High-Ranking Guatemalan Officers to Face Trial for 1981 Disappearance and Rape

Louisa Reynolds
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by Louisa Reynolds

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Five high-ranking military officers will face trial for the 1981 disappearance of 14-year-old Marco Antonio Molina Theissen (NotiCen, Feb. 11, 2016, and Aug. 11, 2016) and the detention and rape of his sister, Emma Guadalupe Molina Theissen, in accordance to an Oct. 25 ruling by Judge Víctor Herrera Ríos, who presides Guatemala’s High Risk Tribunal C.

Prosecutors have been given a one-month deadline to gather the remaining evidence. The trial is set to begin on Dec. 9.

The accused are Benedicto Lucas García, former deputy chief of staff of the Army; Antonio Callejas y Callejas, who was director of intelligence (known as G2); Francisco Luis Gordillo Martínez, who was the commander of the Quetzaltenango military zone;

Edilberto Letona Linares, who was second-in-command at the Quetzaltenango military zone; and Hugo Ramiro Zaldaña, former head of intelligence of the Quetzaltenango military zone. They are between 78 and 84 years old.

On Sept. 27, 1981, Emma Guadalupe Molina Theissen was detained by Army officers who searched the bus on which she was traveling to the highland city of Quetzaltenango. Among her belongings, they found pamphlets from the Juventud Patriótica del Trabajo (Patriotic Workers’ Youth), a division of the leftist Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo (PGT), which had been outlawed by the military regimes that had ruled Guatemala since 1954. Molina Theissen was taken to the Quetzaltenango military base, where she was interrogated, tortured with electric shocks, and repeatedly gang raped by soldiers.

After a month, she was so emaciated—she lost 20 pounds during her time in captivity—that she managed to free her wrists from the handcuffs and leave the base, walking past the soldiers guarding the main entrance, who mistook her for a sex worker. Her family’s joy at having her back was short-lived, as three soldiers raided the family home and kidnapped her 14-year-old brother, Marco Antonio, hoping this would force her to surrender.

Ana Lucrecia Molina Theissen, Emma Guadalupe and Marco Antonio’s elder sister, reported that her mother, her brother, and a housemaid had been at home when they heard a knock on the door. Three men had arrived in a pickup truck. One remained in the vehicle, she said, the second climbed onto a ledge on the outside of the house in order to keep a watchful eye on the family’s movements, and the third forced his way into the house, pushed Marco Antonio, handcuffed him, sealed his mouth with masking tape and ordered him to remain seated on the sofa. He then grabbed the boy’s mother, Emma Theissen Álvarez, and pointed a gun at her head, used her as a human shield as he searched the house.

In one of the rooms, the man found an album containing photos of the young Emma Guadalupe, which he tore out and kept. Once he had finished searching the house, he pushed Theissen Álvarez into one of the rooms, grabbed the boy, and left.
The terrified mother ran out to the street and saw the truck leave. Marco Antonio was in the back, being held down by a large man. She managed to remember the license plate: O-17675. Theissen Álvarez never saw her son again and doesn’t know where he was taken.

Ana Lucrecia learned what had happened several hours later. “It was the day of my first death,” she recalls.

**A promising student**

Marco Antonio was the only boy and the youngest of five siblings: Sonia, the eldest sister, who died in 2000, Ana Lucrecia, María Eugenia, and Emma Guadalupe, with whom the young boy had a particularly close relationship.

Ana Lucrecia describes Marco Antonio as a well-built youth who was quiet and intelligent, a good student who excelled at drawing and dreamed of becoming an engineer. He is smiling in the black and white portrait that his mother and sisters always carry.

“We always had books at home, and he was very familiar with reading; he enjoyed learning and was very devoted to his studies,” she said.

Marco Antonio never revealed where Emma Guadalupe had hidden after her escape from the Quetzaltenango military base. “That makes me think that my little brother was capable, at his young age, of being heroic and sacrificing himself,” Ana Lucrecia said.

**In search of justice**

In 2000, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) held the Guatemalan state responsible for Marco Antonio’s abduction. Four years later, it ordered Guatemala to investigate the case and locate his remains. Thirty-five years after his disappearance, it is not known where he was taken, whether he was tortured, or where he was buried.

The IACHR ordered the state to pay the Molina Theissen family US$698,000 in compensation for the legal costs they incurred in, to cover the cost of therapy to overcome the trauma they endured, and to pay for the home they lost when they had to seek exile in Costa Rica after Marco Antonio’s abduction.

As a symbolic gesture, the court also ordered that a public school in the municipality of Villa Nueva should be named after Marco Antonio, a poignant gesture given that Marco Antonio’s mother and his sister Ana Lucrecia are both school teachers.

Bringing to justice the five high-ranking army officers for the boy’s forced disappearance sets an important precedent for the human rights organizations that in 2006 promoted a bill that would force the state to create a commission to search for the 45,000 Guatemalans who disappeared during Guatemala’s civil war and to compensate their family members. Although the relevant congressional commissions have decreed the bill is technically viable, it has not been debated in Congress.

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