



Archives, Historical Memory, and Human Rights in Guatemala: The Case of Fernando Garcia

Virginia Garrard, University of Texas at Austin

Join us for a campus presentation with noted historian Dr. Virginia Garrard of the University of Texas at Austin.

In 1984, a young Guatemalan labor activist by the name of Edgar Fernando García was “disappeared” by the Policía Nacional from the streets of Guatemala City. He left behind his wife, Nineth de García, and a young daughter; his body was never located. The following year, Nineth helped to found the Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo, a families of the disappeared group that was among the first to openly confront Guatemala’s military government for its atrocities against the civilian population. After the armed conflict came to an end, Nineth García eventually went on to become an influential member of the National Assembly and a reformist presidential candidate. Their daughter, Alejandra, is now a prominent human rights attorney. Decades later, the (accidental) discovery of the Archivo Histórico de la Policía Nacional de Guatemala (AHPN) in 2005, which housed more than 80 million documents, made it possible for many Guatemalans who had lost family members to the security forces in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1990s, to learn about the final disposition of their loved ones. Because of the prominence and persistence of his family members, Fernando Garcia’s was among the first to be researched in the AHPN and also one of the first to result in successful legal proceedings against the members of the AHPN for human rights abuses. This presentation will explore how archival research of historical documents, as in the García case, can shed light on legal proceedings such as this.

Garrard received her PhD in History from Tulane University and has been on the faculty at the University of Texas since 1990. She is Director of LLILAS Benson and a professor in Latin American history. Her most recent work, which she co-edited with Stephen Dove and Paul Freston, the *Cambridge History of Religions in Latin America*, was published in April, 2016.

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Photo: CC image of Maria Soto and other Ixil women as they stand vigil after former Guatemalan dictator Rios Montt was found guilty of genocide against the indigenous Ixil people in the 1980s. Photographer: Elena Hermosa.

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