultural, and gender inequalities. Would it be too much to ask those who have suffered for so long to leave behind their desire for vengeance covered in the cloak of justice? What does liberation and restitution look like in the process of subverting the system in place? Could it be that a first step is to accept Hinkelammert's invitation to affirm human dignity through

a process of anthropological reimagination? I believe that the answer to these questions is in the communal interpretation of Scriptures through non-violent hermeneutics which I will take time to explore in chapter eight.

Secondly, in opening the space for the voice of those who are experiencing suffering and exclusion, one must be open to the possibility of one's participation in the systems that perpetrate violence onto others. That is why the concept of "collective woundedness" is of utmost importance for the understanding that sometimes one also participates in the sacrificing of others. The next chapter will enter with more depth to the exploration of this concept. In addition, chapter eight will engage in the acknowledgment of one's participation in different kinds of violence, which include the practical theologian of liberation as a participant who at times perpetuates violent structures even within the academic world. In the meantime, it is important to take a serious look to the proposal presented by Julio de Santa Ana. Could it be that the rationality presented in his analysis is still present in grassroots leaders? What if exclusion is the translation and transformation of that rationality?

Finally, liberation must help those under oppression and suffering to shift from a paradigm of scarcity to a paradigm of abundance. In this process, those who have been set free from the rationality of the market can take a communal approach to subvert the system. Contemporary institutions heavily rely in the individuality of the members of society. For that reason, community building becomes the first step towards *el don de sí*. It is only in community that one finds a purpose that goes beyond the laws that isolate those at the margins. Community gives meaning and a reason to give one's life to a cause. As the reader will see in the next chapter, community addresses the isolation and rivalry imposed by the current systems.

PART TWO

LIVING: THE GUATEMALAN CONTEXT AND GRASSROOTS LEADERS

CHAPTER FOUR

LIVING: DESCRIBING THE NON-TRUSTING VIOLENT CULTURE AND HISTORY OF GUATEMALA

In order to have a contextual view of Guatemala City that can shed light on other contexts, the next pages are an attempt to enter into the collective woundedness of Guatemalan society. Each one of the hurts presented below will provide a bird's eye view of Guatemalan history, economics, culture, and social issues. This is not an exhaustive socio-historical account of everything that has happened in Guatemala City and the rest of the country; rather, it is an attempt to describe the collective wounding of the Guatemalan context. With that said, this chapter will be focusing on the collective woundedness of Guatemalan society, the theory-laden faith practices of grassroots leaders within that context, and the interpretative knowledge built in community with the grassroots leaders through the research process.

4.1 The Guatemalan Context: a brief history of Guatemalan collective woundedness

Exploring the surface of the Guatemalan context will be no small task. This section will define three key elements for the hermeneutical process that will follow. Firstly, it will define the concept of the collective woundedness from an interdisciplinary approach. This will allow the historic-hermeneutical process to flow from the experience of collective pain, suffering, and healing, entering into a poststructuralist perspective to not fall into a reductionist interpretation of the Guatemalan context. Secondly, it will explain the choice of historical hermeneutics that will help the reading of Guatemalan history. Thirdly, it will open the space to enter into the consideration of five representations of the Guatemalan collective woundedness.

4.1.1 The Concept of Collective Woundedness

The consideration of the Guatemalan “collective woundedness” is of high importance to construct a practical theology of peacebuilding that responds to the Guatemalan reality. It connotes the understanding of responsibility and participation one has in inflicting the wounds of one’s society. Following Heidegger’s understanding of being (*Dasein*), the collective woundedness opens the door for a hermeneutical understanding of being-in-the-world not only as being a victim and survivor, but also as possibly being a perpetrator. It implies the thoughtful consideration of one’s own wounds in order to develop a practical theology of peacebuilding that will not transfer one’s suffering to others, while bringing pain into sight in order to heal. The idea of collective woundedness is better explained by Michael Lapsley (2012: 113) while reflecting on his experience when he returned to South Africa after the apartheid years:

The thing that struck me on my return to South Africa was that we were a damaged nation—damaged by what we had done to one another, damaged by what was done to us, and damaged by what we failed to do—and everyone had a story to tell about our experience of the apartheid years.

Being conscious of one’s participation in the collective woundedness opens the door to look after one’s wounds, and reflect on the wounds one has inflicted unto others, while simultaneously being prepared to heal the wounds of others (Nouwen, 1972).

If the collective woundedness is understood in its full impact as a history of traumatic events, then it is easier to recognise the wrongs done to all in one’s society. For Luis Cruz Villalobos (2015), following a post-rationalist psychological approach, trauma affects the fundamental assumptions about the world. Thus, trauma creates a confrontation with one’s own existential fragility. At the collective level, the existential crisis fuels a communal/societal identity crisis. The collective woundedness, thereby, becomes an intrinsic part of one’s understanding and interpretation of one’s reality; it is not merely an event in the past. It is a lens to experience life. It

is a direct confrontation of the fundamental comprehension of the world, hence creating a fragmentation of the being-in-the-world (Cruz Villalobos, 2015). This fragmentation affects the identity of a people to the point that individuals and groups can define themselves by their wounds. The risk, however, is that people become their wounds, in which case they end up transferring their pain to others (Rocke & Van Dyke, 2012: 203). In Guatemala City, trauma is a constant, “you cannot avoid confrontation with trauma, it permeates every aspect in everyday life, and the professional and organizational contexts as well” (Rohr, 2015: 108).

Importantly, the use of the collective woundedness concept is very intentional because wounds can heal. People and communities that have undergone stressful and traumatic experiences can overcome their sufferings. This does not imply that pain goes away immediately. It entails that hope for growth and healing will spring by finding new narratives in the midst of pain and suffering (Cruz Villalobos, 2015). Such is the case of Jesus as he “continues to bear the wounds of his suffering, and ours, in his resurrected body. The resurrection does not mark the end of woundedness, but its transformation” (Rocke & Van Dyke, 2012: 203).

Roland Spiller (2015) suggested a trifold structure to address some of the wounds of Guatemalan society that acknowledges the existence of a multifaceted truth in regards of the 36-year armed conflict, a truth that necessitates finding new narratives. This truth intersects the official memory, which juxtaposes the different historical narratives of the civil society with the official governmental accounts: the historical memory of the civil society, which has its own antagonistic narratives on what happened or did not happen after the signing of the peace accords, and the historical memory in the cultural doing of Guatemalan society, which emphasises the meshing of the imagination through the arts with the historical memory of both, the official and civil society’s

account. For Spiller (2015: 5), “Remembering, especially in regards to the collective memory, is not possible without a narrative discourse.”

New narratives are key for a practical theology of peacebuilding that responds to the collective woundedness of Guatemala City. It is imperative, however, to ground the exploration of these new narratives within a post-foundational theological paradigm, as “practical theological research is not only about description and interpretation of experience, but it is also about deconstruction and emancipation” (Müller, 2004).

In Guatemala as a post-conflict society, Tom Koenigs (2015) postulates that the opinion and accounts of the victims must be the centre of any discussions that seek peace and healing. Koenigs based his experience on studying the case of Germany in the post-holocaust society and Guatemala after the signing of the peace accords in 1996. Koenigs suggests that the violence experienced by any person is not a thing of the past. It is something that is felt in the present. In the case of Guatemala, if the truth of the damage and violence remains hidden, the war will keep on going in the minds of those who suffered it (Koenigs, 2015).

Koenigs’ methodology has deep implications for the understanding of the Guatemalan collective woundedness. If Koenigs is right, then there is an explanation for the violence that Guatemala City undergoes daily. Violence is not a thing of the past for Guatemalans; the war is very present and real for those who suffered it. Violence and exclusion have not been dealt with, so Guatemalans keep transferring their undealt suffering to others and even on to the next generation. In a way, Guatemalans have converted into their wound. This is why the idea of collective woundedness is understood not only as a concept, but also as a hermeneutical lens. Guatemalans read the past, present, and future through the being-in-the-world as collectively wounded.

4.1.2 A Lens to Read Guatemalan History

Before entering the collective woundedness of Guatemalan society, it is important to make the distinction between three ways of understanding history in order to explain the chosen hermeneutical lens. First, there is the winners' perspective, which is presented and provided by those who are in power. The victors write history. In this case, historical revisionism says that history can become a tool in the hands of those in power. The powerful justify their victories with a teleological and deterministic philosophy of history. In the case of Guatemala City, this history is written and perpetuated by the Guatemalan white elite and the *Ladino* (this term will be explained later in this chapter) sector of the population, who happen to identify as European descent, and the Guatemalan government. Secondly, the idealistic perspective gives a moralistic view of history lifting the deeds of the big figures. Hegel proposed the idea of the "great man,"⁸ and Thomas Carlyle presented the argument that history was the biography of a few individuals, heroes, the so called "great man theory" (Carlyle, 1897: 8–58). In the case of Guatemala most of the great men are from European descent, with the exception of a couple revolutionary indigenous leaders and Maya warriors.

Finally, one can read history from below. This perspective looks at history from the point of view of those who have been oppressed. It looks critically to the power structures that have shaped the world and have affected and subjugated others in order to preserve the status quo. As Howard Zinn proposed, nations are communities. The history of a country conceals fierce conflict of interests between conquerors and conquered, masters and slaves, and dominators and dominated

⁸See G. W. G. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, New York: America Dome Library Company, 1902 for a more detailed understanding of the great man theory. It is very important to understand that Guatemalans read history through the deeds of men who shaped the country into what it is today.

in race and sex. Therefore, in a world of conflict, victims, and executors, the job of thinking people is, as Camus quoted by Zinn says (2003: 8), “not to be on the side of the executioners.”⁹

In the process of exploring some of the socio-historical collective woundedness of Guatemala, the lens of choice will be *from below*. The reason behind this choice of historical hermeneutics is due to the lack of acknowledgement of the powerless, poor, and oppressed in Guatemalan society throughout history. The omission of those in systemic disadvantage in Guatemala City is such that people from higher social strata ignore the location of slums and pockets of poverty. People perfectly know which neighbourhoods not enter, even though they do not know where those are located. It is as if Guatemalans have a mental map that purposefully ignores some areas of the city. In the words of Zygmunt Bauman (2007: 5), “people have a mental map of their city that has blank spaces.”

For the purpose of this analysis, the Guatemalan collective woundedness will be explored through four representations of the systemic suffering and oppression Guatemalans experience racially, socio-economically, gender wise, religiously, and in terms of the neo-colonial intrusion of The United States. Notably, these five representations are not an exhaustive account of suffering in the Guatemalan urban experience.

4.1.3 Racism as a Representation of the Guatemalan Collective Woundedness

One of the unspoken and deepest wounds of colonialism in Guatemala City is racism. According to Marta Elena Casaúz Arzú, even when social scientists outside Guatemala are looking closer to the effects of racism in the world, there are not enough studies done in Guatemala that comprehensively tackle this social issue. For Casaúz Arzú (2000: 27–28), the concept of racism

⁹For another perspective on history from below see also: Juan Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America*, New York: Viking Penguin, 2000. See also Enrique Dussel, *A History of Christianity in Latin America: From Colonialism to Liberation*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1981

has suffered different transformations during the last few decades, not only in its semantic structure, but also in the way it is practiced and manifested. In some cases, the resurgence of a new concept of racism has taken some social scientists to redefine the understanding of racism as a form of domination over others.

Guatemala City is a multicultural city, including representation of many cultures of Maya descent and cultures from all around the world; regardless, culture in the city is firstly the result of a clash of worldviews, the Spaniard and the Maya. The Spanish conquest brought two civilizations into a violent encounter. Each group had different ways of seeing the world and life and different value systems. The Spanish and the Maya had a distinctive social, economic, and political organization. Thereby, the initial clash resulted in a military victory by the Spaniards and the crushing of the indigenous element. The violent encounter between these two groups gave birth to a series of relationships and social interactions that became a heritage that today involves both groups bringing them paradoxically closer to and distant from each other in very particular ways (Guzmán-Böckler & Herbert, 1974: 33–35), especially in the way of pseudo-non-racist society. It is from this clashing point on that the manner in which these two groups relate to each other will be defined by the victor, who will also try to impose its ways of behaving and thinking in order to justify the unequal system created by the Spaniards.

One of the historical oversimplifications that resulted from this clash of cultures, which is the base of the colonial and neo-colonial ideology, says that the indigenous population was in decay before the Spaniards arrived. Thereby, the Spaniard *conquistadores* helped the indigenous populations by rescuing them from paganism to develop them into a modern and Christianized

civilization (Guzmán-Böckler & Herbert, 1974). However, various scholars have proved these ideas simplistic.¹⁰

As one can see from the social-historical interpretation of Guatemala by Guzmán-Böckler and Herbert, the clash between the Spaniards and the Maya was not only cultural. In fact, as Casaúz Arzú (2000) argues, racism was the ethos of colonial society. Odina L. González and Justo L. González (2008: 38) insightfully describe the ethos that Casaúz Arzú talks about. Racism and slavery were not only a profitable enterprise for the Spanish crown, but also a very important part of the mission of the church, understanding that “Mission” meant the activities by which the Western ecclesiastical system was extended into the rest of the world. The “missionary” was irrevocably tied to an institution in Europe, from which he or she derived the mandate and power to confer salvation on those who accept certain tenets of the faith. Therefore, the *encomenderos*¹¹ were responsible for the Christian education of their Maya slaves, and slavery became a means to salvation, or execution in order to save them. In the words of the *requerimiento*:

If you do not do this [accept Christianity and the Spanish crown], and maliciously make delay in it, I certify to you that, with the help of God, we shall powerfully enter into your country, and shall make war against you in all ways and manners that we can, and shall subject you to the yoke and obedience of the Church and of their Highnesses; We shall take you and your wives and your children, and shall make slaves of them, and as such sell and dispose of them as their Highnesses may command [...] and we protest that the deaths and losses which shall accrue from this are your fault, and not that of their Highnesses, or ours. (Penyak & Petry, 2006: 25–27)

¹⁰ Authors like Ricardo Bendaña Perdomo *Gutemala: Una Historia Repensada y Desafiante*; Chals C. Mann with the books *1491* and *1493* explain the transitioning periods that the civilizations were going through in the Americas. Civilizations like the Maya, Inca, and others were in a process of establishing new political, economic, and social systems. When the Spaniards arrived, they found transitioning civilizations, not necessarily decaying civilizations.

¹¹ *Encomenderos* were the Spanish conquistadors that had the right to subdue the land and its people by declaring them property of the Spanish crown. The *encomenderos* had a document called *requerimiento*, the requirement, which gave them absolute power to convert the indigenous peoples by force. The *requerimiento* was written by Dr. Palacio Rubios under a royal order in 1513. The document was supposed to be read to the natives present in the initial incursion of the Spaniards on the newly “discovered” land.

Ironically, the Maya did not know Spanish when they heard these words for the first time. In fact, they had never seen people like the Spaniards before.

In 1550 the Spanish thinkers started wrestling with the ideas of racism, slavery, and the right of the Spanish crown to govern the Americas. Most of the thinkers adopted the Aristotelian ideas to make sense of what was happening in the Americas. It was the nature of the natives themselves. Following Aristotelian reasoning in the understanding of natural slavery, the Scottish theologian John Mair proposed justifying slavery because the Amerindians had all the Aristotelian-defined characteristics of barbarians, and because barbarians are slaves, and slaves are barbarians, the Spaniards had the moral obligation to rule in the Americas (González & González, 2008: 41–42).

In contrast to that idea, Bartolomé de las Casas, Francisco de Vitoria, who was a professor in the University of Salamanca, and his students were not following that line of reasoning. This group of scholars soon became known in Spain because they pushed the arguments to a deeper level in the controversy. They pushed beyond the bounds of strict theological inquiry and applied theological principles to ethical questions, including the conquest of the Americas. For them, the “Indian Problem” became a theological issue that was about different groups of people relating to each other, and the problem went even further than just the Indians and Spaniards (González & González, 2008: 43). In the case of Bartolomé de las Casas, he was an eyewitness of the “Indian Problem” and an advocate for the humanity of the indigenous peoples in the Americas. In a translation by Penyak and Petry (2006: 22), de las Casas states, “Our own eyes have seen such inhuman conduct several times and God is witness that whatever is said of it falls short of reality.” Las Casas’ defence of the indigenous peoples is based on a positive evaluation of their human qualities. However, many scholars criticise his approach as it did not challenge the colonial

enterprise. He did not go beyond his perceived cultural superiority as he still referred to the *Indians* as “ours” (Rieger, 2007: 166). In addition, his view of Christianity did not allow for a deeper challenging of the imperial religious forces as there was a conflict of interest as Las Casas was extremely well connected within the Spanish empire and received his wealth and properties from Columbus himself (Rieger, 2007: 160).

In the case of Francisco De Vitoria, the “Indian Problem”, however, was more focused on whether or not the Spanish crown had the right to wage war against the indigenous peoples in the *Indies*. His arguments were not necessarily to advocate for the humanity of the *Indians* (Rieger, 2007). De Vitoria engaged in a debate with Juan Ginés de Sepulveda in 1550 (González & González, 2008: 43). Contrary to the popular perception of this encounter, the debate did not focus on the humanity of the *Indians*; instead, it emphasised the role of war in the conversion of “barbarians”. For Juan Ginés de Sepulveda, the Spanish crown was entitled to subdue the barbarians in order to civilize them. Conversion to Christianity was part of that civilising effort. For Francisco de Vitoria, war was not a justifiable means of conversion and evangelisation. Vitoria, though, did propose specific ways of keeping the Spanish rule over the indigenous peoples and the land (Rieger, 2007: 162). Interestingly, Las Casas, Sepulveda, and Vitoria agreed in the use of war to remove obstacles in order to convey the Christian message (Ibid.: 163).

The racial clash in Guatemala has been fierce, and the consequences have carried forward from the colonial society in the mid 1500’s to the liberal reform¹² in the late 1800’s, and beyond. According to the Guatemalan historian Ricardo Bendaña Perdomo (2010) the main difference

¹² The liberal reform in Guatemala has a different concept of what “liberal” means in other contexts. The liberal reformed wanted to centralize power in the capital city. In addition, it looked at the Catholic Church as the one of the institutions with most of the political power, and as an obstacle for progress. Therefore, the liberals wanted a clear division between church and state, the modernization of Guatemala, and scientific progress. Nowhere in the liberal agenda was the liberation of indigenous peoples.

between colonial times, and the liberal revolution is that the conservatives exploited indigenous people through the colonial times with a very paternalistic view of being less than human. The liberals, however, saw those of Maya descent as an impediment for the modernization of Guatemala to the point of taking indigenous land away and forcing people to work under the new social class of *hacendados*¹³. It is imperative that one understands that being “liberal” in Guatemala meant that one wanted a complete division between the church and state. During the 1800s, both conservatives and liberals depended on the exploitation of the indigenous class to create their wealth. This, of course, kept old wounds open within the Maya descent population who were sent back to the treatment they received in the 1500’s through the *Encomiendas* and *Mandatos* (Bendaña Perdomo, 2010).

Racism is the ethos of colonial and neo-colonial Guatemalan society. In Guatemala, one can see the connection between two ideas within the expressions of racism, segregation and discrimination. Segregation is the geographical and political boundaries that separate different ethnic groups. Discrimination is linked to the rejection of an ethnic group based on biological and cultural differences when different groups cross paths in common spaces. The expressions of racism mentioned before can be both institutionally or ethnically and racially based (Casaús Arzú, 2000).

One can see the development of segregation and discrimination in Guatemala City in the way Guatemalans cross paths in different areas of the city. It can also be seen in the city’s development as the white elite builds a city within the city¹⁴. Interestingly, the most obvious form

¹³ The word *Hacendados* comes from the word *hacienda* which means parcel. The new hacendados were the equivalent of the colonial encomenderos, explained a couple pages above.

¹⁴ See Ciudad Cayalá’s articles <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jan/09/guatemalan-capital-wealthy-haven-city> and <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/guatemala-builds-private-city-escape-crime>

of racism results in the final differentiation and creation of a social construct known as *ladino*¹⁵. The social stratification of Guatemalan society is the consequence of the justification of the colonial exploitive system. In the process of validating the colonial economy, those who brought the system ended up taking a position of superiority in belonging to the white race. This process created a caste system that gave the Spaniards from the Spanish Peninsula a higher rank, then the *criollos*¹⁶ and *mestizos*¹⁷ lower ranks on the social scale, with the indigenous population at the bottom of the Guatemalan society. Today, the term *ladino*¹⁸ ends up pulling together the first three ranks of the colonial caste system due to a lack of Spanish immigration as time went by (Guzmán-Böckler & Herbert, 1974). The *ladino* then becomes an ethnic group as a way of defining itself through *via negativa* of not being indigenous. Thus, the concept takes on a life of its own and perpetuates the stereotypes presented by Casaús Arzú (2000) of the lazy, stupid, pagan, and useless Indio. Interestingly, Casaús Arzú (2007) does not agree with Guzmán-Böckler and Herbert. For Casaús Arzú, the *ladino* group should not frame the *mestizo* group as the latter one sees itself as a mixture, whereas the first one has not a racist, but an ethnocentric perspective. It is important, however, to note that Casaús Arzú (2007) does not refute the idea of the *ladino* being an imaginary social construct within Guatemalan society.

Guatemala City is then divided between two groups because one wants to claim ethnic independence and the other wants to recover what was crushed by the colonial ideology. In contemporary Guatemala there is, on one hand, the Maya descent that have retaken some of their spirituality and culture through a mixture of pre and postcolonial accounts and memoirs. On the

¹⁵ Ladino is believed to be the ethnic group of non-Maya descent.

¹⁶ Criollos are those of Spanish descent born in the Americas.

¹⁷ Mestizos are the mixture of Spanish and Maya descent.

¹⁸ The *Ladino* was part of the lowest groups during the colony. The term was first used referring to indigenous people who adopted the ways of the Spaniards. They were called *indios ladinos*. They were seen as traitors by the indigenous population and rejected by the Spaniards, creating the *via negativa* definition of this group. They were neither indigenous nor Spaniards.

other hand, the *ladino* is a group that lacks a concrete identity due to the meshing of colonial and neo-colonial values. This can be better understood through the interpretation of Guzmán-Böckler and Herbert (1974: 45):

The indigenous groups are seen as the exact measure of the limitations of the *Ladino*. The *Ladino* creates an inferior image of the *Indio* due to its lack of identity. In this substitutive process the world of the *Ladino* will always have *Indios* as long as this one keeps considering itself as *Ladino*. Thereby, the fictional character of the *Ladino* will always exist as long as this one keeps trying to find its identity in reaching out to the foreign models and standards as the way to be (United States and Europe). The *Ladino* will be haunted by this double contradiction; the *Ladino*'s world will always seem barren, and the escapes of this world even the greatest ones, like poets, writers and actors will be nuanced by a desire to express what is not *Ladino*—in this case, all the mystic, esoteric, and mythic of the Mayan worldview—without finding what truly belongs to the *Ladino*.¹⁹

4.1.4 The Socio-economic Representation of the Guatemalan Collective Woundedness

The racial wound previously discussed opens the doors for the social and economic wound of Guatemalan society as another consequence of colonial ideology and imperialism. The racial and social-economic representations of the Guatemalan collective woundedness are intrinsically related. For that reason, the reader will see that the contemporary racial struggle is inherently tied to the socio-economic one. The struggle represented here is not only between Guatemalans who live in poverty and the Guatemalan elite, but also representative of the struggle of millions of people around the world who fight against the forces and spirit of Empire.

The concept of Empire is introduced at this point in the Guatemalan Collective woundedness analysis for two reasons. First, it brings a global perspective into the Guatemalan struggle for healing and liberation. If this account of the different social issues of Guatemala cannot be seen, understood, and interpreted as relevant for other contexts, then the process of analysis falls into a reductionist incomplete perspective of the global forces that influence and shape

¹⁹ My translation, this book is discontinued and only in Spanish. Italics are for the words and concepts that have no direct translation to English.

Guatemala City's context. Secondly, "the concept of Empire and the controversy about imperialism as an expression of late capitalism today occupy an important place in political science and philosophy" (Míguez *et al.*, 2009: 1) and liberation theology. For the heart and spirit of Empire in the words of Miguez, Rieger, and Sung (2009: 130), "is a sacrificial theology that demands and justifies human suffering in the name of the realization of impossible desires and objectives through submission to an institution falsely transcendentalized".

In the case of the Guatemalan collective woundedness, the poor and indigenous people are seen as a needed sacrifice. Human suffering is imposed in the name of progress to honour the gods of the liberal revolution of the 1800's and nowadays to honour the gods of capitalism and the free market that the Guatemalan elite desperately tries to enter. The formation of this system that is called Empire is built on the capacity to bring together the interests and desires of certain elites, including the Guatemalan elite, beyond different institutional potentials without a significant impact from national or ethnic limitations (Míguez *et al.*, 2009).

The socio-economic representation of the Guatemalan collective woundedness falls into classism. In Guatemala, racism and classism are interlocked in a way that is representative of the systemic evil in Latin America and other regions of the Global South. The Filipino scholar Eleazar S. Fernandez (2004) has proposed what he calls "the interlocking structures of forms of oppression". In his argument Fernandez includes classism, sexism, racism, and naturism as general categories that can help frame oppressive structures. Fernandez sees of vital importance to recognise that there is not a paradigmatic form of oppression. If one agrees that there is such a thing as a fundamental form of oppression, then one can fall in perpetuating experiential imperialism, and totalizing discourse. In Fernandez's (2004: 31) words: "I take the position that these systemic forces of oppression and exploitation cannot be isolated from each other even as

they are distinct. As intrinsically connected, they affect each other; as distinct, the elimination of one does not necessarily mean the elimination of the other”. In addition, as an attempt to not fall into a reductionist understanding of the Guatemalan collective woundedness, one has to be aware that even Latin American liberation theology fell into the trap of reductionism. As Gustavo Gutierrez, quoted by Fernandez (2004: 32) said, “one of the social lies has been the claim that there is no racism in Latin America.” In Guatemala, the lie that separates the racial struggle from the social-economic one is so translucent that the racial categories presented in the previous section are seen as a communist attempt to disrupt Guatemalan society.

What can be seen today in Guatemala as a vestige of the colonial ideology and imperial forces is what Santiago Bastos (2010) calls “Inferiorised Sectors”, meaning that there are different spaces in Guatemala City that are considered inferior to others depending on the origin of the people that interact with each other. In one way or another, Guatemalans and foreigners (even missionaries) who live in Guatemala City tend to reinforce the different racial and discriminating categories imposed by colonial society, thus wounding each other even more. The discourse that has been accepted by the vast majority of Guatemalans sees being poor intrinsically related to being indigenous. The internalization of such oppressive understanding can be seen also within the poor communities when they see themselves as poor, but not indigenous, thus creating and interiorizing an ethno-racial category on top of the social class category (Bastos, 2010). In a sense, this kind of categorization allows the urban poor of Guatemala City to feel “superior” regardless of their social allocation. At this point, one might see similarities with other contexts around the world. That is because “considering the pervasiveness and grip of white culture all over the world, it is difficult to imagine a race that has not struggled against the white race’s assumed normativity and superiority” (Fernandez, 2004: 35). I will explore with more detail the production of social

space in Guatemala City in chapter seven. For now, I will just focus on the socio-economic part of the struggle.

The socio-economic struggle in Guatemalan society is like a cascade of intolerant neo-colonial and imperial behaviour. It starts at the higher social groups and flows down, feeding the fear and rejection of the other, especially the indigenous-other. Casaús Arzú presents a clear example of this kind of thought in a research project done in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Casaús Arzú dedicated time to studying the Guatemalan elite family groups who trace themselves as direct descents of Spaniard *conquistadores* that arrived in the XVI century. In the study, *Guatemala: Lineage and Racism*, Casaús Arzú (2007: 188) concluded that 55% of the Guatemalan elite consider themselves to be white, 21% *criollos*, 13% *ladinos*, and 11% *mestizo*.

After examining the evidence collected, Casaús Arzú concluded that the racial discrimination and segregation towards the indigenous and mixed-heritage people in Guatemala begins with the auto-definition and ethnic description of the Guatemalan elite. As an example of this self-definition Casaús Arzú (2007: 192) quotes a young 30-year-old man who was part of study as saying:

“I love Spain deeply, and every time I go there, I identify even more with that country. Everything there is white; its towns are white, people are white, and they even smell white. They don’t smell like charcoal and firewood, like our towns filled with *indios*”.²⁰

This Guatemalan elite that lives in Guatemala City is about 5% of the population of the country. Nevertheless, this small group owns about 80% of the workable land in Guatemala through their businesses and corporations (Valladares, 2011).

As one can observe, neo-colonial Guatemala has a racialization of the social esteem. One can see that in everyday life biological features create a social scale that connects the origin and

²⁰The writer of this dissertation also translated the quote from Casaús Arzu’s book.

class with the colour of the skin (Bastos, 2010). The wealthier people are, the whiter and more European-like they are. The poorer people are, the more indigenous and darker skinned they are. Wealthy people live in exclusive residential areas, and poor people live in slums.

In Guatemala City, slums are referred to as “invasions” in popular speech. In other parts of Latin America, people call them *Villas Miserias* (misery villages), favelas, or *barriadas*. The idea is still the same. The term *invasion* alone gives a clear indication of how Guatemalans see those who live in slum communities. People who live in the slums are illegal residents of the city (Davis, 2006). Most of the slum invasions formed between 1986-1990. Impoverished families occupied municipal and private land, parks along the railroad tracks, and open lots and, in many cases, were removed with violence (Audefroy, 1993). The slums in Guatemala City formed as people fled from the violence of the armed conflict in the highlands. People invaded the ravines and green spaces of the city and took the land as their own. In addition, earthquakes and other natural disasters have pushed people to move from rural Guatemala to the urban centres, especially to Guatemala City. The city, however, was not ready to receive the massive migrations that happened in the mid 70s, 80s, and 90s (Valladares Cerezo, 2003). This influx of people made of Guatemala City’s metro area a 3.35 million people city, according to the National Statistical Institute of Guatemala (2016). Due to the lack of opportunity in the city, 60% of its inhabitants live in poverty, and within this sector of the population the poorest of the poor live in precarious, almost inhuman conditions (Valladares Cerezo, 2003). The flip side of the city’s promise of a better future and economic growth is the shattered expectations people find in unfulfilled promises. Most people will never earn enough money to move out of the economic disadvantage that drove them to the city in the first place (Um & Buzzard, 2013).

In Guatemala City the struggle for land is not only a matter of land ownership, but also an issue of geographical location. Most slum communities in Guatemala City are located in ravines, and very hazardous environments. In the case of communities located in the Zone 3 area, around the city's garbage dump, the slums are built on trash landfills. The location issue, however, is not a problem exclusive to Guatemala City. During the twentieth century more than 100 million homes in slums and impoverished areas were destroyed by earthquakes and natural disasters around the world (Davis, 2006). This is the result of an intentional urban design, which I will explore in chapter seven.

Over more than 230 years, Guatemala City has become a "world class city" to use the term of Ray Bakke (2006) characterized by a population of over 1 million people and its influence to the neighbouring countries. This, of course, implies that the social issues in Guatemala City are very visible too. With more than 60% of its population living in poverty, the metro area of Guatemala City has become a place where poverty, suffering, and violence are personal matters.

The pages above are dedicated to the racial and social-economic wound of Guatemala City. This has been done purposefully as racism and poverty are issues that are visible to Guatemalans, though omitted for a long time, especially by the *ladino* urban middle class. Eleazar S. Fernandez (2004: 38) said:

At the international level, especially where there is an encounter with another race, classism takes on a different texture. The subjugated race becomes the target of 'racialized classism' or 'coloured classism'. The subjugated race is readily relegated to the lower rung of society and the dominating race assumes the higher echelons of society [...] For the system to continue, local elites arise and act as conduits in the exploitation of the inhabitants, even against their own race. As society evolves into greater complexity, the middle-class and the professional-managerial stratum come to play the role of conduits in the exploitation.

In other words, it is the Guatemalan urban-*ladino*, non-white and non-indigenous, the one who oppresses his or her fellow country men and women. Frantz Fanon's (Fanon, 1952) analysis of the

Malagasy is quite parallel to what I have tried to describe here. the *ladino* is a mixed-heritage brown individual wearing a white mask. The *ladino* suffers through the experience of not being white to the extent that the white elite discriminates against the indigenous population. As a result, the *Ladino* will try to become white for the European elite to acknowledge its humanity (Fanon, 1952: 78). As a result, the *ladino* who does not live in the slums sees the slum dweller as criminal with no place in the world.

4.1.5 Sexism as a Representation of the Guatemalan Collective Woundedness

I am completely aware of my limitations as a man to explore sexism as a representation of the Guatemalan collective woundedness. I have been shaped and formed by it. I grew up in this culture, and I am in the struggle of healing from this wound. However, my suffering pales in comparison to the suffering of my sisters. In the words of Eleazar Fernandez (2004: 110), “Men, indeed, suffer under patriarchal society, but to assert that they are the major victim is to go overboard. It is this kind of claim that erases the unequal power relations that happen in patriarchal and sexist society”. I must acknowledge that I am articulating this representation of the Guatemalan collective woundedness from a place of privilege that does not allow me to fully understand the struggle and pain within it.

Sexism is a form of evil and oppression that is deeply rooted and universal (Fernandez, 2004: 105). In the process of exploring the Guatemalan collective woundedness, it is imperative that one understands that sexism plays a principle role in the hurts of Guatemalan society. Sexism is interlocked to the racial and socio-economic representations of the collective woundedness. It is an affliction that takes concrete forms and cultural patterns within the Guatemalan context. This systemic form of oppression reinforces male domination by elevating men over women. “It is an ideology and cluster of practices that justify male privilege and support the continuing of

oppression of women on the basis of gender difference” (Ibid.:106). For that reason, I will briefly explore sexism as a representation of the Guatemalan collective woundedness through colonial times, the years of the war, and contemporary Guatemalan society.

During colonial times, a specific gender ideology of the superiority of men and the evilness of specific kinds of women was key in the process of the colonial state building. Gender, ethnicity, and social status were spaces of contestation and negotiation (Few, 2002: Loc. 158). In the case of Guatemala, it is a very specific kind of woman that is usually at the bottom of the social sexist practices, indigenous and mixed heritage. That classification, however, has historical roots that need to be analysed to understand the contextuality of violence against women in contemporary Guatemala.

The role of women in Guatemalan culture is intrinsically connected to the creation of the colonial city and its forms of organisation, which I will explore with more detail in chapter seven. For now, what is necessary to understand is that the Holy Office of the Inquisition was established in New Spain within the colonial city in 1571. The idea was to enforce the parameters of decency and the gender and religious norms for accepted behaviour in colonial society (Few, 2002: Loc. 368). Interestingly, during colonial times, the relationships between and poor Spaniards and mixed-heritage people diversified. In fact, some poor Spaniards started mixing with indigenous and African descent women, from a domination perspective, nevertheless. In that process of inter-mixing, the colonial rule tried to regulate the evolution of Guatemala society. This regulation mostly happened through the attempt of controlling the bodies of those under colonial rule. More specifically, the bodies of women were of particular interest to the inquisition and colonial law. Certain women used their bodies as instruments and expressions of ritual power as midwives, wet nurses, shamans, and witch doctors. As a result, the Guatemalan focus of colonial authority was to

control the female body with all its racial, gender, and social hierarchies of power, making the women's bodies and sexuality the primary interest of colonial power through the threat of sexual violence and defilement (Few, 2002: 852).

The racial, socio-economic, and sexist representations of the Guatemalan collective wound were deepened through the colonial regulation of marriage practices and the limitation of women's sexual activity within marriage. The control exerted over women's bodies had the purpose of "protecting" a specific kind of woman from sexual violence and defilement. However, the real intention was to create stable colonial settlements that did not allow for the sexual racial mixing between the Spanish and Indian populations. "Authorities used the reforms of the Council of Trent (1545-63) as well as the Holy Office of the Inquisition in their attempts to enforce Christian marriage" (Few, 2002: Loc. 866). Consequently, the categories of a *doncella*, a young female virgin, and *soltera*, a single but not virgin female, affected all women in colonial Guatemala through the categorisation of their worth within the boundaries of colonial decency (Ibid.). It is important to note that colonial society institutionalised violence against women. The victims of the Holy Office of the Inquisition were women accused of witchcraft and evilness. These women transformed their male victims into defenceless martyrs against their spells, justifying the persecution and oppression against them. Interestingly, witchcraft and bodily rituals performed by women were contested acts in defiance of colonial rule (Few, 2002).

Now, allow me to fast forward a few hundred years to the second half of the 20th century. During this era, Guatemala experienced a war that lasted thirty-six years. Interestingly, one can trace the politics of colonial sexual violence forward to that experience. The threat of sexual violence and defilement became a real experience for many women. Indigenous women were one of the main victims in the armed conflict. They were systemically used as a weapon through the

perpetration of sexual violence as a form of pressure, punishment, and vengeance by the Guatemalan Army. This was done purposefully because they were women, which makes the case for gender violence (Rodríguez, Palacios, Contreras, Eslava & Martínez, 2014: 356). An example of this violence is the case of the women of Sepur Zarco. In this community, indigenous women suffered systematic rape and slavery at the hands of military personnel (ONU Mujeres, 2018). Sadly, this was not an isolated circumstance. During the war, many women were subjects to sexual violence and slavery. Entire communities were scorched. What makes the case of the women from Sepur Zarco special is that in 2011 the women started a slow process in seeking justice. The *Abuelas* (grandmothers) of Sepur Zarco are brave women who decided to stand against colonial heritage and systemic violence against women. They brought their case to the Guatemalan Supreme Court, seeking justice for the suffering military personnel imposed on them. As a result of their brave efforts, in 2016 two military officials were convicted for committing crimes against humanity, rape, and slavery (Ibid.).

In Guatemala, there is an evident heritage of sexism through the perpetration of violence against women and the control of their bodies. Since colonial times, through the armed conflict, and in contemporary Guatemalan society, institutions recreate misogynistic practices at many levels. At the family level, the contempt for women's lives is evident even in regular households. 48% of women's murders happen in their homes, perpetrated by their spouses or partners (Jimenez Borrego, 2010: 101). In an investigation done by the newspaper *El Periódico* (2019), during the first trimester of 2019 there were 178 women murdered in Guatemala. At a societal level, the national registry of people registered ninety thousand pregnancies in girls ranging from ten to nineteen years of age during 2017 (Vega, 2018). At the religious level, decency and purity are still measured by the worth of young women being virgins. In addition, the control of women's bodies

is still part of the religious conservative agenda as they are pushing for a law that could even punish involuntary miscarriages (López, 2019). With that said, the interlocking structures of oppression allow to make the argument that the very bottom of the Guatemala social chain is occupied by indigenous women (Wulforth, 2017).

4.1.6 The Religious Representation of the Guatemalan Collective Woundedness

The religious wound in Guatemalan society stems from colonial times as well. As it has been established, the Catholic Church's policy on evangelization was very violent. Thankfully, there were men like Bartolomé de las Casas and Francisco de Vitoria who tried to see beyond the colonial ideology and defended the human dignity of the indigenous population from a theological perspective not only in Guatemala, but also in the rest of Latin America. The debate in regard to racism and treatment of indigenous populations is just a sample of what was to come for Guatemala. Other forms of oppression have been religiously and theologically justified, such as the armed conflict, the Catholic and Evangelical Churches' support of the US involvement, gender roles and violence, and sexual orientation.

Guatemala City is a deeply religious city. 39% of Guatemalans consider themselves evangelical, meaning they are from any denomination that is not Catholic. 48% call themselves Catholic, and 13% non-religious (Morales, 2014). This differentiation is recent. The first protestant missionaries did not come to Guatemala until the late 1800s. J. Rufino Barrios was the president of Guatemala during that time. Barrios was the leader of the liberal revolution, which pretended to centralize the power of the state in the capital city. In addition, since the Catholic Church was the largest landowner and political influence, liberal leaders thought the Catholic Church needed to relinquish some of the power and land that it held. In fact, the liberal revolution wanted a division between Church and State. The Catholic Church was in total disagreement with Barrios' new

policies and refused to abide by the orders of the new liberal president. As a part of his plan, Barrios pulled a very strategic move against the Catholic Church when he invited the first official protestant missionary from the Episcopal Church to come to Guatemala in 1882 (Bendaña Perdomo, 2014: 155).

The general perception held by evangelical Guatemalans is that Barrios was serving God's higher purpose in bringing the first protestant missionary to Guatemala. It is, nonetheless, quite simplistic to read Guatemalan history that way. In my own perspective, Barrios had a very Machiavellian idea in creating dissention within Guatemalan society. Even before the first protestant missionary arrived, Barrios expelled Catholic orders from Guatemala, including nuns, the Jesuits, and secular priests that would not abide by his orders. In addition, Barrios confiscated property from the Catholic Church, including cemeteries, convents, monasteries, churches, and schools (Bendaña Perdomo, 2014). In summary, Barrios divided Guatemalan society through a "religious reform" that was intrinsically connected to his political and economic liberal reforms. The division created by Barrios' religious reform can be seen until today. Guatemala City is a place where the Catholic Church has very little dialogue with mainline evangelical churches. Likewise, the different evangelical denominations have very little communication with each other. There is a non-trusting, violent culture that was born in colonial ideology and flows through history until today.

As Victor Perera (1993: 9) proposes, Barrios was not the only cause of the Guatemalan religious division. During the armed conflict, one of the main products of the battles between the revolutionary movements and the Guatemalan army was the rise of the protestant evangelical movement imported from the United States. Most of the United States based protestant missionaries who came to Guatemala were aligned with authoritarian liberal governments

beginning with the first missionaries who came under Barrios. Perera (1993: 12) makes an astonishing connection between Pedro de Alvarado, the conquistador who waged war against the Maya, and the *criollo* and *mestizo* army generals who planned the counterinsurgency campaign. He creates a continuum between colonial violence and the violence of the armed conflict as a continuation of the conquest efforts against the Maya descent people in the highlands. Perera calls the army generals Alvarado's descendants, which confers a heritage of violence directed against indigenous people.

Interestingly, the impact of the traditional protestant missions among the indigenous communities has been negligible because the religious division in Guatemala is linked to the racial representation of the Guatemalan collective woundedness. There was a transition in the Guatemalan elite when many of the families aligned themselves with evangelicalism from the United States through the 80s. This happened as a result of the intensification of the war under the leadership of evangelical General Efraín Ríos Montt. His church, *Iglesia Verbo* (Church of the Word), participated directly in the military process of securing the highlands for a military occupation that was friendly to the United States. The missionary efforts of both early colonial Catholics and protestants during the 1980s and 90s were focused in cleansing the beliefs of the indigenous communities, adding a layer of intolerance for the ancient culture that they represent (Ibid.). There was no difference between the approaches of early colonial missionaries and the military Pentecostal evangelisation during the war. Both came with steel in one hand and the Bible in the other hand. What took place was a transformation of the idols to cleanse. "The devil of idol worship had been replaced by the devil of communism and Marxist theology" (Ibid.). In my perspective, even after Vatican II and the Catholic Church turning its eyes to the poor through liberation theology, the Maya did not have a real option in Guatemala, so they chose

Pentecostalism to save their lives. Liberation theology opted for the poor, but the poor opted for Pentecostalism to survive.

4.1.7 The Neo-Colonial Representation of the Guatemalan Collective Woundedness

Barrios' ideas and reforms died with him in 1885. From there on, a series of dictators took power until 1944. These dictators sent Guatemala back into a neo-colonial semi-feudal system. In the 1920s, Guatemalan president Jorge Ubico created a forced-labour law sending indigenous people into a new kind of slavery. All of those who were unemployed were forced to work in the agricultural field benefiting the Guatemalan elite and foreign investors, especially the United Fruit Company (Bendaña Perdomo, 2014).

It is at this point in history that the United States started intervening in Guatemala and other countries of Central America more officially, since US interventions started in 1854 with William Walker's mercenary involvement in the Nicaraguan war (Morales, 2015). The US involvement in Guatemala inflicted a new wound, an armed conflict that lasted thirty-six years. The wound of US intervention started through the smoke screen of foreign investment and development. In 1932, president Ubico gave large spaces of land on the south coast of Guatemala to the United Fruit Company, leaving peasants without a way to make a living.

As time went by, things got difficult under Ubico's dictatorship. Guatemalans lost the freedom of speech, press, and property in the city and countryside. People in the city and the rest of the country had a tough time improving their quality of life, and the small rising middle class did not have the opportunities to fit into a city that was under a neo-colonial ideology (Bendaña Perdomo, 2014). Ubico's iron fist became progressively heavier on those living in Guatemala City, and after seeing the atrocities and unfair treatment of peasants in the countryside, a group of teachers decided that it was enough. After demonstrations against Ubico's government, a group of

311 teachers, small businessmen, lawyers, and doctors handed Ubico a letter asking for his resignation. Even though there was a feeling of solidarity and hope, circumstances did not go as planned. Ubico's successors thought people were just tired of Ubico and wanted a new leader. What the oligarchy did not know was that people wanted a true revolution of the Guatemalan State. After a short revolution on the 20th of October of 1944, a new group of leaders took power and started a reform that sent Guatemala into what some people call the "democratic spring" of Guatemalan society (Schlesinger & Kinzer, 1990).

As the democratic spring flourished, Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán became the first democratically elected president of Guatemala in March of 1951. According to Schlesinger and Kinzer (1990), Arbenz was a nationalist hoping to transform a neo-colonial oligarchic society. Arbenz's project wanted to accomplish three objectives: 1) to move Guatemala from a semi-colonial economy to a capitalist independent economy, 2) to move from a feudal economy to an independent capitalist state, 3) and to make this transformation happen in a way that raised the standard of living of the great Guatemalan mass. This process, however, was bound to encounter difficulties along the way, especially because it would touch the interests of the transnational United States based corporations, specifically the United Fruit Company.

When the interests of the United Fruit Company were touched, its main investors, including Allan Dulles, the head of the CIA at the time, brought before the United States Congress a motion to eradicate the communist threat in Guatemala. Interestingly, Arbenz did not believe in communism as he saw it as unnatural to being human. Arbenz was overthrown in June of 1954, and the CIA sent General Carlos Castillo Armas to Guatemala, who was the last remnant of the dictatorship of president Jorge Ubico (Schlesinger & Kinzer, 1990). This intervention commenced a series of military dictators supported and financed by the United States, sending Guatemala into

an armed conflict that lasted thirty-six years. The war took a toll of 250,000 victims, most of them in the rural areas. In the city, however, the war threatened the foundations of Guatemalan society, the institution of the family, and the education and worker's movements as university professors, thinkers, union leaders, and many others were kidnapped, tortured, and executed.

Since then, the United States has had its grip on Guatemala to the point of using soldiers, inmates of the penitentiary system, and prostitutes as test subjects for STDs vaccines and treatments²¹. In addition to the colonial evangelization, since the early 1900s Guatemala has had a massive influx of US based missionaries bringing with them colonizing theologies. Guatemalans have received a range of theology, from fundamentalism to prosperity gospel, most of it coming from the United States starting in 1882 with the arrival of the first missionaries.

4.1.8 A Glimpse of Hope and Beauty

In light painful overview of Guatemala's collective woundedness, it is important to acknowledge a glimmer of hope and beauty. In 2015, Guatemalans started a hopeful and beautiful awakening. As it happened in October 1944, Guatemalans went out to the streets in peaceful demonstrations asking for the resignation of former president Otto Pérez Molina. Perez is known to be one of the army generals that led massacres of indigenous communities in the countryside during the armed conflict. In addition, Pérez Molina is one of the most corrupt presidents that has ever governed Guatemala, stealing millions of US dollars between him and his presidential cabinet. Perez Molina underwent trial, was convicted, and now is in prison.

Beauty is not only found at the societal macro level with the awakening of a city against corruption. The grassroots leaders of the CMT Guatemala network are engaging their communities

²¹ Bendaña Perdomo makes a short mention of this in his book. See US Apologizes for STD experiments in Guatemala http://www.nbcnews.com/id/39456324/ns/health-sexual_health/t/us-apologizes-guatemala-std-experiments/

from a different perspective as well. They have started to fight corruption in tangible ways at the level they can. Many of the grassroots organizations that integrate the CMT Guatemala network have become incorporated before the Guatemalan government in the last three years. The government now has access to their accounting books and tax-deductible transactions. The leaders have started to see the importance for transparency and accountability. They are now living examples of a societal fight against corruption and secrecy.

This awakening is also visible at the personal level of those who are served by Guatemalan grassroots leaders. Guatemalans are learning to live, laugh, and love in the midst of beauty and affliction. The leaders of the network are being called to find new ways to interpret their context, The Bible, and the relationships surrounding them. Byron, or as his friends call him, *Bebé* (Baby Face) is an example of the beauty born in the hearts of Guatemalans. *Bebé* was part of a youth leadership development program that my wife and I led in the slum area of Zone 3 in Guatemala City. Part of the process took each one of the participants through conversations that studied the different “I am” statements in the Gospel of John. Every week, at the end of the conversation, the participants were reminded to try to see how Jesus’ definitions of himself were real or not for them through the week, and the youth would share their experiences at the beginning of the next session.

The week after studying the “I am the bread of life” statement in John 6:35, the facilitators forgot to ask them to share. When *Bebé* noticed that the group had forgotten the space for sharing he said: “You told us to think about the ‘bread of life’ statement. I have something to share”. My wife answered: “I apologize, please go ahead and share”. *Bebé* then proceeded to tell us how, during the week, there had been a day when there was no work at the recycling facility where he works. Thus, his boss sent him down to the garbage dump. He said: “I didn’t want to go. I hate working in the dump. The work is so hard. It got so hot that I thought I was going to pass out. I

even thought of quitting, but I knew my family needed the money. I hated being there, and I was really hungry. I was so hungry I thought I was going to pass out. As I was digging through trash, I saw a bright plastic wrapped package. I picked it up, and inside there was a neatly packaged loaf of bread. I saw it right in the trash. I remembered that Jesus is the bread of life and He is never going to let me go”.

It is in the midst of a city that is plagued with poverty, racism, violence, and the worship of what comes from the United States that grassroots leaders try to find beauty in affliction, to serve their communities, and to improve their and their neighbour’s quality of life. These leaders, however, are influenced by the colonial, neo-colonial, and imperial ideologies and theologies that hurt Guatemala, wounding it in the ways that have been explored above. In addition, Guatemalan Christian leaders fall prey to colonizing ways of reading The Bible that justify and perpetuate the hurt that has been previously exposed. Stories like the one presented above, which exemplify beauty and affliction in the midst of Guatemalan society, are inviting grassroots leaders to be creative in the way they read scripture and develop a practical theology of peacebuilding in the midst of their context. For this reason, the question this research is asking is, what will a practical theology of peacebuilding look like in Guatemala City in response to the collective woundedness of Guatemalan society?

In conclusion, Guatemala City has open wounds. Some of these are painful reminders of colonial history that Guatemalans and neo-colonial military and hegemonic intervention from the United States. As it was stated at the beginning of this dissertation, René Girard’s mimetic theory plays an important role in understanding the history presented above. Guatemalans do not know what to desire. Therefore, they imitate each other’s desire for an object that nobody can possess,

Guatemala. That leads them into a non-trusting, violent culture and many other faith practices that will be explored below.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE THEORY-LADEN PRACTICES OF GRASSROOTS LEADERS

5.1 Brief Overview of Grassroots Movements in Guatemala

When entering the exploration of the CMT Guatemala network's leader's faith practices, the reader must understand that the CMT network does not reside in a societal or religious vacuum. There have been plenty of efforts to create change at the grassroots level in the Guatemalan context. These efforts, however, have been more focused on societal reforms, whereas the CMT network's leaders have mostly focused on direct service within marginalised communities. Interestingly, the leaders who integrate the CMT network have not engaged in other grassroots movements. From my perspective, the lack of engagement is due to the theological and missional narrowness that has permeated the evangelical imagination in Guatemala for decades. Common people who happened to be evangelicals were not supposed to be involved in politics or social change. In addition, there is a moral component to the lack of participation because many of the grassroots movements pushing for social change are not aligned with the moral perspectives of the CMT network's leaders, which will be explored with more detail in the articulation of the network's faith practices. Grassroots organising in Guatemala City comes out of the necessity to face the powers that be in specific time periods of Guatemalan history. For that reason, I will mention the different grassroots movements that I consider have fostered newness in the midst of the Guatemalan collective woundedness.

One of the historically best-known grassroots movements is the *Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo* (Group of Mutual Support, GAM)²². This group started in 1984, in the midst of the civil war. It was formed by family members of those disappeared and murdered by the Guatemalan Army.

²² Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo <http://grupodeapoyomutuo.org.gt/quienes-somos/>

They are still pushing for justice in contemporary Guatemala. They exist to seek justice for those who were disappeared and to dignify the victims of the war. The organisation of this group sparked the bravery of many in the midst of a context where the response of the government against any kind of organising was repression. During the war, there were many groups that organized to create change. However, the GAM was one of the most prominent grassroots movements in that time as it stood against atrocities committed by the government.

Another influential grassroots movement responds to the violence against women that is present in every level of Guatemalan society. In 1999, Norma Cruz, and her daughter, Claudia Hernández Cruz, who is a survivor of sexual violence, started *Fundación Sobrevivientes*²³ (The Survivors Foundation). Norma Cruz and her daughter tried to understand the Guatemalan legal system to seek justice for the abuse Claudia endured. However, they found a terrible void in the Guatemalan justice system. Sexual abuse was not fully typified as a crime. The movement grew beyond the two of them, and the organisation now fights for justice and contributes to the prevention, punishment, and healing of violence against women and children in Guatemala.

I spent some space in mentioning the two previous organisations as I considered them paradigmatic in the grassroots organising within Guatemala City. Both were founded by women and are very focused in seeking justice for victims of the systems that still rule Guatemala. Now, I want to make a distinction between two different groups of grassroots organisers. While this differentiation may not do justice to the plethora of organisations that are in the struggle of societal transformation, it will help to set the context that surrounds the CMT Guatemala network. The first group of grassroots organisers I consider to be within the political and religious conservatism of Guatemalan society. The groups are *Movimiento Civico Nacional* (National Civic Movement,

²³ <http://sobrevivientes.org/surgimiento/>

MCN), *Asociación La Familia Importa* (Family Matters, AFI), and #OremosPorGuate. MCN²⁴ was founded as a result of demonstrations against President Alvaro Colóm in 2009. The movement started asking for justice in the murder case of a high-profile lawyer who was involved in the murder investigation of a businessman and his daughter. The whole case is one of the greatest conspiracy theories of Guatemalan history. Some people believe the lawyer set up his own assassination and others believe that it was the government who killed him (Grann, 2011). The MCN organised to protect the rule of law and fight against the impunity of high-ranking politicians. MCN is not a religious organisation; however, they are aligned with neo-liberal political and economic traditional values.

AFI and #OremosPorGuate come from the conservative Christian community, gathering both Catholics and evangelicals. AFI²⁵ is organised to advocate for traditional family values, the protection of life since its conception, and freedom. AFI is known to be an anti-abortion and anti-LGBTQI movement. #OremosPorGuate (pray for Guatemala) is a social media movement that gathered people to pray for Guatemala during the political corruption crisis of 2015. This movement gathered every Saturday morning of 2015 in the central plaza of Guatemala City, while every Saturday afternoon the Plaza was filled with demonstrators against corrupt government officials. It was quite interesting to see the same space used in very different kinds of grassroots mobilisation.

The second group, a group of more progressive and inclusive grassroots movements, is seeking justice and social change in Guatemala with a wider perspective, beyond the more conservative moral framework. The first movement is #JusticiaYa, which started as a social media

²⁴ MCN <https://mcn.org.gt/sobre-nosotros/>

²⁵ AFI <https://afiguatemala.com/>

movement. This group was formed by young professionals, students, and mostly middle-class Guatemalans from the capital city. They sparked weekly demonstrations during 2015 until the president and vice-president of the country resigned and were brought to justice for corruption cases. This was the group that gathered every Saturday afternoon, after #OremosPorGuate gathered in the morning to pray in the same plaza. #JusticiaYa was able to unite all sectors of Guatemalan society, resulting in a national strike that gathered more than 60 thousand people in the central plaza (Nómada, 2015). As a result of these mobilisations, a group known as *Movimiento Semilla* (Seed Movement) was born. They trace their beginning to the demonstrations and mobilisations of 2015 and desire to bring national reconstruction and reconciliation for Guatemala (Movimiento Semilla, 2018). *Movimiento Semilla* as political party is formed diverse professionals, not traditional politicians, with a grassroots component as the base of the political party. The last two groups in this segment I want to mention are *Visibles* (LGBTQI+ activism) and *Otrans* (Group of transgender women), which are groups struggling for the inclusion and respect of sexual diversity in a highly conservative and religious context. These groups tend to be at odds with AFI and what it represents.

The last group that I want to mention is CODECA (The Committee for peasants' development by its initials in Spanish). I situate this group in its own category because neither of the urban grassroots movements truly represent their struggle. However, #JusticiaYa was able to integrate with them in the fight against corruption. This movement is mostly formed by rural indigenous people. CODECA was founded in 1992 to protect agricultural workers from the abuse of the big agricultural businesses (Morales, 2018). Today, they are organised in a way that their movement is spread throughout the whole country. They are a controversial group as most of the communities they represent are self-declared *Pueblos en Resistencia* (Communities in Resistance)

through the rebellious act of not paying for the electricity they get from the main electrical grid. As a result, the common perception of the urban Guatemalan is that they are criminals because they steal energy from the grid, and, when they mobilise, they have the capacity to bring the whole country to a halt. They have recently formed a political party MLP (Movement for the Liberation of all People), which is more representative of the struggle of the urban and rural poor. It is my perception that the morality used to measure their marginality to the law is a cover for the racism against well organised indigenous people. They are the living reminder of the socio-economic, racial, religious, and sexually based representations of the Guatemalan collective woundedness, even more now that their presidential candidate is Thelma Cabrera, an indigenous woman.

Before launching into an analysis of the theory-laden practices of leaders from the CMT (The Centre for Transforming Mission by its initials in Spanish) Guatemala network, it is necessary to acknowledge both limitation and bias. While the previous pages provide familiarity with the Guatemalan collective woundedness, the content was not an exhaustive overview of history and social issues. While the movements described above are a representation of the grassroots mobilisation landscape in Guatemala, I am aware that this brief overview is incomplete and may have left out struggles in Guatemalan society that are unknown to me. With this acknowledgement, the description that follows in the next pages will move from big picture to a more focused setting of relationships and interactions, the CMT Guatemala network. The reader must understand that it is impossible to divorce this analysis from my worldview, experiences, and beliefs.

There is no assumption that the attempt to describe the theory-laden practices of a small group of Guatemalan grassroots leaders is completely objective. Charles Kraft (1979: 28) wrote:

The assumption is that whether we are dealing with the reality of the physical environment, the reality of human nature and psychology, or the reality of divine revelation, the process of coming to know always involves the process of theory and model building on the part

of the observer. We perceive data in terms of some combination of the theories that we have been taught and the theories that we construct.

I will explore the micro-cosmos of the CMT Guatemala network in the light of my understanding of the world, experiences, and belief systems. First, this segment will overview a brief account of the beginning of the CMT Guatemala network. Secondly, this segment will characterize the leaders of the network through the explanation of the data gathering process and a description of the leaders and their theory-laden practices. Finally, I will explore the communal building of knowledge as an interpretation grassroots leaders have of their own context and participation in the collective woundedness.

5.2 The Beginning of the CMT Guatemala Network

It is important to give some context before entering in the description of the theory-laden practices of the leaders who are part of the CMT Guatemala network. Setting the context of the birth of the network will allow the reader to better understand the relational and missional dynamics of the leaders amid their city and missional community. For that reason, what follows below is a short history of CMT Guatemala as a network that moved into the institutionalisation of a non-for-profit organization.

The Centre for Transforming Mission has its roots in the Philadelphia Youth Ministry Project, which was developed and executed from 1996 to the year 2000 by pastor Joel Van Dyke and his colleagues. Joel Van Dyke moved to Guatemala from the United States during the year 2003 as a missionary with Resonate Global Mission to start working in youth leadership development through an initiative called *Liderazgo Juvenil*. The training that Van Dyke developed during his first years in Guatemala and Central America was based on the theological training

designed for the Philadelphia Youth Ministry Project, called *The Street Psalms Intensives* (CMT Guatemala, 2017).

One key event in 2005 started the CMT Guatemala network of relationships and work in Guatemala City. The event was called *The Street Psalms Consultation on Gang Members*. This consultation was designed and implemented during a wave of rising crime and gang violence in Guatemala City. On August 15 of 2005 two of the most infamous gangs of Guatemala City, the MS-13 and the Barrio 18, broke a truce known as *Pacto del Sur*. This pact promised relative peace among these two gangs in order to not affect the everyday life of common Guatemalans and the gangs' relationships inside the prison system. The breaking of the accord between the gangs left thirty inmates murdered across four different prisons (Prensa Libre, 2017) and served as the beginning of a gang war on the streets of the most impoverished, gang-ruled neighbourhoods of Guatemala City. As a result of the rising gang violence, the Guatemalan authorities decided to segregate the prisons by separating five thousand inmates in penitentiary facilities specifically set for their known gang affiliation (Palma, 2016).

The Street Psalms Consultation on Gang Members gathered a group of seventy-five leaders, active gang members, and survivors of violence who were interested in exploring a conversation that would engage gang violence in Guatemala City and the rest of Central America, as gang violence is an issue throughout the region. At the end of the consultation, the Guatemalan director of the penitentiary system invited the first members of the CMT Guatemala network to begin a chaplaincy program with gang members inside the prisons (CMT Guatemala, 2017). These chaplains needed theological training that could sustain them in the midst of unimaginable violence. For that reason, they engaged the Street Psalms training intensives series which focuses on the theology of the incarnation and its implications for mission and everyday life. Interestingly,

the group of chaplains grew as other leaders from around the city gathered around these theological conversations (CMT Guatemala, 2017). These leaders were working in isolation in the most impoverished and violent neighbourhoods of Guatemala City, and most of these leaders also happened to be from the communities they served. They were true incarnational leaders working with reckless abandonment on behalf of the most vulnerable and marginalized of Guatemalan society. The chaplains in conversation with other grassroots leaders formed what was known until 2014 as the Strategy of Transformation.

As the leaders needed more structure and capacity to serve, the network asked for an organization that could help them grow and find sustainability, and that is why CMT Guatemala was founded as a non-for-profit organisation in 2014. The leaders of the network started applying and experiencing organizational growth because of the training they had undergone. They were able to experience first-hand the organizational and missional implications of incarnational theology and mission. From 2014 to 2018, CMT Guatemala provided training and capacity building for the diverse group of leaders who form the network (CMT Guatemala, 2017). These leaders represent more than thirty organizations with presence throughout the metropolitan area of Guatemala City. It is important, however, to mention that the life cycle of CMT Guatemala ended during the month of April 2018. The network, however, stays connected and engaged.

Before moving on, it is timely to introduce the Incarnational Training Framework (ITF) with more detail. The ITF has shaped the CMT Guatemala network through trainings that have been designed through it, and the incarnational approach presented in it is the backbone for the urban bias of the network's leaders. The ITF was born out of the kind of experiences presented above. However, it was not only written with the input of the CMT Guatemala leaders. The Street Psalms intensive series was the birthplace of the ITF, and that is how the influence of a larger

network also influenced the theological reflection and training of the CMT Guatemala network. Writing the ITF involved a global network of grassroots practitioners that engaged in conversations about the city and incarnational theology within the urban context. As a result of a global conversation, The ITF proposes “a way of *seeing and celebrating Good News in hard places*” (Rocke & Van Dyke, 2017: 12). The authors, however, recognise that this theological framework is not something that they created in isolation; they happened to be the ones who articulated a larger, international body of thought. The ITF was cultivated through the interactions with grassroots leaders and practitioners serving in some of the most challenging places around the world (Ibid.). For that reason, the framework is designed to be a gift for any leader or organisation that wants to use it. In a way, it was conceived as an open source Incarnational Training Framework.

The ITF was originally designed to serve the training hub directors of the Street Psalms network called the Urban Training Collaborative (UTC). Networks of Resonate Global Mission, which is an agency from the Christian Reformed Church of North America, and the Leadership Foundations merged into a larger community of practice, the UTC (Rocke & Van Dyke, 2017: 13). The ITF serves multiple purposes for this community. It is a diagnostic tool, a leadership development resource, a source of hope, and a suite of resources. It identifies a way of seeing—scarcity to abundance, a way of doing—from theory to practice, and a way of being—from rivalry to peace-making. “Ultimately, the ITF is designed to free the messenger to do the work of urban transformation” (Ibid.). In my perspective, the beauty of the ITF lies within the flexibility implicit in the framework. It is not designed to be prescriptive, and if for some reason it is used that way, the framework becomes weakened and crumbles. In other words, it cannot stand on its own. It needs the groundwork of grassroots leaders and organisations that are loving a particular city and

seeking its peace. Since I am part of the CMT Guatemala network and belong the UTC extended network, it is important that I know that I have been deeply shaped and transformed by the global conversation that formed the ITF. For that reason, the theological reflection that I embark on in this dissertation also seeks to expand and transcend the framework itself for the benefit of the extended network of leaders that I belong to.

5.3 Describing the Leaders of the CMT Guatemala Network

5.3.1 The Interview Process

In order to answer the main research question of this dissertation: What will a practical theology of peacebuilding look like in Guatemala City in response to the collective woundedness of Guatemalan society? I interviewed a group of thirteen leaders from the CMT Guatemala network. These leaders represent 50% of the whole network and work in different areas of Guatemala City. The purpose of this tool was to generate and compile qualitative empirical data that allowed to find understandings of non-violent theologies, violence, peacebuilding, and a paradigm shift from scarcity to abundance among grassroots leaders, and also to provide information for an empirical but accurate description of the leaders who form the CMT Guatemala network. The questions for the interviews were designed to provide a space to develop a descriptive theology of the theory-laden practices of the CMT Guatemala network's leaders that give rise to the practical questions that generate theological reflection. In addition, this opened up the exploration of the leaders' cultural and religious meanings that surround their religious and secular practices (Browning, 1996: 47).

The training that the CMT network engaged in for the last twelve years of its existence is framed by the Street Psalms Incarnational Training Framework (ITF). The ITF explores the transformation of four paradigms that shape the action of those involved in city transformation:

from scarcity to abundance, from theory to practice, from rivalry to peace-making, and from fear to freedom. These paradigm shifts happen as leaders explore a theory of change informed by the method, message, and manner of Jesus's mission (Rocke & Van Dyke, 2017). Two of the paradigms, scarcity to abundance and rivalry to peace-making, were explicitly mentioned during the interviews to tease out the possibilities of new narratives regarding grassroots peacebuilding theologies. The other two paradigms, from theory to practice and fear to freedom, served as points of reference as the four paradigm shifts are intrinsically related to each other, and the transversality of incarnational theology permeates the interaction of the four.

The first step for this process was to sit-down and talk with the grassroots leaders about their daily lives and how they serve their communities, to take the time to observe specific meanings within the way the leaders interacted with the researcher. What do they find meaningful? How do they give meaning to their reality and faith practices/*vivencia*? *Vivencia* can be defined as a full experience of an event with all its possibilities, lived through direct participation (Glassman & Erdem, 2014). The research process was done as a hermeneutic exercise to describe, interpret, and discern the conflicting cultural and religious meanings that guide the actions of the leaders of the CMT Guatemala network (Browning, 1996: 48).

The questions in the interview script were designed to evaluate three elements in the CMT network's leaders. Firstly, the discussions intended to explore the paradigm about the perception of reality, opportunities, resources, and Guatemalan history through the study of the experiences of scarcity and abundance. The intent was to discover the leader's concept of abundance and scarcity to see which perception affected the leader's understanding of reality. Then, the interview moved to a conversation about violence to explore the leader's concept of violence and the leader's capacity to enter the perspective of those who suffer violence. Part of this process involved

questions that challenged the respondent to see him or herself not only as a possible victim, but also as a possible perpetrator of subjective, objective, or symbolic violence²⁶ (Zizek, 2008a).

Finally, the third part of the interview focused on the concepts of rivalry, peace, and peacebuilding. The intent behind the questions crafted in this section was to approach the respondent's leadership style and see if he or she is developing peacebuilding practices in the community the leader serves. This opened the space for the leader's experiences to shape their concept of peacebuilding and its implications. The interview then moved to explore if the leader has intentionally avoided certain topics of conversation within the organisations, communities, or circles where the leader develops his or her incarnational presence. In other words, the purpose was to explore whether there are rivalistic faith practices or taboo topics within the CMT Guatemala network including, but not limited to, issues of doctrine, faith practices, racism, and gender and sexual orientation issues. The progression of the interviews was designed with the resolution to explore if the leaders of the network are willing to create a culture and theology of peacebuilding that engages the collective woundedness of Guatemala City.

Describing the Leaders and Their Theory-laden Practices

During the introduction of this work, it was mentioned that Guatemala is marked by the meshing of beautiful and afflictive realities in which grassroots leaders live, laugh, and love. For that reason, the theory-laden practices that came out of the research process will be seen from that perspective.

Firstly, this section will describe the context and attitudes of the members of the CMT network. I

²⁶ These concepts are taken from the understanding of violence presented by the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Zizek in his book *Violence*. According to Zizek, objective violence happens in language as language is our house of being, and as such it has violence embodied in all its forms. One may not see this kind of violence, but everybody feels it when perpetrated. Secondly, systemic violence for Zizek involves all the catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of the economic and political system. Finally, Zizek sees subjective violence as the perpetration of a violent act against somebody else.

will use some of the history of the network and the data gathered through interviews and focus group to amplify the depiction. Then, I will name and explain how exclusion is a repeating afflictive faith-practice that the leaders of the network have as a part of their tradition. This will be done through the interpretation of focus group information and Girardian mimetic theory as a lens to interpret the ethnographical notes from the experience. Finally, this part of the description will take a turn to an anthropological re-imagination as a beautiful faith practice that can serve as a foundational cornerstone to a practical theology of peacebuilding. the narrative will take the space to describe the beauty that emerges from the leaders' *vivencia*.

Environment and Attitudes

The leaders of the CMT Guatemala network come from very different backgrounds. Some of them grew up in poverty and decided to do something for their community. Others come from the Guatemalan middle class and experienced an incarnational journey downwards which led them to engage with impoverished and violent communities, while others found themselves involved in working with the vulnerable by accident²⁷. According to the communicator and freelance journalist Liz Herrera, during an interview conducted on March 3, 2018, this diversity created a network of leaders who were willing to learn, but were tired and frustrated, isolated but independent, and who came from conservative churches and NGOs without knowing how to collaborate and work in community. Herrera believes that all groups are a mirror of the larger society where they are located. Herrera affirmed that, in the case of the CMT Guatemala network, the wounds of the leaders are the same collective wounds of Guatemalan society. In a way, the leaders of the network

²⁷ 10 of the fifteen leaders interviewed during this dissertation alluded to accidental circumstances when answering the interview question: Could you please describe the work you do and how you came to do it?

have become the collective wounds of Guatemala, thus transferring their undealt pain to the people they serve (Rocke & Van Dyke, 2012: 203).

Herrera's comments open the conversation and analysis of the CMT Guatemala network to a new level. The leaders are part of the collective woundedness and participate in it without being conscious of it. Since all the leaders of the network work with impoverished and violent communities, that puts them in direct engagement with the social-economic representation of the Guatemala collective woundedness. In fact, the leaders serve in or belong to the "Inferiorised sectors" of Guatemalan society (Bastos, 2010). According to Hector Sandoval (Personal Communication, 21 March 2018), a community developer in Zone 3 of Guatemala City, some organisations that work in these inferiorised sectors are constantly fighting for resources. The organisations and communities are in a dog-eat-dog tension that is exacerbated by the communal rivalries, thus creating a non-collaborative culture that creates more wounding. Thus, affirming the earlier descriptions communicated by Herrera.

Another important characteristic of the leaders of the CMT network is that all of them have experienced or directly witnessed acts of subjective violence. Subjective violence is the perpetration of a violent action from one individual against another person (Zizek, 2008a: 6). In an interview conducted on June 27, 2018, a member of the network, who wishes to remain anonymous due to her experience, expressed: "I started questioning what I could do to help the youth involved in gangs and conflict with the law, after I witnessed a friend of mine being beaten and humiliated for committing a crime in my community. My neighbours hit him until his skin opened and his flesh was out". Because of this kind of experience, the members of the network are prone to act immediately when witnessing violence, poverty, and misfortune, without reflecting on the circumstances and systems that allow subjective violence to sprout in their communities.

The members of the network are always ready to start new programs that address the needs in their communities. In addition, the way the leaders have experienced violence created a bond among them. I believe that the constant facing of violence is what created a bond that is not easily ruptured. “There is a bond that forms among those who live daily with danger and depend utterly on one another for survival that is not easily ruptured” (Lapsley, 2012: 82)

When people constantly face subjective violence, they have no time to reflect. This, of course, is completely understandable as they are experiencing and persistently facing traumatic events that shape the way they see their being-in-the-world. The need to stop violence becomes so great that the urgency of the matter at hand becomes more important than the causes of violence. Herrera (Personal Communication, March 3, 2018) also referred to this attitude explaining that the concept of peace is something that the members of the network are not willing to engage. To them, resources to run programs and feed their beneficiaries are a priority; thereby, the ignorance about peacebuilding means it is not an immediate priority. The priority is the constant fight for resources that can help run the programs needed to serve the leaders’ communities. Consequently, violence becomes hidden in that sense of urgency legitimizing the system that provoked violence in the first place. Zizek describes the dynamic of this false sense of urgency in a way that is very similar to the experience of the leaders in the CMT Guatemala network. Zizek (2008a: 6) explains:

Let’s think about the fake sense of urgency that pervades the left-liberal humanitarian discourse on violence: in it, abstraction and graphic (pseudo) concreteness coexist in the staging of the scene of violence-against women, blacks, the homeless, gays... ‘A woman is raped every six seconds in this country’ and ‘In the time it takes you to read this paragraph, ten children will die of hunger’ are just two examples. Underlying all this is a hypocritical sentiment of moral outrage. Just this kind of pseudo-urgency was exploited by Starbucks a couple of years ago when, at store entrances, poster greeting customers pointed out that a portion of the chain’s profits went into health-care for children of Guatemala, the source of their coffee, the inference being that with every cup you drink, you save a child’s life.

The members of the network are not hypocritical in the engagement of their communities; nobody should dare to imply they are due to the way they deal with violence. The value in Žižek's explanation of the dynamics of violence rests in the pervasiveness of subjective violence as it blinds people from the systemic and objective violence, which fuel the acts of subjective violence in the communities where the leaders of the CMT Guatemala network live and serve. This system is the global sacrificial theology that creates inequalities through the current modes of production, which I will take space to explain with more detail when I talk about scarcity as an institution.

The leaders of the network deal with communities immersed in deep competition and rivalry. Thereby, there is a sense of over-spiritualization that permeates the CMT network. The sense of urgency, in this case, translates into the salvation of souls in a never-ending battle between God and Satan. The communities' environment is so violent that people's souls must be rescued before people are killed and their souls go to eternal damnation. As one of the pastors of the network stated, their job is to save souls (Personal Communication, 5 July 2017). Thus, in many cases the leader's faith-practices that see the betterment of people's lives as secondary or an excuse to preach the gospel. Hector Sandoval (Personal Communication, 21 March 2018) also believes that this faith practice creates a reality in the communities that perpetuates the disempowerment of the people leaders claim to serve. Sandoval stated that the organizations who serve those living in poverty have damaged the self-esteem and sense of dignity of the community. This is the result of the rivalries that arise from something that seems to be apparently well intentioned, saving souls. There is rivalry in walking and serving with the poor and saving their souls, to the level of making the poor the object of one's desire. As a result, violence is perpetrated not only against those who fight for resources to run their programs and save more souls, but also against the people they claim to serve (Aguilar, 2018: 117).

These faith practices are perpetuated not only by members of the CMT network, but also by other organisations around the city that have affirmed “the weakness” of those living at the margins through this form of false charity. According to Paulo Freire (Freire, 2003: Loc. 546), false charity is the constraining of those who suffer, the most vulnerable and excluded of society, to keep extending their hands for the leftovers of the system. The lack of dignity fostered through false charity creates even more violence in the communities the CMT leaders serve. Saving souls is a form of charity that does not acknowledge the material and psychological reality of those living in poverty. Consequently, the most vulnerable are still left to their own demise, but their souls are saved. Therefore, the abstract focus of soul saving exacerbates people’s psychological and material reality, creating more violence. Sandoval (Personal Communication, 21 March 2018) explained that people are violent because of the poverty they live in, and that “the poor will want to achieve their dreams by force as long as they do not have a dignified way of bringing food to their table”. As a result, one may ask, what is the good of saving people’s souls when they still live in a corporeal hell created by humans? People burn in the flames of poverty, violence, discrimination, rape, and collective wounding.

During the interviews for this dissertation, the urgency of saving souls from eternal damnation was so strong that twelve of the interviewed members of the network did not make a connection between the colonial history, the armed conflict, and the current realities of the communities they serve. A member of the network stated: “to be honest with you, between the different times in Guatemala and its violence, I do not see a connection. I see it from a spiritual perspective. I see it as a spiritual time that Guatemala is going through” (Personal Communication, 5 July 2017). Sadly, the lack of contextual connectivity shows the inadequacy of the training provided for the leaders of the CMT network. Over the course of ten years, there was not enough

work done to make clear connections between the material and psychological reality of the Guatemalan context and the incarnational theology taught through the Street Psalms intensives. In my perspective, the collective processes the leaders underwent were not completely clear in connecting the contextual reality to the theological principles that formed the network.

The second question of the section, engaging the paradigm shift from scarcity to abundance, asked the leaders to please describe the reality of the people who live in the community you serve. What causes that reality? The purpose of this question was to explore the paradigms about perceptions of reality, opportunities, resources, and Guatemala history. Interestingly, the responses varied depending the area of work, from family dysfunction to drugs and alcohol, and from lack of resources to unequal opportunity. The lack of connection between the members of the network and the historical memory is part of the trials and tribulations of national consciousness that Frantz Fanon talks about in the *Wretched of the Earth* (2004). It is also part of “the grandeur and weakness of spontaneity in the formation of an underdeveloped colonial nation”. Fanon posits that the lack of integration of the history of the village and conflicts between tribes and clans into the people’s struggle ends up disregarding the minor local histories, thereby trampling on the only thing that is relevant to the nation’s actuality, that is, the native histories of struggle and reconciliation (Fanon, 2004: 68). As a consequence of colonial thought, the minor local histories are not taught in school (Morales, 2015: 5). The colonial foundation of the military conquest and the idealization of the conquest marked the beginning of a collective consciousness based on frustration and a feeling of disempowerment. However, the narratives of the minor local histories could be seen as alternative contestations to the colonial narrative. What needs to be rescued from the Guatemalan collective woundedness is not the tragic romanticising of the defeat and conquest of indigenous people, but the revalorisation of heroic resistance that is characteristic

of Guatemalan people. Resistance that has taken, is taking, and will take different shapes across Guatemalan history (Morales, 2015: 41).

5.3.2 Exclusion as an Afflictive Faith Practice

During the research process, part of surfacing local theologies and faith practices involved challenging the grassroots leaders through the understanding of non-violent or violent theologies. Thus, there was a series of conversations that served as both a case study and a focus group. The conversations presented CMT Guatemala network leaders with different groups of people that are marginalized by mainstream evangelical Guatemalan theology and that represent the collective woundedness of Guatemala City (LGBTQ groups, Catholics, indigenous movements, pro-choice abortion groups, etc.). The reactions of the network's leaders were documented as an ethnographic narrative of grassroots leaders' behaviour when facing the other.

After two years of conversations, the focus group activity teased out very interesting reactions from the participants during these theological conversations, which happened to be a contextual adaptation of the Street Psalms Intensives. The participants felt challenged, disoriented, and underwent a process of theological deconstruction. All of it was done in a safe environment that allowed for the communal building of knowledge in order to see if their faith practices were violent or encouraging peacebuilding. During the focus group, one of the participants said: "It was a shock to break the mould of what one has always believed. Though, I was never in full agreement with the content of the conversations" (Focus Group Personal Communication, September 8, 2018). Another participant shared: "I started having an internal conflict between what I was learning in church and the content we were discussing as a group. How could I bring these two perspectives together? How can I apply them? How do you handle two kinds of teaching?" (Ibid.).

It was through the dialogical nature of the training that the participants' perspectives started changing. Some of them started crossing religious boundaries, while others challenged internalized racism and racial discrimination within the church. One of the participants expressed that, through the conversations, the organization she serves with started interacting with other Christian traditions. Another participant went as far as sharing his journey into developing perspectives to reflect on the racial discrimination he suffered inside and outside of the church.

Interestingly, as the questions got more personal and closer to doctrinal and sexual orientation issues, the resistance grew among the participants. Some of them expressed deep pain caused by their local evangelical churches to the point of not wanting to engage with the local church anymore. One of the participants, a pastor who works outside of the institutional church, said in a very strong assertive voice: "We had really difficult conflicts with the congregation where we used to work. We did not find the support we needed. Through that, we learned that God was out on the street. We won't work with the Church (institutional) unless God changes it" (Focus Group Personal Communication, September 8, 2018). Participants tried to calm each other by appealing to tolerance as a key to being in communion with the church. It was quite interesting to observe the tension building in the room as the time to ask the last question came closer.

The last question was: How would you respond if an openly gay person tried to join your ministry as a volunteer? The follow up question was: how would you respond if they wanted to be involved in leadership? As soon as the question was asked the posture of the participants changed. The frustration with experiences of exclusion and discrimination changed its locus. The posture turned into a defensive and faith apologetics stance. The second participant to respond to the question was middle-age man. His voice was significantly louder during this participation when he said: "I understand that the Bible does not accept that. I would never allow something like that

to happen. If I am the leader, I would not even allow a person like that to join the group. If I was part of a study group (not a Bible study) I would not have an issue with it” (Focus Group Personal Communication, September 8, 2018). Some participants nodded with their heads in affirmation to what he said. Another participant, a young 30-year-old female said, “Anybody who is gay has not been filled (baptized) by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, that person cannot be a leader” (Ibid.).

During the verbal rejection and exclusion of gay people, another member, a middle-age man, said with a calm voice: “I could not do that to anybody. If the person is serious and is showing a determined attitude, there should not be any kind of limitation. My question to that person would be, are you willing to face rejection, complaints, and prejudice against you in your service?” (Ibid.). I did not have a chance to reflect with the group on this statement as the time limit that we agreed to ended. Interestingly, they just pushed the comment of the member who was more embracing to the side, almost like it was something that slipped out his mouth, a mistake not worth addressing. Their response blew my mind. I interpret this reaction as a direct consequence of the heteronormative mentality that is not willing to engage in the smallest way with the possibility of accepting gay people in a Christian faith community.

Even though the group showed tremendous progress in the acceptance of others who think differently during the last two years, there is always a different other that will be excluded. In this case, it was very clear that anybody that identifies him or herself as gay cannot be in Christian leadership or, in some cases, even a volunteer. This reveals not only the limitations of the theological bandwidth of the CMT Guatemala network leaders, but also the human condition of excluding those who are different.

The understanding of exclusion as an afflictive faith practice is of great importance to create new pathways towards a practical theology of peacebuilding. That is the reason behind

trying to understand the desire to exclude those with a different sexual orientation from the leadership of grassroots Christian organizations or even from the community formed around the work with those living in communities marked by poverty and violence. It is at this point that the work of Stefano Tomelleri becomes very useful. Tomelleri has developed a simple yet intricate approach to mimetic theory through the understanding and conceptualization of *ressentiment* through the analysis of Nietzsche and Scheler. In the foreword of Tomelleri's *Ressentiment*, Paul Dumouchel defines resentment as the "ill will, the negative disposition that we normally, and spontaneously experience toward those who deliberately injured us, or simply manifested toward us contempt, a malevolent attitude, or careless indifference" (Tomelleri, 2015: xvi) Importantly, resentment is not the same as *ressentiment*. Ressentiment can be interpreted as frustrated resentment, which is an internally twisted attitude that happens when agents cannot express their resentment or respond to the offenses they have experienced. Ressentiment, according to Nietzsche, becomes an "occurring emotion", a trait of character and a predisposition that settles in the heart and poisons the agent's soul. Ressentiment, according to Tomelleri's interpretation of Nietzsche is, thereby, an emotive condition with negative implications because it is connected to a type of mediocre individual who has been given the same dignity as other humans through the figure of Christ (Tomelleri, 2015: 13). It is important to understand that for Nietzsche this process becomes a "conspiracy," a "revolt", as Tomelleri calls it, "of the sufferers against the sound and the victorious" (Nietzsche, 2010: LOC 1697), "which clothes itself in compassion, love, and the thirst for justice, but behind these vestments of Christian goodness there is a *reaction* of the weakest, their desire for revenge that has been buried over time" (Tomelleri, 2015: 13). Ressentiment is, thereby, a phenomenon that happens over time; it does not build immediately; rather, it is a slow process.

In the case of those who participated in the focus group, the rejection and exclusion they have faced by the institutions that they once believed in was marked by the lack of resentful expressions due to their understanding of Christian piety as turning the other cheek as a practice of submission and non-violence, thus brewing a resentment *a la* Nietzsche-Scheler in their hearts. Tomelleri's understanding of mimetic theory as a lens to re-interpret these internal distortions of the being-in-the-world creates a sociology that brings mimetic theory as a lens to re-interpret the reactions presented by the participants of the focus group.

The emotion of resentment evolves from mimetic desire. It is an experience that arises when a rival denies the other from opportunities and valuable resources (Tomelleri, 2015: 92). This evolution of desire enters into the metaphysical realm of the internal mediation proposed by Girard, which happens when the triangular distance between the subject and mediator is sufficiently reduced to allow both parties to penetrate their identities and alter their being-in-the-world through rivalistic tendencies (Girard, 1965: 9). It is in this internal mediation that other groups, like the LGBTQ community, who also happens to be rejected by the religious institutions, become a rival in the fight for acceptance and legitimation before a system that has excluded both groups. The object of desire is not only the acceptance of the institution that rejected in the first place, but also the control of the institution itself.

As it was shown in the previous chapter, the Biblical revelation brought to light the innocence of the victim through the passion of Jesus. This, however, has created another set of dynamics as this revelation has been misread and misinterpreted. Since the victim is now seen as innocent, contemporary parties in rivalry tend to "victim play" as a mimetic strategy that seeks to validate their prerogatives solely based on the fact of having experienced suffering. Even more so, the semiotic transformation of the victim has created a new image where the victim has moved

from being sacred to being innocent. This evolution highlights the fact that human suffering is caused by human interactions, which since the origins of humanity have the capacity of generating victims, nurturing and hiding rivalistic and destructive tensions in their midst. (Tomelleri, 2015: 94–101).

Exclusion, then, becomes a faith practice that seeks to invalidate the claims of other groups that consider themselves as victims of the same system. This, again, happens through the same process of mimesis as people try to set themselves apart from the other by emphasizing their differences. Those who once felt excluded now exclude others in the name of righteousness. Morality and legalism trump grace and collaboration because there is a colonial theology of perfection that comes out of the fear of being contaminated by the sinful-other. Thus, the other is not the bearer of the image of God, but the sinful sub-human that needs to be saved from hell to be made whole.

Miroslav Volf (1996: 74) describes the anatomy and dynamics of exclusion in a way that is helpful to interpret the mimetism that spreads from *ressentiment* to exclusion as an afflictive faith practice. Volf posits that Christian theology has a long history of trying to follow all sins to the root of a basic form of sin. For that reason, Jesus's ministry was more than just a call to inclusion. It was the re-imagining of human relations in a way that transgressed the limits of the current religious and political system. For Volf (Ibid.), the pursuit of purity is a key element of exclusion. A community, or an individual, enforces purity by setting itself apart "from the defiled world in a hypocritical sinlessness and excludes the boundary breaking other from its heart and its world". Therefore, Volf (1996: 71–74) states:

An advantage of conceiving sin as the practice of exclusion is that it names as sin what often passes as virtue, especially in religious circles ... We exclude because we are uncomfortable with anything that blurs accepted boundaries, disturbs our identities, and

disarranges our symbolic cultural maps ... We exclude because we want to be at the centre and be there alone, single handedly controlling the land ...

In the case of the CMT Guatemala network, the LGBTQ community blurs the accepted boundaries of heteronormative and patriarchal Christianity. Thus, disturbing heterosexual identities posing a threat to the tenets of the interpretation of the biblical, ideal nuclear family. In addition, if there was a full acceptance of LGBTQ people within the network, the symbolic cultural maps rooted in a Guatemalan *macho* culture would be disarranged in such a way that the network itself could split in disagreement regarding sexual orientation and identity issues.

It is in the mimetic process of exclusion and reciprocity that the members of the CMT Guatemala network have lost sight of what their tradition and theology truly stand for. They were excluded from the mainstream evangelical churches due to their calling to work with people living in poverty and violence, who also happened to be excluded from the different Guatemalan social systems. They work with some of the most excluded sectors of Guatemalan society. Yet, they will not think twice before excluding others from their community based on sexual orientation and, in some cases, religious affiliation.

In summary, exclusion as an afflictive faith practice is born of the *ressentiment* created by the rejection of not only the institutions to which the CMT network leaders belong, but also from the societal rejection that comes with working with and coming from a scandalous, inferiorised background. Exclusion, then, becomes a way of delegitimizing the claims of other oppressed groups that may enter into the rivalry for acceptance and belonging to the current religious system.

5.3.3 Anthropological Re-Imagination as a Beautiful Faith Practice

In order to talk about an anthropological re-imagination as a beautiful faith practice, the reader must realize that this is a reactive process. The response of a re-imagining and rehumanizing faith

practice comes from the deeply rooted dehumanisation that people have undergone under the current global systems. The process of dehumanisation does not happen overnight. It is a progression that takes centuries of repeating a discourse that labels specific groups in society as lesser and more expendable than others. This distortion of the “vocation of becoming more fully human” (Freire, 2003, Loc. 525) is a historical process that has marked the reality and interactions between different groups of people. Dehumanisation can be seen in the early writings of Karl Marx when he explains that one of the costs of the capitalist system is the worker selling his/her humanity in the name of making profit for the great capitalists (Marx & Engels, 1966: 31). The hope lays, nevertheless, in the fact that dehumanisation does not go beyond its factual historical concreteness. It is not a given destiny that transcends the inter-individuality of each person. It is the consequence of a system that engenders violence in the oppressors, who in turn dehumanise the oppressed (Freire, 2003, Loc. 533).

Oppression and dehumanisation are almost interchangeable terms in the face of the global economic and social systems. These systems have imposed a way of being-in-the-world that has robbed the dignity away from those who happen to be at the bottom of the social chain, turning them into the scapegoats of society. A Girardian lens to understand dehumanisation is very helpful here. As rivalry and violence increase in society, people start seeing each other as monstrous doubles (Girard, 1977). What does not fit the accepted morality of the majority become the traits of monstrosity and the differentiating features that set a group apart from the impure. It is in this metaphysical space that exclusion functions as a dehumanising practice as the monstrosity of the other becomes an obstacle to see his or her humanity as a uniting factor. Since this is a crisis of distinctions, the more different a group is from the other, the more dehumanised the other group becomes.

As one can see, humans are not that far away from their archaic ancestors. As Girard points out in his mimetic theory, the mechanism of violence has its foundations in archaic religion, and its purpose is to “quell violence within the community and to prevent conflicts from erupting” (1977: 14). The sacrifice of the scapegoats was to appease the gods that reigned over the minds of archaic peoples and to allow the society to avoid extinction. This process, however, is stopped by the belief that Christ is the ultimate sacrifice (Míguez *et al.*, 2009: 39). Interestingly, the sacrificial logic still permeates the imagination of many religions and systems today²⁸, especially in Christianity as it has misread the death of Jesus (Girard, 1987).

People maintain a growing need to scapegoat those who are different, and they are totally blind to the hidden mechanism of violence. For that reason, the fundamental enemy of evangelisation and humanisation in today’s world is not atheism, but idolatry. The idols, not atheism, are constantly asking for sacrifices. The idols demand the souls, bodies, and time of people (Fernandez, 2004: 5). Dehumanisation happens along the way in the mimetic progression. Parties in rivalry dehumanise each other, and when the righteous unanimity against a scapegoat comes to unite the antagonists, the dehumanisation turns against the scapegoat; “All the rancors scattered at random among the divergent individuals, all the differing antagonisms now converge on an isolated and unique figure, the *surrogate victim*” (Girard, 1977: 79). In other words, the need to blame somebody and the process of scapegoating the other are a sacrificial dehumanising practice. All of this happens because “the persecutors always convince themselves that a small number of people, or even a single individual, despite his relative weakness, is extremely harmful to the whole society” (Girard, 1986: 15)

²⁸ See *Sobre Sacrificios* edited by Hugo Assmann, the conversation between Girard and Latin American liberation theologians. Girard was pushed to see the implications of the sacrificial logic and to admit the political use of his theories in this process

In the case of the CMT Guatemala network, it was very hard for both, the focus group and the interview respondents, to name people they were uncomfortable working with or willing to scapegoat. This is due to the hidden power of rivalry in its metaphysical stages. The difficulty to see the other that makes one uncomfortable came with a glimpse of hope. During the process of the interviews conducted during the research, there was a recurring idea among some of the respondents. Six of the respondents claimed to experience a transformation in the understanding of the other through the acknowledgement of the humanity of the other or in the recognition of the other as an equal. A pastor who now works with the homeless population in Guatemala City said: “It was a process [referring to working with homeless people]; we changed fear for seeing them as humans. We learned through sharing meals with them. We earned their trust little by little” (Personal Communication, June 23, 2017). Two members of the network, both chaplains who work with the national police said: “there is always a human under the police uniform. We are one in Christ” (Personal Communication, July 7, 2017). “The uniform marginalizes them; without the uniform, they are just human” (Personal Communication, September 3, 2018).

In the faith practice of anthropological re-imagination, the leaders of the CMT network are reassessing the images of self and God in the midst of life as being collectively wounded by the local and global systems (Míguez *et al.*, 2009: 32). This realisation of wounding does not happen in the abstract realm. The leaders see the reality of the effects that ideas bear on the disfigured bodies and minds of the marginalised through sharing meals and entering the embodiment and allocation of the people they serve. They have come to encounter a different epistemology in the process of finding the humanity of the other (Fernandez, 2004: 13). When leaders stand in this epistemological point, their conventional patterns are deeply challenged, and their doctrinal edifice appears to break down. In the process of losing sight of their tradition, there is a need for a process

of “reconstructive memory” as proposed by Browning (1996: 184). This practice allows the leaders to challenge the reality of the work they do through asking the question “what do our traditions really say about what we should do?”, coming to terms with the humanity of the one they refused to serve in the beginning.²⁹ In doing so, the CMT Guatemala network leaders fight to destroy the causes which nourish “false charity.”

Anthropological reimagining is a constant process. Both Freire (2003) and Fernandez (2004) suggest that being human is the process of becoming human. Freire calls it the vocation of being human, implying that there is a call to not only find one’s humanity, but also liberate others in the process of encountering humanity. The liberation Freire talks about is not outside of the human. It is a “condition for the quest of human completion”. The power of this kind of anthropological reimagination comes from the weakness of the oppressed and dehumanised subject as it is the only power that is strong enough to liberate both, the oppressor and the oppressed (Freire, 2003: Loc. 537). The power that lies in the grassroots leaders of the CMT network has been strong enough to liberate not only people living in poverty, but also those who are in the category of the oppressors. Such is the case of María Mayorga, one of the members of the CMT Guatemala network who comes from the Guatemalan business elite. Mayorga encountered another member of the network, who works in the slums, as she was trying to discern what to do with her time between jobs. Mayorga stated, “I was not trying to find Jesus in the poor or anything like that; I was trying to figure out what to do with my time” (Personal Communication, September 7, 2018). Mayorga explained during an interview for this research that she went down to help with the great ideas of her business experience, but that those living poverty ended up feeding her spiritually. She commented that, in working with the poor, “I fell in love with Jesus, with the non-for-profit

²⁹ The interview respondents mentioned that during the first stages of their work, they were not fully comfortable or willing to work with the communities they serve today.

work, with the work on the street; I fell in love with the irreverence and counterculture of grassroots leaders. I loved it, but I did not feel capable of living it. So, I helped with what I could, developing manuals to optimize internal administrative processes for the organization and people I fell in love with. After a while, I kept visiting the slums without doing anything concrete. I was visiting so they would spiritually feed me” (Personal Communication, September 7, 2018).

Fernandez’s (2004) proposal complements Freire’s process of humanisation. Fernandez advocates for a re-appropriation of the metaphor of the heart as key point for the reimagination of humanity. This metaphor has been subordinated to the margins and equated with those living in the outskirts of society as a consequence of the project of modernity, which put the mind (rationality) at the centre of being human. Therefore, relationality not rationality is decisive for becoming more human. This relationality is juxtaposed with the understanding of the self as a reasoning subjectivity as this would leave out other humans (the case of those with mental disabilities) and beings (the rest of nature) without the capacity to reason (Fernandez, 2004: 186–88). It is in this relationality that the leaders of the CMT Guatemala network have approached their incarnational work. Relationality is key in the process of anthropological reimagining as an essential part for the search of a practical theology of peacebuilding that responds to the Guatemalan collective woundedness. In the experience shared by Mayorga, one can see the process of re-humanisation as the work with the poor also led her to work with the Guatemalan elite from a relational perspective. Mayorga (Personal Communication, September 7, 2018) sees the business elite as a “community that is afraid of belonging to a social circle that seems empty”. The emptiness that they feel is due to their attachment to their wealth and power. The wealthy become isolated even within their social circles because they are afraid of each other and of the rest of Guatemalan society. This fear is so deeply rooted that the business elite is afraid of any change in the

Guatemalan social order as it could imply the loss of their wealth and power (Fundación Gedeón, 2016: 27). In Mayorga's perspective, abundance equates to relationality because, for her, "abundance is to walk your path always seeing, listening, loving, being curious, and constantly being astonished by the other; and along that path look inside you, embrace everything as a part of your being. Add elements of your life to the identity you have in Christ" (Personal Communication, September 7, 2018).

The process of becoming human is a gift that comes from below. It is important, nevertheless, that the poor and vulnerable of this world do not become responsible for the liberation and re-humanisation of those who are oppressing them. This would put yet another burden on their shoulders (Míguez *et al.*, 2009: 22). What those living at the margins of society do is to remind people of their humanity as they struggle and react to the dehumanising discourse of contemporary institutions. In Mayorga's case, her anthropological reimagining came from encountering the poor even if it was not her first intention. The beauty of the CMT Guatemala network is located in the relationality that opened the encounter of somebody from the oppressor's group to encounter a human-equal-other in the face of the oppressed, those living in extreme poverty. Even more so, this encounter changed Mayorga's approach to the business elite to see them as humans as well.

5.4 Communal Interpretation and Building of knowledge: abundance as a peacebuilding and liberating perspective

The last section mentioned in a brief manner the different paradigm shifts that are part of the Incarnational Training Framework (ITF). These movements are what framed the training and conversations that the focus group went through in the last two and a half years. During the process of the theological conversations and interviews, the members of the network showed an understanding of abundance that can serve as a foundation for a practical theology of peacebuilding

that responds to the collective woundedness of Guatemala City. Even more so, the knowledge that was acquired through the interview process takes the concept of abundance beyond what is expressed in the ITF, a reminder of the beauty of the ITF being a framework, not a curriculum.

According to the writers of the ITF, there are three ways of seeing that shape the paradigm shift from scarcity to abundance, seeing anthropologically, from below, and in the light of the resurrection. First, seeing anthropologically is a process that takes the time to explore the nuances of culture, history, families, friends, and even those who are viewed as enemies. The idea behind this exploration is in the understanding that humans are shaped and formed through the eyes of the other (Alison, 2010c). In other words, what we see is filtered through the lens of our community. Secondly, seeing from below implies not only the perspective of the poor and vulnerable, but also the understanding of the incarnation itself as the Word made flesh. This perspective understands and explores God as God-self located not in the ethereal realm of heaven, but in the reality of the human condition. Finally, seeing from the light of the resurrection implies to see the world from the perspective of the victim. In this case, one sees not only from the point of view of the victims of the unjust systems that shape reality, but from the viewpoint of the innocent forgiving victim in Jesus Christ. These ways of seeing are accompanied by three pathways to perception for the urban environment. Firstly, the City as Classroom, which sees the urban as the place to learn, and the city as a teacher. Secondly, the City as Parish, which understands the urban space as sacred and holy. In this view, the Spirit is already moving in the city way before anybody starts working in it. This perception of the city opens to the engagement of other faiths and streams of spirituality for the transformation of the city. Finally, the City as Playground, which proposes that the violent imagery of warfare that shapes the city needs to be transcended to see the city as a playground for God's grace (Rocke & Van Dyke, 2017: 61–71).

Even though the previous understanding of the shift from scarcity to abundance shaped the leaders of the CMT Guatemala network, the leaders took their own *vivencia* and put it in place as a lens to come with a concept of abundance that could be useful for their context. The members of the network propose that abundance is the understanding and belief that there is enough for all as people walk together in community and communion with each other.³⁰ This concept is not a mere abstract idea that comes out of an academic exercise. It is a bold statement in resistance to the forces that create inequality and violence in the Guatemalan context. There is a sacramentality to this concept that will need more expansion and thought in the paragraphs to follow.

5.4.1 Scarcity as an Institution

This small section will briefly explore scarcity as the institution that sustains the current social and economic global systems; however, this section will not enter into the economic and social debate or the implications of such a cornerstone of the system. It will just set the concept of scarcity as an institution to then move into the beauty presented by the concept of abundance proposed by the CMT Guatemala network. The reader must understand that scarcity is an institution in the sense that it sustains the global systems in place. It is the beginning of the current modes of production.

The movement from scarcity to abundance is a process that requires an awakening that allows people to see the current reality, scarcity, for what it is, a myth and institution of exclusion and sacrificial logic. Scarcity is an ambivalent term that is understood as want and deprivation in many political and academic discourses in the social and economic arena. This lack is understood as the cause of violence and social conflicts, or a problem to be solved. Consequently, impoverished neighbourhoods are seen as violent and dangerous under the assumption that poverty

³⁰ This concept was crafted after fifteen interviews and the interpretation and comparison of responses to the interview question: From your perspective, what is abundance?

equals scarcity, and scarcity equals social unrest and violence (Dumouchel, 2014: ix). Remember for a moment Sandoval's statement in the previous section of this chapter: "the poor will want to achieve their dreams by force as long as they do not have a dignified way of bringing food to their table" (Personal Communication, 21 March 2018). In the institution of scarcity, the violence of the vulnerable and weak is labelled as such, while the violence of the strong, the ones who maintain and sustain the current order, is seen as legitimate. In other words, it is not violence; instead, it is a purifying and restoring violence of the endangered order (Míguez *et al.*, 2009: 61).

The ambivalence of the term is evident when scarcity is also conceptualised as an incentive that emphasises economic growth, and economic advance is accepted as the best protection against social turmoil and disarray. Interestingly, this incongruity is explanatory at the moral level as well. The judgement on violence that comes from the poor is harsher than the outcry that comes when violence is caused by greed. In the current system, scarcity becomes a personal issue that needs to be solved by individual means, breaking the bonds of solidarity and promoting the abandoning of obligations as it reduces the transmittable component of violence (Dumouchel, 2014: xii). For Paul Dumouchel (2014: xii), scarcity is like the sacred:

It protects us against our own violence violently, though that violence takes a different form. It is indirect rather than direct, and tends to be impersonal. Abandoning others to whom we were previously attached by these obligations, allowing the evil, whatever it is to befall them.

The problem with the pervasiveness of scarcity is that the victims in this system are held to be personally responsible for their misfortunes. In addition, they become undeserving of the help that people fail to provide for them. They become the surrogate victims of indifference and violence. What humans fail to see is that this is the same process of violence that produced victims for sacrifice in archaic religions. This process in itself makes of scarcity an institution, not a social construction. This implies that scarcity comes before discourse or belief. It is praxis and experience

(Ibid.). The suffering of these victims is understood as sacrifice, thereby, human suffering is imposed in the name of progress. Consequently, human suffering is erased from memory and all that is left is the beauty of development, progress, and the salvation brought by western civilisation. (Míguez *et al.*, 2009: 67).

The concept of scarcity in economic theory is defined as “the quantity of goods and resources available, the limitation of resources ... The quantity of goods and resources available is a direct expression of the constraint of scarcity” (Dumouchel, 2014: 4). It is amid this institution that the members of the CMT network challenge the cornerstone of scarcity by proposing such a concept of abundance. A system based on scarcity is highly rivalistic as mimetic desire is controlled by a falsely / transcendentalised entity like the free market. In fact, Hayek, one of the original architects of the idea of free market society, proposed that a progressive society “increases the desire of all in proportion as it increases its gifts to some” (Hayek, 2011: 98). The *ressentiment* of this inequality was interpreted by Mises through his idea of the Fourier’s complex (Von Mises, 1994: 29–34). What both Hayek and Mises failed to see was the highly sacrificial institutions that their ideas would create as those who appear less competent or who happen to resist the laws of the market would become the sacrificed victims (Míguez *et al.*, 2009: 40).

The institution of scarcity as the origin of the current system happens as traditional solidarity obligations are broken. This creates an opposition between the social and individual consequences of human actions. Scarcity, then, is constructed by the rejection of these obligations abandoning each to his or her fate. Consequently, this creates a space where anybody can become a sacrificial victim. In a way, violence does not disappear; it changes its form and loci. It transforms as it cannot be expressed directly through subjective violence. It changes into envy, jealousy, and

impotent hatred—resentment. Scarcity becomes “the social construction of indifference to the misfortunes of others” (Dumouchel, 2014: 48–51).

5.4.2 The Sacramentality of Abundance

The power of the theological proposal made through the concept of abundance presented by the CMT network is sustained by its sacramentality. As it was mentioned before, the leaders of the CMT network propose that abundance is the understanding and belief that there is enough for all as people walk together in community and communion with each other. The CMT leaders are starting to walk a path that is calling forth a new understanding of the world and the other. “Enough for all” means all. Sadly, as we saw in the previous section, there will always be a different other that will be excluded as that is part of the hidden mechanism of violence and exclusion. However, the hope rests in the fact that the process of becoming human will continually invite people to expand the boundaries of their symbolic cultural maps. “Enough for all” opens the space for an understanding of eucharistic forgiveness as “at the heart of the cross is Christ’s stance of not letting the other remain an enemy and of creating space in himself for the offender to come in” (Volf, 1996: 126). The words attributed to Jesus on the cross (Luke 23:34) resonate in the theological statement proposed by the CMT leaders. The process of opening oneself to the other enters the anthropological reimagining addressed in the previous section. In the process of becoming more human, the other will become rehumanised.

Now, the community aspect proposed in this concept of abundance addresses the isolation and rivalry that the current systems have imposed on humanity. Girard advocates for an interindividual reality among humans through his mimetic theory. Humans imitate each other in the realm of social relationships, thereby, in community. It is in the communal realm that it is possible to speak of a change in desire and a change in the understanding of the other (Míguez *et*

al., 2009: 149). This change in desire approaches the realm of spirituality, opening the door for a communal spirituality that shapes and forms the positive imitation of desires that resist the isolation created by scarcity as an institution. Girard advocates for a renunciation of mimetic desire from a rivalistic perspective, while opening the door for the goodness of imitating Christ. Girard (1996: 63–65) explains that “Jesus seems to say that the only way to avoid violence is to imitate me, and imitate the Father. So, the idea that mimetic desire itself is bad makes no sense. It is true, however, that occasionally I say ‘mimetic desire’ when I really mean only the type of mimetic desire that generates mimetic rivalry and, in turn, is generated by it”. In this imitation, the positive movement towards the imitation of Christ inevitably opens oneself to others, and can be the basis for “heroism, and devotion to others, and everything”.

The sacramental shape of abundance can be seen through the understanding of the change of desire as a journey. Like the disciples in Luke 24 on the road to Emmaus, the communal element ends in communion. The beauty of this process is in the interruption of the third person that joins the journey as a stranger. In fact, this stranger is an innocent victim who was murdered, but who came back without any rancour and desire for revenge (Alison, 2013: 75). For Alison (2013: 77), communion and reinterpretation of the text in a non-violent way happen in a progression: “The walking together, the texts, the homilating, the interpretation, the breaking of bread and the recognition of ‘I AM’ who has deliberately given himself in sacrifice for you.” Communion implies a meal, which opens a liturgical approach to the understanding not only of Scripture, but also of the other. Even more so, the liturgical aspect of bread breaking must empower the community to engage into a political act with each other through sharing resources. This is the ethic of breaking bread (Walker, Jr., 2001: 35). As the leaders of the CMT network open themselves to others, peacebuilding is creeping into their approach to mission and the Guatemalan

collective woundedness. The beauty and affliction present in the abundant communion of the eucharist shapes the journey from rivalry to peace-making, to then engage in peacebuilding.

PART THREE

LAUGHING: THE JOY OF CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGISING

CHAPTER SIX

THE JOY OF CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGISING: CONCEPTUALISING CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY

6.1 Introduction

At this point, the theological reflection of this dissertation is transitioning to the second movement proposed in this research, to find a practical theology of peacebuilding that responds to the Guatemalan collective woundedness. The first stage, *living*, presented in the previous chapters reveal how the grassroots leaders of the CMT Guatemala network express themselves amid the social and historical context where they live and serve. The present section, separated in three chapters, will explore the “laughing” element of a practical theology of peacebuilding in the joy of contextual theologising. I will argue that it is possible to find a non-violent hermeneutical approach to read the Bible with grassroots leaders and reimagine Guatemala City and the CMT network from below. The possibility for a transformed hermeneutic emerges from what I will call a hermeneutical ontology, which is centred on Jesus as the forgiving victim. This interpretative turn needs to consider different “linguistified” correctives to enhance contextual theology with elements that enter into the reality of urban spaces, which is where the leaders of the CMT Guatemala network exercise their faith practices. I will expand on what I mean by “linguistified” correctives in the next section of this chapter. The change in interpretative lenses will open the possibility for a different perspective of who God is through pushing the boundaries of positivist ways of doing theology and challenging contemporary prohibitions that are represented through the metaphors of purity, cleanliness, and decency. In the end, I hope that this progression opens the horizon for more relevant theological possibilities that can contribute to the CMT Guatemala network and the international network of the UTC.

The current chapter will explore what contextual theologising is and the importance of a clear understanding of possible methodologies. Then, it will focus on space as a meta-philosophical category that enriches contextual theology. The interdisciplinary theological dialogue will then transition into chapter seven, moving into the study of the city as a space that needs to be redefined and explored in a way that helps grassroots leaders to develop relevant faith practices in relation to the forces of globalisation. Finally, chapter eight will explore the hermeneutic needed to “see paradise in the dust of the street”. It will also explore the act of indecent contextual theologising as a tool to criticise hegemonic theological constructions and to visualize a new horizon of urban theological possibilities.

6.2 Defining Contextual Theology

In the process of finding a practical theology of peacebuilding that responds to the Guatemalan collective woundedness, the theologian remembers that practical theology is also about emancipation and liberation (Müller, 2004). With that perspective, the path that I follow uses the liberation theology paradigm in connection to Girard’s non-sacrificial perspectives. In order to define contextual theology as a liberating practice, this portion of the chapter will enter into dialogue with Stephen B. Bevans, who has proposed specific definitions of contextual theology. First, there will be a brief analysis of what I consider one of the greatest challenges that contextual theology faces in contemporary postmodern society. Secondly, this part will explore Bevans’ *Models of Contextual Theology* to better frame the grassroots theologising process. Finally, the models presented by Bevans will be tested against the experience of the leaders of the CMT network to see what model serves better as a contextual framework.

6.2.1 The Challenge of Contextual Theology

The challenge in entering the joy of contextual theologising lies within its own contextuality in the midst of language as a postmodern epistemological, methodological, and ontological point of departure. Manuel Mejido Costoya (2006) posits that the postmodern reality has created an unnecessary dualism between liberation and language within the United States context that is generating the eclipse of liberation as historic-practical category. It creates a false choice between liberation and language. The choice for practical theologians of liberation in and outside of Latin America, especially connected to the United States context, is quite difficult. Should one have to choose between liberation as a historical praxis or language as the house of being and emancipation? However, if a poststructuralist and postfoundational perspective is taken, there could be a positive bias towards “theologies that give pride of place to the problem of exclusion and capitalism” (Mejido Costoya, 2006: 276–77).

Liberation theologies are succumbing under the postmodern style of thought as they have been reduced to a way of expressing the process of liberation through the naturalization of global liberal-democratic capitalism. The problematisation presented by Mejido Costoya goes beyond language within its postmodern understanding. Postmodernism is not just a cultural face or a period in time. Postmodernism is an attitude (Van Huyssteen, 1998: 5). Consequently, the postmodern turn undermines the relevance of socio-historical emancipation because the implementation of liberation theology’s project is still understood as the application of real socialism. This is especially true in Latin America as the failed 21st century socialist dictatorships have solidified a rejection to anything that speaks about emancipation, social justice, oppression, and so on. Liberation theology fell prey to the historical-hermeneutical reductionism of “the poor” as a human category by not transgressing the established concepts of decency in religion and theology.

Furthermore, liberation theology did not expand beyond the Marxist historical methodology thus fetishising the poor. “The poor” became an abstraction in the midst of the institution of language, creating a theological praxis that devolved into mere jargon. As a result, liberation theology was reduced to the historical praxis of socialism alongside many other lines of thought within western Marxism. For that reason, a contextual practical theology of liberation needs to take language beyond its historic-hermeneutical understanding to a poststructuralist and postfoundational psychoanalytical conception of language in order to free it and provide “linguistified correctives” to Latin American liberation theologies (Mejido Costoya, 2006: 277–79). It is important, however, to mention that this is not the case of all liberation theologies. There are many practical liberation theologians who have moved beyond jargon and are proposing innovative ways of theologising. I will take the time to explore a few of them in the chapters to follow.

I agree with the arguments presented by Mejido Costoya (2006) as he follows the space opened by Žižek’s reworking of Lacanian psychoanalysis. The proposal opens the space to rectify the pathological state of Latin American reality in relation to the neo-colonial power of the United States. The theological and practical concern, therefore, needs to be with the creative transformation of the Latin American local material-economic realities in relation to the Hispanic reality in the United States as migration sets the context for this experience. Mejido Costoya (2006) opens a door for the collaboration between Latin American and US based Hispanic practical theologians of liberation as both are still oppressed and depend on the Anglo-American intellectual and economic capital. As a result, the challenge of contextual theology is to not fall prey of the historic-hermeneutical interpretation of its own reality, but to open a third way between postmodern thought and the liberation/emancipation project. Consequently, there is a constant need that arises for a postfoundational inter-contextual way of theologising that creates linguistic

and symbolic paths between seemingly different contexts. Contextual theology's focus should be on theologising through finding the similarities between contexts to break with the postmodern notion of alterity and the plurality of particulars. For that reason, through this dissertation I have taken and applied the understanding of the interlocking structures of oppression proposed by Eleazar Fernandez (2004). Fernandez's approach gives a poststructuralist perspective to the inter-contextual pathology of oppression through interlocking structures that affect the psychological and material reality of those who live at the margins of society. Following that line of thought, the collective woundedness of Guatemala City is not exclusive in its historicity, nor reduced in its contextuality. It is carefully articulated in a way that allows the different representations of the collective woundedness to be general categories that can be applied to other contexts without falling into a historic-hermeneutical reductionism.

The challenge that contextual theology faces is not only at the philosophic-contextual level, but also at the personal level of those involved in theological articulation. In chapter three I mentioned the engagement of the practical theologian of liberation. For that reason, I will not expand the conversation much here. However, one must remember that the role of the traditional professional theologians is still part of contemporary theological sub-cultures. There is a specific task given to professional theologians, which in many cases is disconnected from reality. The challenge is that the trained practical theologian of liberation understands that his or her role is to articulate in a concrete fashion what people express in general, sometimes vague, terms. The task is to create access to the wealth of Christian tradition that has been reserved for a specific theological elite. In addition, the mission of the practical theologian of liberation is to challenge people to expand their theological horizons through presenting people the whole of Christian theological expression (Bevans, 1992: 18). As a result, the practical theologian of liberation

confronts and resists the hegemonic powers within different theological traditions and institutions through engaging popular religiosity and theology.

6.2.2 Bevans' Models of Contextual Theology

It is my perception that Stephen B. Bevans' *Models of Contextual Theology* is an important reference for all who want to engage in the joy of contextual theologising. His approach to map the different possible models to use in the process of doing theology creates a helpful set of tools to interpret ways of theological engagement with the context. Besides, Bevans reminds the readers that, more often than not, the understanding of western and northern liturgical and theological categories make no sense in other cultural contexts (Bevans, 1992: xix). With that said, I want to embark in the exploration of Bevans ideas and test them against the Guatemalan context to see if there is a model that can frame grassroots theologising and articulate a practical theology of peacebuilding that responds to the Guatemalan collective woundedness. This is done because models, whether static or dynamic, are developed within specific cultures for particular reasons. As a result, the models ought to be interpreted within the culture they were designed for and then be evaluated for cross-cultural potential (Kraft, 1979: 33). In that process, the models presented by Bevans will be tested against experience of everyday life of Guatemalan grassroots and other theologians who can expand, challenge, or enhance the ideas presented by Bevans.

The Importance of Contextual Theology

For theology to be truly liberating and joy-full, it is important that one acknowledges that all theology is contextual. There is no pure theology; there is only contextual theology (Bevans, 1992: 3). In recognizing this, the practical theologian of liberation can access the context in a way that avoids historic-hermeneutical reductionisms that silence other religious and theological

experiences. One ought to understand that there is not another option outside of contextual theology. The exploration and attempts to understand any theological and religious experience within a specific context are a theological imperative (Ibid.).

Context is one of the most important elements in the theologising process. It is a highly important part of the hermeneutical methodology. The context can be an element to be interpreted in the light of Scriptures, like it is for the liberation theology (Boff & Boff, 1987: 34), or it can be a lens to interpret Scriptures as the starting point of imposed closed knowledge through the positing of religious experience as an unmediated and unique dimension of experience (Van Huyssteen, 1999: 62). The first attitude is a constructivist approach that uses the reading of the Bible and theological tradition to make sense of and respond to contemporary society. The latter methodology strives to find the meaning intended for the original recipients of the text and then find what is applicable to current events. The latter one comes with a positivistic perspective that does not allow the problematisation of the current nor the scriptural context (Baltodano, 2013: 401).

Contextual theologising goes beyond the social, cultural, and economic context in scripture or contemporary society. It is the recognition of the legitimacy of a different source of theology present in the human experience at an individual and communal level. Bevans (1992) posits that truly contextual theology recognises that culture, history, contemporary and ancestral thought forms, and so forth are valid sources for theological articulation. For that reason, it is a necessity to engage all possible linguistified correctives for a practical theology of liberation from a post-foundational perspective.

The third way of post-foundationalism is of great help in this process. On one hand, one can see the objectivism of foundationalism represented by the literalist approach to the

interpretation of Scripture, which evolves into undisputable methodology, doctrine, and dogma. Thereby, it turns into imposed static knowledge that transforms biblical interpretations into moral imperatives. On the other hand, there is a total relativization of the contextual experience, which creates the challenges explored above. For this reason, Charles Kraft (1979: 33) made a distinction between the biblical data as “the primary subject-matter” for theological analysis and articulation and “theological perspectives,” which are always an interpretation of the Biblical data. Consequently, Kraft proposed that inspiration does not necessarily extend to extra-scriptural interpretative perspective. A post-foundational approach will fully recognize the contextuality and rootedness of theology in human culture, affirm the epistemic implications of interpreted experience and tradition, point beyond the locality of such experience to engage in interdisciplinary and inter-contextual dialogue, and take into account the biology behind human rationality (Van Huyssteen, 1998: 23–24), which, in the case of this dissertation, takes mimetic theory as part of human evolution and the development of religious rationality.

According to Bevans (1992), there are several reasons that make contextual theology an imperative in the midst of the contemporary *glocal* experience. One can see a set of external factors that push for a contextual articulation of theological knowledge. Firstly, traditional theological assumptions are not always in accord with local non-western cultures. Secondly, traditional theological methodologies are seen as oppressive. Finally, the growth of so many different expressions of Christianity is demanding the development of truly contextual theologies. These elements are the result of the Global South realising and becoming convinced that traditional European and North American theological categories do not make complete sense for the local epistemologies (Bevans, 1992: 10–11). Theological articulation in Guatemala, Latin America, and other countries and regions of the Global South results from colonialism fostering a feeling that

anything that is good came from the colonial powers. Consequently, all things produced in the colonies was deemed as poor quality and an imitation of original thought (Bevans, 1992; Fanon, 1952; Santos, 2014). However, there is also a set of internal factors that create the necessity for contextual theologising. These factors are internal because they are born out of the history of Christian theological development. Firstly, Bevans argues that the incarnational nature of Christianity shows the contextualisation of Godself to communicate God's love with men and women in a specific context. Secondly, the sacramentality of the incarnation posits that God is revealed primarily through the concreteness of reality, not through the ethereality of ideas and concepts. Finally, revelation is also conceived in the process of God offering Godself to humanity by means of concrete actions and symbols in history. Thereby, faith is a personal response to that revelation in a specific context (Bevans, 1992: 12–13).

In the process of theologising contextually, the clearer choice is to enter from a constructivist perspective, which ends up moving into a post-foundational search of theological knowledges. This will allow for a rupture in the theologising process when facing positivistic static imposed theological knowledges dominated by North-Atlantic theological categories. Sara Baltodano (2013) has proposed a series of six ruptures that take place in the process of contextual practical theological hermeneutics. The first rupture moves those engaged in the theological praxis from imposed closed knowledge to the knowledge that is built through the criticism of the established status quo. The second rupture takes the practical theologian of liberation from a research that starts from theory to a construction of communal knowledge that begins with practice (Baltodano, 2013: 402). This shift does not deny the theoretical elements that come with a practical theology of liberation. It just assures that everyday life is considered in the process of critically evaluating theological articulations of knowledge. For that reason, it is of utmost importance that

the practical theologian of liberation does not understand contextual theology as a method. It is a cycle that moves from theory to practice and vice versa. It is not something static. It is a dynamic process that constantly changes one's theology and reading of The Bible (West, 2011: 432).

With the third rupture, a practical theology of liberation will take in participation the majorities who suffer in order to construct an existential truth that acknowledges their psychological and material condition. The fourth and fifth ruptures allow for a different kind of interaction with those involved in the theologising process. Those who have been referred to as objects of theological study become coresearchers, subjects, and agents of transformation in the process, while their voices become part of the liberating cry that breaks the hierarchical, patriarchal, analytical, reductionist, and ethnocentric voice that has dominated the theological discourse so far (Baltodano, 2013: 403). Finally, the last rupture happens between a knowledge that is acritical, neutral and distant, and a knowledge that is committed and transformational. The latter one is biased towards the practice of solidarity with those who are at the margins of society. It develops a transformational action that evolves into an epistemology that allows one to see not only what is but also what is not, while simultaneously orienting reality to what it should be (Baltodano, 2013: 404).

In the course of rupturing and departing from positivist ways of doing theology, it is important to not discard all theological knowledge from the past. One can always learn from others. This learning can be diachronically experienced, which includes all the traditional sources of theology such as church doctrine, Christian creeds, and so forth. It can also be done synchronically, which implies learning from other contemporary cultural and religious experiences, even though somebody else's theology cannot be one's own theology. Contextual theology has to be up to date and relevant to the contemporaneity of a particular context (Bevans, 1992; Kraft, 1979). For

theology to move beyond tradition, it must go through the process of appropriation to be made one's own. For that to happen, the tradition that has been passed down has to go through the filters of communal contemporary experience (Bevans, 1992: 5).

These breaks from a positivist theology are of utmost important to develop a practical theology of liberation. Even more so, these separations need to take place to develop a practical theology of peacebuilding that responds to the Guatemalan collective woundedness in a way that can be reinterpreted for the benefit of other contexts around the world. These breaks begin the transition from a foundational theological perspective to a post-foundational theological paradigm. As a result, the quest for religious unambiguousness will not only allow for the search of the ultimate meaning of human life, but also will connect the theological quest for understanding to the more general pursuit for comprehending the world rationally (Van Huyssteen, 1999: 96).

Exploration of the Models of Contextual Theology

Bevans (1992) presents six models of contextual theologising that can be used to frame theological articulation. In this process, Bevans also presents challenges and issues within contextual theologising that can become a hindrance for the practical theologian of liberation. I have already mentioned what I consider the biggest challenges for contextual practical theology of liberation in contemporary society. For that reason, I will not enter into the issues of contextual theology presented by Bevans. In the paragraphs that follow I will summarize each model of contextual theology. At the end, I will attempt to frame the grassroots theologising process researched in this dissertation within a combination of the models present by Bevans.

The use of models for Bevans (1992) is quite specific. It follows a similar articulation to the cultural models presented by Kraft (1979), which represent practical ways that culture expresses its operational aspects. Consequently, the models of contextual theology are more at the

operational level than the metaphorical level. This approach uses an inclusive and descriptive type of modelling, hence creating a practical use of the models presented. As a result, Bevans introduces his readers to different ways of theologising that take the specificity of a particular context seriously. Thereby, each model signifies a precise theological starting point and different sets of presuppositions (Bevans, 1992: 31). Nevertheless, Bevans understands that the particularity of each model does not limit its use in combination with other models. The principle behind the models is: if one's faith is authentic; "one can express it and articulate it authentically in a contextual manner" (Bevans, 1992: 32). It is with this understanding of the models of contextual theology that one can explore the authenticity of one's faith and the theological articulation of grassroots leaders.

The Translation Model

The first model presented by Bevans is the translation model. This model seems to be the oldest one in use by the Christian tradition (Bevans, 1992: 37). It is found within the witness of the biblical narrative. One can find examples of this approach in the apostle Paul's preaching and the way he entered different contexts in his Christian expansion journeys. In the process of translating doctrinal and theological principles, one could argue that all the models presented by Bevans have an element of the translation model. There is always a principle, faith practice, or theological concept that needs to be translated not only into a new language, but also into a new cultural code. As a result, one of the strongest assumptions within this model is that the message of the gospel is unchanging. Thereby, tradition is not a way of communicating the message, but a way of being faithful to the message. Christianity's message is seen as "supracultural" or "supracontextual", thus the gospel has an unchangeable core that needs to be translated into every context. In addition, the implications of understanding the message of the Gospel in static way lead to one of the most

important convictions of this model. All cultures have the same basic structure. There are, however, expressions and modes of behaviour that happen to be specific to each culture (Bevans, 1992: 37–42).

This model benefits those who engage it as it takes the Christian message seriously, recognises cultural ambiguity, and can be used by cultural participants and foreigners. The translation model, however, has two common pitfalls among those who engage in it. One is the naïve understanding of culture and the gospel. This creates a narrow perspective that can fall into historic-hermeneutical reductionisms if one is not careful. Secondly, it has a propositional notion of revelation, which falls into incomplete understandings of scripture and move interpretative data into the category of inspired revelation (Bevans, 1992: 44).

The Anthropological Model

In the translation model, the main purpose is to keep Christian identity amid any context. In the case of the anthropological model, the main concern is to preserve cultural identity by a person of Christian faith (Bevans, 1992: 54). In other words, the ultimate purpose is to make sure that a person keeps his or her cultural identity intact when becoming a Christian. For Bevans, this model is anthropological in two senses. Firstly, it is centred on the value of the human person. Thereby, human experience is an extremely appreciated source for theological articulation. Humanity is limited and yet realised within cultural, societal, geographical, and historical circumstances. Secondly, it is anthropological because it uses the tools provided by anthropology and other social sciences (Bevans, 1992: 55).

In this model, the role of the theologian falls into the category of facilitation. The function of the theologian is to help people articulate what people already practice and present them with the vast knowledge of Christian tradition. In a way, the theologian becomes a “midwife” in the

birthing process of local ways of theologising. This model requires that the theologian is a full participant of the culture that he or she is trying to facilitate theological articulation for (Bevans, 1992: 58). The strength of the anthropological model lies in its high regard for human reality in its contextual situatedness. However, the danger that many participants tend to fall into is in romanticising the local culture. Theologians are prone to forget that cultures are not static and that globalisation, colonialism, and other forces constantly change local cultures (Bevans, 1992: 61).

The Praxis Model

In this model, the focus is primarily on the identity of Christians within a particular context. The context is understood in light of its possibilities for social change. Other models are more focused on the theological articulation of the religious experience, while the praxis model is dedicated to the practical elements that come into the process of reflection. When talking about the praxis model, one speaks of a model in which theology is done not only by providing relevant expressions of Christian faith, but also by a deep commitment to Christian action. (Bevans, 1992: 72). In this process, a key assumption of this model is that the highest level of knowledge is intentional, intelligent, and genuine responsible doing. As a result, participants who commit to this kind of theologising reject irrelevant academic theology that seems separated from action. Consequently, this model takes a radical epistemological break which favours a commitment to first act, then critically reflect and discern in the midst of the realities of the Global South (Bevans, 1992: 73). These realities are seen through the lens of revelation understood as the presence of God in history. God is present in the experience of the poor and the marginalised, social and economic structures, and also in the midst of oppression and violence (Bevans, 1992: 75). Although this model relies heavily on praxis as the starting point of theological reflection, it does not reject nor downplay the

theoretical elements that accompany such practical engagement. Theory is constantly tested against praxis and the reality of everyday life.

Some practitioners of this model fall into the trap of articulating theoretical frameworks inadequately in the process of their practical engagement. In addition, there is a heavy historical critique as this model has been associated with Marxism. In all fairness to its critics, Latin American liberation theology did rely heavily on Marxist practical engagement, which resulted into the reductionist interpretation of liberation as real socialism. Nevertheless, doing theology as a critical reflection on everyday Christian practices turns theology into a powerful expression of Christianity (Bevans, 1992: 77).

The Synthetic Model

In Bevan's models of contextual theology, one can see a spectrum from relying heavily on experience of the present to the models that relying more intensely in experience from the past. The first three models so far—the translation, anthropological, and praxis models—are in different positions of this progression, with the anthropological and praxis models relying more on experience from the present. The translation model, however, relies on the experience from the past and theological tradition to define what Christian expression is. In the case of the synthetic model, one finds a framework that sits more centred on the scale of Christian experience. In a way, the synthetic model attempts to balance the views and perspectives of the models explored so far and the models to come.

The synthetic model tries to preserve the essence of the gospel and the theological and doctrinal articulations while simultaneously recognising that the context plays a vital role in the process of doing theology. As a result, this model also takes into account the practical implications for contextual action through a theological articulation that does not ignore the possibilities and

importance of social and cultural change (Bevans, 1992: 89). Revelation is seen as propositional and content oriented, as a personal presence, and as the action of God in history. This opens the door for dialogue as this model's strongest perspective. The openness to dialogue, however, comes with harsh criticisms as it may seem that those who engage in the synthetic model of contextual theology are in danger of "selling out" their theological convictions (Bevans, 1992: 95).

The Transcendental Model

The transcendental model can be considered a paradigm shifting model. It requires a theological commitment on the side of the theologian to enter into an authentic theological articulation. One could argue that this model is a constructivist and inductive contextual methodology for theological articulation. This model understands the task of building a contextualised theology as attending to the affective and cognitive processes of the self-transcending subject (Bevans, 1992: 103). This model proposes an existential transcendental approach to theological articulation. In this theological process, the theologian sees him or herself as involved in the process of determining reality. As a result, one must enter the theologising process by focussing on one's own consciousness and desire to know. According to those who engage in this model objectivity is achieved by "attaining authentic subjectivity" (Bevans, 1992: 104).

The starting point of this model is not focused on the attempts to articulate or thematise theological articulation in a particular context. It is focused in the understanding and existential engagement with one's religious experience within a specific context. This approach comes from the realisation that one's experience is constantly formed and transformed by the context where one experiences everyday life. As a result, this model has a positive and negative side. On the one hand one can see that theology is a contextual activity. On the negative side, one could argue that such a methodology can be quite abstract, thereby, too ideal to be practical (Bevans, 1992: 109)

The Countercultural Model

The countercultural model starts with the perspective that the gospel is offensive to culture. The offense is not based on a disrespectful approach to the local culture or because it deems a culture completely corrupt. It clashes because the liberating power of the gospel calls to judgement a particular element of a culture within specific historical and social locations. The gospel is understood as a purifying element within the specificity of a culture. This view of the gospel will call for a radical transformation through questioning the understandings within a cultural local language as some contexts are antithetical to the gospel. The assumption is that the gospel's liberating power will challenge the context through calling out the elements that are contrary to the gospel's message (Bevans, 1992: 117–18; Newbigin, 1986: 6). Interestingly, this methodology has been very used by theologians who go back to western North Atlantic contexts and realize the lack of relevance Christianity has in such contexts. This is the result of understanding the context as ambiguous and resistant to the gospel's message (Bevans, 1992: 117). This model has a strong engagement of the context and a strong faithfulness to the story of the gospel. The flipside is that it can come across as anticultural and divisive. In addition, it can lead to sectarianism and exclusivism within certain Christian traditions (Bevans, 1992: 126).

Bevan's Approach

The models explored above introduce the reader to a plethora of possibilities for theological contextual engagement. One cannot help but wonder if there is such a thing as the right model to follow. In the process of outlining the different models, Bevans makes sure that the reader does not oversimplify the particularities of each model. Each one of the models could be valid within the specificity of a context. This is the result of contextualisation in and of itself. The beauty and

joy of contextual theologising is that no model can claim hegemony over the processes of contextual theology. In addition, the models are inclusive in nature, which means that elements of different models can come together to better serve a specific context for different authentic theological articulations (Bevans, 1992: 139).

I agree with Bevans in the inclusivity of the different models. For that reason, the testing of the models is done against the Guatemalan context and in response to the Guatemalan collective woundedness. This is done reflecting on the nature of my involvement in the theologising process and the place grassroots leaders inhabit within the communities they serve. As I mentioned in chapter five, the leaders either belong to the communities where they serve, or they are Guatemalans who underwent an incarnational journey into the experience of those who live, laugh, and love from below.

6.2.3 A Guatemalan Grassroots Model of Contextual Theology

One aspect that became clear during the analysis of the interviews of the leaders of the CMT network is that the leaders' theology comes from a conservative evangelical background (Herrera, Personal Communication, 3 March 2018). This implies that their way of doing theology has been marked not only by the religious representation of the Guatemalan collective woundedness, but also by ways of theologising that equate salvation to the euro-American way of life (Kraft, 1979). This is the result of the hidden or not-so-hidden mentality of colonialism "and the narrowness of theology and missionary vision in the past" (Bevans, 1992: 25). The old paradigm of mission and theology ignored much of the richness within Guatemalan thought processes. Nowadays one can make use of decolonial theory in seeking to honour epistemologies that have been omitted for a long time. Bevans posits that in contemporary contextual theologising the national identity of former colonies is becoming stronger; therefore, the comprehension of theological cultural

situatedness is emerging more clearly. Cultural and national identity are becoming the prime locus for the construction of contextual theological articulations (Ibid.).

This turn in the theological locus is a beautiful transition that allows a valid local way of doing theology, but the practical theologian of liberation cannot fall into romanticising a culture that does not exist anymore, “a culture that did exist before colonisation but that after colonisation and contact with the western world does not exist except in some people’s romantic fantasies” (Bevans, 1992: 25). In the case of Guatemala, very much like the rest of Latin America, it is imperative that the theological situatedness considers two elements I deem important and interdependent. Firstly, the CMT network must consider the concept of *Nuestra America* (Santos, 2014: 51), which I believe is an attempt to not romanticise Latin American pre-colonial nor neo-colonial cultures. Secondly, *Nuestra America* should take the CMT network to consider the use of theological methodologies born in the global south, such as *Lectura Popular de la Biblia* (Popular reading of the bible), which was born in South America, and the Contextual Bible Study, which was born in South Africa through the influence and crosspollination of *Lectura Popular*.

Nuestra America (Our America) and Contextual Theology

Nuestra America is not an easy concept to grapple with. This concept was coined by the Mexican intellectual José Martí (1891). It involves a plethora of nuances that creates a very specific epistemological point of departure, not only for theology, but also for politics, economics, social engagement, and development. Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014) proposes five principles that make of *Nuestra America* an important concept to consider when entering the joy of contextual theologising. First, *Nuestra America* is in contraposition with European America. This implies that America is the violent crossing of cultures and societies that end up creating racist structures. This America, however, has the capacity to dig deep to its own roots and to identify the kinds of

knowledge that are adequate for its reality, knowledge that is not imposed nor imported (Santos, 2014: 52). The theological contraposition of European and indigenous religious experiences is of utmost importance to develop a contextual theology that does not silence other voices for the sake of elevating specific theological articulations. *Nuestra America* does not allow one to deny the violent history of the continent when theologising. The violent saga of the Americas must be considered to theologise from a Guatemalan perspective and develop a practical theology of peacebuilding that responds to the Guatemalan collective woundedness that is inter-contextual. Secondly, *Nuestra America* makes both, the local context and the world, richer through the complexity of its mixed roots, thus creating a more nuanced and new form of universalism from below (Ibid.). This universalism from below will allow for a *glocal* response to the challenges presented by globalisation, postmodernism, and global sacrificial theology. *Nuestra America* can provide some of the linguistified correctives needed for a contextual theology that does not fall into historic-hermeneutical reductionisms.

Thirdly, *Nuestra America* “has to endow itself with genuine knowledge” (Santos, 2014: 53). This implies that the practical theologian of liberation must build theological knowledge that is rooted in the hopes and desires of the oppressed. The epistemic component embedded in this concept demands a continuous search for identity, behaviour and engagement in public life (De Beer, 2015; Boff & Boff, 1987; Meylahn, 2015; Santos, 2014). As a result, one must find and articulate about and from the specific realities of the continent, instead of importing foreign ideas that can keep up the boundaries of decency within North-Atlantic theologies. Fourthly, *Nuestra America* is a savage America that stands tall and defiant against the local intellectual and political elites that take the United States and Europe as models to be imitated, but look down on their own countries with “ethnocentric blinders” that deem their own peoples as ignorant and barbaric

(Santos, 2014: 54). Finally, the last basic idea of *Nuestra America* is that its political thinking is continentally strengthened by an anticolonial and anti-imperial stance (Ibid.). This implies that doubt is intrinsically connected to both, the theological and political methodologies. There needs to be a degree of distrust to everything that comes from North-Atlantic theologies that have been created to preserve a specific structures and ways of life.

It would be naïve to believe that *Nuestra America* as a continental concept is or was an achieved ideal at any point in history. It was very limited in its conception and execution. There are various factors that did not allow for the fulfilment of *Nuestra America*, including but not limited to the unexplored ideas of *mestizaje*,³¹ the neo-colonial capitalist influence of the United States, and the failure of all the workers around the world against capital (Santos, 2014: 64–66). Nevertheless, the principles presented above can be a useful filter to develop a practical theology of peacebuilding that responds to the Guatemalan collective woundedness. The practical theologian of liberation can use the principles distilled by Santos and test if his or her theologising is liberating or oppressive and also if its methodology is assisting liberation or encouraging oppression (Sobrino, 1994).

If *Nuestra America* is an element of *nuestra teología* (our theology), one can argue that theology is undergoing a contextualisation process. The problem lies in the reality that many people do not have access to the writings of José Martí (1891) or Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014). However, people have more access to northern positivist theologies through social media.

³¹ According to Oxforddictionaries.com *mestizaje* is “Interbreeding and cultural intermixing of Spanish and American Indian people (originally in Mexico, and subsequently also in other parts of Latin America); miscegenation, racial and cultural intermixing.”

Liberative Methodologies from the Global South: lectura popular de La Biblia and contextual Bible study

The second element the CMT network ought to consider is the liberative hermeneutical and theological approaches that were born in the Global South. There are two contextual hermeneutical and theological methodologies that require the attention and use of those working with marginalised communities, *Lectura Popular de la Biblia*, born in South America, and The Contextual Bible Study, developed in South Africa. These ways of practical engagement with The Bible and theology come from a common tree, sprouting liberating fruits across different contexts. Both make use of the praxis cycle, *see-judge-act*, proposed by Father Cardjin in Belgium after the two World Wars. This constant progression of practical engagement with the context and The Bible created a transformed way of understanding and seeing God's revealing action among God's people in history (Orofino & Mesters, 2007: 18).

The praxis cycle present in the *Lectura Popular* and Contextual Bible Study starts with *seeing* as the process of seeing the reality of a people with all its good, bad, and ugly adventures and misadventures. This is done even before getting into what God did and spoke in the past, which is revealed in Scripture (Orofino & Mesters, 2007). *Seeing* happens through the process of interrogation of a specific marginalised context. Only after this contextual questioning happens does the current reality dialogue with the prophetic resources found in Scripture (West, 2014: 7). The prophetic texts serve as a sounding board to judge the current reality of a people. Consequently, God's word comes out not only from The Bible, but also from the contextual circumstances that now are illuminated by the witness of Scripture (Orofino & Mesters, 2007: 18; West, 2014: 2). As a result, the historic-contextual circumstances become the conveyer of God's

Word and calling, which help a specific community to find new ways to *act* that are relevant to the context and its social issues (Orofino & Mesters, 2007).

Lectura Popular stayed within the limits of the earlier praxis cycle and developed a network of communities that became known as Ecclesial Based Communities (CEBs by its initials in Spanish and Portuguese) (Orofino & Mesters, 2007). However, the South African sibling of this movement, the Contextual Bible Study, further developed five values that deepened the contextual application of the praxis cycle. These values are community, criticality, collaboration, change, and context (West, 2015: 238). Each one of these values has its own conceptual depth. For that reason, I just mentioned them as an important part of the South African contextual theological development.

These liberative methodologies are dialogical in nature. Both *Lectura Popular* and the South African Contextual Bible Study allow for the interaction between the contemporary context and the biblical context. They also foster the interaction between conventional people and scholars (West, 2014: 2). Thereby, *Lectura Popular* and the Contextual Bible Study favour specific geographical, spatial, and epistemological places. They give primacy to the places and people that are marked by poverty, stricken by violence, and marginalised from the mainstream (West, 2014: 3). Consequently, these liberative methodologies serve people in their context. *Lectura Popular* and Contextual Bible Study paved the way for the poor and oppressed to read the Bible with the only criteria they have available, their experience of oppression. Therefore, even though I have named these ways of practical engagement with the Biblical text as “methods”, it is important that one understands that these are not fixed processes. They are a process that is done through constant action, reflection, and discernment. In the words of West (2011: 432): “Method is not something fixed but something that is ‘done’ as a part of a process of action and reflection, as one moves

from practice to theory, and then from theory to practice, and then from practice to theory in an endless cycle of prax[i]s.”

I understand that this is a brief exploration of two liberative methodologies that have come out from the Global South. This examination does not do justice to the wealth of knowledge in these interpretative traditions. They rupture the traditional, theistic, and colonial way of doing theology that has the professional theologians as the infallible interpreters of scripture. The Contextual Bible Study and *Lectura Popular de la Biblia* create a space that is produced and controlled by those who have been marked by poverty, marginalisation, and violence. In creating such a space, the door opens for the search of communal knowledge that springs out of the lived experience of the poor and oppressed. Consequently, this hermeneutical and analytical process creates new communal, shared, and contextually relevant languages that respond to the collective woundedness of a particular context (West, 2014: 4).

Framing the Contextual Theology of the CMT Network

After the exploration of *Nuestra America* and two Global South born liberative hermeneutical and theological methods, I want to frame the process of grassroots theologising by distilling the elements from CMT’s network contextual theology that may resonate with the principles, models, and methodologies presented above. The point of departure of Part One of this dissertation was to explore afflictive and beautiful faith practices of Guatemalan grassroots leaders. The theory-laden practices that were presented in chapter five are the result of tested experience in working with marginalised communities in Guatemala City. As a result, I articulated two faith practices that allowed for a theological exploration and the expansion of possibilities for the search of practical theology of peacebuilding. The first faith practice was exclusion. The second one, which I will focus on here, was the beautiful faith practice of anthropological reimagining.

Anthropological reimagining is a theological-practical process that employs a contextual way of theological articulation. In this process, I would like to present three elements that distil from this contextual act of theology that will test the models presented above and frame the act grassroots theologising within its own contextual situatedness. Firstly, anthropological reimagining is an act of practical engagement. It is not through the reading of the Bible or the approach to theoretical frameworks that the leaders of the CMT Guatemala network are able to encounter the humanity of the people they serve, but it is through a process that starts with action, continues with reflection, and re-starts with discernment. A good example is the previously quoted statement of a pastor who now works with the homeless population in Guatemala City: “It was a process [referring to working with homeless people], we changed fear to see them as humans. We learned through sharing meals with them. We earned their trust little by little” (Personal Communication, June 23, 2017). It is in the process of sharing the most mundane experiences that leaders come to engage their faith practices from a theological perspective that tests their tradition, theology, and doctrine, while simultaneously pushing the boundaries of decency and purity. This resonates with a theology that is born out of the desires and hopes of the oppressed, hence taking not only the Guatemalan reality, but also the Latin American reality into consideration.

Secondly, anthropological reimagining takes the countercultural aspects of the gospel seriously. Evangelical protestant theology is based on purity, decency, and cleanliness as metaphors of exclusion. This comes from the imperial and colonial mindsets that needed to create distinctions between people to preserve the *status quo*. These metaphors will be explored with more specificity in chapter eight. However, even without exploring the concepts of purity, decency and cleanliness in depth, one can see the actions that confronted the purity based sacrificial structures in the gospels’ narrative. Jesus engaged in his countercultural actions through the

challenging of religious exclusionary institutions. One could argue that Jesus engaged in the act of anthropological reimagining (Matthew 12). Even more so, his disciples were transformed in the process of anthropological reimagining as in the cases of Paul and Peter (Acts 9, 10, 22). I would like to argue that this beautiful faith practice expressed by the leaders of the CMT Guatemala network is intrinsically and counterculturally connected to the core of the gospel. As a result, there is a growing scepticism against northern theologies that focus on keeping up the boundaries of purity and decency.

Finally, there is a transcendental element in the act of anthropological reimagining. I am engaging in both mine and the grassroots leaders' cognitive processes. Grassroots leaders have taught me to explore my inner being, to explore my own boundaries of purity, decency, and cleanliness. As a result, I can engage in a theological articulation that focuses on my religious experience within the context of the CMT Guatemala network, which is influenced by the social, historical, and cultural context that surrounds me. This resonates with the search for genuine knowledge as we search to communally consider the realities of other Latin American countries as well.

With this in mind, I dare to frame the CMT Guatemala network's leaders' model of contextual theology as a combination of the praxis and countercultural models. Interestingly, the countercultural elements are stronger regarding the way grassroots leaders understand biblical revelation. There is a great emphasis on the "fact" of Jesus and the way he challenged religious structures. Grassroots leaders have found that in many cases their faith tradition does not respond properly to the challenges they find on the streets and communities they serve. During the focus group one of the leaders said: "We had really difficult conflicts with the congregation where we used to work. We did not find the support we needed. Through that, we learned that God was out

on the street. We won't work with the Church (institutional) unless God changes it" (Focus group personal communication, September 8, 2018). As a result, anthropological reimagining challenges the boundaries set by both, the church and Guatemalan society. In addition, the leaders of the network have overcome their personal, cultural, and religious boundaries to serve the communities they now belong to. In going through the interviewing process, one can see that the leaders who responded to the interviews underwent transformational process that transgressed the boundaries they kept. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the leaders arrived at the boundary breaking understanding of Jesus' practical engagement through reflecting on their own practical engagement and its consequences to discern how to better serve their communities.

The leaders' way of doing theology is not without fault. The grassroots practitioners of the CMT network also fall into the dangers described in both the praxis and countercultural models. Often, the leaders of the CMT Guatemala network lack the capacity to articulate their engagement theoretically, thus weakening their practical engagement when it needs to be justified and theologically articulated. They also fall into exclusivism as they are very prone to omit others who may disagree with them. Finally, in many cases, they have become anticultural towards the evangelical subculture of Guatemala City that many of them have left behind. The leaders of the CMT Guatemala network have their personal views regarding scripture, context, and ways of approaching both. They follow very similar lines of interpreting the text, a mixture of traditional evangelical theology with health and wealth prosperity gospel theology that was developed in the United States and expanded throughout Latin America.

The previous paragraphs were an attempt to frame the leaders' way of doing theology around Bevan's models of contextual theology. It is obvious that this approach has its limitations. I am conscious that the members of the network could disagree with what I have presented here.

However, this framing is helpful to find ways to challenge the leaders' theological perspectives and faith practices. After exploring and framing the CMT network's leaders' theology, I would like to suggest that grassroots leaders need to expand their way of doing theology considering other contextual elements that would allow them to engage beyond and break apart from exclusion as an afflictive faith practice. This includes a more conscious use of *Lectura Popular de la Biblia* and Contextual Bible Study. These liberative methodologies entail the creation of a space that allows for the liberation of those who have been marginalised. These methods ask for an understanding of *spatial* construction that challenges the structures that have shunned ways of knowing that may challenge the *status quo*. For that reason, I consider it important to explore *space* as a *meta-philosophical* category, since, spatial justice and engagement could open the door for grassroots leaders to empathize with the groups that they still exclude from their missional engagement as these groups also experience the urban from the *spatial experience* of being excluded.

6.3 Space as a Meta-philosophical Category to Enhance Contextual Theologising

At the beginning of this chapter I mentioned that one of the biggest challenges for contextual theology is the historic-hermeneutical reductionism of the emancipation project as the practice of real socialism (Mejido Costoya, 2006). This is the result of postmodernism and the development of the idea of democratic capitalism and its expansion through the constructions of language as an ontological, methodological, and epistemological point of departure. The deconstruction that postmodern thought brought into the modern worldview melted the social institutions that had been held with utmost regard. As the liquid sociologist announced, a time has arrived where the understanding of social action happens amid a world, reality, and space that has been dismembered. "Abandon all hope of totality, future as well as past, you who enter the world of fluid modernity" (Bauman, 2000: 22).

More importantly, the categories in postmodern thought that liquified modern institutions are the catalysers for modern ways of social construction to embed themselves in the midst of alterity and the plurality of particulars. This is the birthplace for what I call postmodern conservatism. In my perspective, postmodern conservatism strives to preserve the elements of the modern project that benefit the political, social, and cultural elite that sprouted out of the imperial and colonial enterprises of the 15th century. Postmodern conservatism is a constant struggle to hold the power in the spaces that were constructed during the project of modernity, through the right use of language that is consistent with conservative moral framings (Lakoff, 2014). This can be seen in the contemporary construction of the state, which I believe is structured along the lines of what Marx (1966: 137) understood as the State to be, the tool the dominant class uses to have their interests prevail. In a way, postmodern conservatism is the very thing that the modern mentality wanted fight in postmodernism. The evolution of capitalism as the result of the modern enterprise now uses postmodern tools to legitimize the catastrophic consequences of consumerism and violence as the ethics of capitalism and the production of segregated social spaces.

In this world of language, which is still considered the house-of-being (Meylahn, 2014b; Zizek, 2008a), it is imperative that new conceptual categories come to the front in order to create the much needed linguistified correctives to articulate a practical theology of peacebuilding that responds to the Guatemalan collective woundedness. Even more so, if this endeavour is to be part of practical theology of liberation, it needs to consider ways of being and knowing that take contextuality beyond its historicity and sociality, beyond language. For that reason, one must enter the metaphilosophically charged world of space as a meta-philosophical category, for lack of a better word. In this process, the reader will see that *space* goes beyond its linguistic metaphysical content. It evolves into a way of being-in-the-world that that can be a place of resistance and

peacebuilding in response to a collective woundedness that results from a global sacrificial theology, whose tentacles reach into the spaces in which grassroots leaders inhabit and give meaning.

The realm of meta-philosophical thought opens the space as it points beyond philosophy and theology as a way of philosophising. It takes theological articulation and philosophical assumptions in the fullness of their possibilities and in the breadth of their limitations. This understanding of meta-philosophy comes from the articulations of Edward Soja (1996) and Henri Lefebvre (2013).³² For both authors, the preposition *meta* implies a transgression to the previous establishment, not necessarily the abolition of the institutions (Soja, 1996: 34). This allows for an honest conversation that is not limited by the blind allegiance to a specific philo-theological methodology. In Lefebvre's case, he made Marxism incomplete. In the case of the practical theologian of liberation, he or she should bring the knowledge of Christian tradition into its fullness and limitations. Borrowing words from Soja's (1996) articulation, a truly liberating theology is incomplete, endlessly explorable, resistant to resolution, but faithful to Jesus as the lens to interpret the Scriptures and the experience of everyday life.

6.3.1 The Spatial Turn

Rocke and Van Dyke (2012: 17) open the *Geography of Grace* book with a powerful statement, "When it comes to grace, geography matters." One needs to pay close attention to the geography where leaders serve and how it came to be. Grassroots leaders work and serve in specific locations of Guatemala City. They walk specific streets and give and find meaning in different localities of the urban environment. It is important to recognize the reality of their *spatial practice* as the meta-

³² The date of this book is for the Spanish version, which I deemed closer to the Lefebvre's articulation as Spanish shares a lot of its metaphysical construction with French as both are romance languages.

philosophical implications of such interactions are real and impact the way leaders practice their faith. Acknowledging *spatial practices* is imperative because contextual theology is mostly focused on how the Christian religious experience is expressed in the cultural and social spheres of a specific context, not necessarily considering *space* and how it came to be. In Latin America, the Christian experience is intrinsically connected to a message that was translated and imposed into a specific culture via the mode of colonisation, which ended up suppressing local religious experiences (Bevans, 1992), creating specific *spaces of representation*. As a result, Latin American Christianity fell prey to the historicism that was part of the process of critical theory's focus on history over geography in both western Marxism and liberal social science (Soja, 1989: 13).

This deterministic view of history omitted *space* as the place where history unfolded relegating *space* to a philosophical sub-category at best. Space was referred as an empty receptacle for history as a narration of human interactions (Lefebvre, 2013: 53). However, one needs to keep in mind that the stories that make history happen in specific geographies. They are not isolated from the reality of space and the specificity of geographical locations. Even though this is true, in the middle of the last century, most critical theorists put history as the main container of specific geographies (Soja, 1989: 14). In my opinion, this also happened in western theology. The historical literalist interpretation of scripture did not allow for the problematisation of spatial production within the biblical text nor the contemporary context.

The theological traditions that started in the United States and Europe impacted Latin American evangelical theological development. The progression of the middle of the 20th century religious thought shows that most of the theological locus was placed in the Word, through Barth, Brunner, and Cullman, to then move into the post-liberal perspectives of Reinhold and Richard

Niebuhr, the latter ones focusing more on the cultural elements of Christianity and contemporary society and the interactions in between the church and western culture (Macquarrie, 2002). This evolution created an emphasis that did not take space as a theological meta-philosophical category, resulting into the development of existentialist theologians that followed Heidegger and Jaspers' existential concern of being in the midst of time. Theologians like Bultmann, Gogarten, Buri, and Tillich focused more in the inner workings of Christian existence in light of biblical revelation (Macquarrie, 2002). Tillich (1957) especially emphasised the role of faith in contemporary institutions and Christianity. However, Tillich did not consider the geographical situatedness of where faith takes place. The 20th century religious thought just shows what was also happening in critical social theory. The historicity and existential concern did not ponder *space* as the place where existence, history, politics, and economics happened, took identity, and produced a reality, hence creating the need for a spacial turn in the approach to social theory and theology.

It is in the midst of the evolution of western thought that Henri Lefebvre (2013) and Edward Soja (1989, 1996, 2000) turned their eyes and reflections into space as meta-philosophical environment for reflection. This created a different approach in the understanding of urban environments and geopolitics. The city was not only the centre of the production of capital, but also the production of social life and interactions (Soja, 2000). Space became way too important to be left in the hands of specialised disciplines like geography, architecture, and urban studies. Scholars came to realise that the spatiality of human life actually infused every discipline and discourse (Soja, 1996: 47), including theological expressions and religious relations. Therefore, contextual theologising ought to take *space* into account to enhance its theological articulations. Taking *space* as a part of the theologising process will bring the practical theologian of liberation into a healing process for the human embodiment of realities. Western thought disincarnated

theological and philosophical concepts by betraying the body through a process of metaphorization that abandoned the human agent transforming it into subject and object of metaphysical articulations (Soja, 1996: 51).

Nevertheless, it is important to approach space as a meta-philosophical category with caution. The practical theologian of liberation that follows Lefebvre's and Soja's reflections is in danger of reducing theological reflection into an abstraction. It is imperative that the narratives of urban reality and the complexities of everyday life come into play (Shannaham, 2014: 54). It is necessary to create a spatial reflection that contemplates the collective woundedness of particular contexts to incarnate the meta-philosophical reflections and the resistance to contemporary institutions that can come out of it.

6.3.2 The Concept of Thirdspace

Thirdspace is a term, concept, and metaphor created by the urban philosopher, and postmodern political geographer Edward Soja. Soja's articulation of thirdspace expands on Henri Lefebvre's (2013: 75) trialectics of spatiality, which see space as a social product. Since thirdspace is the result of theoretical constructions, the concept may seem elusive or even considered as just meta-philosophical jargon. However, the metaphysics behind such an idea are profound and complex. With the use of the term "trialectic" there is a movement beyond the Hegelian, therefore Marxist dialectical systems. The concept of spatial trialectics opens the door for an integrated notion of space. This incorporation allows for a different perspective to read not only urban environments but also history and the forces that have shaped the spaces people inhabit.

The process of trialectics results from the understanding of space as a social product (Lefebvre, 2013: 86). This implies that space is elevated into the same category as money, merchandise, capital, labour, and other elements in the contemporary mode of production.

Lefebvre posits that, in reaching this level of categorisation, *space* serves not only as an instrument for thought process and action, but also as an instrument of domination and power. In other words, social space functions as an instrument for the analysis of contemporary society (Ibid. 93). It is imperative that one understands the trialectics of space as the process of thirding. Thirding opens the epistemological horizon through the process of “othering”. In other words, thirding goes beyond the binary understandings of historical reductionisms and interpretations of class struggle to open the discussion to “additional otherness, to a continuing expansion of spatial knowledge” (Soja, 1996: 61), and also theological knowledge within the specificity of particular *spaces*. In the words of Soja (Ibid.): “asserting the third-as-Othering begins an expanding chain of heuristic disruptions, strengthening defences against totalizing closure and all ‘permanent constructions.’” The reader may have picked up the instrumentality of space in the process of describing the collective woundedness of Guatemala’s urban environment. The spatial construction of Guatemala City is the resulting local impact of the global enterprise of colonialism. The spatial construction of Guatemala City gives expression to racial, socio-economic, and other colonial forms of oppression.

The need for a linguistified corrective such as “thirdspace” is born from the reality that every society and mode of production produce space with all the diversified phenomena that they entail. Even ancient cities cannot be only understood as the constellation of people and things thrown into a space and the production of specific texts or discourse about that space. Ancient cities, just like contemporary ones, developed their own spatial practices that limited social interaction in very specific ways (Lefebvre, 2013: 90). Thirding as othering, therefore, invites for a conversation that opens an epistemological cycle that sees the material world and consciousness

as co-creators of actual social spatial reality. This integrative third option is continuously open to new and simultaneous insights that go beyond totalizing dualisms (Soja, 1996: 65).

Lefebvre (Lefebvre, 2013: 92, 97, 116) proposed a thematic trialectic that presents three simultaneous moments in the production of space. Soja (Soja, 1996: 65–68) worked in integrating Lefebvre’s descriptions and formulations as there is a constant expansion and reformulation of the trialectics of spatiality through Lefebvre’s thought. The first moment is *Spatial Practice*. This is the process of producing the physical materiality of social spatiality. This space entails the routines of everyday life within the modern understanding of contemporary modes of production. This space takes its concreteness from the “routes, networks, workplaces, private life, and leisure enjoyments of the urban”. It is the materialization of socially produced empirical space. In other words, it is the space that people inhabit through their everyday life expressions; this is *firstspace* (Ibid.: 66). The second moment is in the *Representations of Space*. This is the space conceived by scientists, urban planners, urbanists, technocrats, social engineers, and so on (Lefebvre, 2013: 97). This is where any society or mode of production contains its epistemological power. As a result, this is the space where language as a social institution is regulated in a way that produces specific texts, ideas, and discourse. This mental space is the representation of power and ideology (Soja, 1996: 67). People take meaning and construct their social identity from the conceptions visualised in the *Representations of Space*, and by moving through these representations as they develop their *Spatial Practice*. It is in the *secondspace*, as Soja calls it, that people who inhabit and belong to the inferiorised sectors of Guatemalan society carry their “inferiority” within the totalising and oppressive discourse of colonial heritage. However, *secondspace* is also where utopian thought and vision can be developed. It is where the creative imagination resides.

Finally, the third moment is the *Spaces of Representation*. This is the space lived through the images and symbols that are embodied in it (Lefebvre, 2013: 98). Soja (1996: 68) posits that, “It overlays (*recouvre*) physical space, making symbolic use of its ‘objects’ and tends towards ‘more or less coherent systems of non-verbal symbols and signs.’” It is the space where the real and imagined come together, where ideas and concreteness meet. It is the place that fosters the creation of “counterspaces”, spaces of resistance to the hegemonic dominant order that are born out of their marginalised and in many cases rejected positioning (Ibid.). It is *thirdspace*. As a result, all journeys that embark into its exploration must begin with an ontological restructuring, with the assumption that one’s being-in-the-world is existentially defined through a holistic integration of history, society, and space. “We are first and always historical-social-spatial beings, actively participating individually and collectively in the construction/production—the ‘becoming’—of histories, geographies, societies” (Ibid. 73).

In summary, this process of thirding is focused on the trialectics of being. Thirding-as-Othering involves the recognition of space as part of the being-in-the-world. It is a third way through and against the binary tendencies of western philosophy, theology, and critical social theory that favour the a notion of being that is limited by historicity and sociality (Soja, 1996: 71). As a result, the self is interpreted in its historical, social, and spatial context, thus enhancing the exploration of the human experience as an integrated and embodied conjunction of internal and external phenomena.

Consequently, this involves the exploration of different epistemologies that depend on the spatial moments. There are three epistemologies that can lead to different kinds of knowledge constructions. *Firstspace epistemologies* usually favour objectivity and materiality. They point to a formal science of space. *Secondspace epistemologies* have had the tendency to be reactionary to

firstspace modes of knowledge. This epistemological perspective tends to create an oppositional reality between the arts and sciences, idealism and materialism, and subjective and objective ways of interpreting reality. *Thirdspace epistemologies* open the conversation between *firstspace* and *secondspace* epistemologies in a strategic way. This kind of knowledge construction entails a kind-hearted deconstruction and heuristic reconstruction of the previous dualistic epistemologies. In the words of Soja (1996: 81):

The starting point for this re-opening and rethinking of new possibilities is the provocative shift back from epistemology to ontology and specifically to the ontological trialectic of Spatiality-Historicity-Sociality. This ontological rebalancing introduces a radical scepticism toward all established epistemologies, and all traditional ways of confidently obtaining knowledge of the world.

In summary, *thirdspace* is a concept that aligns with Christian spirituality. In Ignatian terms, it is a third way that holds the different tensions of *spatial experience*. It is in that tension that contextual theology can be expanded to articulate God's movements and invitations in the midst of a production of urban spaces that segregate and exclude the other. It also starts opening the possibilities to see God not only as the creator of *thirdspaces*, but also as third even fourth spaces that are completely other and different to humanity.

6.3.3 Enhancing Contextual Theology

In the models of contextual theology presented above, one can see that history, culture, and society are important elements in the interpretation and comprehension of the context. However, does not seem to be considered for the theologising process. This omission creates a specific theological output that stays within the boundaries imposed by positivist theologies. The result is a theology that legitimises the current spatial, therefore, economic and social structures. Even when a theology seems to be counterhegemonic, if it does not take *space* as meta-philosophical category, it can fall into historic-hermeneutical reductionisms. For that reason, contextual theology can be

enriched by the exploration of religious experience in spatial terms. This search opens a theological dialogue that can seek for spatial justice within the urban environment where grassroots leaders engage their theological praxis.

Since the theologising process of this dissertation is clearly oriented towards a practical theology of liberation, one needs to keep in mind that the acknowledgement of the suffering voices of contemporary society is a vital part of the theological articulation. In this theological endeavour, the spatiality of suffering opens an ontological point of departure that enhances the contextual theologising act. In a way, it takes a step beyond the liberationist epistemology into becoming a liberationist ontology. This ontological beginning recognises that there is a close relationship between the body and *negative lived spaces*. This connection, made by Gert Prinsloo (2013: 774) through the studies of lament in the book of Psalms, creates new avenues to explore not only the *negative lived spatial experience* of the authors of the Psalms and other Scriptural data, but also the experiences of contemporary sufferers. Suffering and space are related through the trialectics of being-in-time-space. The connection occurs amid the dualism of *firstspace* and *secondspace* epistemologies. As a result, *thirdspace* allows contextual theology to explore the *negative lived spatial experience* of people in specific localities. In Prinsloo's (2013: 784) words: "the individual spatial experience of a sufferer provides a key to a holistic interpretation of individual laments." Prinsloo makes his point through comparing ancient Mesopotamic and Biblical texts. However, his statement provides an ontological and hermeneutical key to the interpretation of contemporary suffering in connection to the Biblical narrative. This is enhanced even more through following an ontological point of departure to develop hermeneutics of suffering through the eyes of Jesus as the forgiving victim, hence the importance of the Girardian anthropological perspective presented in previous chapters.

In acknowledging the *spatial representations* of suffering, the collective woundedness becomes a spatial milieu and point of departure for reflection and resistance. It is important, nonetheless, that one remembers that when entering in resistance against hegemonic structures one is dealing with yet another dualism. On one side, there is a traditional approach of resistance that has based its struggle on the affirmation of universal principles of equality, democracy, and so on. On the other hand, there is a more confrontational way of resistance, which is based on the differences and inequalities experienced by specific groups as the basis for community, identity, and struggle against current power structures (Soja, 1996: 89). These modes of resistance are not necessarily oppositional to each other. They can be found working in conjunction depending on the context. Nevertheless, it is clear that these two kinds of counter-hegemonic approaches feed from the mimetic crisis and struggle of all against one and vice versa. The key of an enhanced contextual theology is in finding or creating a *thirdspace* to inhabit in a non-rivalistic and violent way that is conscious of the contestation between the counter-hegemonic struggles for freedom and acknowledgment. For that reason, occupying *thirdspace* is a dynamic process. I want to argue that the embodiment of *thirdspace* happens in two continuously cycling moments. Firstly, if *thirdspace* is understood as the process of othering, it must be a space for radical openness that calls for an identity that is not in contraposition and rivalry against the other. This moment is a shift from an epistemological position to an ontologically open space. However, this space is to be embodied and inhabited through the acknowledgment of who one is through the eyes of the other. Secondly, one must choose the space of marginality in a way that does not transform specific spaces into fetishisms of space. This implies that the practical theologian of liberation must enter and belong to the margins in a way that is not dependent on the reaction of the oppressive other. One cannot expect the legitimisation of one's place within the power structure as oppositional in

and of itself. This creative *thirdspace* has to be inhabited “*in and for ourselves*” (Bell Hooks in Soja, 1996: 97). Consequently, this moment implies a constant physical and metaphorical movement in and out of the margins. The ontological positioning, however, stays in the margins. This movement back and forth allows for an interaction with the powerful and the powerless in a way that positions the practical theologian of liberation as a buffer that does not allow the powerful voices to silence the voices that have been muzzled for so long.

I would like to argue that a practical theology of peacebuilding that is contextually articulate is relevant not only through inhabiting and embodying *thirdspaces*, but also through the creation of such spaces. If Marx, Lefebvre, and Soja are right in saying that all humans actively participate in the creation of history and space, then grassroots leaders have the capacity to intervene in the history and spaces around them to create *thirdspaces* for the sake of those who have been marginalised by the current production of urban spaces. These spaces can be open to the creation of new rituals that subvert the triad of archaic religion which is still present in contemporary society. New rituals would open the *thirdspace* for new narratives that could subvert the myths that sustain and nurture exclusion and oppression in the current modes of social and religious production. As a result, a contextual practical theology of liberation would produce spatial faith practices that would improve the *lived spatial experience* of those who enter in relationship with practical theologians of liberation who commit themselves to serve, awake, and liberate those who are under the bondage of the consumeristic, violent, and exclusionary ethics of late capitalism.

Nevertheless, the practical theologian of liberation must stay conscious of his or her privilege in making the decision to inhabit and embody specific marginal spaces. One needs to be constantly reminded that, for the vast majority of people, dwelling in marginal spaces is not an

option, but the intentional outcome of social interaction through the social production of space. With this in mind, part of the joy of contextual theologising lies in the process of awakening those who inhabit, embody, and belong to both inferiorised sectors and the elites to the consecrated truth and reality of being human, children of God, despite of the alienation created by the current modes of production. In the words of Bell Hooks (cited in Soja, 1996: 105):

I am located in the margin. I make a definite distinction between that marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as site of resistance—as location of radical openness and possibility. This site of resistance is continually formed in that segregated culture of opposition that is our critical response to domination. We come to this space through suffering and pain, through struggle. We know struggle to be that which pleasures, delights, and fulfils desire.

One example of *thirdspacing* is the cemetery reflection tours that I have helped create and led for the last 10 years, which I have mentioned in a previously written academic paper (Aguilar, 2018). The *Cementerio General* (General Cemetery) in Guatemala City is a space that the CMT Guatemala network has reclaimed to allow the voicing of the pain caused by the different representations of the Guatemalan collective woundedness. The tours have become rituals of pain acknowledgment. The *space* of the *Cementerio General* creates an interesting dynamic as presidents of old, writers, and poets are buried there, amidst known locations that were used as execution grounds and clandestine graves for the eradication of the subversive movements, workers' union leaders, and student leaders. In addition, the cemetery backs to Guatemala City's garbage dump, where approximately seven thousand people work to sustain their lives. In this place, the extended community of the CMT Guatemala network has named the Guatemalan collective woundedness through the socio-economic division, the racial wound, the religious disunion, and the wound of the internal armed conflict (Aguilar, 2018: 128). A *thirdspace* and a new subversive ritual is created as groups, contemporary student leaders, community leaders, businessmen and women, members of the Guatemalan-European elite, grassroots leaders, and

college students have come together to give and ask for forgiveness, voice their pains, and find ways to move forward together.

In conclusion, *space* as a meta-philosophical category has the capacity to enhance contextual theology through providing the linguistified corrective of *thirdspace*. In using this concept and metaphor, the practical theologian of liberation can explore the urban landscape as an oppressive structure in and of itself. In doing so, the interaction with the leaders of the CMT Guatemala network acknowledges not only their cultural and social experience, but also their *negative spatial experience*. Thus, the conversation opens to take suffering, pain, and violence beyond their historicity and sociality. It creates access to the recognition of marginalised communities as sources for theological reflection and articulation. Even more so, *space* gives permission to explore how other marginalised groups experience their *spatial practice* within a society that rejects them and sees them as polluting and corrupting agents, as in the case of the LGBTQI community. I can only hope that more *thirdspaces* are opened so the grassroots leaders of the CMT Guatemala network can come together with the other they exclude.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE JOY OF CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGISING: SEEING AND HEARING FROM THE GRASSROOTS

Chapter six defined contextual theology, and chapter seven will explore urban space and the city from a metaphorical perspective that can empower grassroots leaders to take *space* into account when interacting with each other and the communities they serve. It will be a journey through colonial, urban, and religious concepts of the city that have permeated the imagination of Guatemalan grassroots leaders in order to justify exclusion. This chapter calls for a redefinition and exploration of urban space from a grassroots perspective. Firstly, I will explore what I mean by hearing and seeing from within the urban grassroots experience. Then, I will explore the three pathways to see the city proposed by the ITF and see if they are contextually relevant in response to the Guatemalan collective woundedness.

I want to start this exploration of urban space with the “City Psalm” by Denise Levertov (1964):

THE killings continue, each second pain and misfortune extend themselves in the genetic chain, injustice is done knowingly, and the air bears the dust of decayed hopes, yet breathing those fumes, walking the thronged pavements among crippled lives, jackhammers raging, a parking lot painfully a gleam in the May sun, I have seen not behind but within, within the dull grief, blown grit, hideous concrete facades, another grief, a gleam as of dew, an abode of mercy, have heard not behind but within noise a humming that drifted into a quiet smile. Nothing was changed, all was revealed otherwise; not that horror was not, not that the killings did not continue, not that I thought there was to be no more despair, but that as if transparent all disclosed an otherness that was blessed, that was bliss. I saw Paradise in the dust of the street.

Levertov’s description of the urban environment is a beautiful starting point to think about the city. It calls forth an exploration of the city that is rooted in the brutal reality of the urban. It does not allow for an abstract romanticising of the city, nor a philosophical intellection of the urban dynamics. Levertov extends an invitation to see and hear from within, to call things by their name, without euphemisms. In doing so, one needs to have an anthropological standpoint to see the city and

one's community as a human construction. The beauty and affliction that one finds in the city are just a reflection of the human condition. All the good, the bad, and the ugly of humanity is exponentially exposed in the city. In a way, the city is marked by both violence and grace. In other words, the city is the result of encountering the other in a specific spatial production and interaction (Meylahn, 2014a: 1). In this perspective, the city is a magnet and a magnifier for human culture (Rocke & Van Dyke, 2017: 25; Um & Buzzard, 2013: 38). By culture, I mean the human culture based on death and explored through the lens of mimetic theory. Thereby, people and communities can be seen as microcosms of a larger urban reality (Bakke & Sharpe, 2006: 81) regardless of people's social allocation. If one is willing to examine and know oneself, one can learn about the human condition of the city. Levertov's "City Psalm" serves as the point of departure for metaphorical constructions to develop a grassroots perspective of the Guatemalan urban reality.

7.1. Seeing and Hearing from Within the Grassroots

Seeing and hearing from within requires an incarnational anthropology for the city. According to Rocke and Van Dyke (2017: 23) an incarnational anthropology places the point of departure to explore the urban environment in the human in and of itself. It is through the process of knowing who one is that one comes to know one's city. This perspective roots theological formation and reflection in the *spatial practice* that develops within the urban environment. As a result, the act of contextual theologising finds its locus in the urban context since places and spaces acquire significance through the constant transit and social interactions between individuals. For that reason, seeing from within requires an anthropological rootedness that allows for a perspective of the city that creates a connection between the social issues of the urban environment and one's internal conflicts through the problematisation of both the contemporary context and the Scriptural data. In the case of the CMT Guatemala network, seeing and hearing from within implies taking a

deep, conscientious look into the Guatemalan collective woundedness. In my experience as a member of the network, I would argue that the problematisation of the biblical accounts has been incomplete due to the lack of historical connectedness as stated in chapter five. Thereby, it will be contextually impossible to fully problematise the biblical account if the leaders of the network do not have their personal, communal, and societal wounding providing the backdrop for their theology. Considering that part of my identity is connected to the CMT network, I aim to hear and see from within three historic-geographical and social spaces. Firstly, I will address the history of Latin American colonial urban design. I believe the voices of the urban past can help in the process of seeing the present urban reality. Secondly, I will take space to see from within internalised oppression of Guatemalan people as the acknowledgment of past and present class struggles and lack of solidarity can be both a hindrance and an asset to healing the collective woundedness of Guatemala City. Thirdly, I will enter the space, or lack thereof, for women in the communities of the Street Psalms and CMT Guatemala networks, since seeing and hearing from within must be done from a place of transparency and acceptance of the ways one has wounded others. The last space that I want to enter is still a communal open wound that only recently has opened the space for women to express their pain and feelings of exclusion.

7.2.1 Hearing from Within Urban Colonialism

Latin American cities, like Guatemala City, are not the result of chance or human progress. They are the product of specific designs that responded to the birth of Western capitalist societies through the colonial invasion. The development of Latin American cities happened through a speedy and conscious urbanisation enterprise that meshed religious syncretism, colonial law, architectural theories, and the labour needed to sustain the modes of production of colonial times (Mardones & Lolas, 2015). It is from the foundation of the colonial city on that the racial wounding

also inflicted the socio-economic and sexist representations of the Guatemalan collective woundedness.

The Colonial City

In the beginning, the emerging colonial city did not appear very urban. It was developed from a square grid that had streets running north, south, east and west known as el *damero* (checkerboard) city planning. This was done to distribute the virgin land, populated by indigenous peoples, starting from a central square and expanding on. This specific *representation of space* responded to the desire of an *ex-nihilo* creation of the urban with the colonial city as the symbol of order and civilization (Mardones & Lolas, 2015). The first attempts to consolidate the colonial rule were done through the literal and symbolic representation of the city. Building the colonial capital concretised the new political reality of the conquest and the enslavement of indigenous people (Few, 2002: Loc. 303). Since Europe could not demolish and rebuild its cities in the likeness of the renaissance urban ideal, Latin American cities became the epitome of urban design and development. Spain contributed to global urbanism with the materialisation of the ideal renaissance man and the city as the ordering of human work, art, and so on. The Spanish crown found itself with a blank slate to create the ideal city they envisioned in Latin America and did not miss the chance to make it happen (Magaña Juarez, 2004).

Mardones and Lolas (2015) argue that the square grid mode of urban planning was designed to create a network of cities throughout the continental colony. This web of cities created a very specific order that ensured communication and control over the different indigenous nations and the land they inhabited. As a result, *checkerboard* cities became the means to impose a communal order and a specific colonial matrix over the newly “discovered” territories in which the Christian values of order and virtue had to stand out. For that reason, one can see the same

pattern throughout Latin American cities. In other words, the building of the colonial city was also part of the Christian mission to not only subdue de land, but also save the “savages” who occupied it. As a result, all cities within this continental urban network have a central square that brings together the political power in a government building, the religious power with a cathedral or parish, and the economic power with a building for economic transactions and a market. Mardones and Lolas (2015: 23) explain it in these terms: “[my translation] In summary, from the first moment on, the Latin American city was conceived by the Spanish crown as vital ‘civilising’ instrument that renewed the classical conception [...] that saw the city as the element where an adequate social order had to come together with a particular territorial distribution.”

Two Cities in One

Since the foundation of the second capital city, which today is known as *Antigua Guatemala*, the Spaniards distinguished between people in the way the city was designed. Political, economic, and racial differentiations were codified into law and city planning, creating what is known as the *Two Republics* (Few, 2002: Loc. 353). The idea of the two republics created a specific kind of segregation that was transported to Guatemala City when the capital was moved from *Antigua Guatemala*. The two republics were clearly divided within city planning. The Spanish families stayed in big houses closer to the central frames of the checkerboard city planning, and the *Indian* population was relegated to the outer ring neighbourhoods, known as *barrios*. Interestingly, the indigenous community had their own institutions of local government closely connected to their religious institutions. However, their forms of cultural, social, and political organisation were still supervised by parish priests and other colonial officials (Ibid.: Loc. 360).

The City of Antigua Guatemala was developed in such a way that the comfort of the *criollo* and *peninsular* class was at the centre of its design. In the historical account presented by

Christopher H. Lutz (1994: 141–143), one can clearly see rural and urban segregation as a way to control trade and production of goods and the mixing of people during colonial times. The trade routes were open to have an influx of products to the city, not for the elite to move between the towns of the Kingdom of Guatemala. For that reason, roads were not sufficiently developed. Even more so, commercial and economic relationships were managed by middlemen who spoke Mayan languages and belonged to the first generation of the *mestizo* class. This trading and production system assured the control of the marketplace at the racial, economic and political level. Interestingly, the over-controlling nature of the colonial marketplace created a black-market economy that stigmatised indigenous and *mestizo* traders who engaged in it (Lutz, 1994: 142), which, in my opinion, was the origin of contemporary informal petty trade of smuggled goods in contemporary Guatemala City.

Importantly, the relationship between rural and urban Guatemala was based on the provision of goods for the survival of the new colonial urban reality. It was a transplant of the metropolitan model used by the colonisers. The colonies supplied the metropolis, and the rural provided the products and tribute for the colonial city. Urban colonial economy relied heavily on the tributes presented by indigenous subjects. According to Lutz (1994: 159), it was the economic relationship, not only the need of control, that created the two different groups of relationships within city limits. The centre of the city was inhabited by a Spaniard elite formed by merchants, *encomenderos*, government officials, and so on. For the most part, the urban elite required the service of black, indigenous, and *mestizos* as in-house servants. The neighbourhoods in the outskirts of the city, however, had a less stratified network of relationships. This does not imply that inequality and injustice were not present. It just indicates a different way of relating to one another within the urban colonial context.

As previously stated, colonial urban design pushed the lower castes of the Guatemalan colonial system to the neighbourhoods on the outskirts of the city. Lutz (1994: 153) argues that the movement of people and the living conditions in these overcrowded zones created a sense of community, which I believe could be the equivalent of contemporary Guatemalan slums. People lived close to each other, attended the same parish, faced the same problems, and helped each other out every now and then. It is likely, too, that the common people living under impoverished conditions realised that their standard of living was inferior to the European descent urban elite. Interestingly, this realisation did not pose a threat to the colonial order. In Lutz's (1994: 160) words: "Socioracial stratification within the plebe itself, measured by the degree of access to jobs, potable water, housing, and other measures of economic status generated competition between individual and subgroups (castizos and mestizos for example) and made one's status all-important." The rivalries amongst the lower class trumped any chance to overthrow or even challenge the colonial rule. Consequently, a sense of harmony and tolerance developed between the Spaniard elite and the lower castes (Lutz, 1994: 161). This sense of "civility" perdures until today and it will be explored in the next sub-section.

The colonial city reveals that the lack of class solidarity among the middle and lower layers of colonial social stratification was not only racially biased. According to Martínez Peláez (2011), the rise of the *mestizo* was a consequence of the oppression of indigenous people. In other words, the mixed-heritage group (not a class group as it lacked a common social and economic interests) could be considered a scandalous blood line. The *mestizo* during colonial times was the result of the sexual meshing between antagonistic classes, the *criollo* and the indigenous. As a result, they were a displaced culture and people whose parents could not allow them access to their respective groups without socially and economically harming themselves or the new rising group (Martínez

Peláez, 2011: 347). The result was a landless, displaced, impoverished, mixed-heritage, middle social layer. The mixed-heritage people are the offspring of sexual violence during colonial times, creating an illegitimate culture that would become the *ladino* (see chapter four) group which later would turn to oppress the indigenous peoples as a result of its lack of identity and hunger for power amid their own oppression. Seeing from within this racial, social, and economic perspective complexifies the contextual theology and anthropological reimagination that comes out of the CMT Network. With this as the backdrop, the contextual theology that is birthed from the CMT network should acknowledge its urban, impoverished, and scandalous roots as the starting point to reflect and problematise Scriptural data and the relationships within the network, which include the elite and foreigners.

Hearing from within the urban colonial system provides three important lessons to understand contemporary Guatemalan urban society. Firstly, the collective woundedness that is represented through the socio-economic division, racism, and sexism is not something recent. It is part of Guatemala's colonial heritage. The leaders of the CMT Guatemala network are dealing with historical faith, social, and economic practices. Secondly, the inferiorised sectors have internalised oppression in ways that one cannot fathom. Thereby, the leaders of the network are immersed in history of traumatic events, communal and personal wounding, and internalised oppression. Thirdly, the history of the Guatemalan urban collective woundedness makes subversive *spatial practices* hard to imagine. Metaphors to reimagine the city seem scarce and, at times, impossible in a city that was originally designed to cater to the elite.

I cannot sufficiently emphasize that cities in Latin America were created for the benefit and enjoyment of the white European elite. Cities were designed to be served by the indigenous and mixed-heritage labour force. As a result, the leaders of the CMT Guatemala network, and

people who live at the margins of Guatemalan society today, develop their *spatial practice* through a lens of servitude and in spaces that were not conceived for them. Even more so, they experience spaces that continue being built without them in mind. This kind of *spatial practice* is the result of what Santiago Bastos (2010: 29) argues is a domination system that has been periodically recreated through contemporary Guatemalan institutions. The system is built on the beliefs that there are certain kinds of social inequalities and access to power that result from specific characteristics of a particular sector of Guatemalan population. The city makes sure to reinforce and regulate these inequalities.

7.2.2 Seeing from within Internalised Oppression and Exclusion

Oppression and exclusion in Colonial Times

The challenge of seeing from within, seeing anthropologically, lies in renouncing to the idea that the way one sees is not mediated. In reality, the way one sees is shaped and formed through the eyes of the other and how they perceive oneself (Alison, 2007). In the case of Guatemala City, Guatemalans still see through the eyes of colonial heritage and the *spatial* and social production that resulted from it. In his historical essay, Martínez Peláez (2011) interprets one of the most influential historical accounts of Guatemalan history, *La Recordación Florida* (the colourful remembrance). The colonial chronicles portrayed in *La Recordación Florida* are recorded and interpreted through the eyes of a *criollo* (see chapter four social strata and racial definitions) historian who was influenced and formed by his social class and status. In the words of Martínez Peláez (2011: 19), “[my translation] Nobody comes to the world with an already formed class consciousness; it develops through the course of time, as the interests of the social class where one lives in are acknowledged as one’s own.”

The statement of class consciousness presented by Martínez Peláez are of utmost importance as the documents he analyses are the only ones written by a lay *criollo* historian. Most of the historical accounts that tell the story of colonial Guatemala were written by church historians. Consequently, the development of the concept of *Patria* (motherland) in the case of *La Recordación Florida* is purely ideological in nature as the *criollo* class was in a feud with its actual motherland, Spain. The result of such an interpretation is the portrayal of Guatemala as a landscape, a beautiful land rich in natural resources and colonial cities, surrounded by majestic volcanoes and mountains. However, Martínez Peláez argues that the *criollo* historian fails to recognise that it is due to the enslavement of indigenous peoples that the class he belongs to is able to imagine Guatemala in that way. The land for the indigenous and mixed heritage people was not a landscape; it was hard soil that had to be worked to pay homage to the new rulers. Thereby, *La Patria del Criollo* (the motherland of the creole), which is the name Martínez Peláez gives to his historical essay, is not the motherland of the indigenous and mixed-heritage, which is not something to be considered strange since there is no moment in history when the master and slave had equal rights and considered each other as fellow countrymen (Martínez Peláez, 2011: 41).

The late *criollo* class, the ones who powered the independence movement in 1821, had the same mentality as their predecessors. They operated and fought to preserve and expand their land rights and control over the indigenous population. In other words, the land without indigenous people was worthless because it did not come with the free labour of indigenous people that built *La Patria del Criollo*. Consequently, the *criollo* class needed to amass large extensions of land to fit the indigenous peoples within their patronage (2011: 149). Martínez Peláez (2011: 101) argues that the *criollo* European descent elite class consciousness has remained central to the development of Guatemala since colonial times. When Martínez Peláez first wrote his historical interpretation

in 1970, he stated: “[my translation] The *criollismo*—the *criollo* class consciousness already fundamental since the first centuries of colonial rule—is still alive in the mentality of the powerful groups of the country, it is a natural consequence of the perpetuation of those [colonial] economic bases.”

Contemporary Oppression and Exclusion

Guatemala City recreates the perceived differences between the different racial groups in Guatemalan society. In the same way as in colonial times, different kinds of people have particular *spatial practices* depending on their ethnicity and the different zones of Guatemala City they come from and transit within. This process of hidden—more likely ignored than concealed—segregation and internalised oppression makes the city a place where strangers meet. However, this coming together is without a metaphysical encounter in Buberian terms. There is no real “I” that meets a real “You”. What occurs in Guatemala city is what Zygmunt Baumann (2000: 95) called a *mis-meeting*. This phenomenon happens when strangers meet in their capacity as strangers, when the other remains as the other and nothing more. As a result, people who encounter each other emerge as strangers because the interpersonal/metaphysical encounter never really took place. For example, when workers arrive at the luxury developments and the wealthy ghettoised communities of Guatemala City, they remain strangers to the patrons they serve. Even when in many cases, there is the potential for a real encounter, the elite will always choose to stay in a series of events without a past and future in order to avoid their real feelings and perceptions of the other being exposed, which is central to the *criollo* ideology as proposed by Martínez Peláez (2011).

The mentality that still permeates Guatemala City, which flows down from the *criollo* class perspective, requires a great deal of civility. The perpetration of violence has been so great that there is always a risk of having the Guatemalan collective woundedness fostering more violence.

Baumann argues that Sennett's understanding of civility is what leads the *mis*-meeting process. Civility is an activity that protects people from each other while allowing them to enjoy the proximity with each other. For Sennett (cited in Baumann, 2000: 95.), "Wearing a mask is the essence of civility. Masks permit pure sociability, detached from the circumstances of power, malaise, and private feelings of those who wear them. Civility has as its aim the shielding of other from being burdened with oneself". For that reason, what I perceive as the Levertov's invitation to see from within is of utmost importance. Grassroots leaders ought to see from within to identify the masks they wear in order to have civil *mis*-meetings with each other and with other Guatemalans and foreigners who may support the work they do. In seeing from within, grassroots leaders can overturn the power differential as the other will have to deal with an honest vulnerable encounter with somebody who is not willing to stay a stranger.

If one is to explore this ontological point of departure in Lacanian terms, one's perception of reality is not necessarily real. This way of seeing the reality of the city brings quite a difficult conundrum for the grassroots leaders of the CMT Guatemala network. We still see the city through the eyes of the *Criollo*. The city is nothing more than the infrastructure that serves the purpose of being the centre of domination and enjoyment of the elite (Magaña Juarez, 2004; Mardones & Lolas, 2015; Martínez Peláez, 2011). Guatemalans may cross paths in the city in more civil ways nowadays. However, the danger with this perceived civility lies in the lack of engagement with colonial history that still fuels relationships within Guatemalan coloniality.

Therefore, when seeing from within, one needs to make a distinction between what Zizek (2008b: 58) calls *symbolic history* and *phantasmatic history*. The former one entails all the "explicit narratives and ideologic-ethical prescriptions that constitute the tradition of a community". Whereas, the latter one is the hidden backbone of the former one. In the case of the

Guatemalan collective woundedness and its spatial representations in Guatemala City, Guatemalans are faced with the *symbolic* and *phantasmatic* histories. Related to the *symbolic history*, Guatemalans still believe that the European descent *criollo* class and the national and transnational corporations still wants the best for all Guatemalans, thus justifying the ghosts of the *phantasmatic history* that elevate and honour *conquistadores* who murdered and enslaved the indigenous nations. As a good example, Martínez Peláez (2011: 51) analyses the distorted perspective of the *criollo* historian of *La Recordación Florida* when portraying the *conquistador* Pedro De Alvarado. In the eyes of the *criollo* historian, De Alvarado was a righteous man who could do nothing wrong; on the contrary, De Alvarado was known for his cruelty against indigenous peoples and disregard for authority to the point of compromising the conquest of the Americas.

The atrocities committed by the *conquistadores* can be easily dismissed as a thing of the past. The centuries-old records show that the colonial infrastructure was built on terror and the oppression of indigenous and mixed-heritage people (Martínez Peláez, 2011). Nevertheless, contemporary Guatemalan history cannot be *phantasmatic*; the indigenous genocide during the armed conflict is a ghost that cannot be dismissed as *phantasmatic*. It is too recent. In the same way that the Holocaust is an excruciating reality for global history, the Guatemalan war is unbearable for most Guatemalans. Žižek (2008b: 63) explains the Holocaust in a very dynamic way when he states: “Although this event sent in motion the entire contemporary ethical discussion, it continues to haunt us as a spectral entity that cannot be fully ‘accounted for’, integrated into our social reality, even if we know (almost) all about it on the level of historical facts”. In the same way, accepting and integrating the atrocities of the armed conflict into Guatemalan social life would imply the acceptance of having the same murderous tendencies in

contemporary Guatemalan society that the *conquistadores*, the Nazis, and many other groups had. As a result, the psychological and material realities of the city stay the same because the *real* is too hard to bear. For that reason, seeing from within is painful though necessary.

One can argue that the independence movement in early 1800s and the liberal revolution in the later part of the XIX century were nothing more than the historical continuation of the colonial structure. The social groups that took over power did it in order to economically benefit from the exploitation and oppression of the indigenous and mixed-heritage lower classes (Martínez Peláez, 2011: 565). Consequently, one must accept that the violence that impoverished communities experience today could be interpreted in the same way Martínez Peláez (2011: 280) understood violence among the middle layers of colonial society: “suicidal violence that results from the lack of group solidarity.” The acceptance of such interpretation implies that all of us who do not belong to the elite are the historical continuation of servants in a city that is constantly developed for the enjoyment of those who possess the contemporary means of production. This realisation has the potential to destroy the myths that create division among the social layers of those who do not possess the means of production. In my interpretation of the Guatemalan context, Guatemalan society could deceive the outsider, making him or her believe that there is a growing “middle class”. However, the reality is that the distance between the so called “middle class” and the urban poor is quite short. It is easier for a “middle class” person to become poor than for a person living in poverty to become “middle class”. What seems to happen is that consumerism creates an illusion within our capitalist global society. Guatemalans believe themselves to be “middle class” due to their consumption capacity. However, the wealth separation between those who own the means of production and their workers is abysmal. Seeing from within will compel one to accept a reality of servitude that needs to be subverted and transformed. In my case, I have

come to accept the scandalous origins of my mixed-heritage self so I can anthropologically reimagine myself and the other with the possibility of healing our collective woundedness. It is only through the juxtaposition of colonial and contemporary Guatemala City that one can come to terms with the reality that the poor and oneself share the same condition before the eyes of *La Patria del Criollo*. The beauty, however, rests in the opportunity to unite and search for communal liberation through a *human catechism* that will help one find and restore the humanity of the other. I will take more time to explore this process in chapter ten. For now, it is important to mention that a *human catechism* is only possible through hearing and seeing from within.

In learning from the city, one will reach the understanding that coloniality is not a construct of the past. Guatemalans do not live in a postcolonial society. Colonial rule formed and reinforced a social structure that has yet to be transformed. Guatemalans still belong to this structure (Martínez Peláez, 2011: 563). In the case of the colonial city, “the city was the centre for domination and the enjoyment of what was dominated; [for the *criollo* class] it was a centre to live without having to work” (Martínez Peláez, 2011: 287). In the same way, allow me to repeat myself, contemporary Guatemala City is for the enjoyment of the elite. It is not accessible for those who work in it. People still pay their tribute, earning low wages, to the new generations of families who can trace their lineage to colonial Guatemala and to the newcomers who have enough money and influence to break into the conservative Guatemalan market. Furthermore, the end of the colonial situation during the independence of 1821 was not the end of the colonial structure. The European elite and the rising squirearchy promoted such movements to benefit from the colonial structure without having to pay homage to the Spanish crown (Martínez Peláez, 2011: 565).

7.2.3 Seeing and Hearing from Within Sexism

After hearing and seeing from within Guatemalan coloniality, I must enter a more intimate domain. One of the greatest temptations throughout this dissertation has been to stay at the theoretical level of theological, historical, and social reflection; however, I was encouraged to go deeper and engage the difficulties of my context and the problematisation of the power dynamics within it. Even with that push, I have been reluctant to engage in the significance of seeing and hearing from within the Guatemalan sexist culture. The expression of sexist violent practices during colonial times and contemporary Guatemalan society were briefly explored in chapter four. I still shy away from that conversation as I do not want to speak on behalf my Guatemalan sisters, and brothers and sisters from sexual minorities. However, in this subsection I will dare to see from within the network of relationships of the Street Psalms community (See chapter one) and CMT Guatemala and how, in many ways, we have perpetuated the wound of sexism within our context.

As I stated in chapter four, the truth of the matter is that I do not know how to see beyond my heterosexual male identity. This is because my experience and placement within my culture limits me to fully understand the sexist evil that is present in institutions and the social structures that accommodate it. The hindrance that I have become aware of in the last ten years is that the church has been historically dominated by men. Consequently, the experience of evil and suffering has been portrayed and understood from the perspective of men. As a male, evil is something that I can perpetrate on somebody else. However, as stated in chapter three and four, in Guatemalan society and other societies around the world, for women, “evil is their very being” (Gebara, 2002: Loc. 80).

Women still sit at the bottom of the Guatemalan social chain, especially indigenous women. Consequently, seeing and hearing from within sexism creates a hermeneutical challenge.

The way that we read Scripture and articulate theology must consider the condition of women and different sexual minorities in Guatemalan society, the CMT network, and the Street Psalms community. In Phyllis Tribble's (1984: 3) words: "Women, not men, are suffering servants and Christ figures. Their stories govern the use of the leitmotifs. Scripture thus interpreting scripture undercuts triumphalism and raises disturbing questions for faith." These "disturbing questions for faith" must come from women, in the case of the CMT network, the questions must come from the female leaders who work for the transformation of their communities with reckless abandonment. This implies that the network's male leaders, me included, ought to ask for the forgiveness of our sisters. We have wronged them in not opening the spaces for leadership, theological articulation, and professional development. I understand that the language I am using, "we have wronged them", still falls into the power dynamics of a male oriented and dominated culture. However, I hope that this shows that, in my case, seeing and hearing from within sexism cannot be done anywhere else but from within the linguistic expressions and practices that are already sexist within a specific community. It is from within that subversion and transformation happen.

At the communal level, the CMT Guatemala Network and the Street Psalms network have fallen into the same patriarchal transactional patterns of our predecessors. We have used the voices of women to our advantage. We have made ourselves look good by quoting feminist theologians, scholars, and activists. As a community, we have presented ourselves before others as a progressive, inclusive community, when, the community has been formed and exclusively led by heterosexual men since its beginnings. We have even used women from the Scriptural data to our advantage, thus trampling the work of theologians like Tribble, which translated to the use of the communities that we claimed to serve in the search of a renewed hermeneutical lens through

“vision trips” that took people to “see” what God was doing in a specific context (Please, see chapter one of Rocke & Van Dyke, 2012, for a better understanding of what I am expressing here). It was not until recent years that we became aware of our sexist sins through the grace of our sisters within the Street Psalms community. Thankfully, we also realised that we were using not only the voices of women, but also the communities we serve because we were admonished by our brothers and sisters who live in impoverished communities marked by violence.

This last subsection may seem like a harsh criticism to the missional communities I belong. However, it is only through seeing from within that one can recognise the individual woundedness, collective woundedness, and violence that is born out of the human heart. For all these reasons, seeing from within requires a specific point of departure. It starts from the theological experience of understanding the resurrection. The resurrection is the starting point of the Christian journey, not the end (Rocke & Van Dyke, 2017: 64). The implications of such an approach lie in the hermeneutical ontology that is born out of it. This will be explored with more detail in chapter eight. In the meantime, I will limit myself to the ways of seeing the city that have impacted the way the leaders of the CMT Guatemala network engage with Guatemala City.

7.3 Three Pathways to See the City from Within: possibilities and limitations of the ITF’s metaphorical redefinition of urban space

Considering the spaces presented above, which one has to enter in order to see from within the Guatemalan context, it is important that I acknowledge the courage grassroots leaders have to re-imagine their city. It has not been an easy task. However, we have risked our cities and identities to re-imagine urban areas that seem closer to a battleground than anything else. In seeing from within there are three specific pathways to perception that have influenced the CMT Guatemala network. These lenses have been articulated and proposed in the ITF to impact the larger network

of the UTC (See chapter four for more information about the ITF and UTC). The lenses that I will explore here are the result of communal work and dialogue between grassroots leaders across the globe. However, one cannot blindly follow a pathway without exploring its possibilities and limitations. The metaphors articulated by Roche and Van Dyke (2017) need to be explored at a meta-philosophical and meta-theological level.

The first way of seeing the city from within is seeing the *city as classroom* (Roche & Van Dyke, 2017: 66). This implies that the city becomes a living library and source of wisdom that is available for all. The practical theologian of liberation will always have a new place to learn, new content to explore, and new tools to learn if one sees the city as a classroom. This metaphor, however, can be contextually limited. In cities like Guatemala City, certain kinds of people do not have access to different areas of the city, thus leaving vast amounts of knowledge out of reach for many. This happens in two ways. Firstly, the poor and marginalised cannot access the places of power where they could learn about the city's history, systems, and the different ways to navigate them. Secondly, the wealthy of the city cannot access the more impoverished areas as going into certain neighbourhoods can easily become dangerous, thus missing the transformational encounter with those living in poverty and marginality. The *city as classroom*, however, is full of potential to create *thirdspaces* that foster learning. If the practical theologian of liberation has the versatility of connecting with different spheres in the city, he or she can create *thirdspaces* that foster learning for the powerful and the powerless of the city. Even more so, one can participate in the creation of communities of transformation through communal learning and theological reflection.

Secondly, the city can be seen as a *parish* (Roche & Van Dyke, 2017: 68). In this perspective, the city becomes a healing sanctuary that contains all the spiritual streams needed for human flourishing and completeness. The concept of *city as parish* entails a geographical

community that surrounds a local church. This specific pathway requires a process of deep spiritual formation as the different streams of Christian spirituality must be seen as needed for urban transformation. The beauty of this approach is that it opens the conversation for the development of new *spatial practices* as geographical location is not a limitation anymore. It opens the whole city for everybody to bring what they have to offer for the social and spiritual renewal. In working with such a geographically and denominationally diverse network, the leaders of the CMT Guatemala network have used this perspective to engage with each other in an inclusive way (Rocke & Van Dyke, 2012: 66–68). The potential is there to acknowledge the need leaders have for one another and to grow in the acceptance of each other through that process. Nevertheless, the limitation of such metaphor lies in not recognising the religious disunion as a representation of a city's collective woundedness. At a metaphorical level, *the city as parish* has unprecedented ecumenical potential. However, if one is to take seriously this metaphor, it requires a great deal of lament and forgiveness. The religious disunion of the Guatemalan collective woundedness requires more than just a perspective to begin the healing process. It first requires that the leaders of the CMT network recognise that exclusion in all forms is still a faith practice they hold on to. In addition, this metaphor unintentionally leaves out interreligious dialogue as it acknowledges only Christian spiritualities within the conception of the parish.

Finally, the last pathway is to see the *city as playground*. The ITF (2017: 70) proposes that “[t]he city is a prophetic sign of peace and a playground of God’s grace for all people.” This is the result of a prophetic imagination that allows for a reimagination of the city and the way it works. Rocke and Van Dyke (2017) take to heart the vision of the prophet Zechariah (8:5) believing that one day the city will be full of children playing in its streets. Through this metaphor, grassroots leaders redefined the violent urban space in a way that transcends the imagery of warfare that

surrounds their environment. Rocke and Van Dyke infer that part of the process of seeing the *city as playground* aligns with the perspective presented by the prophet Jeremiah (29: 7), which they argue is the Old Testament equivalent of love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. The *city as playground* is a beautiful metaphor indeed. It allows for grassroots leaders to imagine a different way to relate to each other. It fosters companionship instead of competition and rivalry. It allows for the development of new rituals that subvert the religious narratives of exclusion.

The limitation of this metaphor, however, lies in the contextuality of its translation and interpretation. In the case of Latin American cities, the cities were built for the enjoyment of the elite. Thus, the metaphor falls short as playgrounds are not part of the *representations of space* that grassroots leaders are accustomed to see. Besides, *playground* roughly translates into Spanish as *patio de recreo* which mostly signifies the school playground. The difficulty to engage in such a metaphor for grassroots leaders lies in the fact that, in most cases, impoverished communities do not have access to good quality educational facilities, let alone playgrounds. Another element that this metaphor does not take into full account is the reality of extreme urban violence. Rocke and Van Dyke (2012, 2017) and Dave Hillis (2014), another proponent of this metaphor, come from developed cities in the United States where violence is a reality. However, the subjective violence they experience and see in their everyday lives is minuscule compared to the experiences of Guatemalan and many global south grassroots leaders.

One opens the potential for metaphorical and theological expansion when exploring the possibilities and limitations of the images that have influenced the CMT Guatemala network and its redefinition of the city. Seeing from within requires a constant metaphorical engagement. If the metaphors presented above are blindly used, one can fall into a reductionist perspective of the urban environment that preserves the status quo instead of challenging the forces that shape the

city. A redefinition of the urban space through the metaphors presented in the ITF must consider the collective woundedness in its fullness. In addition, since I have been part of the CMT network, I am part of the UTC, and have helped in the reviewing and articulation of the ITF; therefore, this is a self-critique on the possibilities and limitations of my own approach. This opens the possibility to transcend some of those limitations and expand not only my knowledge, but also to contribute to the communal building of knowledge of a global network of practical theologians of liberation.

My argument for an expansion of the metaphors presented previously, is that in order to see Guatemala City as a classroom, parish, and playground, one must engage with the colonial heritage of the city. This ought to be done through the conscious engagement and extrapolation of the colonial and contemporary city. In doing so, one will be able to trace the historicity of poverty, violence, and oppression to the colonial rule. This change in perspective is imperative as Latin American urban practical theologians of liberation should not continue to blindly use metaphors that come from the neo-colonial post-metropolis. In the case of Guatemala, the historical moments within the representations of the collective woundedness, explored in chapter four, have been a reinforcement of the colonial structure.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE JOY OF CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGISING: INDECENT CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY

8.1 Interlude and Recapitulation

Before moving forward, I consider it of utmost importance to provide an interlude that revisits the guiding question of this dissertation and to recapitulates the process that I have followed. This dissertation is attempting to answer the question: What will a practical theology of peacebuilding look like in Guatemala City in response to the collective woundedness of Guatemalan society? In order to find an answer to this problem, there are three sub-questions that help as steppingstones to find a contextual response. The questions are: How is the collective woundedness of Guatemala City expressed in terms of racial, socioeconomic, religious, and other spheres/relationships? How can the Bible be read with grassroots Christians leaders using a contextual hermeneutic from below that creates a practical theology of peacebuilding in this context? And, how can Girard's anthropological lens be a tool for interpreting and reimagining Guatemala City from below?

In the process of exploring different answers to the questions asked above, the theological articulation and exploration of this enterprise has led me to follow a specific path. The starting point was the analysis and exploration of René Girard's mimetic theory and liberation theology in dialogue with Girard's ideas. This anthropological and liberationist approach to the collective woundedness of Guatemala City opened the door to explore Guatemalan society as the constant clashing of desires between groups of people and individuals who are in rivalry and perpetrate violence against each other, wounding the other in many cases without realising it. As a result, the exploration of the concept of the *collective woundedness* allowed for the introduction of three expressions of humanity within the Guatemalan context, *living*, *laughing* and *loving*. It is within these voicings of human existence that I embarked on the exploration of the CMT Guatemala

network as a microcosm of Guatemalan society in search of possible glimpses of hope amid a context marked by the representations of the woundedness explored above. As a result, the CMT network became the locus of theological articulation, critique, and self-evaluation. The analysis of the CMT Guatemala network shed light on two faith practices that have shaped this theological exploration, the practice of exclusion and the exercise of anthropological reimagining.

The process followed in the first part of this dissertation explored the *living* element of experiencing humanity amid the Guatemalan collective woundedness. *Living* is understood in the specificity of the urban context and the *spatial experience* of the grassroots leaders of the CMT network. The collective woundedness of Guatemalan society is most visible within the urban centres of Guatemala. For that reason, the second expression of humanity explored here, *laughing*, started with the exploration of contextual theology. The idea behind this approach is that only contextual theology can bring grassroots leaders to laugh at themselves amid the contradictions of having exclusion as an afflictive faith practice and anthropological reimagining as a beautiful expression of their faith. In following this path, this theological articulation explored *space* as a meta-philosophical category to enhance the act of contextual theologising, which allowed for the problematisation of suffering and resistance in the urban context as a spatial and social product, and the struggles within the biblical narrative. In doing so, I attempted to frame the contextual theology of the CMT Guatemala grassroots leaders in order to open the space for an interdisciplinary conversation that can expand their ways of doing theology.

In exploring *space* in its meta-philosophical capacities, the linguistified corrective of *thirdspace* and its implications opened the possibilities for a practical theology of peacebuilding that is also a practical theology of liberation. *Thirdspaces* are the beginning of the re-imagination of the urban and theological spaces that allow for the acknowledgement of suffering and the

beginning of the awakening process to a kind of intelligence that comes from the innocent victims of one's context. As the logic of this articulation developed, I used the metaphors presented by Denise Levertov in the "City Psalm" to enter the joy-full element of *laughing* at ourselves as a contextual theological act. I have explored what seeing and hearing from within implies, and now I embark on the anthropological reimagining act of seeing paradise in the dust of the street.

Thus far, the first sub-question has been clearly answered. The collective woundedness of Guatemala City has specific representations that are continually recreated through the urban space. In finding that answer, one can see that the leaders of the CMT Guatemala network have also been marginalised in the process of Guatemala City's urban development. Additionally, the leaders of the network have also participated in the exclusion of others amid their *spatial practice*. Girard's anthropology is a lens that allows for this kind of historical analysis and theological exploration. However, it is until now that I will enter into the direct exploration of Girard's understanding to find an anthropological hermeneutic that allows for seeing paradise in the dust of the street, which will reveal the answers to the questions: How can the Bible be read with grassroots Christians leaders using a contextual hermeneutic from below that creates a practical theology of peacebuilding in this context? And, can Girard's anthropological lens be a tool for interpreting and reimagining Guatemala City from below? In answering these two questions, I hope to find a concrete articulation of a grassroots theology that is liberating in its practicality, which is a practical theology of peacebuilding that responds to the Guatemalan collective woundedness.

8.2 Seeing Paradise in the Dust of the Street: hermeneutics from below and from within

Levertov (Levertov, 1964) concludes her "City Psalm" with a powerful set of lines that disallow a romanticised view of the city. She writes:

Nothing was changed, all was revealed otherwise; not that horror was not, not that the killings did not continue, not that I thought there was to be no more despair, but that as if transparent all disclosed an otherness that was blessed, that was bliss. I saw Paradise in the dust of the street.

This beautiful but afflictive picture illustrates the reality of the urban environment. The city is a rough place that recreates the structures that continuously inflict more wounding on those who inhabit it. The end of the poem, however, lifts a parallel reality. A truth is hidden in plain sight for those who are willing to see it: paradise is within reach. Delight and utopian dreams can be visualised in the midst of despair and in the dust of the street. This alternate reality that sees and hears from within begins and remains within the mimetic reality of the human condition. Thereby, it requires hermeneutics to read Scriptures and the context with a specific set of lenses.

Before entering into the process of exploring a hermeneutic from within and from below, a hermeneutic that can pave the way to read the bible from a non-violent perspective, it is important to take the space to remember three of Girard's anthropological insights that are especially insightful to the development of this analysis. Firstly, mimetic theory allows for an understanding of humanity that attempts to understand how violence happens and the beginning of the *homonization* process, the process of becoming human. Girard's intention is not to degrade all human phenomena to a violent instinct. What Girard's mimetic theory attempts to do is to call forth a central dimension of human nature and phenomena, mimetic desire, which can help to explain humankind's proneness to crisis, conflict, and violence (Palaver, 2013: 38). Secondly, Girard explains the nature of human relationships through the anthropology of mimetic desire. the imitation of each other's desires has the capacity to create both goodness and violence. Girard's anthropology proposes an understanding of humanity that is both personal and collective. It grasps each individual as completely dependent on the other at the collective and personal level (Alison, 1996: 18). Finally, the scapegoat mechanism, understood through the eye of the gospel narratives

in the New Testament, sheds light on a kind of intelligence that allows for the acknowledgment of the suffering innocent victim in the person of Jesus as a victim of the violent sacred. The fundamental nature of the contrast between myth and the Bible suggests that the biblical account is the manifestation of an anti-mythological inspiration. With these three elements in mind, this section will embark on the exploration of a hermeneutical approach that uses the figure of the scapegoat, the innocent victim, as the interpretative lens that powers non-violent readings of The Bible.

In exploring Girard's anthropology to reimagine from below both Guatemala City and the CMT Guatemala network, it is my intention to go beyond the strict boundaries of Guatemalan evangelical theology and doctrine to now enter the realm of non-violent hermeneutics for the urban reality. The eyes of Jesus, the forgiving victim, offer the lenses needed to read and to see paradise in the dust of the street.

8.2.1 Jesus the Forgiving Victim

Levertov states: "not that horror was not, not that the killings did not continue", and with this declaration, the poet reminds herself and her readers that the urban is filled with a specific kind of violence that allows for the constant killing of innocent victims to appease the gods of the global sacrificial theology. The light that mimetic theory sheds on the scapegoat mechanism as the origin of human culture and religion portrays the gruesome reality of humanity. All cultures and societies across space and time operate within this system. In fact, all religions begin with this mechanism as the origin of their myths, rituals, and prohibitions. In addition, mimetic theory introduces one to the reality that all humans desire by imitating each other, and that the way humans produce peace is through the expulsion of somebody—the scapegoat—who is responsible for all the evils of the community and the community's reconciliation. Interestingly, for this system of

exclusionary practices to work, it needs a blindness on the part of all of those involved in it. This blindness sees the system as the only way to make, build, and keep peace. If this is the reality of the human condition, how is one to build peace or even develop theological insights that allow for a rupture from positivist exclusionary theologies? How can one even dream of something different? How can one see paradise in the dust of the street?

In chapter two I explained the process of revelation that happens in the narrative of the Gospels and how this revelatory process shaped Girard's understanding of Jesus as the victim that unveils the truth behind the system that executed him. In this section, I will explore the hermeneutical possibilities of such a revelation. It is important that I recognise that I am in the process of being transformed and reoriented using Jesus as the forgiving victim as a lens to read Scripture. For that reason, I heavily rely on the theology and hermeneutics developed by James Alison; Alison's theological articulations will be essential in developing the following exploration.

James Alison (1996: 22) posits that there is only one way for the system to be revealed for what it is, a murderous lying structure of victimisation. The light that allows for such a revelation must come from somebody with a completely different perception. In other words, it ought to be the point of view of someone who has not been formed and shaped by the murderous lie of the system. For Alison, that somebody is Jesus as he completes the counter-mythical revelatory process that began with the Jewish story. This can be explored through mimetic theory as this theory is a revelatory process in itself. Mimetic theory connects quite well with the revelatory anthropology that can be found in the Gospel narratives since it can also be understood as an anthropology of mimetic desire (Alison, 1998: 25).

How is the system truly revealed for what it is? Through the subversion and abolition of the possibility of repeating the murderous myth of the scapegoating mechanism, through the

resurrection (Alison, 1996: 25). This element of Alison's approach is quite important for the development of non-violent hermeneutics. Alison does not propose something new or outside of traditional Catholic or even evangelical theology. He offers something as simple as going back to the very event that disoriented and reoriented the disciples amid their turmoil. The resurrection as a historical happening over certain period of time interrupted the mourning process of Jesus' death. As a result, it changed the disciples' perception of Jesus and human reality. The resurrection was not limited to the revelation of who Jesus was, an innocent man, and did not only prove that Jesus was right about who God is, a God of love. It went even further. It revealed the truth behind the mechanism "by which innocent victims are created by people who think that by creating such victims they are working god's most holy will" (Ibid.: 27). It brought to light the true murderous nature of human religion and culture for all to see, even in its most "peaceful" and purest forms. Consequently, the resurrection pointed to the responsibility of all who are involved in such institutions and structures. This, of course, can only be explored and accepted this way if one believes in and chooses to accept the reality of the resurrection of Jesus as a fact, which is a belief and exercise of faith in itself.

This is where the subjectivity of belief and faith come into play. My intention in this dissertation is not to develop a resurrection apologetic. Faith in the resurrection, as a fact of Christianity, is vital for this hermeneutical approach. However, the concept of faith that comes through belief has a complex dynamism. The term *faith* in itself poses quite a conundrum. It needs a great deal of healing before it can be used with the liberty that contemporary society and its collective woundedness require (Tillich, 1957: Loc. 185). Notwithstanding, the dynamics of faith and its metaphysical charge, with its positive and negative applications, is what humanity needs to start healing from its collective woundedness and to develop non-violent biblical hermeneutics.

I believe that the healing of our faith comes through the understanding of who Jesus was. Even more so, healing lies within a decolonised understanding of who early Christians were before Christianity became the empire co-opted vehicle for cultural domination, if there is such a thing as decolonised Christianity. I understand that this dissertation is not the place to develop a quest for the historical Jesus from a Latin American perspective nor a romanticised idea of early Christianity. However, there are three elements that I would like to point out before moving on. Firstly, I deem it important to follow Crossan's (1995: 28) perspective in his search of the historical Jesus. When Christians talk about Jesus or try to understand who Jesus was, Crossan emphasises that "any decision on Jesus' socioeconomic class must be made not in terms of Christian theology but of cross-cultural anthropology, not in terms of those interested in exalting Jesus but in terms of those not even thinking of his existence." This will allow us to have a more realistic understanding of who Jesus was as a man. In my opinion, part of the hindrance that affects the theologising process in Guatemala and other Latin American countries is the refusal to understand Jesus in human terms. Consequently, this overly spiritualized understanding of Jesus has developed a faith that confesses God as good, but experiences Godself as distant, authoritarian, and unjust (Baker, 2013: Loc. 194). Guatemalans, however, would not dare to use this wording to express their experience and understanding of God.

The discrepancy that results from the overly spiritual comprehension of who Jesus was opens the space for the second point I want to mention in this regard. Jesus was very likely "an illiterate peasant but with an oral brilliance that few of those trained in literate and scribal disciplines can ever attain" (Crossan, 1995: 65). The acceptance of such a scandalous possibility opens a beautiful passage through the crude reality that impoverished and marginalised Guatemalans experience. If Jesus truly was a man of his time, culture, and social allocation, then

it would be easier for people who live in poverty to identify with him. It would subvert the current understanding of a powerful Christianity that is closely connected to the State and the powers that be in the Americas. Furthermore, the sociological analysis that has a human Jesus as its point of departure would take one to understand that the Jesus movement, the “people of the way” as early Christians were known, was a movement of inferiorised and marginalised sectors that carried a heavy social critique and the hope and dreaming of a different future, a more just and egalitarian future (Aguirre, 2015: 54).

Finally, this is where the connection with the resurrection occurs. If Jesus and his movement could be characterized as they were in the past few paragraphs, then the resurrection without vengeance of a member of the oppressed, inferiorised, and marginal groups holds incredible amounts of power to subvert human relations. It reveals the Kingdom of God as a non-violent alternative to the current violent reality of things. It opens the space for a more comprehensive view of what the Kingdom of God was, is, and shall be. This, of course, with the understanding that any articulation of the Kingdom is an interpretation people make as Jesus’ followers. Nevertheless, it is imperative that Christians transform their understanding of what Kingdom means. The misunderstanding of the Kingdom of God has served to justify overly spiritual perspectives that care only for the salvation of souls. It has also been used to justify theocratic projects imposed by force in the name of a “Christian civilisation” (Aguirre, 2015: 62). In the words of John Dominic Crossan (1995: 65), it is not a specific site or location, power or rule. It is “a process much more than a place, a way of life much more than a location on earth”. What Christians ought to understand is that the language of the Kingdom of God opened a different way of understanding God. Jesus did not use concepts or dogmatic formulations to refer to God and God’s kingdom. He rather used a poetic and suggestive discourse that allowed his listeners to

discover different perspectives to see and imagine a new reality (Aguirre, 2015: 58). For that reason, Crossan (1995: 63) proposes two ways of understanding the Kingdom of God in Scripture. The first one is the Future Kingdom, which was crafted and proclaimed by the scribal elites. The second one is the Apocalyptic Kingdom, which was exemplified through direct activism and revolution. Crossan intentionally avoids stating that one is better than the other. However, the author does propose a Scriptural alternative to these outlooks. He calls it the present or *sapiential* (wisdom) vision. In this understanding of the Kingdom of God, one enters God's rule and power in the here and now. This implies a simultaneously ethical and eschatological Kingdom. "One enters that kingdom by wisdom of goodness, by virtue, justice, or freedom. It is a style of life for now rather than a hope of life for the future" (Ibid.). In the words of Rafael Aguirre (2015: 62):

[my translation] The proclamation of the Kingdom of God, which is God with all of God's sovereignty, mercy and requirements, approaching history and pushing to open way for Godself, departs from the live consciousness of the existing oppression and dehumanisation, and the necessity for radical change. The sign of the Kingdom of God, far from being the discourse of the ruling classes trying to legitimate their situation through a theocracy, is—in Jesus' mouth—the expression of a genuine desire for a profoundly alternative different situation. The God of this Kingdom is the God of conversion, in other words, the God of change. Without question, Jesus' religion responds to the situation and hope of subordinate sectors of society. That is why it harshly criticises the dominant ideology and religion.

For that reason, the *human catechism* that I will explore in chapter ten is much more than just a faith practice. It is a formation process that starts with the resurrection and develops as a sign of the Kingdom of God. It is a manner of being for the here and now.

With a clearer understanding of the Kingdom of God, faith in the resurrection implies a manner of being that involves a concern with a specific being-in-the-world. Faith is the constant state of being concerned with the unknown as a part of the human experience (Tillich, 1957). In the case of the resurrection, faith is the state of being concerned with the possibility that the apostolic witness is a construction that fabricated the reality of Christianity and nothing more. This

is, in my opinion, one of the concerns of the being-in-the-world as a Christian. However, I would like to argue that there is an ultimate concern that is at the core of every Christian, and that is intrinsically connected to the faith that results from the belief or non-belief in the resurrection. This preoccupation has to do with the understanding of who God is and what God expects from each person. That is why the content of the faith is of utmost importance for the believer at an individual and collective level (Tillich, 1957). In contemporary society, one can see groups of people that hold tight to violent theologies and ideas of the Christian god. Their ultimate concern is to make sure that they are on the good side of a god that is capable and willing to destroy complete civilizations, including children, women, and the elderly in order to keep its unpolluted, clean, and holy self without stain. The ultimate concern of this kind of theology is in keeping the wrath of the Christian god in check to avoid the destruction of humanity once more. In other words, people are concerned with keeping the current order of things within the boundaries of decency, purity, and cleanliness to not spark such wrath. These perspectives fuel the ultimate concern of a human existence that necessitates denial of reality and its violent and exclusionary practices. As a result, everything that happens in this world happens to be guided by the mysterious hand of a mischievous, all-powerful demiurge that uses human hands to unleash his wrath. This kind of faith demands a complete surrender of the self to the laws that seem to come from this demiurge. These laws require constant sacrifices to not upset this god. In addition, the rules require one to help god with the separation of those who threaten the boundaries of purity. Nevertheless, believing and having faith in the resurrection opens a door for an alternate understanding of God. The good news is that the revelatory process that the apostles underwent broke their attachment to the idea of a violent god that asked the exclusion of the impure to gain god's favour and their salvation.

One may wonder how this happened. How did the apostles change their perspectives? How did they manage to convey that message to others? It happened mimetically, through a discovery process. Alison's (1998: 28) perspective on the process of mind change that the apostles experienced clearly shows a relational, mimetic, and inductive process. "It is our relationality to others that introduces us into being human, and that being-related-to-others works mimetically". As a result, the hermeneutics that result from using Jesus the forgiving victim as a lens happen in a community of desire that is in constant expansion and inclusion of the other. Here I would like to point to the story presented in the Lukan account of the resurrection. In Luke 24, one can find an example of the process that the disciples underwent. The story, which I will not exegete in detail, tells us that the disciples had a very specific reaction to Jesus' death. Their emotions, hopes, and dreams in relation to who they understood Jesus to be fell into a void. In addition, these feelings were held up very close to the fact that the ending of their master could be the same one for them. On top of that, they had to deal with the guilt they carried from leaving Jesus alone during his trial and execution. What one can see, then, is a group of "disillusioned, frightened, guilty, mournful, semi-traitors" (Alison, 1998: 73).

The beauty of understanding the apostolic circle this way lies in the possibility of exploring Jesus' resurrection as an act of gratuity towards the disciples and everyone else who was involved in his execution. Those who crucified Jesus, including his disciples, were entangled in the process of mimetic rivalry and violence. In the mimetic progression there is always a possibility that the other will retaliate to one's violent actions. In killing Jesus, his executioners terminated the possibility of reciprocity on their part. They were not at risk of receiving violence in return for their actions anymore (Alison, 1996). As a result, the resurrection was completely unexpected as they were faced with someone completely different from them. The alterity presented by Jesus was

not based in mimetic rivalry. Jesus did not build his resurrected self over and against his executioners. The disciples encountered a resurrected Jesus who was neither accusing them nor reciprocating the violence that he experienced. Jesus faced them with forgiveness (Luke 24; John 20:19-29; 21:15-17). This opened a completely new category for relating to one another and new possibilities for the understanding of Jesus as the son of Man, and God. Alison (1998: 74) argues that in coming back to them in this gratuitous way, an “utterly” other was revealed in Jesus. This encounter with somebody who is not retaliating in vengeance was a terrifying experience for the apostles because it threw out of balance their human frame of reference. The *other* that humans expect is usually a vengeful other. Humans will always expect somebody who is going to retaliate. For that reason, the words of Jesus when reappearing to his disciples is usually a word of peace and not fear (Luke 23:36; John 20:19, 21, 26). It is this completely other who then re-reads Scripture in a way that brings new possibilities to understand who God is revealed through Jesus. The Gospel of Luke (24:27) states: “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself”. This completely other turned himself into a living text that re-read the ancient law and prophecies through his eyes. In resurrecting as the forgiving victim,

[t]he forgiveness was not a change of attitude on the part of Jesus or God, but a change in their relationship to the ‘other’ on the part of the disciples [...] Here is something quite clear: we have a foundational scene of origin in reverse, in which the victim is uncovered and given back in order to permit a new sort of foundation that does not depend on a cover up [...] The resurrection is the possibility of a completely new and previously unimaginable human story, a rereading of all human stories from a radical perspective that had previously been hidden. It had previously been hidden by the reality of death (Alison, 1998: 75–77).

8.2.2 Non-Violent Hermeneutics and the Perception of God

In this process of hermeneutical transformation, it is important that one understands just how subversive is the lens of Jesus the forgiving victim. The subversion of old and contemporary

doctrines and the rebuilding of a paradigm found in the apostolic witness threatens the idea of the evangelical violent god. This god has been interpreted and created within the system of the violent sacred that interprets Jesus' death on the cross as the appeasement of a wrathful god who asked his own son to be sacrificed in order to calm his thirst for blood. This ambivalent god, who is considered to simultaneously be love and consuming fire, is no more than a peer to its mythical counterparts in other archaic and contemporary religions.

A God Pruned of Violence

The lens of Jesus as the forgiving victim opens the possibilities for the exploration of a God that is completely other to its mythical counterparts. In fact, the gift of the resurrection lies in the truth that Jesus came to tell humanity that God is completely different from what humans can envision (Alison, 1996: 39)—a.k.a. penal substitutionary atonement. For Alison (1996: 41), the possibility of an understanding of God as truly other follows three steps within the apostolic witness. Firstly, an utterly other God is a God pruned of violence. This implies that the understanding of humanity as the hands which carry out God's murders is no more. This is something very shocking because contemporary Christianity still clings to mythical understandings of God as involved in violence and violence as something that is outside humans. The God that Jesus reveals is something completely different; it is a God that is “brilliantly alive and completely without reference to death”.

A God Who Is Pure Love

Secondly, God is revealed as pure love. This is quite a challenge for those who have been immersed in the waters of sacred violence for too long as it finishes the ambivalence of a punitive god. Within this step, there are two movements that allow the forgiving victim to shed even more light onto

who God is. The first shift prompts one to acknowledge that if God raised Jesus from the grave, then God was not involved in the killing of Jesus in any way. In other words, God did not ask for the sacrifice of Jesus. This implies that the violence suffered by Jesus during his sacrifice, understanding sacrifice in purely anthropological terms, is completely and solely human violence. As a result, the willingness of Jesus to submit himself was completely deliberate, a plan of self-giving as a revelatory process to create the possibility to believe in a God for whom death is no more. The second shift has deep implications because the rereading of scripture allows one to see the so called “wrath of God” as something different. With Jesus as the forgiving victim, the reading of the Pauline letters becomes more of a revelatory process than the search for a moral code for the church. The “wrath” is to live in the kind of world that is willing to reject, exclude, and murder the son of God. In Alison’s (1998: 127) words, “the wrath, rather than being an act of divine vengeance, is a divine non-resistance to human evil.” Besides, the idea that God is love is in complete contraposition to the idea of a God that is involved in violence, exclusion, murder, and so on.

Creation in Christ

The third step is the revelation of creation in Christ. Alison (1996: 49–56) takes on the exploration of the idea of God as creator starting from the Christian understanding of the divine plan, creation-fall-redemption-heaven. This understanding, however, still holds mythical views that tie God to the order of this world, thereby, to the violence and exclusion that is fuelled by the global sacrificial theological system. This story sees creation and redemption as separate acts. Thus, salvation becomes a kind of rescue operation on God’s part to salvage the creation that has been corrupted. Consequently, the images of creator and saviour are different from each other, leaving unclear what the relationship is between God and Jesus. However, Alison (1996: 51) believes that there

was something that drove the apostolic group to see a clear connection between Creator and Saviour, therefore, between God and Jesus which is evident in many of the writings of the apostolic witness (John 1:1-3; Hebrews 1:1-3; 1 Corinthians 8:6, Colossians 1:13-20). This something that became clear for the apostolic group is the evolution of the understanding of God-Creator as someone who did something once to someone who is doing something through Jesus. Therefore, Jesus becomes the lens to reinterpret the stories of creation and fall allowing for creation to be finished on the cross, but open again in the first day of the week with the resurrection. In Alison's (1996: 55) words:

we understand creation starting and through Jesus. God's graciousness, which brings what is not into existence from nothing, is exactly the same thing as Jesus' death-less self-giving out of love which enables him to break the human culture of death and is a self-giving which is entirely fixed on bringing into being a radiantly living and exuberant culture.

I must admit that this last point is not completely clear in Alison's theological development of the idea of creation in Christ. However, it respects the order of discovery and the inductiveness of the process of revelation of God in the person of Jesus. The connection that Alison makes with the creation in Christ needs to be further developed through the examination of the apostolic witness and a deeper rereading of the creation narrative to completely build a theological articulation of a God pruned of violence. This dissertation is not the space to embark on such an endeavour. However, this is something that could be explored with communities of grassroots leaders at a local and global level.

Before moving on, allow me to take a small reflective detour here. What has been presented by Alison is clearly in the realm of theological theory. The theological endeavour that I have embarked on searches for a practical theology of peacebuilding that responds to the Guatemalan collective woundedness. In that case, I cannot fall in a reductionist approach and leave other contexts and their realities outside of this theological articulation. For that reason, I will take the

time to make a point that will help clarify the path that I have chosen in this section through briefly answering two questions: What happens when people act with violence even when they believe in a non-violent God? Is there a space for that kind of a theological and ethical conundrum? The main issue at stake here is not whether there is a space for violence depending on the circumstances. If one follows Girard's anthropology, one will understand that the way humans relate will be always tainted by violence in its different forms and outputs, which I will explore with more detail in chapter nine.

A Liberative Non-Violent God

The matter at hand is the perception of God amid human violence and the sacralisation of violence to put humanity's responsibility in the hands of a violent god. Girard's anthropology and Alison's theological articulation allows one to see and better understand that violence results from human interactions. In addition, it allows one to explore the possibility of a non-violent God. For that reason, the insight presented by Alison allows one to come to terms with the realisation that even in the face of most horrible evilness, even if one decides to act with violence in retaliation, God has nothing to do with it, God is not asking for it, and God's mercy is ever-reaching, ever-present, and forgiving. The God of life is there to walk with humanity amidst its violence. The God of forgiveness is there to walk with individuals who see no other option but to get involved in conspiracies to choose the least violent option. Let me state it again, the core of non-violent hermeneutics is in the belief that God is not violent.

The three steps presented above are a theological evolution that started with the apostolic witness, and somehow has been transferred through history all the way to today. In no way did this hermeneutical turn happen overnight or through the mere repetition of creeds. Theology, belief, and faith happen through the imitation of one another. People are gradually inducted into a set of

practices that develop and call forth a specific way of being-in-the-world. This something rather different than what people believe nowadays. Contemporary society believes that if people get the ideas right, the skill will then develop to the point of expertise. However, mimetic theory poses that, in reality, people discover from within what ideas really mean as they discover themselves becoming something (Alison, 2013). Such was the case of the apostles as their frame of reference was deconstructed and reconstructed by the resurrected forgiving victim.

In other words, revelation, especially Christian revelation, is a process of human discovery. It is an evolution of constantly becoming more human. Revelation is a counterforce, a constantly revealing process of something which humans tend to cover up, violence as the result of humans being as they are (Alison, 1998). Alison posits that the apostolic group progressively became not only aware of their violence, participation in the system and the killing of Jesus, but also developed a consciousness that allowed them to understand and see Jesus as the forgiving victim and accept his forgiveness for their participation in his execution. In Alison's (1998: 69) words: "This means positing that the slow development of the understanding of who human beings are and the slow development of the understanding of who God is are a simultaneous process, and it is impossible the one without the other."

It would be naïve to believe that this ontological change was completely trunked with Christianity becoming de-criminalised by Constantine in the III century. In fact, the images and ideas of paradise depicted by early Christians, people of the way, under persecution seem to be glimpses of this non-violent resistance against the forces of the Roman Empire. Paradise was the place where those who experienced martyrdom went. It was the realm of the departed where pain, oppression, and suffering was no more (Nakashima Brok & Parker, 2008: 57–65). In my opinion, the creation of such an idea shows that early Christians under persecution believed that peace-full

non-violent resistance was rewarded by God. I write this without the intent of romanticising the suffering of either early or contemporary Christians under persecution. I just want to make the point that the ontological change happened and reached deeply within the hearts of persecuted church. Even after Constantine's intervention, the imagery created by Christian communities depicted a resistance against the force and co-optation of Christianity by the Empire. This theological insight is still present in the church as there are countless examples of the struggle between co-opted religion and Jesus the forgiving victim (Nakashima Brok & Parker, 2008). Alison's work is an example of the new consciousness gained by the disciples and the passed on through generations of believers all the way to contemporary society. In the words of Jung Mo Sung (2007: Loc. 155): "Christian theology has inner accumulated wisdom useful and important for the unmasking of the perverse way in which the relation desire-market-religion is lived out today."

Furthermore, the idea that the God of the Kingdom of God is the God of the victims is a sign of this insight. For "blessed are the poor" (Matthew 5:3; Luke 6:20) needs to be de-spiritualised to explore the possibility that what Jesus meant was the critique of the religious, political and economic systems of his time. If one extrapolates that to contemporary society, the weight of responsibility is quite heavy. Following Crossan's (1995: 70) interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount, the Kingdom of God is a Kingdome of the destitute,

in any situation of oppression, especially in those oblique, indirect, and systemic ones where injustice wears a mask of normalcy or even of necessity, the only ones who are innocent or blessed are those squeezed out deliberately as human junk from the system's own evil operation. A contemporary equivalent: only the homeless are innocent. This is a terrifying aphorism because, like the aphorisms against the family, it focuses on just on personal or individual abuse of power but on such abuse in its systemic or structural possibilities—and there, in contrast to the former level, none of our hands are innocent or our consciences particularly clear.

In other words, the idea is not to reward poverty and the virtues of the poor. Rafael Aguirre (2015: 64–67) posits that the perspective is quite different. The Kingdom of God is justice, mercy, and goodness. Thereby, the Kingdom takes care of those who are in the greatest of needs. Consequently, the Kingdom of God is the social and moral relativization of the Law and the Temple as instruments of salvation. Consequently, Jesus' God is revealed in the process of giving society its human face. This understanding of the Kingdom and the God of the Kingdom is possible through the ontological change of Jesus the forgiving victim and the non-violent perception of God as the core of non-violent hermeneutics.

8.2.3 Non-Violent Hermeneutics: an ontological change within the urban context

With that said, this is where the hermeneutical turn happens. The process of the resurrection and the understanding developed by Jesus in the apostolic witness led to an ontological change in the apostles. The paradigmatic examples are the conversion stories of Paul (Acts 9) and Peter (Acts 10). In both cases, one can see a process of deconstruction and reconstruction of the self in a way that turns away from exclusionary scapegoating practices. This is not to say that this transformation happened overnight. As I mentioned before, it happened gradually within the first community of believers through a revelatory process of who Jesus is. This metamorphosis was only possible due to Jesus' reinterpretation of his own life and death, through the resurrection. The apostles did not have the Scriptural reference to increase their belief in the risen Christ; they had the crucified and risen Christ among them, becoming the interpretative key for a reading of the Hebrew Scriptures that showed God's revelation to the point of completion where they were, with the forgiving victim before their eyes (Alison, 1998: 79).

This ontological change developed a kind of intelligence that Alison (1998: 80) calls the intelligence of the victim, which is the process of rereading Jesus' life as the self-giving and self-

revealing victim. I would like to argue that this is not a simple learning process. It was an ontological change that led the apostles to start using Jesus as the hermeneutical lens to read not only the Scriptures they had available, but also their society and experience in the world in order to write the apostolic witness. The disciples were able to see Jesus' life through his eyes, which allowed them to understand and tell the story of his death and resurrection from the perspective of the innocent victim of a lynching (Ibid.). The beauty of this kind of intelligence is that it reveals a different perspective of God and humanity. It allows humans to see God as pure, loving, and self-giving. That implies that the way humans relate to God is through either ignorant complicity in his victimisation or with the intelligence of the victim, in the commencement of patient solidarity (Ibid.: 83).

The implications of such an ontologic-hermeneutical turn are quite deep. The reading of The Bible assuredly changes, but what is really transformed is the interpretation of contemporary society as one can begin to acknowledge the suffering of those who are excluded from contemporary institutions. If one is to be affected and transformed by the intelligence of the victim, then it is an imperative to stand in solidarity with the innocent victims of a global sacrificial theology. Even more so, the standing in solidarity must be in gratuitous self-giving to the oppressed and the oppressive other. This hermeneutical approach ought to lead to a kind of theology and reading of scripture that transgresses the boundaries of purity and decency that still ask for the exclusion and execution of those who are deemed as impure and polluting. Furthermore, a practical theology of liberation then becomes the slow long-term process of liberating each other from the grasp of the global sacrificial theology without resentment and desires for vengeance. This may seem quite controversial in circles that are in the struggle for social justice. However, the self-

giving part of this hermeneutical approach invites Christians to live out of the exuberant abundance of God's deathless self.

The hermeneutical ontology presented here is a complete transformation of the self. It must be done in the context of community and needs the lens of Jesus the forgiving victim to re-read The Bible and contemporary society. In re-reading The Bible from below with people who have been marginalized and labelled as criminals in many cases, it is important to keep in mind that reading the apostolic witness means entering the stories of bad people. In the case of the apostle Paul (1 Timothy 1:15; 1 Corinthians 15:9), who happens to be the referent for purity and doctrine in contemporary Latin American evangelical subculture, he knew his place well. In knowing his place as a persecutor and murderer, he allowed himself to be, to become, forgiven. In the end, "the people who are not good in their own eyes can allow themselves to be forgiven" (Alison, 2013: 42). This is what I would like to call an ontology of forgiveness. It is through the eyes of the forgiving victim that one comes to construct oneself as forgiven within a community of forgiven people. Furthermore, the ontology of forgiveness and the understanding of Jesus as the forgiving victim allows for an indecent theology that is willing to break the boundaries of purity, decency, and cleanliness from a place of non-violence and peacebuilding.

8.3 Indecent Contextual Theology

The term "indecent" applied to theology comes from the feminist practical theologian of liberation Marcela Althaus-Reid. This concept will help this dissertation as it criticises specific forms of theologising within the liberationist paradigm and re-valorises all theologising as a sexual and political act. In addition, Althaus-Reid's perspective can be taken as a linguistified corrective for the expansion of a practical theology of liberation. It is from the point of indecency that feminist contextual indecent theologising moves beyond the boundaries of purity, decency, correctness, and

religious righteousness, which have psychological and material implications amid late capitalism. Indecent theologising opens the door for a radically inclusive way of doing theology. It considers the sexuality and emotionality of theology as a sexual, economic, and political act. An indecent theology deals with sexuality as a theological category that can also open the conversation of spatial justice in a world where space is still very male dominated and oriented.

Having sexism as a representation of the Guatemalan collective woundedness opens the possibility to reimagine ways of contextual theologising that bring healing to the relationships between women and men. Sexism and misogyny are part of the pathological interlocked structures that oppress both men and women. However, they affect women's understanding of self by stacking oppression and violence in the particular way that they interpret their being-in-the-world as irreparably wounded by the fractures inflicted by men in power. The evil, oppression, and violence experienced by women is not something they choose. It is something imposed through social institutions that facilitate it (Gebara, 2002: Loc. 45). I understand that I may be overstepping my understanding of women's and the LGBTQI community experience from a privileged heterosexual male perspective.

I may be falling into speaking on behalf of women and other groups in the Guatemalan context. For that reason, it is important that, in this theological process, I acknowledge my position of power as a man. It is also important to recognize that I will never be able to fully understand the struggle of my LGBTQI brothers and sisters in the midst of a misogynistic culture that still oppresses the female-other, the gay-other, and so on based on the gender, racial, and social roles that are traditional to Guatemala society. As a man, I cannot do feminist contextual theology, but I can participate in indecent contextual theologising in a way that honours the struggle of my Guatemalan sisters and women all around the world.

With that said, the purpose of entering into dialogue with a feminist perspective for contextual theologising is to stand in solidarity with the theological, social, racial, and cultural struggle of women and other sexual minorities. It is also to open the problematic horizon in a way that is not reductionistic, falling into the trap of a reduced historic-hermeneutical interpretation of the Guatemalan context through a contextual theologising that does not take gender and sexuality as a part of reality. This section of chapter eight will enter the criticism presented by Marcela Althaus-Reid regarding liberation theology in its oppression against women and people with different sexual orientation and identities. Then, it will turn to the concepts of purity, decency, and the unclean to set the framework that an indecent contextual theology must transgress.

8.3.1 Indecent Criticism

When one accepts the invitation to dialogue with feminist contextual theology, it is important that one understands that feminist theologians are not utilizing completely different tools. Irene Foulkes (2013: 126–49) proposes that the methods are not something unknown to more traditional theologians. The concepts, tools, and procedures are the same. The old-fashioned tools produce different results because of the perspective used by feminist theologians. This specific point of view departs from the sociological concept of gender, which is a construct that is not always considered by male practical theologians of liberation. Feminist theologians posit that the exploration of gender within the Scriptures and their social context, and the contemporary context of the theologian, is of utmost importance because patriarchal societies use socialisation as a way of creating continuity of power in the hands of men through teaching the superiority of men and the inferior condition of women. For that reason, one must theologise starting from the assumption that one's social context and all the texts in Scripture are constructed and written abiding by a specific gender bias. As a result, the readers are active agents in the process of reading the texts,

thus building their own meanings and formulating their own responses to both the text and the contemporary contextual reality.

The tools that Foulkes mentions are not different from more orthodox ways of doing theology, exegesis, contextual analysis, historical interpretation, and so on. However, two questions arise: How could the same tools be used in a way that challenge the patriarchal status quo? How did liberation theology fail to be liberating to women even when they used these tools to criticize the system? To answer these questions, it is important to remember that practical theology of liberation is an act of continual recontextualization. This process does not imply the addition of new perspectives to an already established theological discourse. It is, however, a process where doubt is an intrinsic part of the theological method. Continual recontextualization is the questioning of the hermeneutical principles and assumptions that lead previous generations of practical theologians of liberation to ignore key elements of the theological discourse and the reality of the women and men who live at the margins of society (Althaus-Reid, 2005: 17).

Liberation theology was not as liberating as it could have been for women and people with different sexual identities and orientations. In her denunciation of liberation theology falling in line with western decency, Althaus-Reid (2005: 45–54) criticised the fact that liberation theology became a merchandise. Liberation theologians sold their theologising to the system that they so desperately denounced. Thereby, liberation theologians alienated the suffering of the poor and turned it into a good to be sold to the highest bidder. Theological reflection turned into the means of becoming wealthy in recognition, thus devaluing suffering. Consequently, liberation theology could not liberate itself from hegemonic Christianity nor the “decency” that places other human

beings in inferior religious, economic, political and sexual positions; in Althaus-Reid's (2005: 47) own words:³³

Our poverty and physical hunger were exchanged for theological concepts like 'the bread of life', which had no practical use, and it was like giving starving people a cookbook filled with illustrations. Concrete suffering was the currency we used before the systematic promises and descriptions of a bread that satisfies more than truth. But, wow! How ridiculous this was when our bodies cramped up in hunger.

Part of the domestication and selling out of liberation theology's reflection had to do with the fact that it did not address sexual differences. The word "poor" included not only women, but also lesbians, gays, transgenders and bisexual people. Liberation theology did not talk about the reality of the traditions of old within Latin American poverty (incest, sexual abuse, clandestine abortions, etc.). The domestication was a result of the idealistic and romantic depiction of the poor as an asexual being and deserving of poverty. Liberation theology did not free itself from the North-Atlantic systematic models of theologising as it did not address the sexual implications of the economic and religious systems, thus lacking the transgressive elements that could have been liberating for different sectors of Latin American society (Althaus-Reid, 2005: 51).

Another important element of Althaus-Reid's (2005) criticism lies in the denunciation of liberation theology as oppressive towards women. The fact that liberation theology excluded women based on gender has been quite debilitating for the theological discourse that came out of liberation theology. The idealisation of women, as the suffering poor but strong Christian woman, exploited all the social labour that was part of women's anonymous organization in the Ecclesial Based Communities (Althaus-Reid, 2005: 54). Simultaneously, women were excluded from the theological institutions, thus suppressing their voice amid the struggles for justice and equality. The images of the Latin American woman and the Latin American poor became a fetish. These

³³ My personal translation of Althaus-Reid Spanish text.

images never presented the women who struggled to be ordained within patriarchal religious institutions, nor the women who fought against abusive Christian men within their households (Althaus-Reid, 2005: 55). In summary, the idea of women presented by the Latin American liberation theologies and patriarchal institutions became an idealisation of a submissive woman who is just brave enough to raise her voice within the boundaries of accepted decency.

It is important to mention that Althaus-Reid criticised other feminist liberation theologians because they did not concretise the reality of sexuality and spoke from an experience that still obeyed within the parameters of decency and correctness inside western theology. Part of their falling short is due to the lack of engagement with the Marxist and feminist materialist anthropology of the 1960s. According to Althaus-Reid (2005: 67), Ivone Gebara, and others whose work is briefly explored in previous chapters, criticise an imaginary anthropologist or theologian through repeating the key assumptions of liberation theology instead of engaging with the romanticism of seeing women through the image of Mary as the mother of the poor and other images of Mary that reinforced the limits of decency and correctness imposed by an institution built on the privilege of heterosexual men.

Althaus-Reid's criticism is hard and assertive. It does not allow her readers to romanticise her as a theologian or as a woman. Sexuality and indecency exude from her approach to liberation theology and present a linguistified corrective to theologise not from the perspective of women, but with women and other sexual minorities of society as they struggle with the *machista* culture that permeates Guatemalan and Latin American society. Even more so, Althaus-Reid invites her readers to find different theological categories that allow for a theology that is willing to transgress the accepted decency and sexuality within systematic theology. The invitation is to engage theology as a sexual act with political, economic, and cultural implications. Althaus-Reid (2005:

67) asks a question in the midst of her critique of liberation theology, which I will paraphrase as follows: What can the practical theologian of liberation do? She answers: “If he [the male theologian] commits to doing theology with the people, then he needs to recognise that sometimes people do theology without wearing underwear”. This is to say, that people already do theology outside of the accepted parameters of decency, purity, and cleanliness.

The image of the virgin Mary is of high importance for Althaus-Reid (2005: 63–65) as the Virgin marks the creation of the boundaries of decency through the metaphysical and cultural conquest since colonial days in Latin America. However, before briefly exploring the analysis of the image of the Virgin Mary and how she affects the understanding of decency and theologising and how it can also be indecent and liberating, it is important to explain briefly the evangelical perception of Mary. In Guatemala and Latin America, the Virgin Mary is not as important for evangelicals. There are not evangelical theologians I know of who have undertaken deep studies of the person of Mary and the theological implications of her character in The Bible. Mary is someone who belongs to Catholics. For that reason, evangelicals have as little to do with her as they can. However, the common discourse is that Mary is respected for what she did. She gave birth to the Christ. It is my opinion that this distancing from Mary also perpetuates a male centred idea of God and the Church. Thus, it creates continuity in the patriarchal tradition within the evangelical Church. The question that arises, but that it is not to be explored in depth in this dissertation is, could it be that part of the indecent theologising from the evangelical Church has to also come from Mary?

8.3.2 Decency, Purity, and the Unclean

As seen in the religious representation of the collective woundedness, Guatemalan and Latin American Christianity is a direct importation of the United States and European theology and

theological categories. Consequently, the concepts of decency and purity, which are quite important in the evangelical subculture, have been deeply informed and shaped by conservative evangelical theology from the North and colonial European Catholicism. For that reason, I will enter the theological understandings of decency, purity, and the unclean. These metaphors allow us to enter the act of indecent contextual theology because they will set the boundaries that need to be transgressed in order to have a truly liberating theologising experience.

In Latin American culture, decency and the value of a person, a woman to be more specific, depends on her capacity to remain a virgin until marriage, hence the importance of the virginal conception of Jesus and, from the Catholic perspective, the prominence of holy Mary ever virgin. In both cases, Mary could have not been a vessel for God's insemination if she was not a pure virgin. Interestingly, as Elizabeth Gish proposes (2016: 2), in the United States there is a specific look, features and colour of skin, that identifies an attractive young female virgin, the more white and European looking, the better the virgin. These looks reinforce the idea of superiority that comes from the understanding of the man/father as the high-priest and young women as princesses, which later become goods to be sold and consumed in the purity market of evangelical communities (Gish, 2016). In the Guatemalan context and other global south cultures, this ideal reinforces the oppression and abuse of indigenous young females, which in many cases work as domestic workers. Rape culture and sexual harassment become a daily experience as they are seen as property of the family they work for and a sexual outlet for the man of the house's desires (Human Rights Watch, 2006: 9). As a result, the only women who are worth protecting are white, upper class, and young. Gish speaks of and describes the United States' context of purity balls. However, it is important to see the parallel to some Latin American cultures that use the idea of

the *quinseñera*³⁴ princess in a similar fashion. In addition, it is essential to remember that the concepts of decency and purity in the Latin American context are imported through Western Christianity. The importance of entering the reflection proposed by Gish does not rest only on the feminist controversy of the father princess-daughter rhetoric. It lies in the imagery that comes from the evangelical purity culture that uses the concept of virginity as a parameter for decency and approval of the female body. As a result, the ideal girls, both white and indigenous, are expected to express “naturally” feminine characteristics: “passivity, deferral, gentleness, beauty, and closeness to nature” (Gish, 2016: 12).

Since the concept of virginity is tied to purity and decency, the more traditional veneration of the Virgin Mary implies a “metaphysical and spiritual clitoridectomy” (Althaus-Reid, 2005: 76). In this process, the first thing to be denied in this process is the physical body of women. This procedure mutilates women’s sensuality in order to be approved by the Virgin Mary and never question the religious ideology behind such a social construct. Interestingly, the concepts of decency and virginity are not in alignment with the lives of women who live in communities marked by poverty and violence. In impoverished communities, young women are more often than not, not virgins (Ibid.). The reality of the marginalised, especially in a post-armed conflict society like Guatemala, is a legacy of rape and teen pregnancy. Just in 2016, the national registry of births in Guatemala registered 80,000 births by girls and teenage mothers (Bonilla, 2017). As a result, these young girls are not deemed worthy of respect and protection. With their virginal purity gone, poor young girls and women are immediately transformed into poor *putas*³⁵ who keep birthing children to be raised in terrible conditions. For that reason, in the Latin American Catholic Church,

³⁴ Quinseñera is the Word that marks the coming of age into womanhood of a young girl. When a girl turns fifteen in many Latin American countries, she becomes a woman.

³⁵ Whores

the image of the Virgin Mary as a white, wealthy woman, who hovers, not walks, is not relevant and reinforces the patriarchal imagery tied to decency and purity (Althaus-Reid, 2005: 83). Furthermore, the imagery of the passive, background figure of Mary in the evangelical church also reinforces the patriarchal structures. Part of the limitation that comes with the veneration and worship of the Virgin Mary in Latin America has to do with her essence. In Latin American religious imagery, both Catholic and protestant, The Virgin is not an active participant in the symbolic construction of God's discursive actions. She is just an apparition, a ghostly figure that reinforces the patriarchal and colonial structures that separate the indigenous and the Europeans. The Virgin has been portrayed as nothing more than an observer in the biblical narratives (Althaus-Reid, 2005: 83).

What this shows is that, in both Catholic and evangelical theology, there are images that reinforce the boundaries of purity and decency. These boundaries are usually erected to preserve power for specific kinds of people. As a result, a supremacist theology that oppresses at the social, economic, religious, and sexual level arises to preserve the status quo. Indecent theologising, then, is a process of liberation that implies questioning the traditions that sustain specific sexual theological assumptions, a process that has the capacity for societal transformation when it comes to light (Althaus-Reid, 2005: 104).

8.3.3 Purity as a Contested Metaphor

Richard Beck's (2011) insights will be key in exploring these themes as he has developed a deep connection between the metaphors of purity and cleanliness with Girard's mimetic theory. In addition, this is where one must take the ideas of indecent theologising within the context of this dissertation which considers mimetic theory as the revelatory anthropology that can help one build a practical theology of peacebuilding. In the process of defining what is pure, decent, and clean as

the virginal purity of a young white woman, the *via negativa* transforms the other into the unclean. The reaction resulting from facing the indecent and unclean is one of disgust. Disgust, which is a natural reaction and protective reactionary emotion of the human body, is in charge of monitoring the entry and exit points of the body, preventing something dangerous from entering. When disgust psychology is mixed with and regulates religious rationality, it creates a conundrum as the unclean becomes a source of contamination and the moral judgements that see it as such play by their own rules. In other words, once something is seen with disgust, logic and reason are completely shunned (Beck, 2011: 15). In the progression of this transformation, the others who do not fit the criteria of decency and purity become alien and rejected—poor women, gays, lesbians, transgenders, and so on. This metamorphosis does not only affect women. It affects any person who does not fit the category of purity or who cannot perform within the moral understandings of what salvation is based on the categories of decency, purity, and correctness of conservative Western Christianity.

Disgust and morality connect to each other, creating exclusionary faith practices that aim to the purification of all. This happens as the prominence of specific metaphorical constructs elevate the concepts of purity and cleanliness as something holy that comes from above, from heaven, producing an understanding that views everything clean and pure as good, as the location of grace. Contrarily, all that is dirty and unclean becomes the location of sin and moral pollution (Beck, 2011: 36). As a result, humans develop their moral rationality and the ideas of sin and salvation through the embodied metaphors of purity and cleanliness, connecting the idea of sin to dirt and contamination (Beck, 2011: 44).

In my perspective, purity and cleanliness are contested metaphors in the theological perception of both dominant and emerging liberation theologies. The problem of such metaphors is that they leave people who inhabit what are considered polluted environments out of the spaces

that are considered pure. In the United States and Latin America, these metaphors have fertilized the theological soil to allow extreme visions of penal substitutionary atonement as a soteriological theory that makes absolute sense (Beck, 2011: 41–43). In the dichotomy of purity and cleanliness against the polluted, the images of being washed by the blood of Christ become central due to the need for a metaphor of physical cleansing. Thereby, people who get saved tend to lose missional and theological motivation to keep going in the more orthodox concept of *theosis*, which is the gradual process of being formed in the image of God (Beck, 2011: 45).

The metaphors of purity and cleanliness are powerful tools to regulate behaviours (Beck, 2011: 49). This is especially true when it comes down to issues of sexuality. Hence, the importance of the image of the Virgin Mary in the Catholic Church and the virgin princess in the evangelical subcultures as images that appeal to purity and cleanliness. It is important, however, to move beyond the understanding of virginity and enter other nuances of other sexual behaviours. If virginity and heterosexuality remain at the centre of the purity and cleanliness metaphors, other forms of sexual identity and orientation are immediately deemed unclean and possibly contagious. This is the result of a male dominated understanding of God, as “He” becomes the pronoun that regulates human interactions with the sacred (Beck, 2011: 53).

The metaphors now introduce a contested theological and moral space. When purity is connected to the sacred, to a deity, anything that breaks the triad of archaic religion (myth, rituals, and prohibitions) brings havoc to the community. The transgression of purity and the boundaries of decency is a direct confrontation to the rituals that keep the peace within modern-day religious communities (i.e. heterosexual marriage, abstinence, male religious ordination, and many more). Even more so, it is a transgression in the divine realm, which even in contemporary societies is considered a taboo. Purity and decency are modern day prohibitions, and they are often the loci of

communal conflict as people constantly struggle over divinity ethics violations (Beck, 2011: 62). Consequently, the LGBTQI community, the poor, teenage mothers, and even feminists have become a direct confrontation and threat to these metaphors within Christian communities. The problem in the offence of such prohibitions lies in the fact that disgust psychology moralises specific behaviours. This results in the moralisation of the person who commits a certain act, not the act itself. When the moralisation of an individual takes place, the person becomes the act, thus creating a revulsion against the individual. People suffer a metamorphosis that scandalizes those who are still within the boundaries of decency and purity. “People come to represent moral and spiritual contaminants to the collective moral good” (Beck, 2011: 68). As the reader may remember, within mimetic theory’s insight, when a person or a group is deemed as impure, as the source of evil and a threat to the peace of the community, they lose a crucial social connection with the rest of the group, thus becoming possible scapegoats to be executed when needed.

In summary, one could argue that decency is the effort to preserve purity at all costs. As a result, all theological reflection has to fit within the boundaries of sexual purity of women and the heterosexual understanding of masculinity as the penetrating gift of salvation and completion of the humanity of women. It is in this perspective that the reader is invited to enter into the act of indecent contextual theology. One must ask: for whom are the contextual boundaries of decency? How do those boundaries perpetuate the oppression of women and other sexual minorities? How can those boundaries be transgressed? How can contextual theology become liberating to those who are oppressed by the patriarchal heteronormative religious structures?

8.4 Challenging the Boundaries of Purity and Decency

Since purity and decency are embodied metaphors, I would like to argue that the challenging of such concepts needs a bodily practical engagement. I want to propose two ways of challenging the

boundaries of purity and decency. The first one is through the anthropological reimagination, which I explored in chapter five. The second one is through the engagement of radical hospitality. In order to explore radical hospitality, one needs to understand how exclusion happens through socio-moral disgust. Exclusion materialises as the other loses its humanity in the eyes of the exclusionary other, through the moralisation of another human being. The result of the moralisation of the other has physical consequences as the other becomes the thing that is being rejected. The exclusion of specific people and groups is tangible and visible. This kind of rejection enters into the realm of sociomoral disgust, which is connected to the understanding of specific moral violations and groups (Beck, 2011: 73). Purity is central to exclusion as a faith practice and religious communities enforce it by setting themselves apart “from the defiled world in a hypocritical sinlessness and excludes the boundary breaking other from its heart and its world” (Volf, 1996: 74). Sociomoral disgust poses both a practical and a theological challenge since it extends independently of religious reasoning, even though it is intrinsically connected to religious psychology. There are many different factors that transform the other into something unclean and polluting. These issues range from lack of self-care and hygiene to behaviours that are considered deviant. People experience feelings of revulsion when close to specific people, regardless of the source of their judgement (Beck, 2011: 74). For example, one may feel nauseated and revulsed when in proximity to a person with a strong smell of faeces and urine or when close to person whose behaviour is considered perverted. As a result, exclusion passes as virtue in the name of protecting the divine ethics and the sacred (Volf, 1996), which in the end is the protection of a specific group against what they considered polluting. The problem grows exponentially when one acknowledges that religious systems tend to institutionalise sociomoral disgust (Beck, 2011: 75).

The research done for this dissertation has shown that exclusion as an afflictive faith practice is part of the CMT Guatemala network behaviour. Working with marginalised groups, groups that have been considered as polluting, does not immediately cure humans from having exclusionary tendencies based on sociomoral disgust. Exclusionary practices are the fuel that power sociomoral disgust's engine of social scapegoating through religion and politics (Beck, 2011: 91). This may not seem relevant to those who consider themselves as good-hearted, open-minded people. The truth of the matter, however, is that all humans fall into this tendency without realising it. It is a hidden mechanism since the foundation of human culture (Girard, 1987). It is part of the process triggered by mimetic rivalry and the scapegoat mechanism (Girard, 1977). Beck (2011) posits that sociomoral disgust helps in hiding the scapegoating mechanism in two ways. Firstly, the monstrous double activates disgust psychology, thus helping in the obsession and lack of rationality in the process of moral scandalisation. Secondly, once sociomoral disgust has stimulated the creation of monsters, the scapegoat loses its passivity and becomes the monster. Consequently, violence and exclusion are justified against the scapegoats who are now monsters who threaten the security, identity, and purity of a specific group (Beck, 2011: 93).

The boundaries of decency and purity become more rigid during the chaos created by the mimetic crisis. Theologising in an indecent way is a necessity amid such confusion and enigma. Social exclusion, decency, and purity feed from disgust as the primary process of building boundaries between self and the world. As a result, love becomes a secondary process that allows others to cross the boundaries created in the name of purity and cleanliness (Beck, 2011: 120). If conversation and dialogue start with the metaphors of decency and purity, then love is limited by the boundaries constructed in the midst of perceived threats against the purity of the divine and the group that is "called" to protect it. For that reason, I would like to argue that making love in the

act of radical hospitality is what happens in the process of the anthropological reimagination proposed by the leaders of the CMT Guatemala network. However, in the case of the CMT Guatemala network, the contestation between these metaphors is quite deep. In the interview process it became clear that there is an ambivalence in the perception of the leaders of the network. The leaders have moved beyond their boundaries, serving groups of people who have been considered corrupt, such as homeless people, gang members, and the poor. However, ministries that pushed even further to work with the transgender community were marginalized in the process. This shows conflictive narratives that leave love as a secondary process instead of being the foundation of Christian ethics.

Richard Beck (2011) argues that the impact of sociomoral disgust in human affairs is undeniable. As a result, it is not surprising that hospitality as presented in the biblical narratives and the Christian tradition is an act of fundamental recognition and embrace of the other. Since exclusionary faith practices are dehumanizing, “hospitality acts to restore full human status to the marginalized and outcast” (Beck, 2011: 123). Interestingly, sociomoral disgust and hospitality are two sides of the same coin in the life of Christian communities, and the CMT Guatemala network is not an exception. Sociomoral disgust is intrinsically related to the way humans experience holiness and the divine. Thereby, the search for holiness is in constant tension with hospitality. The non-sacrificial understandings of the prophet Hoshea quoted by Jesus presents a conflict between mercy and sacrifice, which is representative of the tension represented by the ambivalence of Christian communities like the CMT Guatemala network (Ibid.).

Beck builds his arguments for hospitality on the understanding of Volf’s (1996) definition of embrace. The concept of embrace has eucharistic shape to it. It is in the remembrance of the eucharist that one can open the space for the other to enter again the circle where he or she has

been excluded from. Embrace is also cruciform since the heart of the cross opens Christ's stance of not letting the other remain an outcast, thus creating a space for oneself and the boundary breaking other (Volf, 1996: 126). In the phenomenology of embrace, Volf speaks of the willingness to open the space for the other in a way that brings one's identity in desire to have the other's identity to be part of oneself. In this process of emptying of oneself, the other is invited into the desire of embracing. As embracement happens it is the responsibility of both, the self and the other, to open up the space again and be open for the embrace to happen over and over again (Volf, 1996: 140–47). Beck brings the “will to embrace” presented by Volf to the front as a key part of hospitality as a counterproposal to the concepts of decency and purity as dominating metaphors for the human-divine and human to human interactions.

In responding to the call of hospitality, one does not answer to an invitation for charity. One is invited to remake the heart, one's emotional stance toward otherness (Beck, 2011: 136) and to attack the causes of false generosity. Beck, however, is not naïve in his approach. Beck takes very seriously the criticisms that he could face in arguing in favour of the breaking of personal boundaries in the act of radical hospitality. In the process of hospitality, the limits of such hospitality remain unknown. How far should one go to extend such radical boundary-breaking invitation? Beck does not respond to such a question. Nevertheless, he argues that a first step is to not allow that discussions of purity and sin to remain at the centre of Christian boundaries. The invitation is to embrace the human dignity of the other before entering any discussion regarding radical hospitality and the challenging of decency. If purity and decency remain central elements, the “will to purity” will trump the “will to embrace” (Beck, 2011; Volf, 1996), thus leaving the process of anthropological reimagination stuck within the boundaries of decency that still control the Church's engagement with the unclean other.

The invitation to those who want to open in radical hospitality is to consciously recognise one of the realities of the human condition. Humans are constantly psychologically compromised, even when it is not obvious. The sceptical attitude that comes out of this approach will allow those open to a radical hospitality to be suspicious about the way people relate, not necessarily dubious about the self. As a result, Beck expands his concept of hospitality and ties it directly with the “will to embrace” proposed by Volf. Radical Christian hospitality needs a will to embrace as the foundational position of the Christian person (2011: 138).

Traditional hospitality poses a paradox. The contradiction lies in the reality that the host is opening the space for the other, but the other is still under the control of the host. The host is the one who decides what is done in the space that is opened for the other to occupy. There is a power differential that has the capacity to oppress the guest and create an awkward and controlling environment that does not allow for the guest to move with freedom. When this happens, the host is usually more concerned about his or her appearance before the guest than with the comfort and freedom of the invitee. There is always a desire to be the perfect host, and the guest has to abide by the host’s agenda (Ruthruff, 2015: 52). In addition, traditional hospitality assumes that the other needs an invitation to enter into a specific space. Ron Ruthruff proposes a kind of hospitality that complements the radical hospitality proposed by Beck. Ruthruff (2015: 53) follows Henri Nouwen’s spirituality of reaching out to the other, positing that hospitality is not about control, but about cultivating a “holy emptiness”. It is in the space created through holy emptiness that the other is freed up from the host’s agenda. The other is released to define its true self in its own time. As a result, the host is also released to suspend any judgement and agenda and open a space for the Holy Spirit to manage the space through the guest. In a way, radical hospitality is the act of

thirdspacing with the other, as one and the other create together a space that can be inhabited by both without constructing the self over and against each other.

Jesus, the forgiving victim, as the lens to reread Scripture and society opens the possibility to explore decency, purity, and cleanliness from a different perspective and transgress the current understandings of these concepts. The Gospel narratives present a point of view that allows love to become not a secondary process, but the beginning of an ethical approach.

The power of the Gospel is this: that God occupied the place of the cast-out one, of the rejected one, of the condemned one so as to show how God's goodness and God's creative power and God's ability to harmonize different realities in a peaceful order has little or nothing to do with the "wise," the "powerful" and the "righteous" of our world. On the contrary, it is principally manifested among those of poor repute, those with little to lose, those who, in the marvellous words of St Paul 'are not' (Alison, 2010a: 6).

Specific elements resulting from this brief theological reflection are central in the search of a practical theology of peacebuilding that responds to the Guatemalan collective woundedness. Firstly, if the practical theologian of liberation wants to engage in the act of peacebuilding responding to the collective woundedness, the theologian needs to develop the will to embrace. This will to embrace is not born out of thin air. It comes from the imitation of others whose desire is tied to the willingness to open a space for the other to enter, form, and transform the self. For that reason, it is of utmost significance that the theologian finds him or herself surrounded by a community that practices radical hospitality. It is in the process of belonging that one comes to believe in radical hospitality as a tool to heal with the other. Secondly, one needs to keep in mind that the act of radical hospitality is an emotional and psychological activity (Beck, 2011: 140). Hence, it is important to be connected to a community that practices hospitality in a way that challenges the boundaries of decency and purity. Finally, to emphasise it even further, one must acknowledge that challenging the metaphors of decency, purity, and cleanliness is not an individual act. It must be performed in community; it cannot and should not be done in isolation.

Otherwise, one could easily fall into the trap of individualistic oppressing theologies and psychologies that still operate within the boundaries of decency imposed by the current religious, political, and economic institutions.

8.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I developed a theological argument that is setting the context for the last part of this dissertation. The argument is that seeing Jesus as the forgiving victim opens the space to reimagine God as non-violent through the relativisation of decency and purity through the act of radical hospitality. This process happens through an ontological change as people face the liberating power of Scriptures and stop understanding their being-in-the-world as the defenders of decency, purity, and the law. After exploring the ideas presented by Alison, Althaus-Reid, Beck, and others, I established a stronger connection between Jesus, the forgiving victim, as a hermeneutical point of departure and practical-liberationist anti-sacrificial epistemology that sees the Kingdom of God as resistance against the global sacrificial theology. Furthermore, I have concluded that it is possible to begin to imagine a God that is pruned of violence in order to develop a practical theology of peacebuilding that can respond to the Guatemalan collective woundedness. I understand that this approach is in direct contestation with the theological and religious tradition that I come from. It is possible that some may see my methodology as naïve and, perhaps, even simplistic. Nevertheless, I believe I have been able to put my foot in the door for a conversation that can allow Guatemalan grassroots leaders to question their perception of God as ambivalent, simultaneously love and consuming fire.

In addition, I have argued that it is possible to reimagine faith through the eyes of Jesus. It may not be possible to completely decolonise Christianity. However, the intelligence of the victim transfers from generation to generation. The Holy Spirit is at work and She is making sure that

theologians like Alison, Althaus-Reid, Rafael Aguirre, and others continue transferring theological insights that criticise and challenge the side of the Church that in many cases is complicit with the sacred violence of the current religious, political, and economic systems. For that reason, I have come to believe that it is an imperative that one embarks on the search of the image of non-violent God since humans have been created in the likeness of that God, regardless of finding a satisfactory answer.

In conclusion, the joy that comes from truly contextual and non-violent hermeneutics is from the realization that one's perception of God is wrong. God is beyond what the practical theologians of liberation can understand. God is beyond the temptation of projecting human violence on Godself. The joy-full part of contextual theology is in realizing that one's faith practices are just silly when they become exclusionary. There is joy in knowing that God is trying to reveal Godself constantly through the innocent victims, the marginalised, and vulnerable of society to remind the faithful that God's self is beyond its mythical counterparts. Joy comes from realizing that the idols of the global sacrificial theology are nothing more than that. I hope my argument is strong in saying that attempting to read The Bible with grassroots leaders from a non-violent perspective can open the door to challenge exclusion as one of the CMT Guatemala network faith practices. My hope is that the intelligence of the victim also gets passed on to the CMT network to reverse the hurt they have caused, create hope for their communities, and open their hearts to the other.

PART FOUR

LOVING: ETHICS OF LOVE AND RE-HUMANISATION

Introduction to Part Four

Part one and two explored the process of *living* amidst the Guatemalan context. It allowed for the exploration of mimetic theory as a lens to interpret the reality of the grassroots leaders of the CMT Guatemala network. It also created the space to explore the collective woundedness of Guatemala City from below. Part three focused on *laughing*, or the joy that comes from contextual theologising as an indecent act that is born out of the intelligence of the victim. Part four involves *loving* as an ethical movement towards the re-humanisation of the other. In this section, I will take the time to unpack the ethical implications of non-violent hermeneutics. I will make the case for three elements that can allow for the first steps to heal the Guatemalan collective woundedness with cross-contextual application. The first step is to risk the engagement with non-violent hermeneutics, which I explored in the previous section. The second movement is to acknowledge one's involvement in violence and its forms. This happens through locating oneself historically and socially to identify the roles one plays in the global sacrificial theology and its interlocking structures of oppression. Finally, one must release personal scapegoats to become a model of self-giving and not vengeance. I will explore this in chapter ten. These steps come out of the interactions with CMT Guatemala network's grassroots leaders and the extended community of the Street Psalms Urban Training Collaborative.

In this section, chapter nine will explore the need for the recognition of one's complicity in violent contemporary institutions. This will allow for an exploration of violence beyond Girard's mimetic theory to integrate other lines of thought into a more inclusive concept of violence and its forms. Chapter ten will explore the need for the development of a comprehensible ethical framework that fosters an intelligible common language around the ontological hermeneutics that read Scriptures through the eyes of Jesus as the forgiving victim. This framework stands against

the concept and forms of violence that will be presented in chapter nine. The ethical framework is what I call *human catechism*, which is the process to teach others how to engage in the act of anthropological reimagination amid violence. Finally, I will bring the reflections of this dissertation to completion.

CHAPTER NINE

WE ARE COMPLICIT IN VIOLENCE: AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In the process of writing this theological articulation, I have come to believe that violence is not what makes us human. It is, however, a result of a specific way of being human. Girard's ideas of mimetic desire help one see that human violence does not come from an innate aggressiveness. As Jean Pierre Dupuy (2013: 43) posits, violence is the consequence of a particular shortfall, a deficiency that is at an ontological level. It is a lack of being that creates the space for conflict with the other one believes will be able to cure this privation. Thereby, I have argued the need for the movement towards an ontological change in hermeneutics through the dynamics of faith that come into play by believing in Jesus, the forgiving victim, as the lens to read scripture in contemporary society. The beginning of this ontological transformation lies in the acknowledgement of one's participation in violence. Violence, however, can take many forms. Violence can evolve and transform itself into more hidden and pervasive shapes. Consequently, one's involvement in violence can also evolve and remain completely hidden. For that reason, the recognition of one's involvement in violence must be a continual act of repentance, forgiveness, and restitution.

In order to acknowledge one's violence, it is imperative that one explores the different forms of violence that can be experienced and perpetrated in contemporary society. This exploration is no small endeavour since the only way to explore violence is in retrospect. One cannot see how violence will evolve in the future. One can barely understand what violence looks like in the present. Nevertheless, one can clearly see what violence looked like in the past, which helps to discern violence in the present and how people engage(d) in it. That retrospective process can help see and comprehend the outputs of violence and the forms that sustain it in the present. For that reason, in the first part of this chapter, I will enter the exploration of different

understandings, forms, and concepts of violence that can enhance or challenge Girard's understanding of violence through mimetic theory. This journey through different conceptualisations of violence will set the ground for the second section to acknowledge the different ways one has participated within the systems of the global sacrificial theology. I will re-enter the concept of the collective woundedness to define more clearly the categories of violent participation into which the leaders of the CMT network, including myself, can fit.

9.1 Violence and Its forms: Arendt, Zizek, and Fromm in conversation with the Guatemalan collective woundedness

In chapter four I explored the different representations of the Guatemalan collective woundedness. These contextual depictions are the result of the exertion of violence in the Guatemalan context. There is, however, a metaphysical component to the violence Guatemalans experience. Violence marks the being-in-the-world of people differently depending on the context. The structure of violence, nevertheless, seems to have a continuum regardless of the environment. One can see different representations of violence through history such as war, exclusion, segregation, and genocide. I consider each one of these forms to be outputs of violence as they are visible violent actions. In this subsection, I will explore the concepts and approaches to violence of different authors to compare what others have said with Girard's approach and the Guatemalan collective woundedness. I will see if they can complement Girard's mimetic theory to present a more comprehensive idea of violence. This is done with the purpose of concretising the acknowledgement of one's participation in different forms of violence and to recognise the scandal of one's violence. I want to argue that taking responsibility for one's participation in violence comes from the acknowledgment and letting go of our scapegoats. Violence must be named for what it is in order to recognise one's participation. The reader will notice that there is a great deal

of influence from Frantz Fanon (1952, 2004). His ideas on violence have become extremely influential to the point that his perspectives are embedded in the interpretation of the Guatemalan context.

The contextual manifestations of violence presented in the representations of the Guatemalan collective woundedness fit within the exploration of violence articulated by Hannah Arendt (1969). Arendt explored violence as a demonstration of power. In other words, violence is an instrument in the hands of political and social structures to protect the status quo. Interestingly, for Arendt (1969: 42) power is always supported by the numbers of people who sustain that power. Violence, however, does not necessitate the numbers as it relies on specific instruments such as war, segregation, and torture to repress people. Within this perception of power and violence, power is seen as an all against one type of dynamic, whereas violence is seen as one against all circumstance. In Arendt's articulation, this seems to refer to the process of legitimising the violence of the powerful against the powerless, which tend to be most people under authoritarian regimes. The understanding of violence presented by Arendt is not completely contrary to Girard's approach as the instrumentality of violence is key in the maintenance of peace within the forms of archaic religion. For Girard, violence is the instrument to keep violence in check. In Arendt's case, the violence of the powerful is always legitimate within authoritarian regimes to keep opposition at bay, whereas the violence of the few is always repressed by the structures that sustain the powers that be. However, it is important to mention that for Girard, violence is an all against one type of dynamic. It is the mob violence what pours into the condemnation, trial, and execution of a single victim that is seen as needed to atone for the sins of all.

One aspect that is quite important in Arendt's approach is the distinction between five conceptual constructions around violence as an instrument. She defines five concepts that

completely isolate the instrumentality of violence. Firstly, Arendt defines power as the human ability to act in concert. As a result, power does not belong to an individual. It is the dynamics that belong to a group that empowers somebody to lead. Secondly, strength is something that is inherent to a person or an object. However, the strength of the strongest individual can be overpowered by a larger group. Force, then, becomes the energy released by physical and social movements. Thereby, force is the energy discharged in the exertion of violence. Fourthly, authority is a structural concept that is conferred into a person or an institution. It is the vested power to dictate instructions. However, authority needs the recognition of those who are asked to obey. Finally, violence is defined as the tool of choice to keep structures in place. As a result, “violence is by nature instrumental; like all means, it always stands in need of guidance and justification through the end it pursues” (Arendt, 1969: 44–51). Arendt argues that, when violence makes its way into power, the evolution of violence into terror is inevitable. Terror, however, is not the same as violence. It is a form of government that settles in when violence has destroyed all power and remains in control. Terror implies that any kind of organised opposition within a social group must disappear. Nevertheless, terror will end up eating the government from within as anybody can become a threat to those who devolve in this process (Arendt, 1969: 55).

What is fascinating about Arendt’s approach is her conceptualisation of the different elements that interplay and interconnect in the instrumentality of violence. In Arendt’s perspective, power tends to be opposite to violence, hence making a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate forms of power. In my opinion, I agree with Arendt as power is what happens between people. It is the dynamic encounter that has possibilities for both violence and peace. However, power as such has very specific connotations and outputs. For that reason, violence can be a direct output of misused power.

Arendt does refer to hypocrisy amid unjust circumstances as one of the causes of violence. It is my understanding that, for Arendt, the roots of violence are not completely clear. She is, however, aware of the pervasiveness of violence and its consequences. Arendt (1969: 80) states: “The practice of violence, like all action, changes the world, but the most probable change is to a more violent world.” Interestingly, for Arendt both power and violence seem to be outside of humanity. They are not a natural phenomenon, so to speak. They are part of the political rationality (Ibid.: 82). This perspective limits the possibilities of a dialogue that takes political rationality and its use of violence as a tool to protect the current structures. It does not allow for the problematisation of religious rationality as the starting point of all social structures as Durkheim, Levi-Strauss, and later Girard proposed. Violence for Arendt still has a corrective quality, which seems to fit Girard’s violent sacred. In addition, the evolution from the use of violence into terror as a form of government seems quite on par with the mimetic crisis and the creation of the monstrous double. Thus, there seems to be a resonance between ideas within Arendt’s articulation and Girard’s anthropology.

Arendt’s conceptualisation of violence becomes helpful when exploring the outputs of violence in Guatemalan society. During the years of the war, the Guatemalan government exerted its power over people using violence as a tool. The Guatemalan Army used torture, kidnapping, and public execution to control the country. Interestingly, what happened in Guatemala was fuelled by a change of conquerors. Here, one can see again a very Girardian mimetic rivalry and conflict. The colonial *criollo* class lost much of its power in ruling Guatemala, and the Army became its own political and social class with the clear expectation of engaging the Guatemalan European descent elite as equals (Perera, 1993: 53). That transition created a parallel process within Guatemalan coloniality in contemporary Guatemalan society. Hence, the Army and the European

descent *criollo* elite maintained the process of colonisation and subduing the land and indigenous peoples. Violence remained the instrument to control most of the people through economic, political, and social repression. If one follows Arendt's approach, the evolution of violence into terror stayed within its earlier stages as all forms of social organising were repressed by the government, and torture and disappearing were direct outputs of violence that instituted the politics of terror as a part of the new Army ruling class.

In the case of the Guatemalan collective woundedness, Arendt's approach serves well to understand colonial and armed conflict violence as a part of authoritarian military regimes and coloniality. However, it falls short if one takes it to the level of common violence in interpersonal relationships and the rising crime and violent deaths that erupted in the Guatemalan post-war society. That leads one to believe that violence just morphed into small acts of subjective violence amid a collectively wounded people. Thereby, Arendt's approach falls short in the explanation of the evolution of violence into individual acts of subjective violence, which I will engage later.

This conversation poses an interesting contextual challenge. As I mentioned in chapter five, the leaders of the CMT Guatemala network do not make a direct connection between the different epochs and outputs of violence in Guatemalan society. There is a disconnect between colonial violence, the violence of the war, and the rising crime and violence in contemporary Guatemalan society. One of the members of the network stated:

When we went through the armed conflict it was a different kind of violence. The violence I lived was between two groups, the army and the guerrilla. The violence that we live today is different—it is social violence. It is violence that is between young people, like gang members, and the effect of the gangs has been a result of our society because we do not have healthy families. And also, it is responsibility of the government for the lack of opportunities for young people. (Personal Communication, 5 July 2017)

In addition, I argued before that there is a sense of urgency that sprouts out of constantly facing violence. This, I argue, is reflective of the conscious opposition to the subjective violence that is

not legitimised by the powers that be. Using Fanon's (2004: 68) understanding of violence and its effects in the postcolony, the disapproval of illegitimate outputs of violence happens without a conscious analysis of the structural historicity of violence through the Guatemalan collective woundedness. This results in a lack of understanding and connection between the different outputs of subjective violence and the systems that fuel it through Guatemalan history.

I believe that Žižek's articulation of violence and its forms can expand the understanding of violence that comes out of the CMT network. Žižek (2008a) has proposed a triad of violence that is helpful in the understanding of different forms of violence that seem to be cross-contextual and global. The most obvious form is subjective violence, which is the perpetration of a violent action against a specific individual or a group of people. This is where the outputs of violence take the shape of war, torture, murder, and so on. For that reason, I emphasise the word output to make the difference between the actions of subjective violence and the structures that sustain it. Structurally speaking, since language is the house of being, and the challenge posed to contextual theology is based on language as an ontological and epistemological point of departure, it is important that one recognises that violence is embedded in all forms of language (Žižek, 2008a: 1). Violence begins with language as an institution. This is symbolic violence, and it sustains the systems that provoke the outputs of subjective violence. At this point, I will leave Žižek for a short moment and briefly follow Judith Butler's conceptualisation of this form of violence as *hate speech*. Butler (1997: 19) argues that the wounding of hate speech as symbolic violence affects the receiving person's being-in-the-world placing the individual in a kind of existential void. The person becomes the object of the linguistic emission. As a result, the individual is thrown into an unknown future without understanding the time nor the space of the insult, nor the individual's true identity. The individual or group who receives hate speech becomes systemically disoriented

regarding their position as an effect of the act of speech. In other words, it is very likely that those receiving vituperation will become the insult.

Language's symbolic violence through hateful forms of speech asserts the possibility that language as the house of being acts and affects the being-in-the-world of the person that speech is directed towards (Butler, 1997: 37). Furthermore, the symbolism that is attached to the forms of speech creates and perpetuates structures and imposed ways of being-in-the-world. When people enunciate hateful speech they also decree, create, and perpetuate social structures. Hate speech continuously summons the position of domination people impose over one another and strengthens oppressive structures in the moment of speech (Ibid.: 42). The pervasiveness of symbolic violence lies in the accumulation and hiddenness of its strength. As a result, what ends up happening in the process of enunciation of a racist, sexist, or any kind of insult is a historic-structural citation and affirmation of the status quo. It connects the speaker with the history of a linguistic community. Furthermore, it is difficult to link the responsibility of the speaker to the damage done through the iteration of the insult (Ibid.). This poses quite a challenge for the practical theologian of liberation. Is one's theological articulation an act of *hate speech* in the guise of good theology? How is one's theological articulation challenging or reinforcing oppressive structures? These questions must be at the front of any theological enterprise. Even more so, one needs to acknowledge one's tradition's sins in perpetuating symbolic violence through God-talk.

Going back to Žižek, language as hate speech goes beyond the construction of categorical articulations. Language is intrinsically divisive and violent. It is the result of the enunciation of desires that clash with each other to the point of creating rivalry and violence. Language, as the symbolising process par excellence implies the mortalisation of the very thing that it defines. This results in unbalanced reciprocity when different speeches face each other, thus creating a non-

equal terrain for communication and the understanding of the other (Zizek, 2008a: 60–62). In Spanish, people say: “*Hablando se entiende la gente*” (People come to understand each other when they speak to each other). The problem with this declaration is that, if Zizek is right, then people are standing on completely different symbolic grounds when speaking to each other. As a result, language in the form of speech is not enough to facilitate the understanding of the other. Add to that, the plethora of twenty-four different languages that are spoken in Guatemala, having only Spanish as the official language, and it opens the possibility for symbolic violence once more, resulting in the need for common symbolic constructions through language and its forms.

After defining subjective and symbolic violence, Zizek moves into the definition of systemic and objective violence. Systemic violence is the smooth functioning of the current economic and political systems. As a result, objective violence is invisible; it is the safeguard of the system. Because of objective violence, one cannot see what happens in the Guatemalan clothing sweatshops or in the circumstances that impoverished people live through in the slums. There is an apparent peaceful state that is exemplified by the smooth running of economic growth and social cohesion. Systemic violence is the sacred cow that cannot be touched nor revealed. In Zizek’s (2008a: 2) words:

The catch is that subjective and objective violence cannot be perceived from the same standpoint: subjective violence is experienced as such against the background of a non-violent zero level. It is seen as a perturbation of the “normal”, peaceful state of things. However, objective violence is precisely the violence inherent to this “normal” state of things. Objective violence is invisible since it sustains the very zero-level standard against which we perceive something as subjectively violent [...] It [objective violence] may be invisible, but it has to be taken into account if one is to make sense of what otherwise seem to be “irrational” explosions of subjective violence.

The three forms of violence presented by Zizek, subjective, symbolic, and systemic, expand the representations of the Guatemalan collective woundedness to a metaphysical space. At a subjective level, one can start to understand why Guatemala is such a violent country after the

signing of the peace accords in 1996. There is a continuum of subjective violence that submits to the development of the Guatemalan consciousness. The individual outputs of violence have become a second nature to Guatemalans through the perpetuation of symbolic violence. Historically, there has not been a time without subjective violence in Guatemala, even before the arrival of the Spanish conquerors. This violence has been systemically and objectively supported by the different modes of production through each one of the representations of the Guatemalan collective woundedness. The colonial enterprise and the semi-feudal system of land distribution and the subduing of indigenous people needed to run smoothly for the benefit and peace of colonial powers. In other words, Latin America suffered(s) the needed systemic violence in order to provide the smooth flow of commodities to satisfy Europe's and the United States' demands, thus, what happens is not "real" violence. It is economic dependency (Fanon, 2004: 55). This required the creation of a language that allows for the constant oppression and division of Guatemalan people through racist speech and symbols. The racist representation of the Guatemalan collective woundedness needed the creation of social constructs defined by specific forms of speech. As a result, the Guatemalan collective woundedness is the deep internalisation of systemic and symbolic violence by Guatemalan people to the point of seeing the everyday outputs of violence with a sense of normalcy.

During the interview process, I asked the question: What impact does violence have on the residents of Guatemala City? The answer to that question varied from a sense of insecurity to more violence. However, the most common result of violence, according to the CMT Guatemala network's leaders, is a constant sense of fear. It is my interpretation that this sense of fear is the consequence of a strong sense of powerlessness in the face of violence. The leaders of the network, and I would dare to say, most Guatemalans, feel completely powerless. This has created what

Perera (1993: 43) calls *Fatalismo* (fatalism) *Chapín*.³⁶ Perera wrote about this in the last years of the armed conflict. However, I believe that it is a historical reality and perception that Guatemalans carry until today. One can hear this fatalism in everyday discourse as people commonly say “*Pues qué le vamos a hacer*” (there is nothing we can do), or “*Vamos de Guatemala a Guate-peor*” (We are going from GuateMala-bad to GuatePeor-worse) when referring to the violent outputs of subjective violence on any given day. Perera argues that *Chapín* fatalism is way more than just a mental outlook. It is a lifestyle. This lifestyle evolves into the constant fear of the neighbour and destructiveness, which is reflected in the everyday outputs of violence.

Erich Fromm (1969) re-conceptualised destructiveness in a way that fits the concepts and forms of violence that I have explored so far. His psychological approach helps one to enter the individuality of subjective violence. Fromm (1969: 178) defines the basic understanding of destructiveness as, “the escape from the unbearable feeling of powerlessness, since it aims to the removal of all objects with which the individual has to compare himself.” This includes, of course, the objectivization and dehumanisation of the other. From this definition, Fromm articulates two sources of destructiveness that go beyond powerlessness. The first one is anxiety, which is the result of a feeling of constant threat from the outside world. The constant feeling of danger comes from the isolation of the individual amidst contemporary social institutions and constructs. The second one is the thwarting of life, which is “the blockage of spontaneity of the growth and expression of man’s sensuous, emotional, and intellectual capacities” (Fromm, 1969: 81). I believe destructiveness, violence, in Guatemalan post-war society is the result of powerlessness, anxiety, and the thwarting of life Guatemalans have carried since colonial times and into contemporary Guatemalan society. From a Heideggerian (1951: 270) perspective, since Guatemalans have such

³⁶ *Chapín* is Guatemalan slang Guatemalans use refer to themselves.

close encounters with death, anxiety and the feeling of powerlessness have become a way of being collectively wounded.

So far, I have explored Arendt's ideas on violence and its use in authoritarian regimes, then moved to Žižek's structurality of violence, and finished with Fromm's subjectivity of destructiveness. This leads one to a comprehensive approach to violence with Girard's anthropology as the backdrop of the origins of violence in archaic religion, thereby, contemporary institutions as the offspring of religious rationality. Besides, the Guatemalan collective woundedness needed an expansion beyond Girard's anthropology to create a more tangible connection to contemporary institutions and the historicity of violence in the Guatemalan context.

This conversation must move one step beyond to the articulations of violence presented by Byung-Chul Han (2018). I believe that Han proposes quite a dangerous abstraction of systemic violence. Han's proposal takes away the possibility of locating oneself in the history of violence. I will explore this with more depth in the next pages. For now, I will say that Han seems to believe that in any given situation a violent act always has its origin in the system, the structure that the act belongs to. In other words, the violent act is a contextual expression of the structure that precedes it. This implies that there is an order of domination that establishes such actions. At this point the reader can think that Han's proposal is good. However, Han differs from both Girard and Žižek because his understanding of systemic violence implies that everybody, regardless of class, is a victim. For Han (2018: 124), systemic violence is more pervasive than what Žižek can articulate. The subject that holds this violence is not a dominant class but the system itself. As a result, systemic violence lacks a responsible author of oppression and exploitation. One of the criticisms presented by Han lies in the negativity, the antagonistic nature, of the current understanding of violence. Han proposes that it is the overcapacity to produce within the current

economic system that creates violence. The problem with systemic violence, then, is the incapacity to place the responsibility of exploitation and oppression (Han, 2018: 125–28). In my opinion, Han dehumanises systemic violence and places too much responsibility on “the system” behind it. In the face of such dehumanisation of violence, it is imperative that we, humanity, place the responsibility of violence on specific people, not to find vengeance but to stop the system that replicates and sustains acts of violence and injustice. It seems as if Han forgets that the establishment of what he calls “the system” had specific actors and players which created the system as it is today. I believe that the fact that it is virtually impossible to place the responsibility of systemic violence on somebody is the very success of the colonial system. The colonial and neo-colonial powers pillaged, raped, and ripped the resources from the global south and now “the system” is the responsible one, not people, not countries, not leaders, or their descendants, but “the system”. The perpetrators now become victims of their own wrong doings, thus diminishing their responsibility in the oppression, omission and marginalisation of many people.

In conclusion, one must acknowledge one’s participation in the outputs of subjective violence, the use and perpetuation of symbolic violence through hateful forms of speech, and the preservation of systemic and objective violence through theological articulations that perpetuate violent social constructions. The recognition of one’s individual subjective violence seems to be the easiest process to start. However, when subjective violence turns against a whole group of people it becomes legitimised by symbolic and systemic violence as Girard has proposed through the scapegoat mechanism. The complexity of the problem at hand, the recognition of one’s participation in violence, lies in the starting point of determining what is violence. For example, one could be blinded and argue that poverty is not an output of violence, but that the poor inflict outputs of subjective violence on one another, thereby, violence is an issue of the poor. Though, if

one follows Hannah Arendt, Martin Luther King Jr., and others with the premise that violence engenders violence, poverty engendering violence makes of poverty an output of violence; in this case, systemic violence as it is not an obvious output of subjective violence. Thereby, the concept of the collective woundedness can help in categorising the ways one participates in the different forms of violence. Thus, allowing people to take responsibility for their actions and non-actions in the wounding of others.

9.2 Revisiting the Collective Woundedness: categorising violent participation

In my opinion, Michael Lapsley (2012: 113) eloquently stated the dynamics of participation in the collective woundedness as follows: “The thing that struck me on my return to South Africa was that we were a damaged nation—damaged by what we had done to one another, damaged by what was done to us, and damaged by what we failed to do.” Lapsley’s affirmation is cross-contextual and opens the space for a categorisation of one’s involvement in violence. I believe this articulation has the potential to serve the Guatemalan context through three concrete action steps. Firstly, Lapsley starts by recognising the current reality, which is vital for any process of peacebuilding. For that reason, it is imperative that Guatemalans recognise that we are a damaged nation. The acknowledgment of damage, trauma, and suffering opens the space for lament as a form of truth-telling that brings down the façade of innocence in one’s participation in violence (O’Connor, 2003). Guatemalans must acknowledge their collective woundedness. Secondly, Lapsley states that the damage South Africans endured was done by one another. This implies that one’s involvement in violence is one’s responsibility within specific circumstances. This means that there is always an option to not participate in any kind of violence and work against it. There is no space for claiming ignorance. Consequently, passivity in the face of violence becomes a way of violent involvement. Finally, Lapsley speaks of what “we failed to do”. The last part of Lapsley’s

statement makes one to wonder, how does one participate in violence, sometimes without even realising it or by failing to do something? One must question oneself regarding personal involvement in subjective, systemic, and symbolic violence within a specific epoch, social allocation, and spatial production. It is through questioning one's historical, social, and spatial role that one can hear from others the hard truth of one's violent participation.

I want to argue that there are two levels of participation within the global sacrificial theology system which is demonstrated in one's participation in the *glocal* collective woundedness. One is structural; the other is personal. In my opinion, the differentiation between structural and personal participation in violence is of utmost importance since liberation theology seems to not have considered the personal action level of structural sin. In my opinion, when liberation theologians talk about structures of oppression, the theologian is at risk of making structural violence something that is impersonal, something that is outside of the human heart. Structures can be interpreted as something ethereal and impersonal, thus severing the liberative potential of theology. Structural and personal violence are two levels of engagement within the system. These planes of perpetration are intrinsically connected to each other, thereby, making the interlocking structures of oppression hard to break and transform.

In the structural participation, I place the common categories of the oppressor and oppressed. These classifications have been extensively explored by Latin American, Black, Asian, feminist, and many other liberation theologians. For that reason, I will not take the time to explore them in depth. However, it is important to say that I follow Freire's (2000: Loc. 521) understanding when he explains that the main issue in these two categories lies in the humanity of the other. It is the dehumanisation of the other that establishes the belonging to one of these two groups and paves

the way for one group of people to oppress the other. As a result, dehumanisation becomes not only an ontological possibility but also a historical reality.

My intention is not to explore the systemic categorisation of the oppressors and the oppressed, but to enter into the practical and personal engagement level within the system that creates such distinctions. The reason is that, even within oppressed groups, there are ways of violent practical engagement that oppress and exclude others who are not deemed as fully human. This implies that the oppressed perpetrate violence against each other in the same way that the oppressors perpetrate violence against the poor and many other marginalised groups. A good example of the oppressed oppressing even more vulnerable people is what I witnessed while working in the slums of Zone 3 in Guatemala City. In 2015, I led a research group to map the communities in which I worked (Aguilar, 2018). Something that came up during the research, but that was not specified in the final report, was the corruption that oppressed young single mothers in the community. We heard stories of male community leaders withholding help and donations destined to help these teenage mothers in exchange of sexual favours. The males from the communities we studied have been cut off from any kind of decent health services, education, justice, and decent employment. Even within their own experience of oppression and systemic violence, they abused their power as community leaders to oppress an even more vulnerable population within their community. That is to say, the oppressed are not exempt from perpetrating systemic and personal violence. For that reason, I want to introduce five roles one can play in personal violent participation. It is important, however, to understand that these forms of violent engagement are not mutually exclusive. An individual or a group can play one or many roles within structural and personal violent practice.

9.2.1 Victims and Perpetrators

The first two categories that I want to explore in the personal realm seem to be the easiest ones to understand, victims and perpetrators. One's participation and interpretation in these roles, however, can be difficult to accept as people tend to be blinded by the narratives that explain violent circumstances. When people are involved in violent actions, it is hard to identify who are the perpetrators and victims due to the confusion generated through the mimetic crisis and the way the scapegoat mechanism works. In chapter two, I explained mimetic theory as a lens to interpret human interaction in archaic and contemporary societies. For that reason, I will not enter again into explaining the process of the scapegoat mechanism and the mimetic crisis in detail. Nevertheless, as Girard (1986) proposed, one can argue that the perpetrators of violence, the persecutors, fail to realise that they are the ones responsible for the rise of the mimetic crisis and violence. There is a total disconnection between the crisis and the actions of those who perpetrate violence. As a result, the victims are bestowed with the responsibility of creating the crisis and encountering the solution. For that reason, it is that myths, even contemporary myths, present the violence of the scapegoat mechanism from the perspective of the persecutors and perpetrators of violence (Palaver, 2013: 154). "The persecutors always convince themselves that a small number of people, or even a single individual, despite his relative weakness, is extremely harmful to the whole society" (Girard, 1986: 15). Therefore, the perpetrators, whether they belong to the oppressors or oppressed group, are those who use the system and its interlocking structures of oppression to scapegoat an individual or a group for the demise of their community, neighbourhood, or nation. Perpetrators make use of systemic, subjective, and symbolic violence at any given time. Interestingly, this poses quite a conundrum as anybody can be a perpetrator, even when a person has been a victim of violence in different occasions. As a result, it is important that

one remembers that victimhood and survival are not assurances of non-violence. These roles become so nebulous that religion, faith, is used to justify injustices and violence. Hence, the violent sacred is present without people realising it.

In Guatemala's case, the violence experienced by people during the armed conflict created a cycle of violence where even the victims returned violence to others when they could. There was a rupture in the social fabric in urban and rural communities. The politics of terror and the exertion of state sponsored violence blurred the lines between perpetrators and victims (Thomas, O'Neill & Offit, 2011: 3). This ambivalence created a violent non-trusting culture that is willing to unload communal violence on anybody, thus making social cleansing and lynching common practices in both rural and urban communities. Guatemalans see each other with suspicion and are prone to expect the worst of people. Manuela Camus (2011) eloquently explains the decay of urban communities and the violence that flourishes in them as the result post-war social issues in Guatemala. Camus argues that people who have experienced abandonment and oppression are willing to use the same institutions that oppress them to rid their communities of violence (Camus, 2011: 68). The scapegoating process takes residents of Guatemala City to see the source of the problems that enter urban communities as the responsibility of a racialised, poor, and uneducated population, indigenous youth. Interestingly, most subjective violence ends up happening between groups of marginalised people who belong to the inferiorised sectors of Guatemala City. Communities plagued by poverty and violence also see the government as responsible for their demise. This violent interaction and blame casting that happens against indigenous youth in urban areas reflect the "powerful ways that historical divisions along class, race and geographical lines shape the way Guatemala's new violence is perceived in urban areas" (Camus, 2011: 62).

The accuracy of Camus's study is impressive. A few pages above, I quoted one of the CMT Guatemala network leaders interviewed for this dissertation saying: "It is violence [contemporary violence] that is between young people, like gang members, and the effect of the gangs has been a result of our society because we do not have healthy families. And, it is responsibility of the government for the lack of opportunities for young people" (Personal Communication, 5 July 2017). This shows that even when the victims of the system can turn with violence against the perpetrators, they tend to perpetrate and perpetuate violence against other victims who may be in even deeper social, racial, and economic disadvantage.

In the case of the leaders of the CMT Guatemala network, the lines between perpetrator and victim are paradoxically clear and blurred. During the interview process, it was easier for the leaders of the network to point out their experiences as victims of subjective, systemic, and symbolic violence than it was to see themselves as possible perpetrators and acknowledge the ways they exclude others. I believe that the cause behind their reasoning is their understanding of violence as mainly subjective. The leaders could not see themselves as perpetrators because they are not inflicting subjective violence onto others. In addition, the dichotomy between perpetrator and victim leaves out other kinds of participation that could enhance one's understanding of violence. I will explore other forms of participation in the next sub-section.

In summary, the categories of perpetrator and victim are intrinsically connected to Girard's anthropological insight. This allows the exploration of violence at a personal level. People can perpetrate violence in many ways, thus becoming perpetrators of specific outputs of violence that may not be deemed as grotesque or sinful, violent, nonetheless. In addition, it allows one to explore how blame casting works and how the scapegoat mechanism is still at play in contemporary societies. A couple of questions that one can ask in order to unmask these roles are: Who is

constantly being blamed for the problems of the city? Who is casting the blame? And, where is the accepted narrative coming from? These questions, however, need to be asked with caution as blame could shift and the questions themselves could create violence and set the scapegoat mechanism in motion once more.

It is important to mention that in the use of the English word, “victim” comes with associations of powerlessness, shame, and lack of agency. Sharlene Swartz (2016: 153) advocates for the use of the term “dishonoured.” However, I want to keep using the word “victim” as it implies a direct connection with an anthropological phenomenon through the scapegoat mechanism. In addition, in Spanish, the term “dishonoured” has a totally different connotation, thus rendering it inappropriate contextually. A closer equivalent would be the word *ultrajado*, which implies an offense in deed or word with a degree of violence against a person or a group. I understand Swartz’s use of the term to denote the honour and dignity inherent in the humanity of all people. However, it seems to minimize the damage suffered by the actions of perpetrators and the powers that be. With its limitations and all, the term “victim” still contains the full force of the violence suffered by an individual or a group.

9.2.2 Bystanders and Beneficiaries: Sharlene Swartz’s categorisation as a cross-contextual tool

The process of understanding one’s involvement in the structural and personal levels of violence is long and painful. This only happens when one truly encounters the other and makes space for the other to shape and form the self (Volf, 1996). This opens the possibility to engage in a self-discovery journey that can enhance one’s understanding of the perpetration of violence. It is important to note that the ideas I follow in this section are presented by Swartz and are grounded in the specificity of the apartheid regime in South Africa. I believe, however, that Swartz’s

approach and categorisations are broad enough to use them in cross-contextual peacebuilding theological application. Swartz's articulation introduces five different categories that allow people to locate themselves in concrete roles within the spectrum of the personal level of violence. These roles include the commonly known categories of victims and perpetrators. However, Swartz expands people's violent practices into two more categories, bystanders and beneficiaries. The author also presents her readers with the "resister" as a possible role to play within a context of injustice and violence. This role I will explore later.

The beneficiary and bystander roles come from the awareness of one's privilege in a specific context. The comprehension of one's privilege paves the way to recognise one's participation in the personal level of violence in a way that allows every individual and community to accept their responsibility and participation in the perpetration, omission, and legitimisation of violence. Swartz (2016) proposes these categorisations of people's participation in the personal level of violence as a tool to locate oneself historically in the perpetration or victimhood of violence in a way that allows for forgiveness and restitution. As a result, people open the door to explore different expressions of the self in specific historical, social, and spatial realities that pave the way for peacebuilding and reconciliation.

I want to begin with the bystander role as it implies a conscious engagement when witnessing injustice and violence. The bystander carries the moral guilt of overlooking a specific circumstance. Swartz (2016: 154) argues that people tend to ignore structural and personal violence as they see themselves as completely powerless standing against the system or being too insignificant to stop the charge of injustice. One cannot help but make the connection between Swartz's and Fromm's ideas. I would argue that the bystander's powerlessness evolves into anxiety before the structures that justify oppression and violence. In addition, in my interpretation

of Fromm, the thwarting of life can result from the systems that constantly threaten human dignity through the anxious facing of the structures that seem untouchable. Thereby, it is important to place the personal level of violent engagement in direct connection to the system and the architects of such edifices as Swartz proposes. The perpetrators, then, are not only those who use the global sacrificial structures to scapegoat others and who continuously craft unjust systems, but also those who decide to not act in the face of injustice, violence, and oppression (Swartz, 2016: 152).

The heaviness of being a bystander carries a historical state of complicity with both the system and with the architects of such structures. Even though Swartz proposes the term “dishonoured” instead of “victim”, I believe that the term “victim” can be the ethical point of departure for a more comprehensive historical framework to help in the liberation of the bystander. The victims are the ones who could blamelessly place responsibility for the bystander to acknowledge his or her lack of action. This is possible by taking into account the alterity of the victims as it unveils the oppressive material value system as illegitimate and evil (Dussel, 1998: 311). Thereby, the silence and passivity of the bystander becomes an intentional action that places the individual in congruity with the interlocking structures of oppression that rule in specific contexts. In addition, it makes the bystander responsible for the infliction of specific representations of the collective woundedness.

The role of faith is key in the process of reinforcing or transforming the role of the bystander. Frantz Fanon (2004: 7) is of great help in understanding that the process of colonisation, thereby, the road taken by the middle layers of Guatemalan society to become bystanders. Fanon posited that Christianity as the religion of control in the colonies did not call the colonised to the ways of God. Christianity called those under oppression to the ways of their oppressors. As a result, the Sunday liturgy became a reaffirmation of the *status quo* through the constant production

of people whose bodies were disengaged from the physical, religious, and *spatial* representations of injustice and oppression. Consequently, the oppressed and the bystander—now a witness of oppression—lost sight of those who perpetrate violence through religion. In Fanon's (2004: 18) words:

Fatalism relieves the oppressor from all responsibility since the cause of wrong-doing, poverty, and the inevitable can be attributed to God. The individual thus accepts the devastation decreed by God, grovels in front of the colonist, bows to the hand of fate, and mentally readjusts to acquire the serenity of stone.

The sense of urgency to save souls, which I mentioned before, became central to the evangelical discourse, thus disconnecting the physical consequences of oppression and colonisation from the spiritual and psychological impact of injustice. In the Guatemalan context, the evangelical bystander became comfortable with door-to-door evangelisation and filling stadiums and churches to preach a gospel that did not encourage for a holistic liberation of Guatemalan people. The middle layers of Guatemalan society became comfortable with singing and preaching inside their temples while turning a blind eye to the war, corruption, and inequality.

It is imperative that I take the time to briefly mention an important point regarding the bystander. I would argue that the bystander also has the tendency to disguise him or herself as a defender of those who are under oppression. They may seem progressive and liberal—regardless of what liberal means contextually. However, when they are in the middle of the oppressor and the oppressed groups, they try to comply to both groups to ease their guilt in the face of injustice and violence. I argue that these “liberals”, or “Black Souls in White Skins” as Steve Biko (2002: 20) calls them, carry a great deal of responsibility for not engaging the project of liberation in a structural manner. I will let Biko explain:

Instead of involving themselves in an all-out attempt to stamp out racism from their white society, liberals waste lots of time trying to prove to as many blacks as they can find that they are liberal. This arises out of the false belief that we are faced with a black problem.

There is nothing the matter with blacks. The problem is white racism and it rests squarely on the laps of white society.

In my opinion, being a bystander implies having a great deal of privilege. When one decides upon inaction, one has the privilege to not be run over by the machinery of the system. One can decide to not get involved and see what evolves. Thereby, one is not part of the group that the structures of oppression are targeting as second class or not fully human. Thus, the bystander is an affirmation of the system. In this ethical framework, the affirmation of the system by the bystander implies the negation of the other as victim. However, following Dussel's (1998) ethics of liberation, if one departs from the embodied reality of the victim, from the empirical factualness of materiality and corporality, one can learn that the affirmation of the values in the established system and the good life of the powerful, including the bystander, lies in the omission of the victim and the denial of the victim's reality as a negation of the system. As a result, if one decides to act, to stop being a bystander, through using one's privilege in a subversive manner, one can enter a stage of consciousness that judges the system from the impossibility of life that the victims constantly endure. Consequently, what seemed to be the truth is denied as norm, thus creating a new ethical framework that departs from the intelligence of the victim. Therefore, the bystander can turn into a transitional role. Staying a bystander, however, is a constant and conscious decision. The metamorphosis I mention here can be achieved by the intelligence of the victim. The ontological and hermeneutical change that comes with reimagining one's perception of God as non-violent subverts the justification created by a fatalistic view of the *status quo*.

In the case of the CMT Guatemala network, it is hard to place the leaders as bystanders of violence. As I mentioned before, most of them come from and work with the inferiorised sectors and marginal communities of Guatemala City, which are a direct result of state sponsored violence during the war and colonial violence. However, since exclusion is a faith practice within the leaders

of the network, their actions condone the rejection of groups like the LGBTQI community. Those who are not in agreement with the exclusion of this community do not speak out against it. The price to pay would be to be excluded again due to their willingness to build community with the vulnerable and excluded.

At the beginning of this section I mentioned that the bystander and beneficiary roles are intrinsically connected to people's privilege. Here I follow closely Swartz's understanding of white privilege, and I stand in agreement with Fernandez's (2004) argument that there is no culture around the world that has not been affected by its interaction with white colonial powers and the pervasiveness of white privilege. This implies that there is no way to talk about privilege without entering the racialisation of not only society, but also theological articulations. Most of the victims of the global sacrificial theology around the world are dark skinned. The poor and exploited are black, brown, indigenous, or of mixed heritage. For that reason, it is important to remember that the roles that I am exploring are not independent from each other. People can embody different roles at the same time, thus carrying with different degrees of responsibility. As a result, a person can be responsible for not acting or speaking up when needed, and simultaneously benefiting by his or her lack of action even when in disagreement with injustice.

According to Swartz (2016: 155–56) there are two ways of benefiting from a specific way a collective wound is represented. Firstly, one can benefit from the policies and practices of the past as a part of the oppressors' group. In Swartz's words:

To be a beneficiary seems to be a passive location—you find yourself in a situation without ever having lifted a finger as a perpetrator—neither architect nor implementer. After all, you were not there at the time. For those who were there at the time, you may not have been an active perpetrator but you benefited from *doing nothing*, either financially or from escaping the violence and disruption (jail for example) that resisters endured. You may have benefited because you were ignorant or did not care to know from where your property, wealth, job and education came. But benefit you did.

The beneficiary accumulated undeserved wealth from all the policies and has an unfounded sense of superiority. In the case of Guatemala, this implies directly benefiting from wealth, connections, political, economic, and social influence. The new generations of white Guatemalans have access to the same privileges that their ancestors created to control and subdue Guatemala through the colonial system. This is inherited privilege through belonging to the *familias de alta alcurnia y abolengo* (families of noble lineage and cultural prominence). This is the result of what William James Jennings (2010: 60) calls *The Christian Imagination*. The way European Christians saw themselves in colonial times drove them to think of the brown, black, indigenous other in terms of servitude in order to achieve salvation. They saw (see) themselves as agents of cultural transformation through a theological act that “mirrored the identity and action of God in creating”. Consequently, to accept being a beneficiary in this fashion is quite complex. The acceptance of such participation comes with the condemnation of one’s heritage. Such is the case of Marta Elena Casaús Arzú, a leading scholar in the studies of contemporary racism and segregation in Guatemalan society, whose work and ideas I outline in the first part of my study (León Aguilera, 2019). Casaús Arzú has paid a price, which she understands is not as high as it could be. She has been expelled by the Guatemalan oligarchy and her writings are considered inflammatory and subversive.

The other way of being a beneficiary is quite challenging and puts people in a moral quandary as well. People can benefit from resistance to injustice without having to resist on their own. In other words, people can be born into families who put everything on the line to resist injustice and that helps the next generation to escape feelings of powerlessness and inferiority through better education and job opportunities. Swartz acknowledges that this label within the beneficiary category does not fit completely well with her proposal. However, it invites

conversation. In the case of Guatemala City, I believe this could be of great use as new generations of resisters flourish. Some of them have direct access to the political class and can represent those who have been victimised by the system, resulting from the space opened by their families. Interestingly, the new generations seem to lack connection with the new generations of impoverished and marginalised people.

9.2.3 The Resister

After exploring the perpetrator and victim, then bystander and beneficiary roles, I want to explore a different way of engagement with violence. Note the change in words. This role is not understood as violent engagement. That does not mean that, historically, resistance has always remained nonviolent. However, before I enter into the implications of resistance, I consider important to engage in Swartz's (2016: 155) understanding of the "resister" as a way of engaging with violence. Swartz criticises Hilberg's understanding of the resister as a subcategory within the victim role. In her disapproval of this classification of the resister, Swartz argues that putting the resister within the victim category diminishes the moral significance of resisting violence, injustice, and oppression. If the resister is understood as a victim, the sense of agency and the active engagement in resisting loses its power. In addition, Swartz also makes a distinction within the category of resistance. There are two types of resisters. The first one is the architects of resistance. These individuals are the ones who design different ways of resistance within a specific context. The second group of resisters are the implementers. These are the people who engage in large demonstrations and, by the numbers, push the powerful in specific ways to change the structures of oppression.

The role of the resister leads me to engage a question that is at the centre of resistance. Is there a way of resistance that is not violent? I want to answer this question using the lens provided

by Girard and the different understandings of violence that I presented in this chapter. Firstly, it is of utmost importance to keep in mind that the zero level of violence that everything is measured with in the current system is the smooth functioning of the current political and economic systems (Zizek, 2008a: 2). This is the origin of any violent act as it is subjective violence that manifests an implicit structure that sustains such actions. In this process, it is important to make a distinction between injustice and violence. The resister tends to engage both. Violence in and of itself is the instrument to perpetuate injustice, thus injustice becomes the output of the structure that contains violence as a form of the exertion of power. This distinction is important because, just like inequality, injustice triggers the desires that those in disadvantage can imitate from those who are in a more privileged position. The game is based once more on desire, thus creating a deficiency at the ontological level. The self cannot be without desiring what the other desires, and once violence sparks, good violence is used to keep the status quo in a way that perpetuates injustice, subjective outputs of violence, and different ways of personal violent engagement.

Amidst all of this, the resister can unplug from violence while resisting injustice. The problem with such an engagement with the system lies in the possibility of the resister becoming the scapegoat the system needs to purge out the violence that the resister provokes. The accusation against the resister as violent is casted from the perspective of the zero level of violence that does not place the responsibility of violence on anybody, except the resister. Consequently, the very act of resistance is deemed as violent in the face of a system that relies on interlocking structures of oppression as the safeguard of its functioning. The resister, then is faced with a moral quandary as the accusation against him or her is of violence even when the intention is not coming from violence. As a result, the resister must understand that any act of resistance will be interpreted as violent by the system that it is trying to unmask. In other words, there is no act of resistance that

is not violent. This is a *thirdspace* that unbalances the dichotomy between the religious rationality that permeates the global sacrificial theology. In the words of Bell Hooks cited by Soja (1996: 105): “I make a definite distinction between that marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as site of resistance—as location of radical openness and possibility.”

Remember, I am in the search of a practical theology of peacebuilding that responds to the Guatemalan collective woundedness. I am not in the search of ways of non-violent engagement. For that reason, I agree with the understanding of nonviolence presented by Fanon (2004: 23), as he proposes that nonviolence as such is a construction of the colonial powers to avoid a carnage through the slaughter of the ruling class. In other words, the language of nonviolence becomes the way to keep violence in check, and as one can see, it is the system once more making a distinction between good or bad violence. In my perspective, nonviolence should not be a tool to save face for those in power. It must be a way to help the oppressed and marginalised to avoid becoming the oppressors, thus repeating the cycle of violence. Nonviolent resistance will always be violent, even if not with bloodshed because the powers that be will view resistance as a disruption of the its peaceful reality. Consequently, the resister is involved in peacebuilding to avoid a carnage through the recognition that his or her nonviolent resistance will be perceived as violent.

In conclusion, the roles presented in this chapter open the door to explore the self in relation to different kinds of violence and their outputs. Now, there is a language that can be used in the context of the Guatemalan collective woundedness to place responsibility and open the space for healing. The categories presented in this chapter serve as possible places to locate the self in the process of theologising in a practical way towards peacebuilding. At a personal level, I can clearly see myself located in the roles that I explored here. I am a mixed heritage male who has been a

bystander, beneficiary, and a victim in the collective woundedness of contemporary Guatemala City. I have fully taken advantage of a system that allowed me to grow up without experiencing direct discrimination in my everyday life. I grew up with indigenous nannies and house help. It was not until my early twenties that I realised that the very fact that my family had this kind of employee was related to my privilege as a non-indigenous individual. I deliberately use the term non-indigenous as that was the category my family placed itself in, non-indigenous Spanish-descent. This granted me with the self-confidence to navigate the systems in Guatemala City in a way that the indigenous population cannot.

I also played the role of a bystander and did not become aware of it until 2015 when I realized my lack of action and intentional speech against the corruption and injustice of the Guatemalan State apparatus. Even though I had been working in marginalised communities and slums since 2005, I did not dare to speak against NGO and government corruption. Just like Swartz explains, I felt powerless and as if my stance did not matter. These two roles are now standing points to theologise. The recognition of my involvement in the collective woundedness of Guatemala City as a perpetrator-bystander and perpetrator-beneficiary has been slow and painful, empowering and beautiful, nonetheless.

Finally, it was not until 2015 that I came to see myself as a victim within the Guatemalan collective woundedness. It was then when I experienced my first intentional encounters with the Guatemalan European descent elite. A friend of mine, who also formed part of the CMT network, opened the door for me to engage with European descent businesspeople. This was the very first time in my life that I felt discriminated against, distrusted, and pushed down. It was an awakening to the reality that my social and racial allocation within the Guatemalan context was just as transactional as anybody else's. I realised myself to be the perfect pawn in the system. I behaved,

thought, and even voted the way that would ensure continuity of the status quo. This experience awakened me and helped me find even more empathy and solidarity with the indigenous peoples of my country. As a result, my mixed-heritage background has become a theological starting point. My lack of ethnic identity within my own context, which is the result of colonial and neo-colonial rule, became a practical-theological peacebuilding starting point. It is, in fact, the starting point that powered me to engage in this research.

CHAPTER TEN

THE ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF NON-VIOLENT HERMENEUTICS: TOWARDS A HUMAN

CATECHISM

After exploring violence, its forms, and the different roles one can play in engaging violence, I want to propose a process that can be used to attempt the beginning of healing the Guatemalan collective woundedness within the microcosmos of the CMT network of relationships. This proposal comes out of the exploration and contraposition of the paradigmatic conversion of the apostle Peter in the account of the book of Acts of the Apostles and what I interpret as conversion experiences among the leaders of the CMT Guatemala network. I understand that this is not a dissertation in the field of Biblical studies; however, all theology must be rooted in scriptural data as one of its points of departure. For that reason, I will use the elements presented in the narrative of the second conversion of Peter presented in Acts 10-11. This process will be informed by the data gathered through the interview process and focus group. It will be my interpretation and proposal of the implications that non-violent hermeneutics have on those who engage the Bible and the context through non-violent hermeneutics for a practical theology of peacebuilding that responds to the Guatemalan collective woundedness. In this chapter, I want to argue that it is through the process of *human catechism* that people help each other in the process of redefining and reimagining their humanity, thus healing their collective woundedness in community.

This chapter will first attempt to conceptualise the term *human catechism*; for that reason, the definition of such a term will be found at the end of this chapter. I want to introduce a process, not only a concept or idea. In fact, the process has already started in chapter eight. It begins with the recognition of one's involvement in violence and the role one has played(s) within the collective woundedness of a specific context. I will start this chapter with a study of the conversion

of Peter in Acts 10 to explore it in parallel with the transformational experiences of the leaders of the CMT Guatemala network. Then, I will conclude this dissertation exploring what I believe human catechism in contemporary society can look like, in order to propose that human catechism is in and of itself a practical theology of peacebuilding that can respond to the Guatemalan collective woundedness.

10.1 Peter's Conversion as a Prototype for a Human Catechism

The main point of the narrative presented, from a soteriological perspective, in Acts 10 seems to be that God grants salvation to all people, regardless of their ethnic and religious background (Schnabel, 2012: Loc. 13245). However, what happened to Peter in Acts 10, I believe, is one of the most paradigmatic changes recorded in the scriptural data. Peter's conversion evolved in the process of getting rid of scapegoats through the challenging of exclusionary metaphors and the willingness to reconstruct the self through the other (Volf, 1996).

Peter's conversion experience happened at a depth that changed not only his perception of reality, but also the reality that he constructed from that moment on. Acts 10 begins with a vision, but not that of Peter. The story opens with the revelation that the outsider received. This is quite an intentional approach in the narrative as Luke clearly considered his audience, Theophilus, very likely a Gentile reader. This account revealed that the Gentiles would now have access to Jesus as the forgiving victim, not only the Jews. For that reason, Luke ensured that his readers understand who the Gentile was, Cornelius, a centurion who happened to worship the God of Israel and live a pious life. I consider these details of utmost importance as there is a direct connection with another Roman official in Luke 7. However, there seems to be two different manners of approaching the piety of a Gentile within the Luke-Acts narrative.

In Luke 7:5, the Jewish leaders backed the request of the Roman official because he loved the nation of Israel. This means that the goodness of the foreigner depended on the love for Israel, which implied love for the chosen people even when the official was not “chosen” (Alison, 1996: 99). Yet, in the narrative presented in Acts 10, Cornelius’s piety did not imply that he deserved God’s grace, but that Cornelius was as close to God as the Jewish people were. Eckhard J. Schnabel (2012: Loc. 13459) posits that Cornelius was within reach of God’s grace because of his obedience to the instructions given by the angel and his willingness to listen to the Jewish preacher. However, I believe that Cornelius was within reach simply by the fact of his humanity and his willingness to embrace the other as a human. In both cases, the reader of the apostolic account can be tempted to interpret the goodness of the Roman officials based on their works and love for the nation of Israel. Yet, the Kingdom of God operates from different criteria, standards, and principles that do not pertain to a specific group. While those who belong to “our” group may comprehend what it means to be of the Kingdom (Alison, 1996: 99), those who are considered outsiders might have the capacity and willingness to realise that one does not necessarily need to believe in order to belong. Just like the apostles, one belongs in order to start a process of believing.

Schnabel (2012: Loc. 13308) proposes an exegetical comparison table of the whole narrative, which I find quite fascinating. In the process of structuring the story presented in Acts 10 and 11, Schnabel parallels the different references to Peter’s socio-moral religious disgust. This clarifies Peter’s feelings and motivations in the account as the “unclean” and “profane” are metaphors intrinsically connected to the *other*. In other words, for Peter, Cornelius was as inhuman as the unclean animals that descended on the sheet from heaven. If one follows Schnabel’s proposal to put Peter’s vision against the background of the Jewish law, one cannot help but notice that the law played a key role in the moralisation of the other, the outsider, the Gentile, as impure. Thus,

the Jewish people categorised Gentiles as inherently profane, or in Schnabel's (2012: Loc. 13540) words: "the ontological opposite of sacred (holy)." F. F Bruce (1998: 243) argues that Peter was undergoing a transformation already. However, the encounter with Cornelius was directly connected to portions of Peter's inherited socio-moral disgust attitudes towards the Gentiles. Consequently, Peter needed even more preparation for what was to come.

The story says that Peter had a vision of unclean animals descending from heaven in front of him, which happened after Cornelius had obeyed the angel's instructions. The vision provoked a disgust reaction in Peter that was intrinsically connected to his religious rationality (Acts 10:12-15). If one follows Beck's (2011) ideas, Peter had a direct clash between his religious rationality and his idea of the divine. Peter's perspective of the divine was intrinsically connected to his concepts of purity, decency, and the unclean. As a result, his socio-moral disgust created a repulsive response when he faced the vision three times. Peter's response was so visceral that it did not matter who was sending the vision. I would dare to say that for a moment, Peter might have even felt disgusted by God for proposing such a nauseating act.

In following the paradigms of this dissertation, it is impossible to avoid reading the scriptural account through Girard's anthropological lens. The passage is filled with sacrificial references to the Jewish religious system. For that reason, even though Peter was already undergoing a transformation, he was also struggling with the sacrificial mentality of his context, which was based in the scapegoat mechanism. The whole of the Jewish law sustained a scapegoating system that used animals for sacrifice and excluded people as impure. As a result, Peter's ancestral thought process indicated to him that everything that descended on the sheet from heaven equated to everything that was wrong (Bruce, 1998: 244). The progression of events presented in the story suggests that the apostolic witness is asserting the abolition of the ceremonial

laws regarding food, and even more, the eradication of exclusionary faith practices (Ibid. 245). For that reason, Peter's first reaction to the vision is of utmost importance. Even though it is until the end that the reader discovers who the voice of the vision belongs to, Schnabel (2012: Loc. 13555) proposes two possible ways of understanding Peter's verbal rejection. On the one hand, if Peter would have acknowledged the voice from heaven as God, he would have understood the vision as a test of his obedience. Thereby, his rejection would have been rewarded. On the other hand, it is likely that Peter recognised the voice. The way Peter responded could suggest to the reader that it was Jesus' voice, which would fit previous interactions between Jesus and Peter. Once more, Jesus corrected one of Peter's strong and misguided opinions.

Peter's transformation process was slow. His struggle became more evident when he followed the Spirit's directions to join the three men and go to the house of Cornelius, the Roman centurion. At this point, Peter was still puzzled by what he had experienced. He was trying to make sense of such a religious encounter. It is quite interesting to compare Schnabel's, Bruce's, and the New International Version's (NIV) translations of verses 10 and 11, specifically when the Spirit told Peter to go with the emissaries of the Roman centurion. Both Bruce (1998: 246) and the NIV (Acts 10:11) translate the imperative of the Spirit as "do not hesitate", which implies a doubt in the motivation and reason of the strange men's interest in finding Peter. Why were these men looking for Peter? Schnabel (2012: Loc. 13625), however, translates the imperative as "not making a distinction". Schnabel's translation implies that the Spirit was leading Peter in the process of negating the socio-moral and religious differentiations that his tradition dictated. Even more so, I believe there was simultaneously an ethical and ontological transformation. The Spirit took away Peter's scapegoats, thus setting a new ethical framework for human relations that Peter modelled when he released his scapegoats in order to embrace them as human.

In their conversation upon arrival at Cornelius' house, Peter made it clear that he was transgressing cultural, social, and political law by entering a pagan household. "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean" (Acts 10:28). In my opinion, this verse contains the central idea of the whole narrative and enhances Schnabel's interpretation of the main point of this story. According to James Alison (1996: 101), this is the only time that the apostolic witness records Peter using the power that had been entrusted to him to bind and unbind things in heaven and earth. "He declares as an absolutely binding part of the Christian revelation that no human is to be called impure or profane". The binding and unbinding and the phrase "I should not call anyone impure or unclean", allows for the extrapolation of the process of *human catechism* to contemporary society. Peter understood that it was never God who made such distinctions. It is humans who make such differentiations, thus creating a system designed to segregate the pure and impure, and Peter acknowledged his participation in it.

Peter seemed to correct his understanding of the other and opened the door for generations to come to avoid the same mistakes. Even more so, Alison posits that Peter understood reality to be a linguistic human construct. I agree with Alison as language for postmodern thought is an ontological, epistemological, and methodological point of departure. Language is the house-of-being, as Heidegger proposed (Zizek, 2008a: 6), and as such, it has the power to create the reality that surrounds the self through social interactions and perpetuation of a specific discourse as a way of systemic violence (Ibid.: 63-73). All humans are a part of such an institution by their reception and use of words. When people call someone "something," people help that person become that thing (Alison, 1996: 101). In other words, the moralisation of the other happens through the use of language as an exclusionary institution. Language and its forms are learned through imitation,

through mimetic desire. Language is the means to express desire. Language is the way to articulate exclusion and impose it. Therefore, what happened to Peter in expressing that God had shown him that he was not to call anything impure was a complete reversal of language as an exclusionary institution that supports the scapegoating mechanism. A new language was born through the forgiving victim, which includes the other, even the oppressive other. This understanding of Peter's vision opens the door, once more, for a non-exclusionary understanding of God. Furthermore, if one understands Peter as the beginning of the church, which is the interpretation of both Catholics and evangelicals in Guatemala, Christianity in and of itself was never meant to be exclusionary or divisive. It was meant to be a deconstruction of the metaphysics of exclusion that come through language as the house-of-being in exclusionary ways amid the sacred violent.

One may ask, how is this story a prototype for human catechism? I would like to argue that the answer to this question lies within the narrative itself. The process that the apostolic witness narrates through the Gospel of Luke has two important elements. The first one is the divine intervention. Both characters had an encounter with divinity. In both cases, the divine instructed them with specific tasks, though both Peter and Cornelius had the capacity to disregard the divine request. In fact, at first Peter responded to his vision with an emphatic no. Cornelius immediately engaged with positive action, and it is until then that Peter received his vision. It appears that there was a divine mimesis at the centre of the story and both characters decided to engage in the imitation of the divine desire for inclusion and the construction of a totally different community. This encounter is simultaneously natural and supernatural. It is natural because imitation is the "absolute condition for the existence of humanity" (Alison, 1998: 28). It is supernatural because the desire that both Peter and Cornelius imitated was born from God. Nevertheless, the visions would have been worthless if either of the central characters of these narrative would have decided

to not follow through. The religious experience was not the centre of their encounter. Their humanity was. It is the relationality that one has to others that introduces one into being human, which is *human catechism*. Even more so, the relationality that allows us to connect with the other works mimetically (Ibid.). When one opens *thirdspaces* for the other and I to meet, positive imitation has the freedom to take us on the journey of building a community of positive desire together. In other words, without the human, the divine is incomplete.

In the case presented in the book of Acts chapters 10 and 11, Luke introduced the reader to a process that starts human and stays human (Alison, 2013). Neither Peter nor Cornelius could be aware of what constituted their consciousness. As a result, it was only through the relationship with each other that they could detect their exclusion of the other and change their lives. In the case of Peter, the vision helped him to become aware of his socio-moral religious disgust, and that became therapeutic in and of itself. Peter and Cornelius became aware that they were moved from without. The process of *human catechism* starts with one's humanity, regardless of how terrible it may be. There was no change in Peter independent from his relationship to Cornelius. In the words of James Alison (1998: 37): "There is no change in 'me' except insofar as there is a change in the relationality with the other [...] this change can be initiated only by the other."

10.2 Human Catechism and Rituals for Reimagining Humanity

Change and transformation only happen in relation with the other. This conveys the truth that the only way one can reimagine one's and the other's humanity is in direct relationship with the other. There is no space for *mis-meetings* in human catechism. One needs to engage in a ritualistic repetition of embrace-full encounters. This reversion of rituals is what happens in the transformational and religious experiences of some of the members of the CMT Guatemala network.

As stated before, the triad of archaic religion—myth, ritual, prohibition—is the structural backbone of the global sacrificial theology; hence, the house of *violence* and the *sacred* (Girard, 1977). Consequently, a practical theology of peacebuilding that responds to the Guatemalan collective woundedness must find ways of subverting this triad, which is present in contemporary institutions as I argued before. It is important, however, that before I enter the subversion of this triad, I summarise how the triad operates. First, the myth is the re-telling of the story of the founding murder of a specific culture. It is the story of the first mimetic crisis and the way the demise of a community was averted through the sacrifice, exclusion, or obliteration of an individual or group of people. The myth is the account of these circumstances through the perspective of the persecutors. As a result, prohibitions are put in place to avoid a similar crisis again. The prohibitions are the safeguard against violence going out of control within the community again. This results in the structuring of religion, which reminds the community of the carnage that can befall if rituals and prohibitions are not carefully followed (Girard, 1987).

One of the underlying arguments throughout this dissertation is that religious rationality, violence, does not change in essence. It does, however, change in form. For that reason, I believe that a key part to start the subversion of this triad is through the *ritual* element. Ritual is the constant repetition of the scapegoat mechanism in its full force. Religious reasoning thinks of everything in terms of the victim (Girard, 1987: 48). As a result, archaic and current institutions are exclusionary by nature. In other words, since the formation of the self happens through the anterior working of victim-related mimetic desire and the formation of society and economic reality sprout from the same paradigm; economic, political, psychological, and sexual reality can be interpreted as a portion of the same mechanism (Alison, 1998: 38). I believe that humans are constantly re-enacting micro-sacrificial rituals in contemporary society. These rituals of exclusion keep the status quo

and continue the sacrifice of those who are deemed as disposable, impure, and polluting within the current modes of production, religion, and politics. As a result, the subversion of ritual, the outside of oneself, and one's being-in-the-world must pass through the acknowledgement of one's complicity in the structures of the global sacrificial theology (Ibid.)

Since rituals are the repetition of the myth of the founding murder and exclusion, the question then becomes, how does one stop the micro-sacrificial rituals of everyday life? This may sound simplistic; however, I believe that it happens through the repetition of inclusion and radical hospitality practices as rituals performed by the practical theologian of liberation and the Christian community. Liberation then becomes an action that engages beyond the oppressors and the oppressed. It is an undertaking that involves a complete ontological transformation through the performance of new rituals. As a result, encountering the other becomes a sacrament that needs to be constantly performed for one's and the other's salvation and deliverance from the festering collective woundedness that keeps inflicting suffering and dehumanisation. For that reason, the interconnectedness of ministry must be at the forefront of liberation. Osmer (2008: 15) argues that practical theology is not only about preaching and pastoral care, but also about academic research and development, ritual studies, and so forth. When the ritual is subverted by new rituals that come from the interconnectedness of ministry, old myths hold no more power. The myths that perpetuate the collective woundedness are unveiled for what they are, violence in its purest form, the sacred. Thereby, *human catechism* becomes a practical theology of peacebuilding and liberation that seeks to heal the collective woundedness of a given context.

In order to subvert the *ritual* element of the archaic triad, the urban practical theologian of liberation must become a city chaplain, a priest that officiates the subversion of *ritual* with a holistic and interdisciplinary perspective. The subversion of rituals must be done within a

community that pushes each member to let go of his or her scapegoats and find a way of inclusion that creates a eucharistic table with space for all. The practical theologian of liberation becomes a *thirdspace* pastor for new communities of desire-full resistance. This is *human catechism*. The previous statement brings me to the vocational theology that is embedded within the foregrounded theology of peacebuilding. All the research, reflection, and interpretation of data comes to a climax in this section. For that reason, I will take now that time to expand my previous assertion.

10.2.1 The City Chaplain: pastoring the city as a coffee-house

The process of becoming a city chaplain entails a metaphorical understanding of the city that goes beyond what was presented in chapter seven. The metaphors of the city as parish, playground, and classroom are useful, but as I previously stated, they have contextual and linguistic limitations. For that reason, I believe that the city as a *coffee-house* can be a useful metaphor to explore the city in a way that allows a broader interaction with people from different backgrounds. For the purpose of this dissertation, the understanding of the *coffee-house* comes from the English idea of coffee-houses amid the XVI century. However, it is important to understand that this metaphor has been carefully explored with its historical and contextual implications. I do not intend to idealise the English coffee-house, but to take the elements and possibilities that such a metaphor provides. However, before using the metaphor it is important to mention that in Guatemala, coffee was introduced 1850s, and since then, it has been part of Guatemalan culture and trade. The coffee enterprise was part of the new generation of *hacendados* (landlords) who oppressed the indigenous communities in order to have cheap labour to increase their profit margins. Nowadays, however, Guatemalan sociability mobilizes around *tomar cafecito* (having a cup of coffee). For that reason, I do not take the history of coffee in Guatemala and the rest of the world lightly when using this

metaphor. Nevertheless, the idea and concept of the English coffee-house is quite useful as a metaphor to reimagine the urban environment.

The XVI century English coffee-houses were the result of centuries of coffee culture that started in the Middle East, where coffee-houses were also social centres (Robinson, 1893). Coffee-houses were the place where ideas came to concretise and incubate. Coffee-houses were a sign of innovation due to the diversity of clients that gathered in them. These establishments were so revolutionary for their time that there was no other place like them in England during the XVI century. Men of diverse social strata came together to discuss politics, fashion, philosophy, theology, and more (Jane, 2014). The coffee-house was a centre for dialogue and humour. It was a place for encountering others who one would not otherwise. Even more so, the coffee-house became a space for political dialogue and activism to the point of entering into a conflict with the Stuart kings (Robinson, 1893). It is true that coffee-houses were mostly for men. They were a product of their time and society. The metaphor, however, is still useful to create *thirdspaces* that allow for the creation of all-inclusive communities. In addition, this metaphor enters in contestation with the image of the contemporary coffee shop. In the United States and Latin America, the coffee shop has become a symbol of city renewal, which in most cases includes the expulsion of neighbourhood residents who cannot afford to live in specific renewed, gentrified, neighbourhoods anymore. Thereby, the coffee-house and the coffee shop are the example of *spatial* contestation and different *spatial* practices within the urban environment. The coffee-houses were places that levelled social distinctions. The space was not design for private conversations since the coffee-house was decorated with long tables and benches, which allowed for anybody to sit-down and engage with people from different social strata. In addition, the cost of coffee was reasonable and that allowed for the economic barrier to access the coffee-house

conversations to be reasonably low (Jane, 2014). The design of coffee-houses, long benches and tables, opens the metaphor for a eucharistic shape of mission amid the urban environment.

I believe that the city as a coffee-house metaphor has tremendous potential. The coffee-house was the place to learn new ideas, inform oneself, and possibly heal with each other through the democratisation of society. In other words, the coffee-house metaphor can englobe the city as classroom, parish, and playground in one place through the contextual expansion of the role of the practical theologian of liberation into a city chaplain. As a result, one enters a vocational dilemma because the transformation of one's city and search for peace ought to include the powerful and the powerless simultaneously. Should one serve the poor or the wealthy, the powerful or the powerless, the included or the excluded? In the case of the coffee-house metaphor, the city chaplain is to serve all with the intent to liberate people from the claws of the global sacrificial theology. The coffee-house metaphor implies that the city chaplain is responsible for fostering the creation of *thirdspaces* of radical hospitality and forgiveness that remove the possibility of generating righteous unanimity against a sinful, different, monstrous other. Hospitality and forgiveness become a new kind of righteousness, not the observance of laws that exclude people based on narrow conceptions of decency, purity, and the unclean.

The perspectives and metaphor presented here require a more comprehensive ethical framework. As I stated above, the design of the coffee-house had long benches and tables for all to share in the conversations and pass information. This part of the metaphor allows for the development of a eucharistic shape of mission amid the urban environment. In addition, since the Eucharist enters the realm of rituals one can now expand the chaplaincy of the practical theologian of liberation to the subversion of contemporary rituals. Theodore Walker, Jr.'s proposal can be helpful here as his contribution can enhance the ethical implications of *human catechism* and the

subversion of contemporary exclusionary rituals. Walker, Jr. (2001: 34) posits that African-American Christianity understands “righteousness” as the right way to relate to God. These relational dynamics, however, imply a social and ethical engagement and understanding. Consequently, righteousness is “being right with God” and it implies the empowerment of the people, since God’s will is understood as the provision and right to have adequate food, shelter, clothing, and provisions. Walker, Jr. calls this the Ethic of Breaking Bread.

The beauty of this proposal lies in its social and economic allocation. The African American experience of oppression and exclusion provides a theological and ethical framework to understand the “give us this day our daily bread” from a perspective of abundance that conceptualises bread beyond the provision for food and basic nourishment. This connects the African American experience to the community of early believers who struggled amid hardship and persecution. Consequently, the understanding of breaking bread implies the sharing of food, money, land, power, and so much more (Walker, Jr., 2001: 35). As a result, the trinitarian mystery in the theology of the Eucharist, as stated by Jeremy Driscoll, O. S. B. (2003: 185), is incarnated in the ethics of breaking bread with the other, since “God’s will is that we should have access to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit.”

Walker, Jr. juxtaposes the ethic of breaking bread and the ethic of crumbs. The ethic of crumbs is based on scarcity and selfishness. In using the example of the story of Lazarus and the rich man, Walker, Jr. (2001: 35) assertively states that the reason the rich man went to hell was because he did not share his bread with Lazarus. The rich man failed to reach the standard of righteousness, which is to share bread with one’s neighbour. On the other hand, the ethic of breaking bread means that, when partaking of the Eucharist, people do not pray for wealth and nourishment to trickle down from the wealthy. In Walker, Jr.’s words: “We are praying for a

relationship to God that compels us to do righteousness; that is, we are praying for a relationship to God that compels us to contribute to the empowerment of the people through sharing bread rather than crumbs.” Thereby, the city chaplain ought to depart his or her engagement with the city from the ethics of breaking bread. This is a direct subversion of contemporary consumption rituals that separate those who have from those who do not have. Thereby, one’s consumption capacity and protection of the boundaries of decency and purity as the measure for righteousness is no more. The ethic of breaking bread thus opens the door for both the empowerment of those who are disempowered and the repentance of those who are hoarding resources and creating wealth on the backs of the excluded others. Even more so, the ethic of breaking bread has the capacity to erase other distinctions that may be attached to the exclusivist understandings of decency, purity, and the unclean.

Therefore, *human catechism* ought to be relevant in the private, liturgical, and public spheres. At the private level, the practical theologian of liberation as city chaplain must be in direct relationship with the different sectors of society. The city chaplain must be in relationship with the powerless and the powerful. In the private sphere, one must have the capacity to break bread with all, to share and steward power with all, always on behalf of those who are vulnerable and victims of the global sacrificial theology. In the liturgical sphere, the city chaplain has the responsibility to foster a community(es) that engages the religious imagination through the eyes of Jesus, the forgiving victim. The liturgy of abundant creative forgiveness that springs from Jesus as the beginning of creation allows all to remember the collective woundedness with responsibility but without *ressentiment* (see chapter 5). The faith practices of radical hospitality and forgiveness have a public representation. In the words of Walker, Jr. (2001: 36)

Comprehensively conceived, breaking bread is much more about politics, economics, and other social activity as it is about the religion of individuals at the communion table.

Righteousness is doing God's will, and it is God's will that we break bread with the people. Moreover, the ethic of breaking bread is prescribed not only for the rich who have a surplus of bread, and whose cup runneth over, it is also prescribed for those of us who have only a little.

In other words, the eucharistic shape of mission in the urban context is the celebration and participation in the trinitarian life and mystery through the other.

10.2.2 Subversion of Rituals: hospitality, the other, and human catechism

The conversion and transformation experienced by different members of the CMT Guatemala network are contemporary examples of the process of *human catechism*. In chapter five I explored the beautiful faith practice of anthropological re-imagination. There is, however, a movement that transforms anthropological re-imagining into a *human catechism*. Catechism, as understood by Catholics (Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 2003) and Reformed protestants (Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, 2019) is a summary of the most important teachings of a religious tradition. Its purpose is to be a teaching guide and safeguard of the most important doctrinal stances. It is important to mention that in the circles of evangelical Christianity in Guatemala, people tend to use the term *discipleship* to avoid traditionally Catholic terminology. However, I believe that the term *catechism* is rich in sacramentality and theological tradition. In a way, the term discipleship responds to a question of belief in order to belong, or what does one need to believe in order to belong? In the case of *human catechism*, I use the term in the sense of a teaching tool and formation process. In other words, catechism is a process of becoming through belonging within a community, not a set of beliefs. *Human catechism*, however, does have one central belief: God became human in Jesus to teach humans how to be human. This process of becoming, the incarnation, is recorded in the apostolic witness and is the departure point for *human catechism*.

How, then, does anthropological re-imagining become *human catechism*? Through a process of induction into a community of desire, a community where “we are gradually inducted into a set of practices such that we find ourselves knowing from within how they work, and become more or less skilled operators of them” (Alison, 2013: 13). In the case of the CMT Guatemala network, some of its members have been transformed through the willingness to embrace each other and the other. This has created a community of leaders who are open to shape the self through the other. When these grassroots leaders come together, their desires are imitated from each other, and in many cases that creates conflict. However, when the leaders align themselves with the desire to inhabit and cross the borderlands, like in the case of Peter and Cornelius, they open the space for the other to re-imagine his or her humanity. As the leaders stay in community, they begin to develop sustainable faith practices that teach each other how to engage incarnationally amid their city. Once that set of sustainable practices is established, the beautiful faith practice of anthropological re-imagining undergoes a transformation into *human catechism*. Rituals of inclusion, such as prayer walks along marginalised communities, the vulnerable sharing their meals with the community, conversational engagement with the powerful, and forgiveness and lament in the form of communal liturgies become faith practices that aim to teach each other how to constantly find, rescue, and re-imagine the humanity of the other. They become a practical and oral *human catechism*. This does not mean that the community of the CMT Guatemala network is perfect by any means. In fact, the rivalries are so intense that the community has been fractured several times. However, as Bonhoeffer (1982) stated, life in community is a sign of the Kingdom of God with its imperfections and all.

It is important to mention that the process of ritual subversion does not start from above. In other words, it does not trickle down from the powerful to the powerless. The subversion of

ritual happens as a gift from the victims of the global sacrificial theology towards the executioners. It is the result of an ontological transformation that removes all scapegoats through an ethical metamorphosis that allows the other to become the point of reference for one's transformation. At this point of *human catechism*, I follow closely Levinas' understanding of the other as the possibility for one to be otherwise in a responsible ethical response to the other. It is important, however, to understand that my use of Levinas' ideas is not with the intention to systematise his thought. Such an endeavour "would be a denial of the language of alterity that Levinas tried to communicate" (Meylahn, 2013: 83). In addition, I will not take the time to enter in the explanation of Levinas' critique of Heidegger, since the field of this dissertation is not in philosophical theology. I am going to use what I consider Levinas' key concepts for *human catechism*. However, the reader will notice that I refer to the concepts that build Levinas' understanding of the other based on his critique of Heidegger's ontology. With that said, I will now take the space to convey how Levinas' concepts serve as the foundation of *human catechism* as a practical theology of peacebuilding that responds to the Guatemalan collective woundedness.

One of the possibilities opened by Levinas' ethical turn is a different perception of God. For Levinas, God is not defined by the nature of God's being. God is not limited by language and one's understanding of Godself. God comes in the responsibility towards the other (Meylahn, 2013: 80). I would call this the incarnational ethics of *human catechism*. The other becomes not only the image of God, but also the direct revelation of who God is. Any ontological definition of the other comes from one's being in rivalry with the other in an attempt to possess his or her being. In other words, it is one's attempt to possess God and control the boundaries of decency and purity that exclude the polluting other. The intent to define the nature of the other, thereby God, is what Levinas (1977) calls *totality*, which is a philosophy of injustice. It is my interpretation that Levinas'

totality is an idol that condones the objectivization of the other through his or her dehumanisation. Thereby, atheism becomes an act of desire-full resistance that allows one to relate to the Other through the embracement of the absolute completely pruned of violence and the sacred (Levinas, 1977: 80).

The break of totality comes in the revelation of the face of the other. The face of the other is quite an important concept to Levinas. Johan-Albrecht Meylahn (2013: 90) summarises quite eloquently the idea of the *face of the other* in Levinas. Meylahn posits that Levinas' idea of the face does not refer to the facial features one may perceive in the other. The face is the revelation of the other that challenges any objectification and dehumanisation. When one encounters the expressions, the non-verbal cues, in the face of the other, one is called to account because the expression of the face of the other is beyond objectification. Levinas (1977: 81) posited that understanding transcendence as the foreigner, the poor, the marginalised prohibits a metaphysical relationship with God that ignores humans and things. The realm of the divine is opened through the human face. Thereby, there is no knowledge of God separated from an ethical relationship with humans. In Levinas, this implies a metaphysical atheism since a relationship with the Metaphysic, God, is an ethical behaviour and not plain theology. Consequently, God's supreme presence is revealed through justice—and I dare to say restitution—done to other humans.

In my attempt to personalise and paraphrase Levinas (1977: 238), I believe that the epiphany, the revelation of Christ, in the face of the other opens the possibility of reimagining the humanity of the other. The face of the other, represented through pain and suffering, introduces me to poverty, violence, and exile. This agony, however, appeals to the power I have. The misery is not just abstract data. It is the expression of the face of the other that calls me to an encounter with the other as equals. It is an invitation from the completely Other, God who is already serving

and consoling those who suffer in the centre of such misery, for me to engage in the learning process of what being human truly means.

Therefore, when I mentioned communities of desire-full resistance in the previous section, I meant communities that are practicing a contemporary form of atheism since they do not believe in a violent god amid a culture of violence and exclusion. A community of desire-full resistance is willing to take the scapegoats away as an act of metaphysical atheism through the irreverent act taking away of the sacrifice from the altars of the global sacrificial theology. Even more so, communities of desire-full resistance, as Rocke and Van Dyke (2012: 294) posit in a very Girardian way, respect and honour what it means to be human, “that we are created in and through desire.” Those who join this type of community are in the process of understanding that there is no “I” for the practical theologian of liberation. There is only “us” and the theological articulations that come out of this dissertation have been distilled from a long-lasting and cross-cultural conversation.

In conclusion, imperfection and desire are part of what makes us human. *Human catechism* as a practical theology that responds to the Guatemalan collective woundedness attempts to help people stay human and liberate each other’s humanity amid the current modes of production, religion, and politics. *Human catechism* is the development of faith practices that contest the exclusionary ways of the CMT Guatemala network’s leaders and the extended community of the Street Psalms network. At a local level, the salvation and liberation of Guatemalans lies within the festering wounds of the Guatemalan collective woundedness. If one learns to be more human, one can introduce others into the faith practices that rescue our humanity.

CHAPTER 11

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER THOUGHTS

Before I conclude the dissertation, I want to take the time to briefly mention the process that CMT Guatemala as an organisation and the network it serves have come through in the last two years. In April 2019, when I was in the middle of gathering data for this dissertation, CMT Guatemala's board of directors decided to cease operations. They made the decision following the suggestion and discernment of the executive staff, which I was a part of. The reason for ceasing operations was that the organisation became financially unsustainable. The relational capital of the organisational director at the time was not enough to bring the needed revenue to keep the operations running. In addition, the relationships of the network suffered deeply as new organisations became part of the network and they required more attention and funds than the long-term members of the CMT Guatemala network. As a result, rivalries arose among organisational leaders. These rivalries then seeped into the organisational structure and operations of CMT Guatemala, creating tension and unspoken forms of violence and rivalry between the organisation and the network.

All of this happened as I researched and articulated this dissertation. Consequently, the data gathering, and interpretation became difficult since I was part of the executive staff of CMT Guatemala. Many relationships were damaged, which made the interviewing process harder as the members of the network looked with suspicion at my interest in researching their faith practices amid such a time. With all the relationships in rivalry, the Guatemalan collective woundedness became very evident throughout the interviewing process and the interpretation of data, making this theological work even more important. The leaders of the network let the old demons of colonial history and violence come to the surface. Their exclusionary faith practices were more

evident, which made the work of finding redeeming faith practices harder. Nevertheless, the Spirit was/is moving among the leaders of the network and the true practice of love and commitment to Jesus' way found a path to flow in their speech and responses to the interview questions. It was only because of the true love that lies in the hearts of the network's leaders that I was able to articulate their faith practice of anthropological reimagination that then lead me to the development of *human catechism*.

The journey of this dissertation has not been easy. I started with the idea of researching a group of leaders who were my faith and learning community of desire-full resistance for over a decade. Sadly, it ended as the community scattered due to the hidden ways of violence and rivalry among the leaders of the network. Along the way, there were other delays in data gathering and interpretation, the bibliographic research, and the theological articulation. However, as I reach the end of this work, I am thankful for the leaders and their co-participation in this dissertation. That said, in this chapter, I will summarise the path towards *human catechism* as a practical theology of peacebuilding, which will show how the objectives of this dissertation were completely achieved through the interpretation of data and theological articulation. I will also mention what the possibilities are for further theological exploration. Then, I will detail the contributions of the theological articulation presented here, which will finalise the process and findings of the research. Finally, I will take the time to recommend further engagement with the theology here presented.

11.1 Research Objectives: the path towards human catechism

The path that I followed to reach the conclusive statements and climax of theological articulation presented in the previous chapter is extensive and complex. For that reason, the proposed title for this theological work has three elements—*living, laughing, and loving*—that are of utmost

importance for *human catechism* as a practical theology of peacebuilding that responds to the Guatemalan collective woundedness.

11.1.1 Living

Living as an element of *human catechism* is the way people understand, explore, and experience their context. For that reason, I proposed utilizing René Girard's mimetic theory as a lens to explore and interpret *living*. Mimetic theory provided the anthropological approach to an understanding of violence that goes beyond acts of subjective violence. It provided this dissertation with the foundations of an understanding of humanity that goes beyond the individualism that flourished during and after the Enlightenment. In addition, it allowed one to explore contemporary institutions as the offspring of religious rationality. Furthermore, Girard paved the way for an anthropological understanding of Jesus' death on the cross, thus creating the opportunity for a non-violent exploration of the Biblical narrative.

With Girard's mimetic theory as the guiding lens for this work, I moved into the exploration of liberation theology as a non-sacrificial theology. At the beginning of this dissertation I had a "theological hunch" about liberation theology and its possibilities as non-sacrificial. However, in my years of research and studies, I did not know that Girard had an encounter with liberation theologians. I came to find this out in an email conversation with James Alison as he pointed me to the written account of the conversations held in the City of São Paulo, Brazil, in June of 1990 (Assmann, 1991). The discovery of this document confirmed my hunch and opened the door for a completely new way of engaging Girard and liberation theology. This breakthrough solved a complication I had at the paradigm level of this dissertation. At the beginning, the problem to engage these two perspectives in conversation seemed to come from the epistemological grounds of each perspective. Liberation theology starts with the reality of those who experience poverty,

marginalisation, and violence and how they read the Bible. Mimetic theory, on the other hand, departs from the philosophical anthropology and arrived at its conclusions through literary criticism and the exploration of religious rationality. In other words, one comes from the academy and the other comes from the street. The more I read, however, the more I realised that both epistemologies come from the same place, the intelligence of the victim (Alison, 1996). In making this direct connection between liberation theologies and Girard's mimetic theory, I was able to use both paradigms in order to search for a practical theology of peacebuilding that responded to the Guatemalan collective woundedness.

With the connection made between Girard's anthropology and liberation theology, I was able to enter the exploration and articulation of the Guatemalan collective woundedness. The research process of the Guatemalan collective woundedness was quite challenging. It impacted me deeply as I found myself amidst my own wounding. The representations of the Guatemalan collective woundedness were the signs and symbols of my own wounding. Even more so, the CMT Guatemala network was revealed as a micro-cosmos of larger Guatemalan society. We were wounded in the same way and we are wounding each other as we repeat many historical patterns and faith practices that are exclusionary in nature. The representations of the Guatemalan hurt were a vital element in the theological exploration of the CMT network. The representations of woundedness allowed me to better understand the theory-laden practices of the grassroots leaders that I have been in community and communion with for over a decade.

In the process of using Girard's mimetic theory and liberation theology as guiding paradigms, I was able to explore the faith practices of the grassroots leaders of the network without condemnation. As the interview process and interpretation of data went on, I was aware of our humanity and the reality of desire as what makes us human. Consequently, I was able to see the

beauty and affliction that are intrinsically connected in the psyche of the leaders of the network. Their hearts are constantly moved and challenged. They oscillate between exclusion as a faith practice and the anthropological reimagining of the other. The grassroots leaders of the network are constantly pulled between the will to be pure and the will to embrace. It is amid this ambivalence that the CMT grassroots leaders have found a way to challenge the institution of scarcity. They are beginning to understand the sacramentality of abundance and the ethics of breaking bread as a way to subvert the rituals that perpetuate exclusion. This is not to say that the leaders of the network have it figured out. It means that there are glimpses of the intelligence of the victim among them.

The process summarised here and extensively explored in the first part of this dissertation allowed me to accomplish the first objective of this learning experience, which was to develop an analysis of Guatemala City's collective woundedness. The lenses used for the study provided a critical reading, interpretation, and evaluation of René Girard's anthropology and practical theological implications of his thought in the Guatemalan context, which was objective number two of this work. The consideration of the gathered data from grassroots leaders provided the platform for the documentation of possible non-violent theologies and faith practices from the CMT Guatemala network, which was the third expected result of this theological enterprise.

11.1.2 Laughing

After setting up the context and the leaders' faith practices, I turned to the *laughing* element of *human catechism*. The idea of laughing at oneself comes from the contextual theologising act. When one does truly contextual theology, one realises that one's exclusionary faith practices are just plain silly. However, laughing at oneself is not an easy matter. It requires the willingness to accept that the only way of doing theology is contextual. Even more so, *laughing* demands one's

theology to transcend the boundaries of decency and purity in order to be relevant and open to laughing. Theology needs to become irreverent in the face of imposed purity. In this movement of the dissertation, I defined what contextual theology is so the rest of the path could be clearly defined as a contextual practical theology of liberation and peacebuilding that responds to the Guatemalan collective woundedness. In doing so, I opened the space to metaphilosophically explore space as an element that can expand the contextual theologising act. This allowed for the metaphorical exploration of the city that can open a resignification of the urban environment. I brought the CMT leaders' way of theologising into a framework that could help the community understand how they do theology and how to possibly transcend their exclusionary faith practices. This, of course, with the understanding that theology is the result of their faith practices and not the other way around. For that reason, the use of the "City Psalm" by Denise Levertov framed the metaphorical engagement of the city as understood by the CMT leaders through the articulations of the Incarnational Training Framework written by the Street Psalms Resource Centre.

With exploration of the possibilities and limitations of space in the city, I challenged the theology and faith practices presented by the CMT leaders with a contextual indecent theology. At this point, the paradigm of liberation theology, which is one of the transversal axis points of the dissertation, expanded into a radically inclusive liberative theology that is in the process of constant liberation. It became evident that the intelligence of the victim is an indecent act that subverts, challenges, and overthrows the boundaries of decency, purity, and the unclean to open a door of radical hospitality for all to sit at the eucharistic table.

At this point, Girard's mimetic theory, liberation theology as an indecent theology, and the metaphorical engagement of the city tested the CMT leaders' faith practices and allowed me to engage the leaders' faith practice of anthropological reimagining as the beginning of a *human*

catechism through the exploration of non-violent hermeneutics through the intelligence of the victim and Jesus as the hermeneutical lens to re-read Scripture. The design, development, and delivery of questions to facilitate the process of non-violent readings of the Bible and the development of a practical theology of peacebuilding in community through the possibilities offered by Girardian anthropology became a reality, thus accomplishing the fourth of objective of this dissertation. It was until then that the starting point for a *human catechism* was ready for the engagement of the self through the other as one becomes who one is through the imitation of the other. The ground was set for the ethical implications of *human catechism* as a practical theology of peacebuilding that responds to the Guatemalan collective woundedness.

11.1.3 Loving

The ethical implications of the foregrounded theology of peacebuilding have a specific process. Three movements frame the process towards a *human catechism*. Firstly, one needs to risk the engagement with non-violent hermeneutics and readings of the Bible. Even if one is not in agreement, it is important to engage the conversation to see what can result from it. The second movement is to acknowledge one's involvement in violence and its forms. It is vital that one is capable to place oneself historically within the collective woundedness, in order to finally release one's personal scapegoats to become a model of self-giving and not vengeance. These are the three movements that allow for a *human catechism*. For, as I mentioned before (See chapter nine):

nonviolence should not be a tool to save the face of those in power. It must be a way to help the oppressed and marginalised not to become the oppressors, thus repeating the cycle of violence. Nonviolent resistance will always be violent, even though it may not imply bloodshed. It will always be deemed as violent by the powers that be as it will always disrupt the peaceful state of things. Consequently, the resister is involved in peacebuilding to avoid a carnage through the recognition that his or her nonviolent resistance will be perceived as violent.

Human catechism as a practical theology of peacebuilding that responds to the Guatemalan collective woundedness and allows one to recognise the other as human, even the oppressive other, as oneself. For that reason, I engaged in the process of revisiting the collective woundedness and exploring violence and the ways one can perpetrate violence.

The ethical implications of *loving* have a specific vocational outcome. In the final chapter of this dissertation and climax of the theological reflection, I stated that the practical theologian of liberation ought to become a city chaplain. This infers a way of being and relating to the city and its inhabitants that creates *thirdspaces* that foster communities of desire-full resistance. This accomplishes the last objective I set out to attain, the systematic documentation of the local grassroots' practical theological proposal for peacebuilding. *Loving* is the result of the interpretation of data and theological articulation that comes from my engagement with the CMT Guatemala network. At this point, the dissertation came to a full circle in chapter ten and now comes to an end.

11.1 Recommendations

There are five recommendations that are directly attached to the accomplished objectives presented in the previous section. These suggestions are intended to encourage further communal exploration of the themes and conclusions of this dissertation. Firstly, hermeneutically speaking, contemporary Christianity needs to return to the interpretative lenses provided by the apostolic witness. Faith communities ought to read Scripture through the eyes of Jesus as the forgiving victim. I am confident that the ontological change presented in the intelligence of the victim has the potential to transform the way people read Scripture and relate to one another. This expands the conversation beyond what has been presented in this dissertation. Thereby, a contextual reading of the Bible among the vulnerable must be at the forefront of any practical theology of liberation and

peacebuilding. Practical theologians of liberation must be plugged into diversely inclusive faith communities that require them to be in constant engagement with the powerless and the powerful.

Secondly, it is important that the practical theologian of liberation keeps in mind that those who work with marginalised and vulnerable communities are not immune to developing a righteous unanimity against a sinful other. The scapegoat mechanism is always at work; our responsibility is to be aware of its function and recognise that we also participate in it in different ways. It is vital that the theologian remembers to see his or her city through the eyes of the forgiving victim. That will allow one to see who the scapegoats are and to act in the subversion of the system that asks for their execution. This, however, puts the theologian in quite a conundrum as he or she searches for justice and restitution. Additional theological engagement and articulation will be needed in the discernment process that makes a distinction between justice, vengeance, and sacred violence. This will need to be expanded into a practical theology of liberation that engages the private, public, and liturgical spheres.

Thirdly, beauty and affliction will always be part of the human experience, as will desire, rivalry, and violence. For that reason, this dissertation opens the space for the expansion of a conversation that considers a theology of desire that allows faith communities to engage, name, and explore positive imitation towards societal transformation. It is essential, however, that the practical theologian of liberation follows a theological life that sees no violence in God. For when hard choices that imply possible violence come, the practical theologian of liberation will be free to act knowing that God's forgiveness is at the forefront of the new creation in Jesus. Consequently, there is a need to further articulate a theology peacebuilding that goes even deeper in the ambivalence of human violence in extreme circumstances.

Fourthly, I have come to realise that the CMT Guatemala network is a beautiful community that needs restoration, healing, and love. The leaders have the capacity to reimagine the humanity of the other. Consequently, they have the capacity to respond to the call their city is making, how are they going to love their city and seek its peace? This question is an opportunity to reengage the network in a contextually relevant way. It presents me with the possibility to go back to broken relationships and heal together in order to love our city.

Finally, *human catechism* is a term that is rich in theological possibilities. I believe that I have only scratched the surface of what it could be. I am introducing practical theologians to a new realm of possibilities. There is a need for further engagement regarding *human catechism* at the level of pastoral counselling, liturgical and ritual studies, and even at the philosophical theology level. I have a great task before me as I imagine ways of developing the terminology and practices that can accompany the richness of *human catechism*.

11.2 Contributions

At the beginning of this dissertation I set out to contribute in three ways to the field of practical theology. Firstly, I aimed to explore, incorporate and apply René Girard's mimetic theory to the field of practical theology. At this point, I have successfully used Girard's ideas as a paradigm for contextual research and the exploration of the faith practices of a small network of grassroots leaders in Guatemalan City, proving that mimetic theory has much to contribute to the field of practical theology. Mimetic theory also proved to be a great tool for the possible exploration and application in the realm of ritual studies within the field of practical theology. The contribution of this dissertation opens the door for further application of Girard's ideas into other sub-disciplines within practical theological articulation. In addition, the ideas of desire, imitation, rivalry, and violence that sprout from Girard's proposals can impact congregational research and strategic

planning. If practical theologians of liberation who are in church leadership make use of Girard's ideas, they will be able to find contextual ways of positive mimesis for conflict resolution, contextual understanding, preaching, and teaching.

Secondly, I wanted to contribute to the local and global impact of the CMT Guatemala network and the UTC Global network. At this level there are three specific contributions that can expand the theological development of both communities. The first one is the idea of the collective woundedness that I have developed. My intention was to create a tool that could be used for contextual analysis. In doing so, I developed interdependent categories that can easily be translated to other countries of the global south. Even more so, the representations categorised in the collective woundedness can be used to interpret the global reality with local contextual specificity. This, I hope, will be used at the local and global level. I have developed concrete categories to map the hurt, hope, and heart (Rocke & Van Dyke, 2017) of cities. In second place, the theological articulation presented in this dissertation is a tool in and of itself. It is a summarised and accessible introduction to Girard's ideas, liberation theology, sociology of the city, non-violent hermeneutics and, of course, practical theology. Finally, for the Street Psalms community, the term *human catechism* can now be explored as a communal concept that can enhance the way we form incarnational leaders that love their city and seek its peace. It allows us to engage in spiritual, theological and civic formation in a holistic way as we learn to reimagine each other's humanity along the way.

Thirdly, I wanted to empower local grassroots leaders to develop their own non-violent hermeneutics for non-violent, inclusive, and decolonized faith practices that deal with the issues of the Guatemalan collective woundedness. I have started an ongoing conversation with this dissertation. The leaders who participated in the interview process are aware of the findings and

development of this work and we are engaging each other once a month in conversations that explore the representations of the Guatemalan collective woundedness. We are starting to open the space to teach each other how to be humans through the faith practices of anthropological reimagining, contextual Bible readings, and radical hospitality. We are practicing *human catechism*.

APPENDIX 1

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APPENDIX 2

Ethics Board Letter of Approval



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Theology

Die Navorsingskantoor
Mev Daleen Kotzé
Fakulteit Teologie
Lynnwoodweg
Hatfield 0083
Pretoria
15/11/2017

Geagte Dr de Beer

NAVORSINGSREGISTER FAKULTEIT TEOLOGIE:

Dankie vir die voorstel wat ingedien is vir evaluasie.

NAAM: Aguilar-Ramirez J
STUDENTENOMMER: 16400926
KURSUS: PhD
JAAR VAN REGISTRASIE VIR DIE GRAAD: 2016

Neem kennis van die terugvoer van die Evalueerder, die Navorsingskomitee sowel as die Etiëkkomitee het die voorstel goedgekeur.

Ek dank u vriendelik vir u samewerking.



— Namens —

Prof DJ Human

Voorsitter: Navorsingskomitee: Fakulteit Teologie

APPENDIX 3

Interview Script and Questions

GUIDE AND SCRIPT FOR DISSERTATION INTERVIEWS

The purpose of this tool is to generate and compile qualitative data that allows the researcher to find possible understandings of non-violent theologies, violence, peacebuilding, and scarcity among grassroots leaders. One of the first steps for this process is to sit-down and talk with the grassroots leaders about their daily lives and what they do. It will be important to take the time to observe specific meanings within the way they interact with the researcher. What do they find meaningful? How do they give meaning to their reality and faith practices?

Questions and Interview script

Introductory questions:

1. Hello, thank you for giving me some of your time. If we are not able to cover everything that I would like to ask you today, would you be willing to be interviewed again? Firstly, let me tell you just a little bit about the research I am doing. I am exploring how local leaders understand their city, and how their city is inviting them to engage in a theology of peacebuilding in the midst of the violent reality they live in. (Please read letter of consent for the full description of this dissertation and the rights of the leaders to be interviewed)
2. Could you please describe the work you do and how you came to do it?

From a mentality of scarcity to abundance

1. What other groups, organizations, churches, or communities do you work with in order to bring transformation to the community you serve? ... Follow up: How do you feel working with them? Could you please share some of your experiences? (Purpose: bring up shared experiences, knowledge and collaboration, or lack thereof)
2. Describe the reality for the people who live in the community you serve. What causes that reality? (Purpose: evaluate the paradigm about perception of reality, opportunities, resources, and Guatemalan history)
3. From your perspective please describe what is abundance. (Purpose: explore the concept of abundance, and scarcity)

Violence

1. In your perspective, why do you think Guatemala City is such a violent city? What impact does violence have on the residents of Guatemala City? (Purpose: explore the concept of violence, and the perspective of those who suffer violence)

2. Do you experience any prejudice for working in a violent community, or with a marginalized group? (Purpose: explore if the leader sees him or herself as the victim of symbolic violence)
3. Are there any people, groups, or communities that you would feel uncomfortable working with, and why? (Explore if the leader recognizes him or herself as a perpetrator of symbolic violence)
4. Who are the most marginalized and vulnerable people within the group, or community you serve, and why? (Explore if the leader can identify others who are victims of subjective, objective, or symbolic violence)

Peace, rivalry, and peacebuilding

1. What obstacles do you face in building peace and unity in your community? (Purpose: explore if the leader is trying to develop peacebuilding practices)
2. When you meet with other leaders in your context, is there any topics you avoid talking about? (Purpose: explore themes of doctrine, faith practices, ecumenism, racism, and gender issues)
3. What are your non-negotiables in working and collaborating with others? (Purpose: explore themes that cause rivalry, and rivalistic relationships the leader engages in)
4. How do you work peacefully with people you disagree with? (Purpose: explore the leader's willingness to create a culture, and theology of peacebuilding)
5. Would you be willing to build peace for Guatemala, even if this changes your doctrine and faith practices? Follow up: Why or why not? Where would your limit be? (Purpose: explore what is more important for the leader, doctrine or shalom for his or her city?)
6. What would like to learn from this dissertation?