

CLAS Events – Easter Term 2026

Thursday 11 June - 12:30pm | Book Presentation & Panel

Room S1, First Floor, Alison Richard Building

Digging for Hope. A Feminist Ethnography in the Land of Mass Graves

Speaker: [Rosalva Aída Hernández Castillo](#) (Simón Bolívar Professor 2013-14)

Chair: [Mónica Moreno Figueroa](#) (University of Cambridge)

Commentators: [Graham Denyer Willis](#) (University of Cambridge); [Joey Whitfield](#) (Cardiff University)

Abstract:

In the shadow of Mexico's ongoing human rights crisis, *Digging for Hope* offers a powerful feminist ethnography of resistance, care, and collective memory. Drawing on nearly a decade of fieldwork, R. Aída Hernández Castillo documents the courageous work of women-led search collectives who, in the face of extreme violence, search for their disappeared loved ones.

Through physical and spiritual practices such as exhumation, mourning, and poetic remembrance, these women reclaim dignity for the dead and challenge a society that has normalized disappearance. At the heart of this book is a profound exploration of what Hernández Castillo calls a "pedagogy of love"—a political and ethical framework rooted in care, solidarity, and the refusal to forget. These women are not only searching for bodies; they are building emotional communities, crafting new languages of justice, and offering a reimagining of what it means to resist violence. Their practices, often overlooked by traditional scholarship, restore humanity and dignify the disappeared.

Digging for Hope is essential reading for anyone seeking to understand the gendered dimensions of violence and the grassroots movements that rise in response. With clarity and compassion, Hernández Castillo brings readers into the intimate spaces of grief and resistance, offering a model for feminist ethnography that is both rigorous and deeply humane.

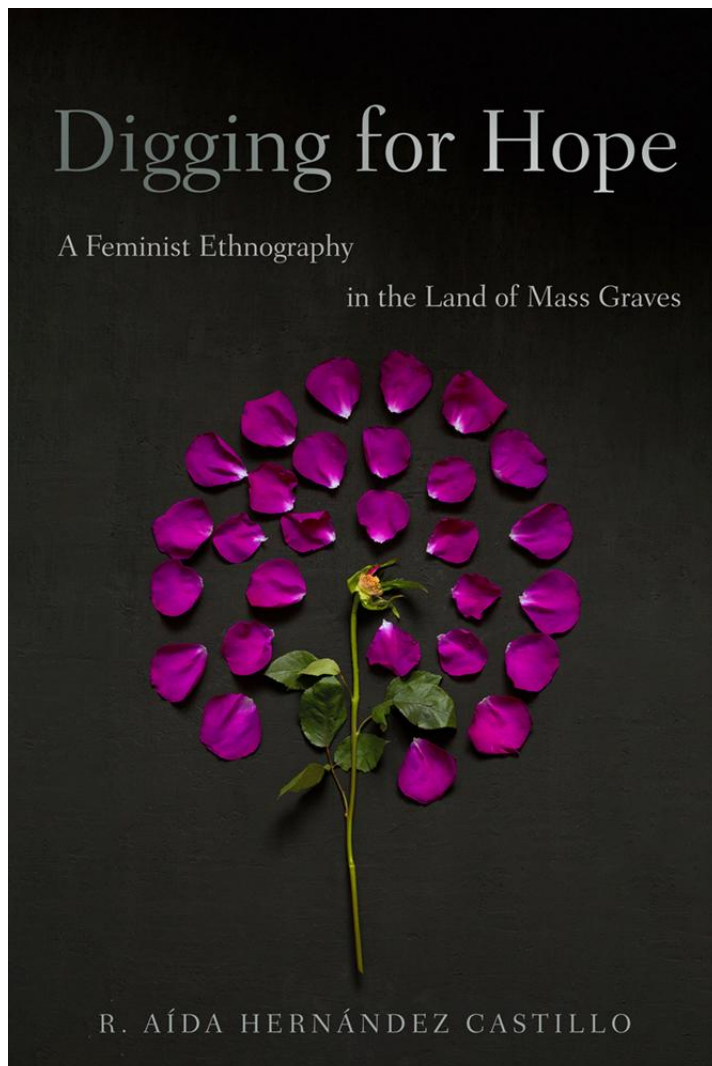
"Digging for Hope is a powerful ethnography revealing how women searching for their disappeared in Mexico craft a pedagogy of love to confront violence. Through brave and caring strategies such as exhuming bodies from mass graves, women searchers teach broader society to dignify the dead and resist normalizing violence. More than a book, *Digging for Hope* is a starting point for much-needed societal transformation."

—Ana Villarreal, author of *The Two Faces of Fear: Violence and Inequality in the Mexican Metropolis*

About the Speaker:



R. Aída Hernández Castillo is a professor and senior researcher at the Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social (CIESAS) in Mexico City. Since her undergraduate days, Hernández Castillo has combined her scholarship with feminist activism and projects in radio, video, and journalism. Her academic work has promoted Indigenous and women's rights in Latin America. Her research interests cover Indigenous studies, legal and political anthropology, decolonial feminisms, and activist research. She has published twenty-two books, and her scholarship has been translated to English, French, Portuguese, and Japanese.



[*Digging for Hope*](#)
[*A Feminist Ethnography in the Land of Mass Graves*](#)

R. Aída Hernández Castillo (Author)