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Con mi corazón en Yambo. A film by María Fernanda Restrepo. Distributed by PRAGDA. Color, DVD, Spanish with English subtitles. Ecuador, 2012. 137 mins.

Carla Guerrón Montero
Department of Anthropology
University of Delaware

As an adolescent growing up in Quito, Ecuador, my main preoccupation was what career to study at the university. My sister, a few years younger, was learning to navigate life in high school. Without ever meeting, my family and I lived parallel lives with the Restrepo Arizmendy family, a Colombian family of five who had planted roots in Ecuador, and who also enjoyed a pleasant middle class existence. I remember reading a newspaper story about two brothers with ages close to my sister and me who vanished, apparently without a trace. It was January 8, 1988 when the Ecuadorian police arrested without probable cause the two elder sons of the family, Carlos Santiago (17 years old) and Pedro Andrés (14 years old). They were tortured and killed by the police within days of their abduction, and their bodies allegedly disposed of in the Yambo Lake. Their bodies have not been found to this day.

This is the story that inspired the argument of "With my Heart in Yambo" (*Con mi Corazón en Yambo*), a fascinating and compelling documentary written and directed by filmmaker María Fernanda Restrepo, the youngest daughter of the Restrepo family, who was ten years old when this crime by the state occurred. With a gentle yet firm hand and in the first person, Restrepo invites the viewer into her comfortable family life prior to the kidnappings: swimming pool parties, Boy Scout activities, ballet classes, religious ceremonies. She then explores the unforgettable day of the abduction by the police and the continued search for answers and justice ever since. The documentary addresses various theories put forth by the police during the investigations: Was it a tragic car accident? Did the boys run away from home to join the Colombian guerrillas? Were they alive and about to be returned to the family in exchange for silence? It also addresses the twisted and cruel ways the police pretended to assist the family with made up stories with the sole intention of delaying the search process.

The documentary narrates the long and courageous battle that two parents, Pedro and Luz Helena, waged against the state, the police and successive governments in the search for answers. For 18 years, Pedro protested every Wednesday outside the President's Palace at the Plaza Grande in Quito, demanding a formal response from the Ecuadorian government. Though current President Rafael Correa has promised to resolve the case, the truth of what happened to Santiago and Andrés is still not fully revealed.

The Restrepo case (as it became known) is crucial for Ecuador because the actions of one family turned visible the repressive years of democratically elected President León Febres Cordero (1984-1988). Although the degree of brutality never reached the proportions of neighboring countries such as Peru, Colombia, or the southern cone, Ecuador was not the "island of peace" amidst its violent neighbors that it proclaimed to be. In 2009, the Commission of Truth estimated that state-sponsored violence was responsible for the disappearance of at least nine people (including the Restrepo brothers) and for the human rights abuses of more than 310 victims during Febres Cordero's regime.

The case was a point of inflection in the struggle for human rights in Ecuador. It was the first time that a denouncement made by civilians against police officers was brought to the courts, that police were judged in civil courts, and that the accused were sentenced and sent to jail in 1995. It is clear that the Restrepo brothers became symbols of the human rights abuses endured by countless Ecuadorian citizens in the 1980s.

This documentary has received 16 awards in international film festivals, including the Film de Femmes in France, the Havana Film Festival in Cuba, and the FIDOCs in Chile. To date, it is the documentary with the largest audience in Ecuador's history. "With my Heart in Yambo" offers an intimate, carefully crafted, and beautifully produced account of the effects of a state crime on a family. But it is also "the story of a personal journey interlaced with the past of an entire country that was marked by this story."

