BASTA YA!: PAN-MAYAN ACTIVISM IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY GUATEMALA

by

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Introduction

Over the last 500 years the Americas transformed with periods of conquest, colonization, and nation building. Starting around 1500, European civilization came into direct contact with a large indigenous population, setting into motion centuries of cultural change. Latin America's indigenous populations suffered a demographic decline as European disease attacked their immune systems. Present-day Brazil suffered a near collapse during the colonial period. Other areas such as Bolivia, Mexico, Ecuador, and Guatemala also suffered a massive demographic decline, yet indigenous communities recovered during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[1] The colonial period ended during the nineteenth century as the patriots fought wars of independence, freeing themselves from Spanish rule. Native populations survived and adapted throughout the colonial and nation building periods. Overcoming centuries of colonialism, indigenous identity persevered.

During the twentieth century, Latin America experienced a rise in indigenous activism as native peoples in the Americas began contesting their rights within the modern nation. Many factors including economic depression, armed conflict, and globalization contributed to indigenous movements challenging discriminatory state policies. Native inhabitants seeking economic empowerment and basic human rights joined together,

[1] Noble David Cook, *Born to Die: Disease and New World Conquest 1492-1650* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Cook discusses the massive demographic decline experienced by the native inhabitants of Latin America.

often working in conjunction with leftist organizations. Activism at the grassroots through the international level empowered the indigenous peoples of the Americas.

For instance, environmental concerns prompted native activism in nations like Brazil and Ecuador. Hydroelectric projects and deforestation threatened tribes living in the Amazon basin. Although Brazil has a much smaller indigenous population compared to other Latin American nations, native communities united in protest. Working with international environmental groups, indigenous activists won government concessions.[2] Likewise, Ecuador's indigenous movement engaged the government over concerns regarding oil exploration. During the 1990s, Ecuador's indigenous communities used an environmental platform to join the political left in protest. A series of protests and demonstrations also brought government concessions and greater indigenous rights.[3]

In other parts of Latin America, nations with large indigenous populations also experienced a wave of activism in the face of neoliberal reform. The Zapatista uprising in Mexico ignited a post-modern uprising in the state of Chiapas. On January 1, 1994, the Zapatistas, led by Subcomandante Marcos, seized municipal offices when the world's attention focused on Mexico and the initiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement. The native population of Chiapas suffered from underdevelopment and

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[2] Seth Garfield, *Indigenous Struggles in the Heart of Brazil: State Policy, Frontier Expansion, and the Xavante Indians, 1937-1988*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001; Linda Rabben, *Brazil's Indians and the Onslaught of Civilization: The Yanomami and the Kayapó*. Seattle: The University of Washington Press, 2004.

[3] Suzana Sawyer, *Crude Chronicles: Indigenous Politics, Multinational Oil, and Neoliberalism in Ecuador*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004.

feared economic turmoil as a result of NAFTA. Desperately in need of land reform and infrastructure improvements, indigenous peasants took up arms. While the government quickly controlled the assault, the uprising provided political clout for the native peoples of Chiapas.[4] While avoiding a direct uprising, Bolivia's indigenous population also gained political influence while challenging neoliberal reforms. Conflict arose in the late 1990s and early 2000s over policies that threatened affordable access to water and squandered natural gas resources. The Aymara and Quechua-speaking population maintained a tradition of working with the political left. Well-organized protests and demonstrations led to new elections inaugurating Bolivia's first indigenous president on a platform of native inclusion.[5]

Like Bolivia, Guatemala has a large indigenous population that survived the Spanish conquest, colonization, and subsequent nation-building efforts. The Maya comprise twenty-two different ethno-linguistic groups living within Guatemala's national borders, along with the Xinca and Garifuna peoples. While the Maya originally identified with the term *indio* or *indígena* especially in the early twentieth century, "Maya" became a term of pride amongst all classes of indigenous.[6]

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[4] Niels, Barmeyer, *Developing Zapatista Autonomy: Conflict and NGO Influence in Rebel Chiapas*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009; Todd A. Eisenstadt, *Politics, Identity, and Mexico's Indigenous Rights Movement*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Barmeyer's work examines the influence of NGO's within the context of Mexico's Chiapas indigenous movement. Eisenstadt focuses his study on indigenous identity within the Zapatista movement examining class, ethnicity, and gender.

[5] Nancy Grey Postero, *Now We Are Citizens: Indigenous Politics in Postmulticultural Bolivia*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007.

[6] I have found in my experience that Guatemala's indigenous population proudly uses a multitude of terms and variations including *indígena*, Maya or their specific ethnic group in conjunction with Maya. For example someone may identify as Quiche Maya or Mam Maya.

During the first half of the twentieth century, Guatemala's indigenous population provided vital labor. With the growing agricultural export economy, the Maya worked on plantations picking fruit, cotton, and coffee for export. The largest commercial entity in Guatemala was the United Fruit Company (UFCO). UFCO formed with the merger of two U.S. fruit concerns in 1899. The corporation would dominate the Caribbean basin and much of Central America as a major landowner and capital investment firm. The company purchased large land tracts, built port facilities, and owned many components of global shipping, including a steamship fleet and multiple railroads.[7] Large agricultural firms used the Maya as an easily exploitable labor force. A bloodless revolution in 1944 began a ten-year period of change for Guatemala's indigenous. The new government outlawed mercenary labor practices and carried out a substantial land reform that benefited many Mayan families. Fearing a disturbance to regional hegemony during the Cold War, the U.S. government initiated a covert plan to overthrow the Guatemalan government. U.S. actions, coupled with dissatisfaction amongst the left, initiated a thirty-six-year civil war in 1960 that had a lasting impact on Guatemala's Maya and indigenous activism.[8]

Given this fascinating history, not surprisingly, scholars have studied Guatemala in an effort to understand growing trends in Latin America's indigenous movements. The

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[7] Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 65-71.

[8] Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States 1944-1954* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991) 372-376; Mario Monteforte Toledo, *Palabras del Retorno: Visión de Guatemala 1990* (Guatemala: Centro Impresor Piedra Santa, 1992). Monteforte links Guatemala's violence in the 1980s to the revolutionary period and its abrupt end.

1983 publication of Rigoberta Menchu's *I Rigoberta Menchu*, inspired a plethora of new scholarship. Rigoberta's story explores the hardship of the Guatemala's civil war through an indigenous perspective.[9] The ancient Mayan civilization has long been an interest to archeologists; however, the modern Maya now offered new areas of academic exploration after the international success of Menchu's work. Since then, Guatemalan historiography has examined the Maya from both regional and national perspectives, studying many topics including human rights, identity, gender, and globalization.

For instance, Garrett W. Cook examines the indigenous village of Momostenango, in *Renewing the Maya World: Expressive Culture in a Highland Town.* Cook relays the importance of religion in the shaping of identity among highland communities. Ceremonies and festivities blend Catholic traditions with indigenous traditions to form something new. Cook suggests that this syncretism strengthens Mayan identity among Guatemala's indigenous people.[10]

Identity is also the topic of David Carrey's *Our Elders Teach Us: Maya-Kaqchikel Historical Perspectives*. Carrey's study is important to Guatemalan historiography in that his transcribed oral histories of Kaqchikel reveal matters of importance at the grassroots level. He finds that land reform, labor practices, and governance played a role in shaping the Kaqchikel identity. Like other Mayan groups, the Kaqchikel desire

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[9] Rigoberta Menchú, *I Rigoberta Menchú*, ed. Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, trans. Ann Wright (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1984), *XI*.

[10] Garrett W. Cook, *Renewing the Maya World: Expressive Culture in a Highland Town* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).

equality within the nation. His study illustrates the broad challenges faced by the Maya, as they attempt to preserve their indigenous identity.[11]

By the end of the twentieth century Guatemalan indigenous identity manifested within studies of globalization, gender, and comparative research. Edward Fischer explores Mayan identity and the impact of globalization in his book, *Culture Logics and Global Economies: Maya Identity in Thought and Practice*. He argues that Mayan identity in Guatemala emerged from a collaboration of local organization as well as national and transnational influences. Fischer argues that rural and urban indigenous communities adapted to changing economic conditions. Together, these groups formed a stronger Maya identity in a globalized world.[12]

Maria Stern's *Naming Security: Constructing Identity* studies indigenous identity through gender in Guatemala. She finds that Mayan women struggle with the dual challenge of ethnicity and gender in a male dominated *ladino* society. The Guatemalan civil war created a hostile environment for women having to maintain family and identity amidst armed conflict. Stern argues that Mayan identity evolved as indigenous organization began questioning traditional gender roles. For example, the rights and security of

[11] David Carey Jr., *Our Elders Teach Us: Maya-Kaqchikel Historical Perspectives* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2001).

[12] Edward F. Fischer, *Cultural Logics and Global Economies: Maya Identity in Thought and Practice* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001).

Mayan women were specifically named in the 1996 peace agreement that ended the civil war.[13]

Like Stern and Fischer, E. J. Westlake explores new understandings of indigenous identity. In a comparative study, *Our Land is Made of Courage and Glory: Nationalist Performance of Nicaragua and Guatemala*, Westlake argues that Guatemalan nationalism relies on a mixed culture. Despite racial tensions, Mayan identity completes a national history. Guatemalan nationalism is built on both ancient and modern indigenous identities. His work illustrates the symbiotic relationship between Mayan identity and Guatemalan nationalism.[14]

A great deal has been written about the modern Maya and indigenous identity, the civil war, and human rights. While scholars have discussed numerous topics regarding the modern Maya including the emergence of the Pan-Maya movement, I felt the need to explore how and why the movement emerged over the last thirty years and how the civil war impacted grassroots indigenous activism. I believe that understanding of the Pan-Maya movement and the impact of the Guatemalan Left is a worthy academic endeavor.[15]

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[13] Maria Stern, *Naming Security-Constructing Identity: 'Mayan Women' in Guatemala on the Eve of 'Peace'* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2005).

[14] E.J. Westlake, *Our Land is Made of Courage and Glory: Nationalist Performance of Nicaragua and Guatemala* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005).

[15] Betsey Konefal, *For Every Indio Who Falls: A History of Maya Activism in Guatemala 1960-1990* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010. Betsy Konefal released her study of the Pan-Maya movement during the final stages of my project. This well researched monograph has provided further insight, specifically regarding religion, that I plan to incorporate into a future revision.

I completed the bulk of primary research for this work at the Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica (CIRMA) located in Antigua, Guatemala. The center was created in 1978 to serve as a regional social science repository. Subsequently, the archive received numerous collections and documents from the seventeenth century to the present. As my academic interests shifted towards the modern Maya of Guatemala, research at CIRMA seemed the obvious choice. Unfortunately, the national archive did not possess a collection of declassified documents pertaining to the recent civil war period from 1960-1996. During a brief exploratory trip to the CIRMA archive during the summer of 2007, I found an abundance of material in the Infostelle, Holandés, and Mario Payeras collections. These collections contain many documents from leftist organizations active in the civil war period. During the summers of 2008 and 2009, my research at CIRMA revealed an abundance of material from labor unions and human rights groups, as well as Pan-Mayan organizations seeking greater indigenous representation within Guatemala. This source material formed the basis for my examination of the Pan-Maya movement. Documents uncovered allowed me to study the emergence of Guatemala's indigenous movement from local, national and international perspectives through a variety of organizations. CIRMA documents provided a unique window into the Guatemalan Left and the impact of indigenous activism during the thirty-six-year civil war. I gained insight into why the Guatemalan Maya had "had enough," or" Basta Ya" and began organizing and working with the left in a broad fight for greater indigenous rights.

The Guatemalan Pan-Mayan movement began as a grassroots action in the latter half of the twentieth-century. Native peoples initially joined leftist organizations to fight for economic, social, and political rights. As participation increased, an independent ethnic movement emerged, which struggled for native rights within the state. Overcoming racial discrimination and civil war, Guatemala's indigenous population achieved a political voice through the Pan-Mayan struggle.

Scholar Kay B. Warren studies the Pan-Maya movement in her 1998 monograph, *Indigenous Movements and Their Critics*.[16] Warren examines the Pan-Maya movement from a local, national and international perspective and dissects the historic conflict between the Guatemalan Maya and *ladino* population. Her monograph dedicates a chapter to the Popular Left and its correlation with the Mayan movement from the 1980s through the 1990s. While Warren's work deals directly with the Pan-Maya movement, it discounts the left's positive impact. Warren points to Demetrio Cojtí Cuxil, a Mayan intellectual, who argues that a leftist agenda corrupted "Popular Maya" organizations, thereby diluting core indigenous social issues.

On the contrary, I contend that the "Popular Left," consisting of Marxist guerrilla units as well as leftist political and community-based organizations, helped promote indigenous rights and greater social inclusion during the violence of the 1970s and 1980s. I find this interaction brought cultural awareness to a new pinnacle with the 1996 Peace Agreement. Despite ideological differences, the Popular Left helped propel the Pan-Mayanist vision

[16] Kay B. Warren, *Indigenous Movements and Their Critics: Pan-Maya Activism in Guatemala* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998).

of greater rights and liberties within the nation. Ultimately, I assert the cooperation between the indigenous community and the left enabled the development of the Indigenous Rights Accord, raised national and international awareness, and created an atmosphere of real, social change in Guatemala. Studying this evolution of modern Mayan activism in Guatemala reveals the delicate balance between *ladino* and indigenous society.

Chapter One of my study outlines the period of change in Guatemala from the 1930s through the early 1960s, when military leaders and the middle class ousted the dictatorship of Jorge Ubico, only to fall a decade later to a Central Intelligence Agency-initiated coup in 1954. During the reform period from 1944-1954, one can see the positive impact of the Popular Left. The notion of true social reform began with Juan José Arévalo who ended Ubico's vagrancy laws targeting the poor Mayan population. Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán, a greater advocate of social reform, addressed the nation's inadequate land distribution in 1952 with Agrarian Decree 900. In 1954, a C.I.A. intervention installed a right-wing pro-U.S. government, ultimately sparking a Marxist insurgency as Guatemala degenerated into civil war in the 1960s.[17] This reversal of "Leftist Democracy" resulted in land seizures and the removal of basic rights enjoyed by the indigenous population for a short period. The process of disempowerment left a bitter sense of resentment among the Guatemalan Maya. Following the C.I.A. coup, the Mayan

[17] Abundant scholarship exists regarding the events of the Guatemalan Revolution (1944 to 1954), and the CIA-inspired coup against Guatemalan President Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán. See: Richard H. Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala: The Foreign Policy of Intervention* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982); Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*; and Nick Cullather, *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of its Operations in Guatemala 1952-1954* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999).

majority experienced a marked decrease in basic rights, especially those related to land tenure. Thomas and Marjorie Melville's important study, *Guatemala: The Politics of Land Ownership* (1971), suggests that land tenure was the root problem amongst the Maya lower class during the 1950s and on through the 1970s.[18] The critical reversal of agrarian reform, coupled with *ladino* land seizures, exasperated the growing divide between Mayan and elite society. This work supports my belief that early indigenous empowerment developed from government disenfranchisement. The failures of conservative government pushed many indigenous towards the left, creating the vehicle for mobilization. The rise of conservative militarism eroded the democratic initiative, and ultimately ignited the Pan-Maya movement.

Chapter Two focuses on the crucial period of the late 1970s and 1980s, not represented in the Melvilles' work, when the counterinsurgency intensified and pushed many indigenous people towards the "Popular Left," especially in the countryside. By the late 1970s, the Marxist insurgency crumbled in urban areas. The Guatemalan government and military proved successful in crushing the Popular Left within universities, labor unions, and guerrilla squads. Para-military death squads like the Mano Blanco, which acted with virtual impunity, targeted and virtually eliminated urban-based activists. Thus, the insurgency shifted operations towards rural areas, home to Guatemala's then 3.5 million-plus indigenous population.[19] As the rural insurgency intensified in the late

[18] Thomas and Marjorie Melville, *Guatemala: The Politics of Land Ownership* (New York: Free Press, 1971).

[19] Robert M. Carmack, *Rebels of Highland Guatemala: The Quiché-Mayas of Momostenango* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), xvi.

1970s, the interaction between the indigenous population and the Popular Left increased. Contrary to Warren, I find a growing cooperation between the left and the indigenous population.[20] This discrepancy remains a crucial point to my argument, placing the native population in direct contact with the Popular Left and vice versa.

As the Marxist guerrilla groups ORPA (Organización del Pueblos en Armas), FAR (Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes), and the EGP (Ejercito Guerrillero de los Pobres) emerged in the rural sectors encountering native populations, they shifted their ideological focus to include them. All three organizations succeeded in mobilizing sectors of indigenous communities, bringing the Maya into the civil conflict. The EGP proved particularly successful in altering its ideological doctrine, to include indigenous communities in the western highland department of Quiché and surrounding regions. The extreme violence inflicted upon indigenous communities by the military drove many to sympathize and to aid these guerrilla forces.[21]

Additionally, non-guerrilla "Popular Left" organizations materialized within the rural indigenous community. The CUC (Comité de Unidad Campesina), the most successful rural labor organization, emerged in the highlands, coordinating primarily indigenous workers and communities to fight for higher wages and land. As military repression increased, grassroots movements also formed human rights groups. The GAM (Grupo de

[20] Warren, *Indigenous Movements and Their Critics*.

[21] Yvon Le Bot, *La Guerra en Tierras Mayas: Comunidad, violencia y modernidad en Guatemala (1970-1992)* (Mexico: Fundo de Cultura Económica, 1995). Le Bot examines the impact of civil war on Guatemala's indigenous communities.

Apoyo Mutuo) acted as a crucial support link for many indigenous communities, being the sole domestic human-rights group functioning within the country through the civil war.[22]

This chapter differs from the anthropological perspective of Robert Carmack's *Rebels of Highland Guatemala: The Quiché -Maya of Momostenango*, which argues that Mayan activism remained constant over the centuries.[23] My research illustrates the effects of the civil war on rural Mayan communities and how the Popular Left influenced indigenous activism and organization. Rather than the steady growth Carmack suggests, indigenous activism exploded through interaction with the Popular Left and the dramatic increase in rural violence. Documents ranging from propaganda leaflets, published bulletins, and foreign solidarity literature from the EGP, ORPA, FAR and URNG (Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca) illustrate the shift towards indigenous participation. In addition, interviews and memoirs written by guerrilla commanders demonstrate the need to incorporate the rural indigenous population into the fight. Lastly, CUC reports, coupled with GAM documents, show the civilian indigenous organizational growth that occurred throughout the 1980s. Mayanists like Warren and Carmack marginalize the impact of the Popular Left and its positive role in shaping the modern Pan-Maya movement.[24] The influence and organizational support of the Popular

[22] Juan Fernando Cifuentes Herrera, *Rebeliones y Otro Incidentes Indigígenas en el Siglo XX* (Guatemala: Instituto de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales, 1988). Cifuentes looks at how indigenous massacres prompted indigenous participation with the left, joining organizations such as the CUC and GAM.

[23] Carmack, *Rebels of Highland Guatemala*.

[24] Warren, *Indigenous Movements and Their Critics*, 86-112. Carmack, *Rebels of Highland Guatemala*, xx-xxi, 375-414. Warren provides a critical analysis of the Pan-Maya movement yet only dedicates a single chapter to the period from 1978-1985. This chapter focuses on the community impact of civil war

Left during the violent period of the late 1970s and early 1980s facilitated the dramatic growth and mobilization of the Maya leading up to the 1996 peace agreement.

Chapter Three focuses on the period between 1986 and 1996, when Guatemala witnessed a marked increase in indigenous organization and activism. This era brought sporadic rebel/government cease-fire agreements and peace negotiations ending the civil conflict between the URNG and the government in December 1996. A body of scholarship has examined the Guatemalan peace process. Susanne Jonas' work, *Of Centaurs and Doves*, conducts a thorough examination of the Guatemalan civil war ending with the signing of the 1996 agreement.[25] Nonetheless, I find it crucial to go beyond the agreement employing a wide body of indigenous organization and solidarity literature, documenting the continued rise and advancement of indigenous activism and the victory of an indigenous rights accord within the final peace agreement. While Jonas focuses more on the protracted conflict, I believe it is important to examine the Popular Left/Pan-Maya connection. During this period, the Pan-Maya movement grew as indigenous cultural, political and social awareness expanded within Guatemalan society and the intellectual community abroad. Multiple native grassroots organizations followed a similar model that the Marxist insurgents employed in the early 1980s when they united under a single political body – the URNG. To gain greater strength, many indigenous groups joined the

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rather than the larger organizational growth that facilitated the development of the Pan-Maya movement. Carmack's study of Momostenango while extremely detailed, is limited to one indigenous town. While Carmack feels that Momostenango is a microcosm of Guatemala, he contradicts himself by calling it far more conservative leaning than other indigenous towns and areas. He discounts the early effects that the Popular Left had on the indigenous population. He views the guerrillas and the left as a disturbance to the indigenous population rather than a potential catalyst.

[25] Susanne Jonas, *Of Centaurs and Doves: Guatemala's Peace Process* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000).

COPMAGUA (Coordinación de Organizaciones Del Pueblo Maya de Guatemala) coalition, akin to the guerrilla model. Indigenous participation expanded on all levels and helped influence the final peace agreement signed by the URNG and the government. One of the greatest victories for the Pan-Maya struggle remains the inclusion of the Indigenous Rights Accord within the final peace agreement. COPMAGUA's mission statements and CONOC (La Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinos) documents illustrate the organizational shift of the Pan-Maya movement from a grassroots movement into an emergent national actor.[26] In a relatively short period, the Mayan population rallied together to achieve greater rights. Employing organizational tactics learned through cooperation with the left, the Guatemalan Maya successfully pushed for an indigenous agenda at the local, national, and international levels. The signing of the 1996 Peace Agreement ushered in the begging of a new era and new challenges for the Guatemalan Maya.

Chapter Four examines the Post-Peace Accord (1996-present) state of the Pan-Maya movement and outlines both its successes and failures. After centuries of racial discrimination and decades of civil war, the native population that became a target during the conflict witnessed a clear advance of indigenous rights in the 1996 Peace Agreement. In his book, *Mayan Intellectual Renaissance: Identity, Representation, and Leadership*,

[26] Santiago Bastos and Manuela Camus, *Quebrando el silencio: Organizaciones del Pueblo Maya y sus demandas 1986-1992* (Guatemala: FLACSO, 1993); Santiago Bastos and Manuela Camus, *Entre el mecapal y el cielo: Desarrollo del movimiento Maya en Guatemala* (Guatemala: FLACSO, 2003). Bastos and Camus find organizational strength at the grassroots level.

indigenous scholar and activist Victor Montejo emphasizes the need for Mayan unity.[27] He believes that only a cultural coalition can achieve social equality and end centuries of *ladino* racism. Despite a peace agreement and accord outlining the rights of Guatemalan indigenous people, new difficulties emerged including a rise in gang and narco-violence, globalization, and the continued failure among local and national politicians to address Mayan needs. The writings of Mayan intellectuals, notably Montejo and Demetrio Cojtí Cuxil, illustrate the challenges, successes and failures of the Pan-Maya movement.[28] Documents such as news clippings and briefs add to my study of the post-peace agreement era. The Popular Left's impact on the Mayan population in the late 1970s directly correlates with the explosion of indigenous activism following the return of civilian democracy in 1986. Through the cooperative effort of the left and the indigenous, positive change occurred within a nation that had long repressed native rights and culture. The end result was the inclusion of an Indigenous Rights Accord within the 1996 Peace Agreement; however, the Pan-Maya movement lost momentum during the chaotic epoch that followed.

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[27] Victor B. Montejo, *Maya Intellectual Renaissance: Identity, Representation, and Leadership* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005).

[28] Victor B. Montejo, *Testimony: Death of a Guatemalan Village* (Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1987); Montejo, *Voices from Exile: Violence and Survival in Modern Maya History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999); Montejo, *Maya Intellectual Renaissance*; Demetrio Cuxil Cojtí, *Politicas Para La Reivindicacion De Los Mayas De Hoy: Fundamento De Los Derechos Específicos Del Pueblo Maya* (Guatemala: Seminario Permanente de Estudios Mayas, 1994); Cuxil Cojtí, *El Movimiento Maya (En Guatemala)* (Guatemala: Centro Educativo y Cultural Maya, 1997); Cuxil Cojtí "Higher Education and the Mayan Movement in Guatemala," in *Indigenous People: Self-determination, Knowledge, Indigeneity*, ed. Henry Minde, Harald Gaski, Svein Jentoft, and Georges Midré (The Netherlands: Eburon Academic Publishers, 2008), 313-330.

My dissertation concludes with Chapter Five, an examination of the broader significance of the Popular Left and the Pan-Maya movement by comparing it briefly with indigenous activism in another Latin American state with a significant native population, Bolivia. By the end of the twentieth-century, Latin America experienced a wave of successful indigenous movements, organizing for a variety of social, political, and ethnic rights. Scholars have studied these emerging trends to better understand the rise of indigenous activism.[29] While Guatemala remains the focus of this study, I also aim to bring new understanding of the left's impact through a brief comparison with a concurrent Latin American indigenous movement. In this regard, Bolivia serves as a poignant case study. Bolivia underwent a period of social reform and land redistribution that empowered the native population beginning in the early 1950s, as illustrated in Laura Gotkowitz's study, *A Revolution for Our Rights: Indigenous Struggles for Land and Justice in Bolivia 1880-1952* and S. Sándor John's *Bolivia's Radical Tradition: Permanent Revolution in the Andes*.[30] Unlike the Guatemalan military elite, the Bolivian power structure reacted to indigenous unrest, implementing reform to stave-off social chaos. When the state failed to continue reform in the 1970s and 1980s, similar to the state's failure to protect the Guatemalan population during the civil war, indigenous movements organized among the

[29]Alison Brysk, *From Tribal Village to Global Village: Indian Rights and International Relations in Latin America* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000); Deborah J. Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America: The Rise of Indigenous Movements and the Postliberal Challenge* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Brysk's study examines the rise of indigenous movements using case studies from Brazil, Mexico, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Nicaragua. Her work reveals the impact that indigenous movements have on international relations ranging from human rights issues to global finance. Yashar focuses on the success of indigenous movements in Ecuador and Bolivia. Her findings illustrate the benefits of joining leftist organizations to attain political success at the local and national levels.

[30] Laura Gotkowitz, *A Revolution for Our Rights: Indigenous Struggles for Land and Justice in Bolivia 1880-1952* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2007); S. Sándor John, *Bolivia's Radical Tradition: Permanent Revolution in the Andes*(Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009).

left. In Bolivia initial organization began with trade unions similar to collective action among the CUC in Guatemala. By 2006, Juan Evo Morales Ayma, an Aymara coca farmer won the presidency with a platform of social justice, uniting Bolivia's indigenous population with the left. Bolivia's progress regarding native organizational unity illuminates the Guatemalan Maya's potential regarding indigenous activism and leftist cooperation.[31] Employing a selection of monographs on Bolivia and native advocacy, I illustrate parallels between Guatemala's Pan Maya/Popular Left and this case.

Much of Guatemalan historiography focuses on the social periphery, exploring the modern Maya from sociological, anthropological and historical perspectives. These works examine many different aspects of the Mayan population, yet more often than not, they do not address the impact that the Popular Left had upon the growth of the Pan-Maya movement. While some scholarship touches upon the left, my work focuses on the crucial triangular link between indigenous activism, the civil war, and popular organizations. As such, my study remains a counterpoint to Mayanist scholar Kay B. Warren's monograph, *Indigenous Movements and Their Critics*. In contrast to Warren's important work on the Pan-Maya, I focus directly on the impact of the Popular Left. I contend that the current successes of the Guatemalan Maya rest firmly on the unfortunate impact of the civil war and the extreme violence that native communities experienced. The harsh measures of the military government forced the rural Maya to organize like never before. As such, indigenous mobilization developed in conjunction with the

[31] Postero, *Now We are Citizens*. Postero carefully examines how indigenous activism successfully merged with the Bolivian left. She argues that the neo-liberal era brought new challenges such as the gas and water conflicts that united indigenous activism with the *ladino* left.

ideological and organizational support of the left. With the support of the Popular Left and the catalytic impact of the civil war, the native population gained basic social, political and ethnic rights within Guatemala, despite the new challenges that lay ahead.

Chapter 1:
Indigenous Incorporation, Enfranchisement, and Prelude to Political Mobilization: 1932 - 1970

Introduction

Well versed in cultural survival, the Mayan people persevered odious hardship throughout Guatemalan history. The colonial period divided the nation ethnically and geographically, leaving the *ladino* population to dominate the east and south, while the indigenous population subsisted in the north and west.[1] Following independence, numerous Maya lost access to suitable farmland, forcing many to work on coastal plantations as part of a migratory wage economy. *Ladino* landowners needed a dependent labor force during coffee and cotton picking seasons pushing native communities into a perpetual cycle of debt slavery.[2] Jorge Ubico came to power in 1931 during the global depression. His broad policies sought to establish Guatemala's infrastructure, create roadways, and gain state control over the native population.

During the Ubico era, the indigenous population entered the national discourse. New vagrancy laws took control of labor away from the landed elite and placed it into the hands of the government. The landless poor, primarily indigenous, were directly affected

[1] Christopher Lutz, *Santiago de Guatemala, 1541-1773: City, Caste, and the Colonial Experience* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994).

[2] Melville and Melville, *Guatemala: The Politics of Land Ownership*, 19-21.

by these laws as power shifted from the hacienda/plantation owner to the state.[3] These laws funneled labor toward state projects or favored landowners. The Ubico dictatorship came to an end with a general strike on July 1, 1944, leaving behind General Federico Ponce as the hand-chosen successor.[4] Activists desired real social change prompting a group of young army officers, most notably Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán and Francisco Arana, to organize the October 20 deportation of Ponce. Following the bloodless coup, Guatemala transitioned into a decade of democracy, bringing basic rights to the indigenous population. During this period of reform, the government allowed for labor unions to organize freely, abolished discriminatory vagrancy laws, and enacted the first major land reform.

Unfortunately, for the newly enfranchised indigenous *campesinos*, the period of positive change remained short-lived. A C.I.A.-orchestrated coup involving the Guatemalan elite and military leaders overthrew the Árbenz administration in June 1954. As a result, conservative forces wrestled control from the left and sent Guatemala spiraling toward civil conflict. The repeal of the agrarian reform ended a political promise to the rural indigenous population, tarnishing government trust. Before long, the continued hardships of discriminatory land and labor practices, coupled with the military repression of the late 1970s and early 1980s, spawned the indigenous organizational growth examined in the next chapters.

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[3] Kenneth J. Grieb, *Guatemalan Caudillo: The Regime of Jorge Ubico 1931-1944* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1979), 39-41. Citizens who did not own cultivatable land were required to provide 150 days of labor, and those falling below a minimum amount of acreage were obligated to provide 100 days of labor.

[4] Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 26-27.

Twentieth-century Guatemalan politics incorporated the native population into state politics, provided benefits during the revolutionary period, and rescinded social advances amid the potential threat of indigenous activism. These distinctive eras led to the deaths of thousands of indigenous Maya during one of Latin America's bloodiest civil wars. Despite seemingly insurmountable hardships, the indigenous population persevered through early *caudillo* state building, social enfranchisement, and *ladino* elite betrayal.

Part 1: Incorporation, Revolution and Reform: The State and the Indigenous Population

Jorge Ubico

Jorge Ubico, a career military officer and Liberal Party member ascended to power in 1931 in an unchallenged election. Ubico's tenure from 1931 to 1944 focused on updating Guatemala's infrastructure and facilitating domestic and foreign investment during the global depression. This period proved a crucial era of transition for Guatemala's indigenous population.[5] Ubico's state policies brought the indigenous population into the national landscape for the first time. In an effort to modernize society, he outlawed colonial-era debt peonage practices. In one deft move, Ubico eliminated the landowner's

[5] Grieb, *Guatemalan Caudillo*. Grieb argues that the "caudillo style" dictatorship of Jorge Ubico proved important in shaping the indigenous peoples' future in Guatemala. While the authoritarian style dictatorship brought newfound hardships, the inclusive and paternal nature of the state brought an initial enfranchisement of the Maya despite the negative attributes associated with the labor codes.

economic hold over labor and restructured the rural Maya into a state-controlled work force and a political tool to reward elite landowners.[6] While Ubico's authoritarian style kept a close reign on the indigenous population, the incorporation of the Maya into the state ultimately provided the initial steps towards the modern Pan-Maya movement.

As a statesman, Ubico sought to build Guatemala's infrastructure. His mission to expand the national economy centered on port, road, and railroad construction to facilitate the agricultural export economy, much like Mexico's liberal-era *caudillo* Porfirio Díaz (1876-1911). Ubico's development model helped consolidate his power base by expanding the national economy vis-à-vis road and rail construction. His tenure in office ushered in tremendous growth in the coffee, banana, and *chicle* sectors. Coffee production in 1931 was 88 million pounds and expanded to 118 million pounds in 1936. Bananas production in 1931 netted $2.9 million in revenue, growing in 1938 to $5.5 million. *Chicle* production in 1931 produced 1.2 million pounds for export, expanding to 3.6 million pounds by 1941.[7] These agricultural sectors relied on landless Mayan laborers. A close relationship developed between state control of indigenous workers and large agricultural concerns, such as the United Fruit Company.

While the policies of Ubico's presidency encouraged economic growth, his administration also affected social change among Guatemala's large Mayan populace. Ubico was the first twentieth-century statesman to visit remote indigenous villages and

[6] Marta Casaús Arzú, *Genocido: La maxima expression del racismo en Guatemala* (Guatemala: F&G Editores, 2008). Casaús examines the struggle of race and identity within Guatemala.

[7] Grieb, *Guatemalan Caudillo*. 51-52, 146-151.

hamlets.[8] These encounters helped the Maya develop a sense of nationalism. More so, Ubico's policies restructured the native position within the state. Road constructions served as a conduit, opening areas largely isolated in the past. However, in order to build these highways, Ubico's vagrancy laws forced the landless indigenous population to provide labor. The laws removed land owners' direct control of labor while boosting state control. While these vagrancy laws freed the native population to seek jobs with higher wages, they still forced Mayan *campesinos* to provide labor for the state and corporate entities at low wages, which the state supported.[9] The native population often failed to grasp the meaning of the new laws, leaving a wide berth for exploitation. However, Ubico made efforts to aid the Mayan populace, providing government development loans through a newly created national pawnshop.[10] Much like the vagrancy laws, the government's efforts to curtail debt peonage were paternalistic and controlling. Nonetheless, the Ubico administration made advances toward the inclusion and betterment of the native peoples unlike any previous government.

The Ubico-era is crucial to understanding the development of Guatemala's modern Maya movement. The outlawing of debt peonage and the growth of the transportation infrastructure incorporated the segregated Maya into national life. Ubico used his

[8] Grieb, *Guatemalan Caudillo*, 37. Ubico made annual trips throughout Guatemala, paying attention to even the most remote indigenous villages. These trips sought to include the Mayan majority into the "republic and the presidency."

[9] Ibid., 38-39.

[10] Ibid., 41.

expansion of the infrastructure to "end regionalism" and centralize his authority.[11] While social conditions for Guatemala's Maya did not improve during the Ubico regime, the rise of the *ladino* middle class propelled reform that, for a short time, benefited the rural Maya.

The Rise and Fall of Revolution and Reform

Fueled by urban middle-class discontent, Ubico's authoritarian regime ended July 4, 1944, after a general strike pushed him from office. In October, young military officers supported by university students, urban workers and the middle class completed the bloodless revolution by removing Ubico's confidant, Juan Federico Ponce. The discontent among a broad leftist coalition served as the catalyst needed to bring reform to the Maya. While Ubico sought to integrate the Mayan populace in a paternalistic manner, the revolutionary period from 1944-1954 challenged entrenched social conditions that had left half the population poor, uneducated and without arable land. Guatemalan elite society often suppressed social reform. The *ladino* population long feared the potential devastation from a large-scale indigenous uprising, something Guatemala had managed to avoid. On the eve of the October revolution, a group of Mayan farmers from the village of Patzicia reacted. The ensuing uprising targeted wealthy landowners as a response to the dire need for social change overshadowed

[11] Ibid., 34-35. Kenneth Grieb finds that the Ubico's economic policies helped bridge ladino and indigenous society. There was a physical link through improved infrastructure and symbiotic connection through co-dependency. Elite land owners were dependent on the state for a stable and cheap labor source, while the rural Maya were dependent on state financing and labor obligations.

Ubico's paternalism.[12] Social reform would prove to be a key component of the 10-year revolutionary period.

After the establishment of a military junta, Guatemala held its first democratic elections in December of 1944, with Juan José Arévalo assuming the presidency in March 1945. The new president immediately threatened the landed elite who had long subjugated indigenous labor. Arévalo believed in "spiritual socialism" and sought to uplift the poor. He quickly repealed Ubico's vagrancy laws, freeing the indigenous population from conscripted work. In addition, the passage of a new constitution in 1954 allowed unrestricted labor organization for the first time. Between 1945 and 1954, 395 co-ops and rural peasant labor unions formed in the western highlands and southern plantation areas. The revolutionary period brought enfranchisement to the rural Maya through peasant leagues. This early rural labor movement, while outlawed after 1954, had a lasting impact on the future Pan-Maya movement that emerged in the 1970s.[13] Arévalo's tenure marked an important first step towards supporting the native population, which had long suffered in poverty.[14]

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[12] Jim Handy, "A Sea of Indians: Ethnic Conflict and the Guatemalan Revolution, 1944-1952," *The Americas* 46, no. 2 (October, 1989): 193-195. On October 22, 1944 indigenous farmers from the village of Patzicia, near the capital, attacked and killed elite landowners. The press coverage criticized the uprising sharply, and thirty-four indigenous villagers were sentenced to death or prison. Handy notes that social grievances were the root cause of the massacre. He cites the vast disparity in land tenure within the village of 7000. 313 *ladino* farmers owned more land than the combined total of fifty-five hundred Mayan *campesinos*.

[13] Greg Grandin, "To End with All These Evils: Ethnic Transformation and Community Mobilization in Guatemala's Western Highlands, 1954-1980," *Latin American Perspectives*, 24 no. 2 (March 1997): 14.

[14] Susanne Jonas, *The Battle for Guatemala: Rebels, Death Squads, and U.S. Power* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), 25.

Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán's presidential inauguration in 1951 represented the first democratic transition of power in Guatemalan history. During his tenure he initiated a brief era of enfranchisement of the rural indigenous. A self-proclaimed reformer, Árbenz held ties to the Marxist Guatemalan labor party (*Partido Guatamalteco del Trabajo* – PGT) and married a Salvadoran communist.[15] He hoped to aid Guatemala's indigenous population by enacting a sweeping land-reform package. Árbenz issued Agrarian Decree 900 on June 17, 1952, a broad based land reform effort. According to the reform package, the government would compensate the landowners with bonds payable in 25 years. Guatemala's foremost proprietor, the United Fruit Company (UFCO), endured the greatest loss in this land redistribution. The United States government, weary of Árbenz's social agenda, refused to sell military arms and subsequently severed aid as punishment.[16] Árbenz resigned under pressure from the military following the Carlos Castillo Armas invasion in June 1954.

Árbenz and Agrarian Decree 900: A Postscript to Disaster

At the start of Árbenz's presidential term, 50 percent of Guatemala's 3.5 million citizens were landless natives. Jacobo Árbenz recognized the needs of the Guatemalan majority and enacted groundbreaking land reform legislation. Agrarian Decree 900, approved in June of 1952, called for the expropriation of holdings containing 670 acres or more of uncultivated land. Under the decree, former owners were to receive 25-year

[15] Gleijses, *Shattered Hope,* 134-136, 182-183.

[16] Ibid., 150-151, 258.

government bonds based on reported tax value.[17] UFCO, Guatemala's leading corporate entity, received government contracts and perks over the years, developing a virtual monopoly over the national economic infrastructure from ports and railroads to basic utilities. Fearless of the UFCO's power, Árbenz held the fruit giant accountable by challenging its corrupt accounting practices and monopolistic hold over the country's resources, expropriating 209,842 acres of fallow land. The company, although financially compensated, felt cheated having understated the value of the land for tax purposes. The corporation vehemently petitioned the Guatemalan and US governments for justice regarding what it felt to be inadequate compensation. While the US government did not act on behalf of the multi-national fruit concern, it did implement covert countermeasures to aid in the overthrow of a sovereign state.[18]

Árbenz challenged US hegemony and broad foreign policy aims during the delicate early years of the Cold War. While documents reveal no clear link between the Soviet Union and the Guatemalan Communist Party, the perceived threat was enough to prompt US action. The State Department saw the June 17, 1952 agrarian reform as a radicalizing of the indigenous peasantry by "freeing thousands of agrarian workers from centuries-old

[17] Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 54. Schlesinger and Kinzer emphasized the connection between US foreign policy and the United Fruit Company in their interpretative study. While historians Richard Immerman and Piero Gleijeses have widely discredited the work, the study does examine in great detail the predatory practices of the fruit giant throughout Central America and in Guatemala. Farms of fewer than 223 acres were not subject to expropriation, and only land that was uncultivated could be expropriated.

[18] Gleijses, *Shattered Hope*, 221-222. In April of 1954, the US State Department issued a formal complaint on behalf of UFCO. The US engaged the Árbenz administration through diplomacy while plotting a covert Cold War intervention.

dependency upon the privileged land-holding class."[19] According to State Department assessments, rural land seizures could spiral out of control. As a result of the agrarian laws, violence in the rural sectors could escalate along with Communist growth, leaving Árbenz powerless to contain the situation. A failure to curb this expansion in rural sectors would most likely lead to the destabilization of Guatemala and its neighbors. If regional destabilization unfolded, as outlined in NSC-68, analysts predicted a shift in the balance of Cold War power.[20]

The US intervention's primary goal included the halting of Communist influence within labor unions and the prevention of political deterioration. Inaction posed a strategic threat to the Panama Canal and ultimately, could create a loss of regional US credibility.[21] Ultimately, the CIA's fear of a potentially destabilizing agrarian reform brought the demise of Árbenz's plan to bring social justice to Guatemala's poor. A July 1952 memorandum illustrates the US inability to understand social reform without a Communist subtext:

> The recent passage of the Agrarian Reform Act, which makes land available to all Guatemalans in the Communist pattern, is expected to win further adherents to the government although it is opposed by the landowning class whose influence will wane as the Act takes effect.[22]

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[19] Intelligence Report Prepared in the Office of Intelligence Research, Department of State, 5 March 1953, in *FRUS,* 1952-1954, GUATEMALA (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 2003), 78.

[20] NSC-68: Memorandum by the Counselor (Kennan) to the Secretary of State, 6 January 1950, in *FRUS,* 1950, Volume I (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1977), 126-138.

[21] Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala*, 103-104. Using state department documents, Immerman asserts that strategic concerns and the possible threat to the Canal Zone prompted the Eisenhower administration to take a hard-line approach.

[22] Memorandum From [*name not declassified*] of the Western Hemisphere Division, Central Intelligence Agency to the Deputy Director for Plans of the Central Intelligence Agency (Wisner), 9 July 1952, in *FRUS* 1952-1954, GUATEMALA (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 2003) 20.

As the United States began preparation for a covert overthrow code-named "Operation PBSUCCESS," the perceived threat intensified with the arrival of a cache of Soviet Bloc arms aboard the Alfhelm.[23] The logical response for the Eisenhower administration remained the CIA intervention and manipulation of the Guatemalan political climate when military support for Árbenz weakened following the Alfhelm incident. Although the Guatemalan military thwarted the CIA-sponsored invasion by Castillo Armas in June 1954, military leadership pressured Árbenz to step down.[24] The CIA claimed a Cold War victory when Castillo Armas assumed control of the junta. The events that unfolded led to the destabilization of Guatemala as counterrevolution prompted a 36-year civil war between the right and left costing more than 200,000 lives.[25]

Part 2: Anti-Communism and the Birth of the Civil War: Antecedent to Indigenous Activism

[23] Cullather, *Secret History*, 80. Unable to provide his military with arms shipments, Árbenz made a difficult decision. He understood that the United States controlled arms shipments and would possibly encourage its allies to isolate Guatemala. As a result, Árbenz brokered a deal to purchase arms from Czechoslovakia, an Eastern Bloc nation. On May 15, 1954, the *Alfhem*, a Swedish registered freighter, docked in Guatemala's Caribbean port, Puerto Barrios. The vessel contained Czech arms, mostly vintage, second-rate World War II surplus, still stamped with Nazi swastikas. The Soviet Union allowed Guatemala to purchase arms from their Czech satellite on a "cash/carry" basis, showing limited Soviet support at best. The CIA detected the arms purchase, but lost track of the shipment en route. The ship therefore arrived in Guatemala without incident. Although Árbenz hoped to distribute arms to both the rural militia and the army, the military quickly seized and unloaded the arms, fearing the destabilizing effect an armed rural militia might have.

[24] Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 320-321. Fearing an invasion by the United States, the military pressured Árbenz to step down and allowed Castillo Armas to enter the capital.

[25] Archdiocese of Guatemala, Recovery of Historical Memory Project [hereafter REMHI]. *Guatemala: Never Again! The Official report of the Human Rights Office,* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books), 1999. While many detailed studies have been compiled, the exact number of deaths remains an ambiguous figure. The totals range from 200,000 to as high as 350,000.

Following the military overthrow of Jacobo Árbenz, Guatemala shifted to the right. Castillo Armas assumed the presidency and immediately dismantled the reform policies of his predecessor, reversing land reform and outlawing the Guatemalan Communist Party.[26] While the turnaround did not spark an uprising of disenfranchised indigenous people, it did create further discontent among the left, which resented the shift toward US influence. While the complex nature of Guatemalan society made it difficult to articulate all social grievances, the underlying lack of freedom, coupled with a disproportionate percentage of marginalized citizens, spawned a guerrilla movement.

Armed social movements were not unique to Guatemala. Throughout the former colonial and developing world, the left reacted to elite repression during the Cold War. Fidel Castro's January 1, 1959 overthrow of the Batista regime in Cuba inspired countless radical movements. The Cuban Revolution addressed many problems affecting all of Latin America, including poor healthcare and education, lack of workers rights, and land inequalities.

Many of the same issues that the Cuban Revolution fought to remedy were present throughout Latin America, especially in Guatemala, as a faltering economy and right-wing repression mobilized a portion of the people to take up arms against elites and the

[26] Roland H. Ebel, *Misunderstood Caudillo: Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes and the Failure of Democracy in Guatemala* (Lanham, MA: University Press of America, 1998), 44-45. Castillo Armas created the Committee of National Defense against Communism and returned 90 percent of the previously expropriated land.

military that supported them.[27] As conditions worsened regarding land and labor, the left mobilized enough of the indigenous peasantry in the late 1970s to bring mass reprisal, international awareness, and ultimately a costly peace agreement by 1996. This future *ladino*/Mayan mobilization outlined in Chapters Three and Four is a culmination of growing injustice and lack of social reform during the counterrevolutionary era.

Castillo Armas and the Democratic Reversal

The political right viewed Castillo Armas as an anti-Communist hero, while the left believed he was the personification of a US foreign policy. Following the resignation and exile of Jacobo Árbenz , the US pressured the army into accepting Castillo Armas into the governing junta.[28] In October 1954, Castillo Armas took control of the junta and repaid his debt of gratitude to the US by moving Guatemala quickly toward the right.

After assuming power, Castillo Armas reversed Agrarian Decree 900 and returned expropriated lands to the rural oligarchy and the United Fruit Company. In an effort to block the far-left, his administration outlawed the Communist Party and cracked down on any urban or rural labor movement. Thousands of Mayan farmers suffered as the government reappropriated land in favor of large domestic and multinational farming

[27] Stephen M. Streeter, *Managing the Counterrevolution: The United States and Guatemala, 1954-1961* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000), 241. During the administrations of Castillo Armas and Ydigoras Fuentes, Guatemala witnessed a 75 percent increase in poverty, heightened political corruption, and growing dependency on the United States.

[28] Ibid., 32. The military did not want to accept Castillo Armas as the replacement president; however, US Ambassador Peurifoy intervened and pressed the issue. Streeter argues that the resulting administration was poorly organized, and neither the middle class nor the military supported it.

concerns. The government closely controlled the rural population in order to reverse the Arévalo-Árbenz reform policies.[29]

The conservative crackdown initiated by the Castillo Armas regime, coupled with the reversal of the land reform, and the lack of state-sponsored social development created an atmosphere of discontent. Hard feelings remained among those connected to the revolutionary nationalist period (1944-1954). Disenfranchised by the Castillo Armas administration, the large *campesino* sector, including many Maya, lost land that had been received and/or occupied during the Árbenz administration. Presidential Decree 31 limited the recourse of small land holders against reappropriation and allowed the new owners to remove the peasantry before it could sell off its harvest.[30] The offense remained twofold for the poor farmers working the land. Not only did they lose their farms, but they also sacrificed the revenue that they rightfully had earned. Castillo Armas widened the divide that the 1944 revolution attempted to close between Guatemala's social classes. While his rule abruptly ended with his assassination in July 1957, his right-wing political and social realignment would dramatically affect Guatemala's future.[31]

Ydígoras Fuentes and the Civil War

[29] Jonas, *The Battle for Guatemala*, 41. Jonas contends that the counter-revolutionary elements sought to re-establish paternalistic control over the lower class.

[30] Melville and Melville, *Guatemala: The Politics of Land Ownership*, 90-95.

[31] Streeter, *Managing the Counterrevolution*, 54. Castillo Armas was assassinated by Romeo Vásquez, a palace guard and suspected supporter of Árbenz.

After the Castillo Armas assassination, the growing divide between the right and left intensified. Supporters of Castillo Armas viewed the attack as an assault on right wing principles. The left grew more dissatisfied with worsening social conditions.[32] The seemingly simplistic answer would be to elect centrist leader Miguel José Ydígoras Fuentes into office, yet his policies satisfied neither side. Ydígoras' autobiography, *My War With Communism* and Roland H. Ebel's monograph, *Misunderstood Caudillo: Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes and the Failure of Democracy in Guatemala*, illustrate that the divisive political and social conflicts of the 1960s were bringing Guatemala to the brink of civil conflict.[33]

President Ydígoras Fuentes took office in Guatemala during a fragile period. Fresh on the minds of the conservative elite, the assassination of Castillo Armas threatened the societal power structure. Ydígoras' policy choices needed to placate the right, while at the same time meet the needs of the students, laborers, and the left. In order to carry out change and promote democratic rule in Guatemala, the economy required an overhaul. As such, both foreign aid and capital were a primary goal of his early administration.[34]

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[32] Ebel, *Misunderstood Caudillo*, 47.

[33] Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes, *My War with Communism* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Pentice-Halls, 1963); Ebel, *Misunderstood Caudillo*. While Ydígoras blames the destabilization of Guatemala on Communist infiltration, Ebel faults Ydígoras who proved ineffective at mending the rift between political factions and the disenfranchised.

[34] Ydígoras, *My War with Communism*, 63. Before officially taking office, Ydígoras traveled to the United States in order to strengthen relations and his political clout at home. His trip proved an utter failure. The US refused to sell Guatemala frigates to strengthen its coastal defenses, provide needed coffee quotas, support territorial claims over Belize (then a British colony), or facilitate World Bank development aid.

In a mediating style, Ydígoras worked to resolve disputes between rail workers and the United Fruit Company. Ydígoras placated the demands of the American corporation to promote a positive business environment for foreign capital. He also had to protect the interest of the workers and maintain a "nationalist" stance. Economic difficulties intensified as coffee prices plummeted, decreasing national reserves and the government's ability to meet financial obligations, while further crippling the delicate indigenous wage economy.[35]

Although a centrist, Ydígoras faced insurmountable political and social challenges. On November 13, 1960 a group of leftist army officers attempted a coup. Although the loyal military foiled the overthrow, a guerrilla movement was born. The rebel officers formed the *Movimiento Revolucionario-13* (MR-13), angered at the impotency of the Ydígoras administration.[36] During his tenure in office, the president permitted anti-Castro forces to train for the Bay of Pigs invasion on CIA bases located within Guatemala. For many, including these young Guatemalan officers, Castro's Revolution sought to remedy the social problems plaguing all of Latin America. Ydígoras' stance against Castro and strong support of US foreign policy incited the coup. The growing tensions between the

[35] Ibid., 75.

[36] Ebel, *Misunderstood Caudillo*, 199. The MR-13 guerrillas took their name from the date of the failed coup.

right and left ignited violent discontent in the military structure, spawning the MR-13 and future Marxist revolutionary groups.[37]

Despite claims of an international Communist conspiracy, Ydígoras admitted in his biography that the MR-13 guerrillas received primary support from the peasantry.[38] Worsening labor and social conditions spawned a popular movement that eventually inspired Guatemala's indigenous to mobilize. Land and labor remained the key aspects of *campesino* discontent. While the Árbenz administration sought to address grievances by allowing unionization and the implementation of agrarian reform, Ydígoras proved ineffective in balancing the demands of the right and the left. Ydígoras failed to help the lower class following the conservative shift of the Castillo Armas administration. Corruption plagued his government, with state land sales benefiting military officers and the wealthy elite, rather than the impoverished indigenous peasantry. Making matters worse, the landed oligarchy crushed rural indigenous workers by cutting daily wages and denying them opportunity to purchase land with government assistance.[39]

Although a staunch anti-Communist, Ydígoras displeased conservatives, especially within the military. Although he won US favor through the covert training of anti-Castro forces in Guatemala, the military did not view his actions in a positive light. Ydígoras'

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[37] Jennifer Schirmer, *The Guatemalan Military Project: A Violence Called Democracy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 16. The MR-13 guerrillas merged with the *Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes* (FAR) in 1962.

[38] Ydígoras, *My War with Communism*, 75. Much of this early peasant support came from poor indigenous farmers.

[39] Melville and Melville, *Guatemala: The Politics of Land Ownership*, 134.

concessions to the US government offended the nationalistic *machismo* culture of the military.[40] The guerrilla insurgency fueled military fears of wide-scale social unrest, leading to Col. Enrique Peralta Azurdia's coup in 1963.

Failed State

Following Ydígoras' overthrow, Guatemala sank deeper into civil unrest. Little changed regarding stalled social progress as conservative leadership ignored the needs of the indigenous population. After the "revolutionary period," economic conditions worsened throughout the agricultural sector due to price fluctuation and mono-culture dependency, affecting native communities living below the poverty level.[41] Ironically, these very Guatemalans were the social class that US State Department documents revealed as a potentially destabilizing force.[42] Agrarian underdevelopment and inadequate land distribution facilitated the radical left's guerrilla struggle and the increased social divide.

In 1966 Revolutionary Party brought a glimmer of hope to the left, electing Julio César Méndez Montenegro, a leftist law professor and civilian, to the presidency. The moderate party formed in the 1950s to counter the rising power of the political right.

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[40] Ebel, *Misunderstood Caudillo*, 224-227.

[41] Jonas, *The Battle for Guatemala*, 45. Following the counterrevolution, Guatemala experienced export growth; however, long-term coffee price declines, along with volatile US banana markets, left indigenous farm workers in a precarious position and dependent on landowners.

[42] Central Intelligence Agency Information Report, 10 October 1952, in *FRUS* 1952-1954, GUATEMALA (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 2003), 44. The document reveals that the US State Department warned that the social unrest among the rural Guatemalan population could ultimately destabilize the nation and the rest of Central America, negatively affecting US interests in the region.

Even so, Guatemala remained far different in 1966 than during the revolutionary period (1944-1954). Méndez Montenegro needed both the support of the conservative military and the support of the people.[43] Right-wing elite held too much political power to allow for social improvements. As a result, land distribution failed to meet the demands of the poor during his tenure. Lacking funds, Méndez Montenegro proposed a 1966 bill increasing the antiquated 1930s tax structure. Right-wing opposition refused to budge, calling the progressive property tax "confiscatory and communistic."[44] Most of those affected by the government failures were indigenous. Ultimately, Méndez Montenegro's tenure failed to create economic development or curtail the worsening civil conflict. Guerrilla groups like the Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes (FAR) expanded their tactics, killing the US ambassador John Gordon Mein in 1968.[45] In response to the guerrilla attacks, right-wing repression went unchecked, widening the political divide as the 1960s came to a close.

Conclusion

[43] Melville and Melville, *Guatemala: The Politics of Land Ownership*, 191-194. Méndez Montenegro was politically weak. Guatemala was tearing itself apart as the guerrilla insurgency expanded, and the military counterinsurgency intensified. Following the failed coup against Ydígoras, urban Marxist guerrilla activity increased seeking to disrupt society and facilitate the collapse of the political right. In retaliation the military and para-military death squads unleashed brutal repression directed towards the left, especially university students, and faculty. The conflict spilled into the countryside by the early 1970s as urban guerrillas fled into the rural interior.

[44] Ibid., 208. Taken from an article written by the Melvilles for *The New York Times*, December 3, 1966 and republished.

[45] Ibid., 248.

Guatemala's indigenous population experienced a broad transition during the twentieth century. At the start of the century, the native population still languished in virtual debt slavery to the wealthy elite. Authoritarian dictator Jorge Ubico reorganized the indigenous within the state, enabling them to function as both a political and social tool of the government. While discriminatory and paternalistic, the Ubico administration included the native peoples like no previous regime. The Maya during Ubico's dictatorship helped build Guatemala's transportation infrastructure and enabled rapid economic expansion.

Economic growth enriched the oligarchy. It also paved the way for an emerging middle class to rise from the global depression amid a growing export economy. It is the *ladino* middle class that took political power from Ubico in the 1944 revolution. While the native population did not directly participate in the re-organization, progressive leaders recognized the need to enfranchise the indigenous majority. Arévalo and Árbenz supported the rural Maya by abolishing discriminatory laws, as well as enacting a desperately needed land reform, supported with government assistance.

Despite the positive social change for the indigenous population, the landed elite and US government felt threatened by the potential empowerment of rural workers. This threat prompted the United States to intervene covertly through the Central Intelligence Agency, thereby overturning the popularly-elected government of Jacobo Árbenz and returning the nation to conservative rule. The clash between the right and left intensified and degenerated, specifically during the Ydígoras administration as guerrilla factions

rebelled against the military and government. Leftist guerrillas and sympathizers carried out sabotage missions and kidnappings, drawing right-wing retaliation. The violence metastasized within urban zones as both sides attacked each other.

During the first half of the twentieth century, the indigenous population became an integral part of the nation-state as the economy expanded and exploited rural workers. The failure to institute and maintain social progress worsened as reform gave way to conservatism. While the Guatemalan economy expanded during the counterrevolutionary period, the overall benefits went to the oligarchy. The majority of indigenous farmers, comprising nearly half of the population, saw a net decrease in actual land holdings and agricultural production.[46] The lack of substantial land reform during the counterrevolution left the rural peasantry desperate for economic opportunities. This in turn forced much of the indigenous population to migrate for seasonal employment on coastal plantations where the cycle of exploitation continued unabated. In 1969, Mayan migrant workers were thrust deeper into economic turmoil. The collapse of the Central American Common Market due to the Honduran/Salvadorian Football War, coupled with the declining world demand for agricultural products forced many small-scale indigenous farmers further into debt. The misery of the Mayan populace intensified driving many towards leftist political organizations.[47] The political left capitalized on the discontent among the indigenous, set in motion by the civil conflict's expansion into rural areas in the 1970s. The transplantation of the guerrilla conflict into the countryside created a

[46] Ibid., 23.

[47] Grandin, "To End with All These Evils," 12.

spark that would develop into the Pan-Maya movement as the failed promises of the state pushed the newly-politicized Maya to act.

Chapter 2:
Smacked by the Right pushed to the Left: The Intensification of Guatemalan Grassroots Indigenous Activism

Introduction

In 1954, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, and members of the Guatemalan oligarch, orchestrated the removal of the democratically-elected Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán government, installing Carlos Castillo Armas as president. Prior to the overthrow, the ten-year democratic era of 1944-1954 had addressed many of Guatemala's social problems, including workers' rights and land reform. These issues directly affected the indigenous population. Ultimately the loss of enfranchisement, military repression, and interaction with a mobilized left, inspired the native population to participate and organize against the right in the late 1970s and early 1980s, laying a foundation for the Pan-Maya struggle.

Since the colonial period, the Maya had lost much of their communal agricultural lands and were forced to farm on small, non-productive parcels. A vicious cycle of plot-division amongst family members, in addition to elite land seizures and swindles, drove much of Guatemala's native population to enter a large pool of migrant workers. With the absence of large-scale governmental land reform post-1954, the migrant workers abandoned their subsistence plots during cane-cutting, cotton-picking or coffee-harvesting seasons to supplement their agricultural production by laboring on coastal plantations. Although a crucial aspect of the *ladino* wage economy, indigenous labor

remained exploitable, with planters maintaining wages at a minimum and providing few, if any, social benefits to their employees.[1]

Indigenous land reform and social justice spiraled downward once Castillo Armas and the Guatemalan oligarchy retained control of the national political scene in 1954. As democracy gave way to a series of military presidencies/dictatorships, civil conflict developed between the conservative elite, middle-class intellectuals, and urban labor unions. After the attempted 1960 overthrow of the Miguel Ydígoras administration, and the proceeding repression, Guatemala fell into a civil war that would last more than thirty-five years. The conflict originated within the capital and urban centers as leftist activists clashed with the conservative, military-led government and right-wing death squads. As government reprisals crippled the labor, student, and insurgency movements of the 1960s and early 1970s, the civil conflict shifted to the countryside.[2] By the late 1970s, guerrilla fronts organized and grew amongst Guatemala's large indigenous population. With the urban Marxist movement in disrepair, leaders began to draw upon a Mayan support base.

Increased guerrilla organization within indigenous sectors ultimately invited a military response. Beginning with the presidency of General Romero Lucas García (1978-1982), and continuing on through the presidency of General José Efraín Ríos Montt (1982-1983)

[1] Melville and Melville, *Guatemala: The Politics of Land Ownership*, 107-119. The Melvilles argue that post-Árbenz repeal of Agrarian Decree 900 forced many Maya to migrate as seasonal wage laborers.

[2] Jonas, *The Battle for Guatemala*, 57-71. Chapter four discusses the conservative reprisal of the 1960s that forced the urban Marxists to reorganize within the countryside.

and General Óscar Humberto Mejía Victores (1983-1986), Guatemala underwent a period of mounting repression and counterinsurgency. Indigenous communities suffered military reprisals, including the destruction of crops and villages, as well as forced service in civilian patrols. These detachments acted as cannon fodder for the counterinsurgency campaign against guerrilla units. This violence pushed the Mayan majority firmly towards the left, initiating the beginning of indigenous activism and the birth of the modern Pan-Maya movement. Guerrilla organizations shifted their focus to incorporate the large indigenous population into their struggle. Drawing upon Marxist thought, these groups initially tried to invoke a sense of a proletariat struggle amongst the rural native population. As the civil war raged on, and the guerrillas became more involved with the indigenous communities, a shift towards social and cultural rights occurred. Furthermore, the native population began organizing themselves through rural labor unions – primarily the Comité de Campesino Unidad (CUC) and human rights groups such as the Grupo de Mutuo Apoyo (GAM). These organizations mobilized both indigenous and *ladinos* in protest of the government's hard-line policies. Their struggles brought international attention to the civil conflict and the military atrocities. Finally, grassroots indigenous organizations like the Movimiento Indio, Organizacion India de Autodefensa (OIDA), and The Comité Campesino del Altiplano (CCDA) infused an indigenous agenda into the larger popular movement. Many of these organizations called for ethnic unity, a primary focus of the current Pan-Maya struggle.

Mayan scholar Robert Carmack examines an indigenous highland community in his 1995 monograph, *Rebels of Highland Guatemala.* Carmack's study focuses on Momostenango

and the surrounding area, where he finds a gradual growth of indigenous political activism over the course of five centuries.[3] Carmack argues that indigenous communities maintained a constant opposition against Spanish colonial rule and ladino society in the post-independence era. While his anthropological observations illustrate a consistent Mayan position, this study illuminates important factors specific to the present Pan-Maya movement. Carmack's argument of a non-passive indigenous population is accurate; however the civil war's shift into rural indigenous areas during the 1970s, combined with the centuries of neglect and abuse at the hands of the landed elite, as outlined by Carmack, brought a surge rather than consistent native response. Pushed by right-wing racism and terror and influenced by the left, the Pan-Maya movement steadily grew out of the increased conflict of the 1970s and 1980s, culminating in the 1996 signing of the Peace Agreement and Indigenous Rights Accord.

Guerrilla Insurgency, The Popular Left, & Indigenous Participation

The emergence of the civil war in the rural highland regions of Guatemala drew the indigenous population further into the *ladino* civil conflict. With the leftist movement nearly defeated, urban guerrillas began reorganizing during the 1970s in areas outside the scope of paramilitary death squads. This shift to the countryside had a profound impact on the indigenous population with whom the leftist guerrillas now had direct contact. As guerrillas organized, the Guatemalan armed forces reacted by re-grouping and increasing operations. This military surge began with the presidency of General Lucas García

[3] Carmack, *Rebels of Highland Guatemala*. Carmack's study employs fieldwork, oral histories, and archival research.

(1978-1982) and inflicted repression upon the citizenry who lived in areas of guerrilla activity, the majority of whom were Mayan. US-trained counterinsurgency specialists employed tactics such as attacking the "perceived" guerrilla support base (indigenous peasants) and food supplies, as well as creating development poles, where model villages enforced indigenous re-settlement under military control.[4] The combination of violent oppression and guerrilla insurgencies soliciting indigenous participation created a shift towards grassroots organization that ultimately spawned the modern Pan-Maya movement.

The growth of interaction between the leftist guerrillas and the Maya created a catalyst leading to the rise of indigenous activism, in contrast to Carmack's findings. Within the rural insurgency, the leftist guerrillas formed crucial ties with the indigenous population. The Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes (FAR), traces its organizational roots back to the urban movement during the José Miguel Ramón Ydígoras Fuentes administration (1958-1963). In 1978, the FAR re-emerged in the southern coastal region and northern Petén jungle. Organización Revolucionario del Pueblo en Armas (ORPA), a breakaway faction of FAR, developed its support base in the western highlands beginning in 1971, and went public in 1979. On a final guerrilla front, the Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres (EGP) founded itself among Quiché communities in 1972. These guerrilla factions, although at times holding divergent revolutionary ideologies, united in a broad oppositional front

[4] Ruth Blakeley, "Still Training to Torture? US Training of Military Forces from Latin America," *Third World Quarterly*, 27 no. 8 (2006): 1439-1461. The School of Americas, now located at Fort Benning, Georgia and renamed Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC), taught and continues to teach Latin American military counterinsurgency tactics. During the 1970s and 1980s Guatemalan cadets learned tactics such as "strategic hamlets," employed by the United States during the Vietnam War.

called the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG) in 1982 as a means of fighting against the conservative repression that plunged Guatemala into civil war. While these organizations developed from the urban-left movement of the 1950s and 1960s, activists and rebels forced underground re-emerged in the nation's hinterland. It is here that groups like the FAR developed ties with Mayan communities in a cooperative effort to end the right-wing atrocities and bring social improvement to millions of poor Guatemalans, the majority of whom were indigenous.

Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes (FAR)

The FAR emerged as an outgrowth of the Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo (PGT), in 1963, adopting a Trotskyite ideological stance. The initial guerrilla struggle began in urban areas and rural departments of Izabal and Zacapa, through the organization of young *ladinos*.[5] The FAR sought to create a base of support centered on anti-imperialism and the destruction of the Guatemalan oligarchy.[6] Guerrilla leadership of the "Edgar Ibarra" front hoped to raise awareness concerning the Guatemalan agrarian situation yet failed to include it as a part of the initial political/social program, targeting urban labor unions instead. Despite early efforts, paramilitary death squads like Mano Blanco quickly crushed the momentum.[7] In a March 1971 document, the FAR outlined

[5] Jonas, *The Battle for Guatemala*, 67.

[6] Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes [hereafter FAR], "Nuestro planteamientos acerca de la unidad (Documentos históricos 1971-1979)," December 1980, Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamerica-Archivo Histórico [here after CIRMA], Infostelle, Signatura 138 12.02.03, 4.

[7] Jonas, *The Battle for Guatemala*, 62.

obstacles of revolutionary growth within Guatemala. Leaders believed that the nation's historical evolution hampered the acceptance of Marxist ideology among all people.[8] Deep-rooted divisions within Guatemalan society complicated the success of an armed revolutionary conflict. Therefore, as the conflict moved into rural areas, guerrilla commanders altered their ideological methods. Leaders conceded the strategic need for unity, and thus the indigenous question entered the political discussion.[9] As conditions within the countryside ripened, a broader struggle inclusive of the native peasantry materialized.

When operating among the indigenous population, the FAR suffered initial difficulties. Guerrilla training taught Marxist ideals based upon an industrial model. This archetype failed to translate within the dispersed indigenous settlements of the rural countryside. Seeking to incorporate the indigenous, the FAR modified its urban-Marxist definition of "class struggle" to include *campesinos*. The FAR needed to achieve a new level of class-consciousness in order to rally the "rural proletariat," by shifting the exploiter from the factory owner to the *finca* oligarchy.[10] The FAR, now exiled from the urban arena by military and paramilitary units, sought to incorporate the indigenous experience within its broader class-based struggle.

[8] FAR, "Nuestro planteamientos acerca de la unidad (Documentos históricos 1971-1979)," December 1980, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 138 12.02.03, 8.

[9] Ibid., 9.

[10] Ibid., 28.

By 1979, FAR strategic planning sought the incorporation of as many "workers" as possible.[11] The FAR's shift in ideological thought paralleled the emergence of labor and land reform-based activism of indigenous communities. By addressing indigenous social issues such as land and labor, within the context of its Marxist-revolutionary struggle, the FAR helped to initiate a dialogue between the Popular Left and a historically-underappreciated and untapped portion of Guatemalan society. The FAR stated that the "poor *campesinos* remain a class linked to feudalism" thus making them a prime target for incorporation into the social revolution.[12] As the guerrilla conflict expanded, the FAR, one of the oldest guerrilla groups, shifted its ideological stance to include indigenous communities. By the mid- 1980s, a FAR document openly discussed the diverse makeup of Guatemala and the importance of social and political freedom for all indigenous people.[13] This emergent process of inclusion repeated itself among the other major guerrilla groups.

Organización Revolucionario del Pueblo en Armas (ORPA)

ORPA, like FAR, emerged in the indigenous highlands of Guatemala in 1979 after operating clandestinely for eight years.[14] Like the FAR leadership, ORPA recognized the need to incorporate the native population into the revolutionary struggle. ORPA began

[11] Ibid., 64.

[12] Ibid., 28.

[13] FAR, "Características de la nación Guatemalteca en la actualidad," 1987, CIRMA, Payeras-Colom Colección, Signatura 1, Documento 04, 10.

[14] Jonas, *The Battle for Guatemala*, 139.

raising awareness among indigenous communities regarding paramilitary death squads that had long been operating in metropolitan areas. Paramilitary units that targeted the urban movement and its sympathizers now operated in the once isolated rural hamlets. ORPA began to distribute pamphlets illustrating the tactics and atrocities of the military-trained death squads, including the sinister, La Mano Blanco (The White Hand) and *El* Ojo por Ojo (The Eye for an Eye).[15] ORPA spread news of these paramilitary death squads in the hopes of broadening the fight to include Guatemala's large native population. The inclusion of the Maya became a crucial aspect of ORPA goals by 1979 as President General Lucas García intensified the counterinsurgency conflict within rural indigenous hamlets.[16] By obtaining a larger support base within native communities, the revolutionary struggle could advance beyond the setbacks of the late 1960s and early 1970s. In an interview Gasper Ilom, head of ORPA, stated that upon mobilizing in the western highlands, the guerrillas received a mass influx of indigenous support within rural *campesino* communities. These supporters made up 85 percent of the organization. Ilom attributes the success to the agro-export industry's prolonged mistreatment of the native labor force.[17]

Utilizing crude drawings in guerrilla propaganda leaflets and bulletins, ORPA helped explain the revolutionary struggle to native inhabitants. A 1979 document illustrates the

[15] Organización Revolucionario del Pueblo en Armas [hereafter ORPA], "Siempre hablando con el campesino (Las verdades del pueblo y las mentiras del gobierno)," November 1979, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 138 12.02.02.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Marta Harnecker, "ORPA: Respuesta a las esperanzas Indígenas" (includes a quote from Gaspar Ilom), August/September 1982, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 138 12.02.02.

war in terms of a "450-year conflict of oppression." ORPA used the figure "450 years" as a cultural propaganda tool to demonstrate that the Maya have been a conquered and enslaved people since the Spanish conquest of Mesoamerica. Drawings depict an elite *finca* owner proclaiming to a downtrodden worker, "Indians are animals, and they do not know how to work."[18] ORPA used this type of propaganda to push for greater indigenous participation, showcasing racist thought perpetrated by the Guatemalan government and upper class. Documents reiterated that the rich owned the majority of the land and kept wages low among the indigenous population, far below a similar *ladino* wage laborer. Guerrilla recruiters used race and culture as a means of motivating and mobilizing the indigenous. ORPA propaganda pointed to the lack of schools in indigenous lands, sustainable employment, and the plight of rural labor migrating to urban areas in search of jobs. The documents depict large cities where men are turned away from factory jobs and women are brutalized as household servants. The propaganda supported indigenous cultural preservation by illustrating elite distaste for native dress and hairstyles. A 1981 document discusses such realities affecting the native population. The pamphlet focuses on discrimination in the schools, courts, hospitals, farms, stores and even on buses. The military easily identified and targeted the indigenous by their physical appearance, language, dress and religious beliefs.[19] The final point ORPA drove home was that, despite a lack of public services for the indigenous population, the military never lacked funds to buy arms. This form of

[18] ORPA, "Siempre hablando con el campesino (Las verdades del pueblo y las mentiras del gobierno)," November 1979, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 138 12.02.02, 3.

[19] ORPA, "La irrupción del Indígena en la lucha," 1981, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 137 12.01.01, 6.

propaganda further enabled ORPA to motivate and mobilize the native population.[20] According to ORPA, the government failed to recognize the importance of the native society within Guatemala. Officially, the indigenous population was, and still is, recorded at a little less than 50 percent despite guerrilla, human-rights agencies and western scholars finding a much higher percentage (55-70%) amongst the total inhabitants.[21]

Given those statistics, it is understandable why ORPA and the other guerrilla organizations sought to incorporate the indigenous people into the larger civil conflict. Without the support of the majority of Guatemala's population, a victory was impossible. ORPA leadership understood that the government never recognized the indigenous population as a political force. For this reason, ORPA dedicated itself to including the Maya by "synchronizing development between the revolutionary fight and cultural values."[22] Following the re-organization of guerrilla fronts in the highland communities, native participation proved crucial to the larger revolutionary struggle. Guerrilla leaders recognized that the indigenous population could serve both as a logistical support base and as an ideological justification for the protracted conflict. The extension of the

[20] Ibid., 6.

[21] Social science researchers and accredited NGO groups have estimated that the native population of Guatemala remains far above the official estimates making the native population a minority. Scholars place the native population at 55 to 70 percent of the total. See: Susanne Jonas, *The Battle for Guatemala,* 1; Warren, *Indigenous Movements and Their Critics*, 5; Carmack, *Rebels of Highland Guatemala*, *3*; The Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human Rights, *Persecution by Proxy*, 11; The Catholic Institute for International Relations, *Guatemala: False Hope False Freedom xvi*.

[22] Melville and Melville, *Guatemala: The Politics of Land Ownership*, 8. ORPA's decision to target the indigenous population as a disenfranchised political force and potential revolutionary body counters the military regime's model as outlined by Thomas and Marjorie Melville. They find that conservative governments following the overthrow of Jacobo Árbenz, failed to implement serious agrarian reform.

guerrilla insurgency into indigenous lands brought leaders face to face with the social ills that the conservative forces within Guatemala had long suppressed.

Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres (EGP)

The EGP proved the most successful out of three primary guerrilla organizations in terms of organizing and mobilizing the indigenous peasantry. Initially, the EGP developed within Guatemala City in 1973; however, increased military and death-squad activity forced its re-organization outside of the urban sector, as in the case of the ORPA and FAR.[23] A 1983 English language version of the "Compañero" newsletter titled *The Fighting Fist*, illustrates the EGP's support for indigenous mass mobilization. The document links the revolutionary objectives of the EGP with that of a potential indigenous support base. Like ORPA and FAR, the EGP understood that the political power of the Maya remained a sleeping giant. The EGP sought to "awaken, organize, and direct the mass struggle" in order to carry out a broad social-based revolution.[24]

Once the EGP entered the jungle region of Ixcán, it sought to incorporate and indoctrinate the native populace into its proletariat struggle. The EGP taught guerrilla tactics to the migratory exiles living in the East and the southern coastal region, as a means of self-preservation.[25] The gross failures of the state motivated the Maya to organize and sympathize with the growing guerrilla insurgency. Throughout 1981, the

[23] Jonas, *The Battle for Guatemala*, 136-137.

[24] Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres [here after EGP],"Fighting Fist of the Masses (Compañero)," August 1983, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 138 12.02.01, 4.

[25] Ibid.

EGP, working within highland communities, gained grassroots community support. Indigenous communities fed guerrilla units, supplied men, and conducted sabotage missions. The guerrilla leadership understood ethnic differences, employing both Spanish and Kanjobal languages to address a group of three-thousand workers in Jacaltenango on Sunday, September 7, 1980. The anti-government speech ultimately incited a riot that destroyed the local jail.[26] In November 1981, an EGP force held Tecpan, a municipal capital of the Chimaltenango department.[27] Local indigenous villagers helped erect barricades made of stone, lumber, and dirt in support of guerrillas fighting the military.[28] Their participation both in Jacaltenango and Tecpán illustrates the EGP's successful incorporation of the indigenous population into the larger revolutionary struggle.

Likewise, solidarity action by leftist organizations like the Comité de Unidad Campesina further supported the EGP aims. The CUC, although not a guerrilla organization, rallied for poor *ladino* and indigenous workers. On May 12, 1982, primarily indigenous CUC activists overtook the Brazilian embassy. Adopting guerrilla tactics, those participating in the peaceful demonstration disguised themselves as street vendors before entering the compound. Negative press over the 1980 Spanish embassy massacre allowed activists to

[26] EGP, "Comunicado nacional y internacional," September 1980, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 138 12.02.01.

[27] EGP, "Fighting Fist of the Masses (Compañero)," August 1983, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 138 12.02.01, 28.

[28] Ibid., 28.

seize the Brazilian embassy and force a negotiated settlement.[29] The EGP training and support of the CUC embassy occupation remains an important example of how early grassroots indigenous organization participated within and supported the armed insurgency.

While the EGP counted on support and cooperation from Mayan communities, it also recruited men directly into the guerrilla ranks. By the early 1980s, Kanjobal, Mam, and Chuj fighters served alongside *ladino* rebels. "Emiliano," a Kanjobal Maya who worked for exploitive landowners, joined the EGP in 1975 to fight for a better life.[30] He represented the portion of the native population, so desperate, that armed conflict against the government appeared to be the most viable solution to indigenous grievances.

Discourse between the EGP and the native population fueled revolutionary solidarity and the growth of grassroots leftist organization among the Maya. Cooperation among the guerrillas and *campesino* population resulted in the successful 1981 raid on Tecpán. By 1982, the EGP accumulated a "local support base" facilitating the Popular Left's ambitions of dismantling the right-wing military dictatorship.[31]

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[29] EGP, "Fighting Fist of the Masses (Compañero)," August 1983, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 138 12.02.01, 28-29; Anders Riis-Hansen, "Commission for the Defense of Human Rights" CODEHUCA, February 3, 1995, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 4, 1.02.01. Members of the CUC occupied the Spanish Embassy on January 31, 1980. Guatemalan forces burned the embassy killing the activists and embassy employees setting off an international incident.

[30] EGP, "Informador guerrillero año II No.26," August 1, 1983, CIRMA, Signatura 138 12.02.01, 6-7. Emiliano is a false name given to protect the identity and family of the interviewee.

[31] EGP,"Informador guerrillero año III No.34," September 18, 1984, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 138 12.02.01, 10.

Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG)

The courtship of the native communities continued among the guerrilla organizations when a unified umbrella organization formed in 1982. The URNG created a governing body that coordinated offensives, published reports, facilitated communication among guerrilla commanders, and created a solidarity base domestically among the indigenous communities and abroad as international sympathy grew. The URNG consolidated and organized the leadership of the PGT, FAR, ORPA and EGP.[32] As the guerrilla campaigns achieved victories in the countryside, José Efraín Ríos Montt led a right-wing military coup in 1982. Ríos Montt's victory escalated rural violence and repression among the indigenous population.

The intensification of the Cold War in Central America during the US presidential administration of Ronald Reagan (1980-1988) forced the URNG to counter not only the right-wing domestic propaganda of Ríos Montt, but also international propaganda disseminated from the United States. For example, conservative evangelical leader Pat Robertson, preached of Ríos Montt's righteous crusade, asking viewers of the 700 Club to donate money. Ironically, Robertson's organization supplied humanitarian aid to the Mayan victims of the regime's counterinsurgency campaign.[33] The Ríos Montt era brought the mass destruction of indigenous villages under the military's scorched-earth policy. The URNG capitalized on the horrific events reporting many of the military's

[32] Jonas, *The Battle for Guatemala*, 138-139.

[33] Dona Eberwine, "Guatemala and Evangelicals: To Ríos Montt, With Love Lift," *The Nation*, February 26, 1983.

atrocities in bulletins and public addresses. On March 23, 1982, military campaigns, conducted simultaneously in the departments of El Quiché and Huehuetenango, massacred more than 500 people, the majority of whom were indigenous.[34] Reports like this and hundreds of others illustrate the carnage carried out by the military and the urgency for indigenous participation within the Popular Left. Although the Guatemalan right dismissed the guerrilla reports as biased, an independent commission funded by the Catholic Church found that, the military proved ultimately responsible for the horrific violence, accounting for 90 percent of the civilian deaths.[35]

The URNG promoted indigenous cooperation and solidarity within its documents. An article taken from the *Campañero* newsletter entitled, "The Indigenous Population and the Guatemalan Revolution," illustrates a clear shift towards the native population. The guerrilla body proclaimed Guatemala a multi-ethnic nation, a statement the government would not acknowledge until 1996.[36] The URNG wished to work in unity with the native population to free Guatemala from the centuries of elite repression that discriminated not only by class but also ethnicity.[37]

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[34] Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca [hereafter URNG], "Guatemala: La crisis de poder y la guerra popular revolucionaria," May 1982, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 138 12.01.11, 4.

[35] REMHI, *Guatemala: Never Again!,* 290.

[36] EGP, "The Indigenous Population and the Guatemalan Revolution (Compañero)," 1983, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 138 12.02.01, 11; United Nations, *The Guatemalan Peace Agreements*, (New York: United Nations Department of Public Information, 1998). Within the final agreement, the Guatemalan government formally called Guatemala a multi-ethnic nation, placing the twenty-two Mayan groups, the Xinca, and the Garifuna people alongside the *ladino* population.

[37] EGP, "The Indigenous Population and the Guatemalan Revolution (Compañero)," 1983, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 138 12.02.01, 11.

As the Guatemalan military shifted strategy, turning the country over to civilian control in 1985, the URNG re-defined its ideological position. The Guatemalan military's inability to achieve a total victory over the guerrilla insurgency, and the URNG failure to defeat government forces, created a unique situation. The URNG now struggled militarily for the political and social reorganization of a democratic nation-state rather than a Marxist revolution. As such, the URNG altered its platform, arguing for human rights and equality for all – specifically attacking the government's cultural repression of the Maya.[38] The URNG stated that for the indigenous people, oppression was "twice as powerful" as they faced both racism and violent repression.[39]

The leftist insurgency intensified in the late 1970s through the 1980s, encouraging the indigenous population to organize and participate. Fed up with a repressive military dictatorship, the Mayan populace supported the guerrilla armies in the countryside, passively by supplying food and intelligence, and actively by joining rebel fronts fighting the counter insurgency. After centuries of *ladino*-elite land theft and exploitation, others joined the Popular Left by organizing into labor and human rights groups at the local and regional levels. It is within the context of human-rights work and autonomous indigenous activism that the movement eventually generated momentum, laying the structural base for the Pan-Maya struggle.

Comité de Capesino Unidad (CUC)

[38] URNG, "Al pueblo de Guatemala," September 1985, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 138 12.01.11, 5-10.

[39] Ibid., 7.

As Guatemala's harsh economic and political realities intensified during the 1960s and 1970s, leftist peasants and rural labor began organizing to fight for land reform and higher wages. Between 1950 and 1979, the percentage of small land holdings (less than 1.4 hectares) increased from 47.6 percent to 54.4 percent.[40] A small elite population held the most productive agricultural lands, drawing upon seasonal migrants, primarily from the indigenous labor pool.[41] The landowners worked in unison to keep wages low and exploit the native laborers. The CUC formed in 1978 creating a support base to challenge the status quo. The CUC illustrates the potential of native activism during a period of indigenous cultural and social awakening. While Carmack's ethno-history contends that the indigenous struggle has remained constant over the centuries, the rapid growth and success of the CUC prove otherwise.[42]

The CUC's early agrarian activism began in 1972 within the Guatemalan departments of El Quiché, Chimaltenango and the southern coast regions. In El Quiché and Chimaltenango, indigenous property holdings remained marginalized and threatened by *ladino*-elite seizure. In addition, large sugar and cotton *fincas*, located in the southern coastal region, remained a critical area of CUC growth. On these farms, large land holders exploited the native population as day laborers during harvest seasons. The small, subdivided plots of land proved inadequate to support many indigenous families

[40] Centro de Investigaciones Económicas Nacionales (CIEN), "Información general sobre la tenencia de la tierra en Guatemala" Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamerica-Archivo Histórico, Infostelle. CIEN secured data from the 1950, 1964, and 1979 agricultural census.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Carmack, *Rebels of Highland Guatemala*.

throughout the year, making migratory labor a necessity despite indigenous desires to remain outside of the *ladino*-dominated economy.[43] Therefore, the southern coastal region became an area ripe for the development of the CUC as workers organized to fight for higher wages and social justice. Officially, the CUC organization went public on April 15, 1978, uniting forty different working-class groups, "integrating both poor indigenous and *ladino* agrarian workers."[44] The CUC was divided into three assemblies: local, regional and national, creating a structure that facilitated fluid communication.[45] The growing popular movement challenged the status quo, thus inviting conservative repression from 1981-1984 and further exasperating the situation among rural labor.

By 1980, the CUC boasted as many as 150,000 members, making it the largest *campesino* organization in the nation. The indigenous population swelled its ranks, comprising 80 percent of the organization.[46] The events of January 1980 brought international attention to the CUC and the plight of Guatemala in general. On January 31, twenty-one indigenous CUC members marched to the capital in protest of injustice faced in the countryside. Soldiers patrolling rural Mayan villages were stealing food, money, personal effects, and land titles.[47] The CUC delegation included Vicente

[43] CUC, "Hoy, el CUC crece y se desarrolla para aportar en el fortalecimiento de la lucha popular," September, 1986, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 4, 1.02.01, 3.

[44] Ibid., 3.

[45] CUC, "Boletín internacional," September 1982, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 4, 1.02.01, 18.

[46] CUC, "Presentacion del Comite de Unidad Campesina," December 1981, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 4, 1.02.01, 1.

[47] CUC, "La masacre de los campesinos Indios de el Quiché cometida en la embajada de España acreditada en la República de Guatemala el 31 de Enero 1980," June 1980, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 4, 1.02.01., 4.

Menchú, a founding leader of the CUC and father of future activist and Nobel Laureate, Rigoberta Menchú occupied the Spanish embassy in protest. Unfortunately, chaos unfolded as police and military forces breached the sovereign embassy, killing both CUC members and innocent embassy employees. The incident created international sympathy for the leftist insurgency, raising awareness regarding the plight of Guatemala's indigenous people. The CUC argued that the negligence of the government forced the CUC organizers and sympathizers to occupy the embassy in an attempt to break through the media "silence" existing within Guatemala.[48] The government, leading up to and including the embassy siege, violated laws including the protection of work and property, respect for diplomatic missions, and freedom of expression.[49]

Following the international outrage over the embassy attack, General Efrain Ríos Montt led a *coup d'état*, placing himself in power in 1982. Internally, the conservative military elite supported this effort as it wished to move past the unfavorable worldview brought by the Lucas government and the crisis surrounding the destruction of the Spanish embassy. Although Ríos Montt removed García from office, his own policies ushered in greater violence, specifically targeting indigenous communities. The increased repression fueled support for *campesino* organizations such as the CUC, which observed, reported on and fought against the conservative military regime.

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[48] Carlos Toledo Vielman, "Fundador del CUC se entregó," *El Gráfico*, October 23, 1981.

[49] CUC, "La masacre de los campesinos Indios del Quiché cometida en la embajada de España acreditada en la República de Guatemala el 31 de Enero 1980," June 1980, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 4, 1.02.01., 5. The CUC cited these violations to awaken the populace regarding the government's blatant disregard of civil liberties.

During the escalated repression of the Ríos Montt era, the CUC categorized its indigenous support base within four specific classifications: People Under Military Control, People in Resistance, Displaced People, and People Abroad.[50] Those who remained "under military control" survived the right-wing massacres and were transplanted into army-run model villages. These spartan outposts often lacked the means for basic subsistence, such as arable land or a clean water supply. CUC documents illustrate the hardships faced by the native population at the height of repression under military control, 1981-1984. Following the 1982 coup, the military appointed municipal mayors, effectively destroying local political representation. The model villages, where suspected subversives were "imprisoned," employed forced labor and created a vicious cycle of debt by selling domestic construction supplies at inflated prices. Similar treatment remained common among coastal plantations, the area in which the CUC first began organizing.[51] Documents also reveal violent crimes against women at the hands of the military and the suppression of religious freedom, serious points of contention among native communities.[52] Finally, the land crisis worsened for communities, when disputes were often settled in favor of the *ladino* elite.[53] The CUC defended people living under such difficult conditions, using their stories to gain additional popular support. The

[50] CUC, "The New Situation," July 1984, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 4, 1.02.01.

[51] Jonas, *The Battle for Guatemala,* 128-129.

[52] CUC, "The New Situation," July 1984, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 4, 1.02.01; CUC, "La masacre de los campesinos Indios del Quiché cometida en la embajada de Espana acreditada en la República de Guatemala el 31 de Enero 1980," June 1980, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 4, 1.02.01; CUC, "Hoy, el CUC crece y se desarrolla para aportar en el fortalecimiento de la lucha popular," September, 1986, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 4, 1.02.01.

[53]CUC, "The New Situation," July 1984, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 4, 1.02.01. When Mayan farmers were forced into "resettlement" camps, officials supported land dealings that often robbed communities and individual farmers of their property.

efforts of the CUC created not only organizational growth, but the further mobilization of the indigenous population as a potential political force. The inclusion of the native population into the broader struggle further challenged the status quo.

The CUC categorized "people in resistance" as indigenous who secretly stayed in the devastated regions of Huehuetenango, El Quiché, Alta Verapaz, Baja Verapaz, and El Petén, and built up support groups as a means to preserve their community life. This form of passive resistance provided a crucial base for the CUC. According to the CUC, these people showed the highest level of social consciousness as their resistance in hiding challenged the government, making them de facto participants within the Popular Left.[54]

Those classified as "displaced people" and those as "people abroad" resisted attempts to be corralled into the government/military-run model villages and, as a result, were forced from their ethnic region. They did not survive in hiding; rather, they moved and settled away from their home community and region in the hopes of returning when the conflict subsided. International attention surrounded these groups of indigenous, as NGOs and human rights organizations documented the hardship and turmoil of the displaced. As domestic and international refugees, they created a new level of popular resistance.[55] These natives served as a symbol of the terrible conflict. The international attention brought about by the mass refugee problem helped put pressure on the right, while

[54] Ibid., 8. By avoiding government oppression, this portion of the native population actively showed resistance to the military and paramilitary squads.

[55] Ibid., 8-11.

strengthening indigenous mobilization especially around the CUC's struggle for labor and land rights.

Within Guatemala, the political and social situation proved arduous for the indigenous communities in areas of conflict. The eighteen-month reign of Ríos Montt came to an end when the minister of defense, Óscar Humberto Mejía Victores, pushed him from power. Unfortunately, Mejía Victores' ascension to power was a mere re-structuring of the military-government rather than social progress.

Policies initiated during the Lucas and Ríos Montt administrations continued and intensified as the military government waged war against the guerrilla insurgency on one front and popular organizers and indigenous communities on the other. Mejía Victores continued the forced resettlement of indigenous populations into camps and service in civil patrols known as PACs. CUC documents illustrated the Guatemalan government's attempt to break the indigenous will.[56] The CUC produced literature aimed at informing the working masses of the PAC abuses. In a caricature pamphlet, the CUC depicts the PAC as an oppressive tool of the government aimed at keeping the rural workers compliant to *ladino* society. Drawings illustrate indigenous *campesinos* forced to work for 12-24 hours at a time for no wages.[57] Furthermore, CUC literature discusses how the military elite coerced native farmers, forcing them to grow export crops the army could

[56] CUC, "Comunicado urgente," October 23, 1983, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 4, 1.02.01. The CUC spread news informing the rural population of the October 21, 1983 massacre of 300 Kakchie in the department of Alta Verapaz.

[57] CUC, "Que son las PAC," circa 1985, CIRMA, Hollendesa, Signatura 6, 1.02.01, 3-9.

sell for profit.[58] Continued government-inspired violence cost thousands of indigenous lives, bringing more Maya to support the political left.

The CUC represented a monumental shift among the rural Guatemalan indigenous. Founded within small regional enclaves in 1978, the CUC grew into a national force of primarily indigenous workers who fought for land, labor, and social rights. By the signing of the 1996 Peace Agreement, the CUC conducted occupations of government buildings and large *fincas*. The organization carried out mass labor strikes, forcing the increase of daily wages.[59] A once-small, regional group expanded to incorporate hundreds of thousands of members, promoting both poor indigenous and *ladino* liberties. The CUC survived military repression and attacks on its indigenous support base. It remains a shining star of native activism and a powerful organization within the broader Pan-Maya movement. While rural land and labor activism remained the bedrock of the CUC organization, human rights work emerged with the increase of government-inspired violence that targeting Mayan communities.

Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (GAM)

Much like the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, six Guatemalan women founded the GAM human rights organization in June 1984. This group, comprised primarily of indigenous women who had their husbands, sons, and daughters kidnapped or disappeared by the military or military-trained death squads, sought answers to the

[58] CUC, "Communique," January 31, 1985, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 4, 1.02.01, 4.

[59] Jonas, *The Battle for Guatemala,*128-129.

whereabouts of their loved ones. Its purpose remained the investigation of disappearances in the hopes of bringing closure to the families affected by violence. Nineth Montenegro, a GAM leader, stated that the majority of those "disappeared" were victims of paramilitary violence.[60] By 1986, GAM emerged as an internationally-recognized human-rights group fighting for the "renewal of hope and the inspiration to persevere."[61] Global recognition of GAM's important work inspired the British House of Commons to issue an October 1985 petition to the Nobel committee in recognition of its hard work under oppressive conditions.[62] Much like the CUC, GAM grew into an international voice, spreading news of native hardships. Although both organizations contained native and *ladino* members, indigenous participation within these groups flourished amidst the growing conflict of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

GAM's struggle to locate the thousands of disappeared remains a remarkable achievement. In 1980, the Catholic Church publicly stated that it could not form a human-rights body due to right-wing assassination attempts. Furthermore, the threat of reprisal forced the Guatemalan Commission for Human Rights to operate in Mexico after the former head was gunned down in 1980. The GAM was seen as a threat to the conservative elite despite its status as a human-rights organization. On March 15, 1985,

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[60] Ricardo Cardona, "GAM pone condiciones" (includes a quote from Nineth Montenegro), *Prensa Libre*, November 2, 1985. GAM leadership publicly denounced the government, calling it culpable in the disapearence of Guatemalan citizens.

[61] Catholic Institute for International Relations [hereafter CIIR], "Press Release: Guatemalan Human Rights Group Nominated for Nobel Prize by British Mps," February 10, 1986, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 1, 01.01.01.

[62] House of Commons, "Letter to Nobel Committee," October, 1985, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 1, 01.01.01.

General Mejía Victores stated that GAM participants "are members of a pressure group, managed and directed by subversion, who are causing problems in Guatemala."[63] Following the general's statement, military death squads began targeting GAM members. Unlike the CUC and guerrilla factions, GAM maintained a non-violent/passive stance while still supporting the left. Despite GAM's peaceful position, the right murdered two GAM leaders. Hector Gomez's desecrated body was discovered with his tongue removed. Soon after, officials discovered the body of Rosario Godoy along with her brother and two-year old child.[64] In the months leading up to the civilian government of Vinicio Cerezo, inaugurated on January 14, 1986, GAM members obtained a forum with General Mejía Victores who denied the human-rights violations, but finally admitted to the existence of the *desaparecidos*.[65] This admission brought a small victory to both *ladino* and indigenous people who suffered the kidnapping of loved ones. While the abuses of the right continued, the Guatemalan government finally acknowledged the disappearance of opposition leaders.

As the extreme violence of the Lucas García, Ríos Montt and Mejía Victores dictatorships came to an end, the crucial and dangerous work of GAM continued through the civilian phase of the civil war. A small group of indigenous women in 1984 created an organization that evolved, within the space of two years, into the most prominent

[63] Chris Corry, "International Fellowship of Reconciliation: GAM Report" (includes a quote from General Mejía Victores), December 1985, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 1, 01.01.01, 18-19.

[64] House of Commons, "Letter to Nobel Committee," October, 1985, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 1, 01.01.01. Right-wing para-military death squads targeted GAM leadership in an attempt to terrorize the human rights organization into going underground or fleeing the country in exile. Right wing attacks had all but eliminated domestic human rights agencies from operating.

[65] Chris Corry, "International Fellowship of Reconciliation: GAM Report," December 1985, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 1, 01.01.01, 18-19.

human-rights advocate within Guatemala. Members risked their lives and their families to fight against the tyranny and repression of the political right, thereby sealing their place within the broader, popular-left movement and the larger indigenous struggle within Guatemala. Native support of the guerrilla conflict as well as leftist organizations like the GAM helped lay the seeds of indigenous grassroots organization.

Popular Left Indigenous Organization

Indigenous involvement within the Popular Left spawned independent activists to form separate native organizations. While groups like the CUC and GAM served broad needs such as labor and human rights, indigenous organizations sought to address specific cultural and social grievances among the Maya. Native activism developed amongst regional and national groups like Movimiento Indio, Organización India de Autodefensa (OIDAD), and the Comité Campesino del Altiplano (CCDA) organized between 1982 and 1984. These groups formed after the worst period of subjugation during the Ríos Montt administration. Indigenous activists, influenced partly by the guerrillas and the CUC, organized on their own initiative. The guerrilla fronts and the CUC spread a leftist ideology that inspired the Maya to mobilize for greater indigenous rights.

The Movimiento Indio formed to protest the failures of the modern state. Despite the leadership change and the removal of Ríos Montt in 1983, the Guatemalan government continued to "fail the indigenous population politically, socially and culturally."[66] The

[66] Movimiento Indio, "Planteamientos del Movimiento Indio de Guatemala," August 1983, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 132, 11.02.07, 3.

movement claimed that the state's abuse of native rights closely resembled that of the colonial period. Movimiento Indio's slogan, "By improving our ancestral cultural legacy we improve our authentic place within the nation," illustrates how grassroots indigenous activism shifted towards a direct Mayan agenda, unlike the broader methods of the CUC and GAM.[67] Fernando Pop, a native activist, states that the indigenous platform attacked the "ladinoization of indigenous culture within Guatemala."[68] Using grassroots tactics the movement sought to educate and mobilize all indigenous communities, overcoming ethnic divisions.[69] Pamphlets provided reports on massacres and repressive government policies. A January 1983 pamphlet depicts Ríos Montt crowning an indigenous peasant for tourists while lobbing grenades.[70] The Guatemalan government and *ladino* society in general held a double standard for the Mayan people. On one side, idyllic Mayan traditions and dress helped generate tourism revenue, while on the other the indigenous culture was perceived as backward and a hindrance to progress. Images like these helped spread the message among non-Spanish reading natives.

The ever-present struggle for land continued to be a point of contention among indigenous groups. The Movimiento Indio turned towards the past to justify an

[67] Ibid.

[68] Fernando Pop, "Como extraños en su propia tierra," *Mayalan*, September 9, 1985, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 132, 11.02.07, 2.

[69] Jonas, *The Battle for Guatemala*, 111.

[70] Movimiento Indio, "Guatemala," January 1983, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 132, 11.02.07, 8.

indigenous land reform, arguing that the Maya were the first true settlers.[71] Movement leaders sought to protect agrarian society and halt the *ladinoización* of indigenous culture.[72] Even so, the Movimiento Indio understood the broader struggle ahead for the native population, declaring solidarity with both guerrillas and Popular Left organizations. When the conflict shifted to the rural countryside in 1970s, guerrilla leaders recognized the need to align with the native population. Likewise the leadership of the Movimiento Indio recognized a need to support the left. Teamwork and solidarity would better the chances for both the disenfranchised indigenous and *ladino*.

The Comité Campesino del Altiplano formed as an indigenous organization following positive interaction with the FAR and highland communities in 1982. While the group rejected the armed tactics of the guerrilla conflict, the counterinsurgency atmosphere forced the CCDA to remain underground through the 1980s. The CCDA organized to fight for indigenous labor and land rights and the preservation of native culture. The CCDA explained that indigenous participation within the popular movement carries "great importance and enormous significance."[73] The integration of the indigenous population into the broader revolutionary struggle served groups like the CCDA, as well as *ladino* organizations. The CCDA rallied against military massacres and the forced recruitment of rural *campesinos* into civil patrols. While addressing broad social

[71] Movimiento Indio, "Planteamientos del Movimiento Indio de Guatemala," August 1983, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 132, 11.02.07, 5. The organization argued that five centuries of elite domination had robbed the Maya of their rightful property.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Comite Campesino del Altiplano [here after CCDA], "Germina otra esperanza," September 1982, CIRMA, Payeras-Colom colección, Signatura 3, Document 76.

grievances, the organization still promoted indigenous rights, raising awareness regarding the mistreatment of the highland communities.[74]

Finally, Organización India de Autodefensa recognized the platforms of Movimiento Indio and the CCDA, but also the necessity to join together as an indigenous body. The OIDA defended native rights based upon the idea that the Maya suffered 500 years of "subjugation."[75] Specifically, OIDA fought for indigenous refugees and exiles and the liberation of native communities. However, OIDA took on a Pan-Mayan perspective, calling for solidarity amongst all indigenous.[76] This Mayanist idea from the early 1980s remains a key aspect of the current Pan-Maya movement's struggle to unite the large and often-fractionalized indigenous population into a single political force. Solidarity remains a crucial aspect of the struggle. The expansion of grassroots organization following the extreme violence of the 1970's and early 1980s helped strengthen the indigenous position within Guatemala as the civil conflict continued.

Conclusion

Although initially the civil war began as a *ladino*-intellectual Marxist movement, it evolved as the guerrilla insurgency shifted to the rural countryside, thereby incorporating the indigenous population. From the perspective of the Guatemalan elite and the Reagan

[74] Ibid., 76.

[75] Organización India de Autodefensa "Manifesto internacional n2," December 1983, CIRMA, Payeras-Colom colección, Signatura 3, Documento 77.

[76] Ibid., 4.

administration, the Popular Left was nothing more than a Marxist plot carried out by domestic and foreign subversives. In reality, the Popular Left remained a complex web of special interests, all working in unison, building an atmosphere for revolutionary change and the return of a popular democratic government. While Robert Carmack's *Rebels of Highland Guatemala* illustrates a long history of indigenous activism, it is difficult not to see an eruption of indigenous participation in the 1970s and 1980s.[77] I agree with Carmack in that the native population of Guatemala has not been a passive victim of colonization and the nation-state. I also find that social and military repression amidst the backdrop of a civil conflict prompted an extraordinary reaction by the native population. The resulting growth of indigenous cooperation and involvement with the left created the underpinnings of a native movement fighting for social and cultural rights.

Ultimately the combination of military repression directed towards the perceived Mayan sympathizers, coupled with the growth of Popular Left influence, advanced indigenous mobilization within Guatemala. The influx of native activism during the late 1970s through 1986 pushed beyond the pseudo-return of civilian democracy in 1986. Influenced by the Popular Left, and supported by an international community, Mayan activists worked towards greater ethnic unity and rights within the nation-state. As the civil war entered the civilian presidency phase from 1986-1996, the native movement grew, ultimately influencing a separate Indigenous Rights Accord within the finalized peace agreement.

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[77] Carmack, *Rebels of Highland Guatemala*.

Chapter 3:
Struggle for Peace and Place: The Growth of Guatemalan Grassroots Indigenous Activism 1986-1996

Introduction

In January of 1986, Guatemala returned to democracy with the election of Vinicio Cerezo. Although the military ceded power to a "democratically" elected president, Cerezo was a conservative whom the army could manipulate behind the scenes. The Guatemalan military succeeded in preventing a guerrilla takeover by the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG); however, it failed to eradicate the growing political strength of the Popular Left.[1] Once Guatemala shifted to a quasi-democracy in 1986, efforts to mediate a settlement between the guerrilla factions and the government increased. Peace talks began in the late 1980s and continued into the 1990s until a final document ended the war in 1996. Despite the arduous debate, the process ultimately brought a measure of victory for Guatemala's large indigenous population.

Susanne Jonas' *Of Centaurs and Doves: Guatemala's Peace Process* (2000) looks at the negotiations that ended the 36-year civil war.[2] Her account illustrates the fundamental role of the URNG in finalizing a peace agreement. While Jonas examines the peace process from a multidimensional perspective that includes the Cold War, human rights, and developmental challenges, I find the growth of indigenous activism between 1986

[1] David Stoll, *Between Two Armies in the Ixil Towns of Guatemala* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1993), 110.

[2] Jonas, *Of Centaurs and Doves.*

and 1996 to be the key factor. It is during the period the Guatemala shifts from military rule to civilian democracy. Ultimately, the protracted conflict and stalemate forced the URNG and the government to enter peace talks. However, the indigenous mobilization Jonas touches upon forced a Mayan agenda into the political discourse. The previous chapter focused on the growth of the Popular Left and the rise of indigenous activism during the late 1970s and early 1980s. It is this development that drove the Maya to organize and assert their political and cultural position within Guatemala from 1986 to 1996, obtaining recognition in the final UN Peace Agreement.

Independent native organizations and cooperation with the Popular Left grew during this period as the URNG and the government worked toward a settlement. While the URNG supported indigenous rights, the mobilization of activists supporting a pro-indigenous agenda empowered the Maya. Furthermore, the international community championed Guatemala's Maya, as awareness intensified. It is the cooperative effort among the Popular Left, grassroots indigenous activism and global organizations that created an atmosphere in which a Pan-Maya agenda succeeded in forcing the state to address native rights.

As Guatemala transitioned to civilian democracy, the indigenous population continued to bear the brunt of the protracted conflict. Native communities rallied against the government, denouncing the forced conscription of the indigenous into civil patrols. Furthermore, solidarity with the URNG intensified as more indigenous communities and organizations stood behind a leftist/pro-indigenous agenda. Older unions such as the

Comité de Unidad Campesina (CUC) grew stronger, as indigenous land and labor rights entered the political discourse of the civilian government, while international support, aided in part by Nobel laureate Rigoberta Menchú, strengthened the native lobbying position.[3] Finally, numerous grassroots organizations solidified the Mayan voices at the local and regional level and projected them on the national scene.

The peace agreement remained a pinnacle achievement for indigenous activism in Guatemala and throughout the world. Hundreds of local, regional, and national groups fought for and achieved the groundwork for basic rights within the nation-state. As indigenous activism grew from 1986-1996, the native position within Guatemala expanded. The collaboration between the Maya and the left solidified a strong indigenous position within the peace process. The primary objectives of the indigenous community remained an end to violent repression conducted by the military, elimination of civil patrols and improvement of land, labor, and cultural rights.

PAC: Right-Wing Attack of the Maya

Although Guatemala returned to civilian democracy in 1986, conscription into civil patrols continued, forcing 1 million primarily indigenous people to support the government's campaign against the guerrillas. As the URNG struggled against the military, the indigenous population suffered twofold, targeted by paramilitary death squads and forced to serve in civil patrols.

[3] Montejo, *Mayan Intellectual Renaissance*, 88.

In 1982, the military created a program called *Patrullas de Defensa Civil* (PAC). Patrols of armed civilians made defensive rounds every ten days around the rural villages that served as their base. While the government claimed participation in this program remained strictly voluntary, human rights reports proved otherwise.[4] In reality, the military pressured the vast majority of those serving in the PAC to join. If villagers refused to enlist, the military perceived them to be subversive targets. A narrative recorded in 1986 from an anonymous peasant of Chichicastenango, illustrates the coercion:

> The civil patrol in Chichicastenango began as an order from the local army commander. We were all called together for a big meeting in a field; there was no way you could not attend – if you didn't show up, your name was put on a list. I was sick that day but I went anyway.
> The commander talked to us. He said, "There are only two things I want you to say. First, do you agree to stop burning trucks and buildings and painting walls?" And the people said, "Yes!" And second, do you agree to defend Guatemala?" The people said yes again. "We have to get rid of all these subversives," he said. "The truth is that among you there are subversives. If you don't want to be kidnapped tomorrow, form your group." The commander also said, "I know that some of you are still involved in guerrilla fighting. So let's join forces and together we will save Guatemala because we (the army) cannot do it alone." The people said that they would "stop doing these things" and that they would defend Guatemala because they knew that if they didn't say "yes, yes," they would be seen as subversives.[5]

The indigenous communities had a long tradition of defensive patrols. Leaders of Mayan communities had organized local civil defense units, independent of both the military and government throughout the twentieth-century. The patrols were formed for the safety and well-being of the community, in contrast to those created by PAC, which functioned

[4] REMHI, *Guatemala: Never Again!*, 120.

[5] The Americas Watch Committee, *Civil Patrols in Guatemala* (New York: The Americas Watch Committee, 1986), 22. The testimony of an anonymous Chichicastenango peasant.

as part of a defense plan for the Guatemalan military.[6] The civil patrols had three objectives defined by the military's Campaign Plan Victoria 82:[7]

1. Deny subversives access to the population, which constitutes its socio-political support;
2. Recover individuals from the local Irregular Forces (FIL), neutralizing or eliminating those who do not want to return to normal life;
3. Eliminate Permanent Military Units (UMP) [army field patrols].[8]

The ranks of the civil patrols swelled to over one million served during the course of the civil war and peace negotiations.[9] Many times, PAC members armed themselves with little more than a machete or wooden pole. The patrollers often carried weapons that they had personally supplied or those that the military required them to buy from old surplus arsenals. Poorly armed indigenous civil guards acted as "cannon fodder" for the military, battling relatively well equipped and trained guerrillas.[10]

The military controlled the indigenous communities through fear and use of ethnic divisions. Officers were always *ladino*. Highly skilled combat troops were, for the most

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[6] Ibid., 14.

[7] Virgina Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit: Guatemala under General Efraín Ríos Montt, 1982-1983* (London: Oxford University Press, 2010), 86. Campaign Plan "Victoria 82" was part of a military plan issued during the rule of Efraín Ríos Montt. It used "seek and destroy" tactics to wipe out possible guerrilla supporters.

[8] The Americas Watch Committee, *Civil Patrols in Guatemala*, 20.

[9] REMHI, *Guatemala: Never Again!*, 119. During the Ríos Montt years (1982-1983) the Civil Patrol peaked at 900,000 active patrollers, with participation shrinking to 375,000 by the program's termination in 1995.

[10] The Americas Watch Committee, *Civil Patrols in Guatemala*, 2.

part *ladino*, and the majority of the foot soldiers were indigenous. The military stationed indigenous soldiers in areas of different ethnic identity. With twenty-two different ethnic distinctions between Guatemala's indigenous peoples, it proved easy to station foot soldiers in unfamiliar areas where they had no ties.[11] This placement allowed for easier manipulation of soldiers and their indoctrination in the brutalities of war. Despite the divisive military tactics, opposition to the PAC became a key aspect of indigenous activism between 1986 and 1996. While the military sought to divide and conquer, the Popular Left and Mayan groups hoped to unite behind a common identity.

For the indigenous communities and their supporters, the PAC remained a violation of basic human rights. Organizations attempted to draw national and international attention to the government's discriminatory practices regarding indigenous rights and the formation of civil patrols. In a joint effort, seventeen indigenous *campesinos* belonging to the CUC and the Coordinadora Nacional de Viudas de Guatemala (CONAVIGUA) peacefully occupied the Guatemalan office of the Organization of American States (OAS) in 1993. This action brought international awareness. Garnering global attention, these indigenous activists spoke out against a variety of injustices; however, their repeated condemnation of the PAC illustrated a fundamental grievance. Protesters asked the OAS and the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights to act on their behalf and place pressure on the government to close the PAC program.[12] International awareness

[11] Richard Wilson, *Maya Resurgence in Guatemala: Q'eqchi' Experiences* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 223.

[12] Comité de Unidad Campesina [hereafter CUC] and Coordinadora Nacional de Viudas de Guatetemala [hereafter CONAVIGUA], "Comunicado de los ocupantes de la sede de la OEA en Guatemala," November 2, 1993, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 4, 1.02.01

regarding human rights became a key point of the Pan-Maya struggle as more organizations identified the Guatemalan military and government as being culpable.

The Comisión de Derechos Humanos de Central America (CODEHUCA), a Costa Rican-based agency, urged greater respect for human rights. A May 1993 document outlining the "Mayan situation" illustrated the past abuse and mistreatment of the indigenous population. The organization questioned how the Guatemalan government could continue forced conscription into the PAC, the same year a Mayan woman won the Nobel Peace Prize for humanitarian work.[13] While activism blossomed regarding the PAC and human rights, a broader Pan-Mayan struggle emerged as the guerrilla movement shifted toward peace talks, highlighting the important role of the indigenous population

The URNG & The Growing Significance of the Maya

By 1986 the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca proved incapable of winning an armed victory against the government. With nearly 35,000 soldiers, supported by thousands of PAC members, the military effectively limited the guerrilla offensive.[14] Nonetheless, the armed forces proved incapable of annihilating the insurgency and its supporters. The success of the URNG remained its ability to avoid defeat, provoke skirmishes, and to conduct sabotage operations, all of which forced the military into a stalemate. Ultimately, the URNG won concessions within the peace agreement that

[13] CODEHUCA-Manuela Alvarado Lopez, "Ayer hoy y mañana de la situación de los mayas y la nación Guatemalteca," CODEHUCA Bulletin, May 1993, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 129, 11.02.04

[14] REMHI, *Guatemala: Never Again!*, 119.

paralleled the goals of indigenous organizations. By December 1996, the Marxist forces of the 1960s and 1970s evolved into an inclusive social movement that addressed land reform, ethnic rights, and political improvements. Through the United Nations, the URNG brokered peace with the Guatemalan government, including a variety of accords addressing social, political, and ethnic conditions. The influx of indigenous participation between 1986 and 1996 created an atmosphere conducive to change both within the Popular Left and Guatemala, propelling the Pan-Maya movement into the post-civil-war era.

In the early 1980s an indigenous platform within the guerrilla movement was emerging. In a May 1982 document, "La Crisis de Poder y la Guerra Popular Revolucionaria," the URNG exposed a class-based agenda arguing that elite society dominated the economic and political apparatus holding the majority of Guatemalans in a subordinate position.[15] When the document was written, the indigenous suffering intensified as counterinsurgency campaigns targeted potential native supporters of the guerrilla campaign. Subsequent URNG documents illustrated the growing importance of native rights within the organization. In a 1985 pamphlet, the URNG identifies "equality and the struggle against discrimination and cultural oppression of the indigenous" as a specific goal.[16]

[15] URNG, "Guatemala: la crisis de poder y la guerra popular revolucionaria," May 1982, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 138 12.01.07, 2-10.

[16] URNG, "A; pueblo de Guatemala," September 1985, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 138 12.01.07, 7.

A 1989 bulletin further revealed evidence of an ideological shift, as the URNG paid homage to the Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo (PGT) for its forty years of revolutionary struggle. The original urban labor-based PGT was disconnected from indigenous society, while the new PGT reflected the inclusive aims of the URNG. By the late 1980s, the PGT supported the rural labor struggle of the Comité de Unidad Campesina (CUC), bridging the gap between leftist urban workers and millions of rural Maya.[17] Evolving political and social conditions brought the Popular Left and indigenous communities closer as new avenues of discourse emerged.

With the guerrilla offensive blocked by military operations, the URNG sought alternative methods for bolstering the revolutionary struggle. On May 22, 1987, the URNG began broadcasting the radio program *La Voz Popular* from the Tajumulco volcano in the department of San Marcos. The primary goals of *La Voz* were to reveal human rights violations, show solidarity with struggling organizations, express popular demands, encourage peace, and most significantly, defend the rights of the Maya.[18] The transmissions were broadcast in Spanish and in indigenous languages, illustrating the impact of native communities on the left and vice versa. By broadcasting a portion of guerrilla transmissions in native languages, the URNG demonstrated its commitment to include the Mayan populace and support indigenous civilian organizations struggling against the government.[19] Often, it would update listeners on pertinent social and

[17] URNG, "Cuarenta años de lucha por la revolución," *Prensa Libre*, October 11, 1989.

[18] URNG, "The Popular Voice: An Alternative Radio Station," September 11, 1992, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 148 12.03.01. English language mission statement pamphlet.

[19] Ibid.

political information beyond traditional guerrilla propaganda. In a September 9, 1987 broadcast, the radio put forth CUC accusations that the military had arrested six men, eight women, and ten children in the Quiché area.[20] Then, on November 11, 1988, *La Voz* broadcast the arrest of two youth members of the Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (GAM), the prominent human-rights agency. "Popular Left" communication proved important as news of the arrests brought a swift public demonstration in the capital, denouncing the actions of the military and civil patrols.[21] Uncensored leftist broadcasts provided an opportunity to facilitate mass mobilization among the indigenous population, heightening its ability to challenge the government.

As the peace process progressed in the early 1990s, the URNG continued its campaign in support of indigenous rights. In a June 1991 bulletin, the URNG argued that indigenous Guatemalans "do not have a real or representative space within national life as dictated by the 1985 constitution."[22] The URNG had shifted its class-based ideology to include a Mayan social agenda that recognized the 500-year indigenous struggle.

In an effort to push peace forward, the URNG and the Guatemalan government sought United Nations assistance. UN Secretary-General Butros Butros-Ghali sent a document to the URNG, complementing the group on its efforts but urging the command to expedite peace talks, as negotiations over indigenous rights stalled in December of

[20] URNG, "Radio Voz Popular," September 9, 1987, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 148 12.03.01, 10.

[21] URNG, "La Voz," December 1988, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 138 12.01.07 [Transcripts from the clandestine URNG radio broadcasts]

[22] URNG, "URNG: Guatemala," June 1991, No.2, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 138 12.01.07, 6.

1994.[23] The final document took years of dialogue, with indigenous rights remaining a primary component. URNG analyst Francisco Villagran believed that the resurgence of leftist activism in the 1990s proved an important political tool while negotiating. He argued that the military's post-war plans centered on a conservative democracy that maintained a divided society, while the URNG championed land reform and indigenous rights.[24]

Ultimately, during the protracted conflict and peace negotiations, the URNG further incorporated the desires of the indigenous population within its platform. Cooperation and solidarity with Popular Left organizations strengthened the URNG and its ties to the indigenous community. Clandestine broadcasts and leaflets often used indigenous languages, a communication policy not implemented by the Guatemalan government until after the signing of the 1996 peace agreement. In 1991, the URNG dialogue declared: "Without the participation of the indigenous community, there can be no democracy."[25] In a 1991 interview with *La Jornada*, a Mexican newspaper, Commander Pablo Mosanto stated that the indigenous comprised 70 percent of the URNG social base.[26] The strength of the Maya movement grew as the class-based revolution evolved into a socio-ethnic struggle. The URNG represented an armed political struggle that

[23] Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Letter to the URNG Comandancia, December 22, 1994, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 138 12.01.06.

[24] The Monitoring Update, "The Return of the Guatemalan Refugees" (includes a quote from Francisco Villagran), October 20, 1994, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 138 12.01.06, 4.

[25] URNG, "Negociación, batalla por la democracia," June 1991, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 138 12.01.07, 6.

[26] Pablo Mosanto, *La Jornada*, July 24, 1991, 37.

sought support and solidarity among the rural Maya. Both the URNG and the Popular Left incorporated a pro-indigenous agenda into grassroots mobilization.

CUC: The Loud Voice of the Rural Maya

Since the founding of the CUC in 1978, the largely indigenous rural labor union maintained an active role in Guatemala. Its primary goal remained the protection of workers' rights and land reform in a nation whose social welfare record remained precarious since the colonial period. The CUC's membership grew after the 1980 Spanish Embassy massacre, uniting both *ladino* and indigenous *campesinos*.[27] Following Guatemala's return to civilian democracy in 1986, the CUC continued its efforts as an inclusive labor union. Despite its efforts, the battle for justice against the government remained arduous. The CUC circulated uncensored news, supported workers rights, and staged mass rallies amid the backdrop of conservative political repression. As the CUC membership grew, the union empowered its large indigenous support base through knowledge and advocacy, ultimately helping spawn independent indigenous activism.

In a September 1986 CUC bulletin, nearly seven months after Guatemala returned to democracy, reports of military repression of native communities remained high. In Ixcán, within the Quiché Department, military activity involving infantry troops and the Guatemalan air force (La Fuerza Aérea Guatemalteca –FAG) continued an assassination

[27] Greg Grandin, *The Blood of Guatemala: A History of Race and Nation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 224. Following the embassy fire, the CUC mobilized indigenous groups at Iximché in a rally promoting Pan-Mayanism.

and terror campaign to control the indigenous *campesinos*. On July 14 and 15, the army operating in this region captured twenty-five, killed seven and destroyed 800 acres of cultivated land.[28] A FAG follow-up attack occurred on August 16, when a helicopter and A-37 plane launched twenty rockets against a "peaceful group of agricultural laborers." In support of this air attack, infantry proceeded into the Ixcán region, destroying houses.[29] Attacks such as these propelled the CUC to mobilize indigenous communities and protest the military violence. A 1990 bulletin illustrated the continued atrocities, this time directed toward the Tz'utujil Maya of Santiago, Atitlan. Having survived the vicious military campaign of the early 1980s, this small indigenous lakeside community again felt the force of repression. In December 1990, the army without provocation killed eleven men, women and children, while injuring another twenty. Like *La Voz,* constant CUC bulletins and rallies spread news of abuse during a time when right-wing periodicals rarely covered "sanctioned" military attacks.[30] The CUC's efforts effectively raised awareness among the rural indigenous population regarding atrocities. Serving as a national advocate, the CUC continued its campaign of workers' rights, labor reform, and social justice.

The rural Maya suffered low wages and unsafe working conditions within the agricultural sector. In 1988 most plantations continued to control and manipulate workers' rights.[31]

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[28] CUC, "Comunicado," September 1986, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 4, 1.02.01.

[29] Ibid.

[30] CUC, "La verdad de la nueva masacre contra hermanos campesinos de la etnia Tzutuhil en Santiago Atitlan: Nadie la puede esconder," December 3, 1990, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 4, 1.02.01.

[31] CUC, February 11, 1989, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 4, 1.02.01.

The CUC demanded a new wage increase of 10 quetzals a day for one ton of sugar cane cut, 100 pounds of cotton or coffee picked, and for a nine-hour workday.[32] On January 23, 1989, the CUC in conjunction with La Unidad de Acción Sindical y Popular (USAP) formed a mass protest "paralyzing" fifteen plantations.[33] The CUC educated the rural proletariat to strengthen its position. Using caricature pamphlets, the CUC illustrated a scene of a frowning Mayan *campesina* staring at rising prices of food commodities needed to feed her family.[34] The efforts of the CUC were vindicated when the nation's largest paper, *Prensa Libre* covered a CUC and USAP protest over skyrocketing costs.[35] As the 1980s came to a close, the CUC expanded its position by turning toward the international community and continuing large scale protest amid the backdrop of peace negotiations.

The CUC intensified its efforts, turning the *campesino* struggle into a global fight. The organization asked for international donations that could support its work, along with letters of solidarity to the Guatemalan president and large plantation owners.[36] Future Nobel laureate Rigoberta Menchú brought credibility as a CUC committee chair working abroad, raising awareness, and creating a global support base.[37] A highlight of the

[32] Ibid. Ten Quetzales a day represented a wage increase of between US $0.30 to $0.50 per day.

[33] Ibid.

[34] CUC, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 4, 1.02.01. CUC propaganda document depicting caricatures of the everyday hardships faced by Guatemala's indigenous people (circa 1980s).

[35] CUC, February 11, 1989, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 4, 1.02.01.

[36] CUC, "Urgent Campaign of Solidarity for a Just Wage," December 13, 1988, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 4, 1.02.01.

[37] CUC, "Solidarity letter," January 10, 1990, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 4, 1.02.01.

CUC's organizational success was a 267-kilometer march beginning April 23, 1992, in Huehuetenango, a remote northwestern enclave of the country. Spanning a week, the protest march arrived in Guatemala City on May 1 (International Workers Day), supporting social and economic justice.[38] Along the nine-day route, more than 100,000 participants, including indigenous from many ethnic backgrounds, joined various stages of the march. On May 1, 8,000 CUC members entered the capital with as many as 500,000 supporters joining in the peaceful protest of government policies. The group's demands seemed modest in retrospect, calling for land distribution, revision of the sales tax, a just salary, the right to organize, and an end to civil patrols, all crucial to the native population supporting the CUC.[39] By 1992, the CUC membership had grown immensely. What was once a small, isolated highland activist group had grown into an enormous labor/political force that stretched throughout Guatemala and contained an international arm that obtained solidarity and financial aid.

The military and conservative government initially took a hardline position regarding the growth of the CUC. Following the mass mobilization leading up to the Workers Day protest in Guatemala City, the Minister of Defense, General José Domingo Garciá Samayoa, publicly called the CUC a "political arm of the URNG."[40]
However, through the steadfast work of the CUC, by October of 1992, the government legitimized the organization as a legal body operating within Guatemala, quite different

[38] "Desfile obrero campesino por día internacional del trabajo," *Siglo XXI ,* May 1, 1992.

[39] CUC, "Boletin Informativo" June 1992, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 4, 1.02.01.

[40]Walter Hermosilla, "La marcha del 1 de Mayo evidenció la presencia campesina en las organizaciones populares" (includes a quote from José Domingo Garciá Samayoa), *El Gráfico*, May 2, 1992.

from the insurgent URNG. The sheer size of the CUC, over one million strong drawing from indigenous communities throughout Guatemala, represented a clear threat to the political oligarchy. To label the CUC the same as the URNG gave too much legitimacy to the guerrillas and not enough to the indigenous support base. As such, on October 5, 1992, President Serrano recognized the "peaceful" nature of the march and stated that the workers union was not a vehicle of the URNG.[41]

As the insurgency campaign gave way to peace talks ending in the 1996 agreement, the CUC flexed its muscles. The union carried out enormous protests and work stoppages in its quest for social justice. Acting independently of the URNG, the CUC nonetheless shared a leftist ideology in the fight for reform and equality among workers. As such, the largely indigenous organization served as a powerful voice of the Mayan *campesino*. The CUC overcame ethnic divisions within Mayan communities serving as a bridge fighting for land and labor reform. As the rural insurgency stabilized, international concern for native rights gained momentum.

Rigoberta Menchú and the International Community

Rigoberta Menchú remains the most identifiable Guatemalan in the world. Born in the Quiché department in 1958, she was raised within the Mayan highland community of Uspantan. Her father, a founding member of the CUC, became a martyr of the

[41] "Presidente Serrano" (includes a quote from President Serrano), *El Gráfico*, October 5, 1992. President Jorge Serrano Elías addressed the government's position on the CUC.

peasant/indigenous movement when he, along with twenty-two other CUC members, died in the 1980 burning of the Spanish Embassy in Guatemala City.[42] Rigoberta herself became a political activist, joining the 31st of January Popular Front, named in honor of the embassy massacre. In 1982, after she was forced to flee Guatemala, she traveled to Europe where there were a growing number of sympathizers. While abroad, her story was recorded, translated and later published. Her book, *I Rigoberta Menchú*, raised global awareness regarding Guatemala's indigenous and enabled her to conduct a campaign of human rights work.[43] Despite controversy over her story, Rigoberta fought for indigenous civil liberties in Guatemala and an end to the civil war.[44]

While abroad, she discussed the Guatemalan situation with academics and politicians alike. Greater awareness of indigenous issues developed as a result of her book and her charisma. The plight of the Guatemalan Maya became a global issue as indigenous leaders turned toward the international community for assistance in ending the civil conflict and in raising support for native activism. In 1982, the international community rewarded her with the Nobel Peace Prize, the first such honor for an indigenous person. Using the money from her prize and lectures, Rigoberta set up the Menchú Foundation

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[42] Anders Riis-Hansen, "Commission for the Defense of Human Rights" CODEHUCA, February 3, 1995, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 4, 1.02.01.

[43] Menchú, *I Rigoberta Menchú*, *XI*.

[44] In 1999, David Stoll, an American anthropologist published his work, *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of all Poor Guatemalans* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999). It was an investigative critique of Rigoberta Menchú's 1984 story *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*. Stoll's research uncovered inconstancies in Rigoberta's story. Almost immediately disputes erupted among academics, with most defending Menchú. While some facts have been disproven, academics supporting Menchú reiterate the overall message of native persecution within Guatemala. Indigenous oral traditions and methods of remembrance contribute to some of Menchú's inconsistencies. Rigoberta's work as an indigenous activist won her the Nobel Prize, not the 1984 publication of her story.

and expanded her role in fighting for indigenous rights in Guatemala and throughout the Americas. Her work spawned discourse and conferences regarding indigenous people in Guatemala, aiding the position of the Mayan movement within the national political framework.

International support swelled in response to reports of gross human-rights violations with thousands of aid workers, investigators, journalists, and volunteers traveling to the troubled nation, further documenting the injustices that affected the native majority. The Guatemala Working Group, based in London, publicized some of these reports. In its English-language newsletters, it spread news regarding the work and tragedies of Guatemalan organizations, like the CUC, Comité de Unidad Sindical (CNUS), and GAM.[45] While organizations like the Working Group sought to raise awareness, others took a hands-on approach. Peace Brigades International (PBI), provided international observers as deterrents to paramilitary groups. Operating in Guatemala since 1985, brigade members served as escorts for GAM members.[46] As GAM was the only human rights agency operating within Guatemala, its workers remained a primary target of the death squads. Chris Corry recounts her time working for PBI in letters sent home and later published:

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[45] Guatemala Working Group, "Guatemala-Update," November 1985, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 4, 1.02.01.

[46] Stoll, *Between Two Armies in the Ixil Towns of Guatemala*, 298-299; James Painter, *Guatemala: False Hope False Freedom* (London: Catholic Institute for International Relations, 1989), 90-91. GAM during the worst years of the conflict remained the only Guatemalan human rights organization operating in Guatemala. Other agencies were forced to flee into exile due to extreme military pressure and threat of assassination. GAM itself had two of its key leaders assassinated in 1987, but continued to work to uncover the truth regarding disappeared loved ones and fight against political persecution conducted by the right during the long conflict.

> Basically, we have 24 escorts for Nineth and Isabel (the two surviving founders of GAM) and sporadic escorts for some of the other leaders who are heavily surveyed (by men in unmarked cars outside their houses, for instance) or threatened. An escort usually stays for two or three days with his or her "friend" and tries to keep out of the way as much as possible so that they can live normal lives. The escort sits facing the entrance of all restaurants, walks on the road side of the sidewalk, and watches as her "friend" answers the door. [47]

Furthermore, large international organizations such as Amnesty International and America's Watch sent observers to document the atrocities taking place in Guatemala, spreading awareness regarding the crisis. A 1985 publication by the America's Watch Committee helped circulate news on the horrors of the civil patrols, a primary point of contention for the indigenous population.[48] The committee's work documented the experiences of those natives forced to participate within the PAC, as well as atrocities that some carried out on innocent civilians under orders from the military. Likewise, the London-based Amnesty International, worked to document the Guatemalan human rights situation in a 1987 publication. The agency's study focused on the Ríos Montt years, as well as the continued human rights abuses and difficulties in the justice system.[49]

The rise of international action, propelled by the reports of human rights violations and the global attention of Rigoberta Menchú, strengthened the Mayan position between 1986 and 1996. While native organization and activism grew from the interaction with the Popular Left and the extreme violence of the late 1970s and early 1980s, heightened

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[47] Chris Corry, "Shadows in the Sunshine: Letters from Guatemala," *Reconciliation International*, February 1986, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 1, 01.01.01.v*Politicas Para La Reivindicacion De Los Mayas De Hoy: Fundamento De Los Derechos Específicos Del Pueblo Maya* (Guatemala: Seminario Permanente de Estudios Mayas, 1994)

[48] The Americas Watch Committee, *Civil Patrols in Guatemala*.

[49] Amnesty International, *Guatemala: The Human Rights Record* (London: Amnesty International, 1987).

international awareness and sympathy facilitated the growth of the Mayan movement during the peace process.

The Growth of Grassroots Cooperation and the Peace Process

As the armed conflict between the guerrillas and the military became a stalemate, a negotiated peace seemed plausible. What once began as an urban Marxist revolution in Guatemala, transformed into an opportunity for social reform throughout the country. In Guatemala, the indigenous movement, like the insurgency, unified in order to maximize its voice in the emerging peace negotiations. The result was a strong native voice within Guatemala, addressing the long-standing ethnic and social injustices affecting the Mayan people. Indigenous groups emerged to push forward a multi-ethnic agenda as the conflict drew to a close.

In 1993, La Coordinación Maya "Majawil Q'IJ" organized at the national level with a set of basic objectives. Its primary goals remained the "unification of ideas, and activism of all leading towards community and the amplified participation and promotion of indigenous music, dress, language, oral history, Mayan spirituality, and indigenous rights."[50] With the successful participation of indigenous communities in the Popular Left, as well as independent grassroots groups, native organizations merged in order to capitalize on broad indigenous initiatives. Larger organizations like the Coordinación

[50] La Coordinación Maya "Majawil Q'ij," "Ponencias de los coordinadores sobre el crecimiento de la Coordinación Maya "Majawil Q'ij," October 1996, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 127, 11.01.05, 7.

Maya worked to represent Mayan communities as a multi-ethnic whole. As a national organization, it operated in seven regions, broken down into fourteen sub-areas. These various community-based organizations worked within the parameters of education, spiritual preservation, legal defense, and women's rights. While these community-based groups sought unity among the native population at a regional and national level, the Coordinación Maya strengthened its position by using Rigoberta Menchú as an internationally recognizable symbol of the Pan-Mayan movement.[51]

In a February 1993 statement, Coordinación Maya connected Tecún Umán and Rigoberta Menchú, symbolizing the importance of Menchú and indigenous identity.[52] Tecún Umán, as legend has it, battled valiantly to expel Spanish conquerors. He died in battle, fighting to protect and preserve indigenous culture on February 20, 1524. The Coordinación described Menchú as the modern incarnation and ancestor of Tecún Umán. Menchú, having won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992, became an immediate symbol of indigenous ability to overcome and persevere. The document describes Tecún Umán as "a light, a sign, an example, a symbol of the heroic indigenous struggle defending the liberty and dignity of all indigenous people."[53] Menchú too became a symbol of resistance regarding the historical fight for land, life, and culture within Guatemala. The Coordinación Maya explained, Menchú's Nobel Peace Prize allowed many other nations

[51] La Coordinación Maya "Majawil Q'ij," "Tecún Umán y Rigoberta Menchú Tum: Conmemoremos el dia de Tecún Umán recordando las grandes batallas de nuestros pueblos por conquistar nuestra libertad," February 20, 1993, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 127, 11.01.05, 3-4.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

to feel the pain of Guatemala's indigenous people. Her victory proved a victory for all Native Americans suffering for "the last 500 years" and an inspiration for the struggle ahead.[54]

The Coordinación Maya shaped its goals around issues pertinent to the grassroots Maya focusing on gender, education, and religion. The organization sought the development of female Mayan identity through political participation. Through legal defense, the organization pursued the elimination of racial discrimination and protection of indigenous rights in Guatemala. The Mayan education initiative sought the right to teach the indigenous community in native languages rather than Spanish. The initiative also promised to raise cultural awareness regarding indigenous history outside the Mayan community. Finally, a commission of Mayan priests fought to protect native religious beliefs, as religion remained a "pillar of resistance."[55] As a national organization the Coordinación Maya represented the hopes and aspirations of local and regional Maya, regarding the future of Guatemalan indigenous rights. Efforts at the community level created a national coalition within the "Majawil Q'IJ" union, setting the stage for larger indigenous collectives.

The Coordinación de Organizaciones del Pueblo Maya de Guatemala (COPMAGUA) was formed on May 11, 1994 in an effort to enter the political discussion between the military and the URNG. COPMAGUA, like the URNG, served as an umbrella body for

[54] Ibid.

[55] La CoordinaciónMaya "Majawil Q'ij," "Ponencias de los coordinadores sobre el crecimiento de la Coordinación Maya "Majawil Q'ij," October 1996, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 127, 11.01.05, 7.

multiple organizations. COPMAGUA united five large indigenous bodies including: Instancia de Unidad y Consenso Maya (IUCM), Consejo de Organizaciones Mayas de Guatemala (COMG), Movimiento de los Abuelos Tukum Umam, Unión del Pueblo Maya de Guatemala (UPMAG), and Academia de las Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala (ALMG). These five organizations worked with many smaller community-based groups fighting for native rights. Much like the Coordinación Maya, these individual units could trace their national level work back to small grassroots movements. The body of membership struggled for a variety of indigenous liberties including: political, economic, cultural, educational, legal, spiritual, gender, health, and linguistic rights.[56] Influenced by the Popular Left and mimicking the structural body of the URNG, native organization rallied together to develop a clear indigenous position within the peace process.

COPMAGUA proved to be an inclusive organization that encompassed the hopes and ambitions of all Guatemalan indigenous, including the twenty-two Mayan ethnicities, as well as the Xinca and Garifuna peoples.[57] While the Xinca and Garifuna are not Mayan people, they accepted a place within the organization. The May 28, 1994 assembly meeting of COPAMAGUA generated the groundwork for the 1995 indigenous accord (Acuerdo Sobre Identidad y Derechos de los Pueblos Indígenas) signed by the rebel army and the Guatemalan government.[58] Topics of discussion at the peace conference included

[56] Coordinación de Organizaciones del Pueblo Maya de Guatemala [hereafter COPMAGUA], "Participación de los pueblos: Maya, Garifuna y Xinka, en la implementación del AIDPI," September 1997, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 131, 11.01.09.

[57] COPMAGUA, "Plan estrategico 1998 y necesidades de apoyo para su implementación," November 20, 1997, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 131, 11.01.09.

[58] COPMAGUA, "Comunicado de prensa," November 4, 1994, CIRMA, Signatura 131, 11.01.09.

identity, discrimination, and culture, as well as indigenous civil, political, social and economic rights. In a November 1994 press statement, COPMAGUA urged continued discussions between the URNG and the government regarding the creation of an indigenous rights accord. COPMAGUA asked that both parties recognize the indigenous fight for respect within the nation-state and that the indigenous world stand in solidarity with the Mayan people.[59] The accord symbolized a momentous achievement for the Pan-Mayan struggle, as well as the global indigenous movement. The lobbying effort of COPAMAGUA, combined with the hard work and struggle of the Popular Left, brought about real hope for the Guatemalan Maya.

The 1996 Guatemalan Peace Agreement

On December 29, 1996, the 36-year civil war came to a close as the URNG and Guatemalan government signed the final UN peace document. More than 200,000 citizens perished in the conflict. Hundreds of thousands fled into exile, and more than 1 million were displaced internally.[60] The vast majority of those affected belonged to indigenous communities that suffered as the military attempted to erode the guerrilla support base.[61] The peace agreement itself brought substantial change by ending the armed conflict, PAC operations, and military mobilization outside of army bases. While

[59] Ibid.,

[60] Jonas, *Of Centaurs and Doves,* 17.

[61] REMHI, *Guatemala: Never Again!,* 290. Following the Guatemalan Civil War, the Catholic Church, in conjunction with numerous human rights groups, formed a truth commission. After years of gathering testimony and evidence, the commission ruled that 90 percent of the atrocities committed during the war were at the hands of the military or paramilitary death squads.

these changes affected the Mayan populace, the inclusion of an indigenous rights accord symbolized a direct victory. The accord sought to restructure the place of the indigenous population in the nation. The opening statement of the accord reads: "Considering that the question of identity and rights of indigenous peoples is a vital issue of historic importance for the present and future of Guatemala… the parties [The Guatemalan government and the URNG] recognize and respect the identity and political, economic, social, and cultural rights of the Maya, Garifuna and Xinca people."[62] These words illustrate the profound change Guatemala underwent during the civil war. The overall tone of the document offered hope for the Mayan people, addressing fundamental problems previously ignored by the Guatemalan government such as social and economic discrimination.

Discrimination of the indigenous population remained an important hurdle to overcome. The Maya joined the Popular Left and formed independent organizations to combat inequality within the nation. The agreement between the rebels and the government acknowledged this desire. The accord stated: "Recognition of the identity of indigenous peoples is fundamental to the construction of a national unity based on respect for and the exercise of political, cultural, economic, and spiritual rights of all Guatemalans."[63] Furthermore, the accord recognized the nation's diversity calling it "multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multilingual in nature."[64] These striking words illustrate a clear victory for

[62] United Nations, *The Guatemalan Peace Agreement, 59.*

[63] Ibid., 61.

[64] Ibid., 59.

all indigenous, as they challenged the dominant *ladino* social structure. Amendments inside the document broached more specific topics important to the movement.

During the conflict, women's rights became a focal point of indigenous activists like Rigoberta Menchú and organizations like COPMAGUA. The amendment stated "indigenous women are particularly vulnerable and helpless, being confronted with twofold discrimination both as women and indigenous people, and also having to deal with a social situation characterized by intense poverty and exploitation."[65] The document sought to remedy past injustices by creating anti-harassment legislation and by creating an office to defend indigenous women.[66] Like gender, the divisive topic of language found a place in the accord.

Before the accord, Spanish remained the official language of the government despite over half the population employing a Mayan language for their primary communication.[67] Leading up to the peace agreement, the URNG rebels broadcast and printed news bulletins directed at the indigenous population, using Mayan languages.[68] While the state maintained the status quo, the left challenged the government's language bias. As such,

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[65] Ibid., 63.

[66] Ibid., 63.

[67] Social science researchers and accredited NGO groups have estimated that the native population of Guatemala remains far above the official figures. Research places the native population at 55 to 70 percent of the total. See: Jonas, *The Battle for Guatemala*, 1; Warren, *Indigenous Movements and Their Critics,* 5; Carmack, *Rebels of Highland Guatemala*, 3, The Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human Rights, *Persecution by Proxy*, 11; CIIR, *Guatemala: False Hope False Freedom*, *xvi*.

[68] URNG, "The Popular Voice: An Alternative Radio Station," September 11, 1992, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 148 12.03.01. [English language mission statement pamphlet]

the accord called for "the listing of all languages which the State is constitutionally required to recognize, respect, and promote."[69] The document also addressed indigenous youth, demanding the opportunity for "children to read and write in their own tongue or in the language most commonly spoken in the community to which they belong."[70] Key issues like gender and language rights were hard-won victories; economic reform required the greatest mobilization from independent indigenous activists to labor unions.

Organizations like the CUC helped strengthen the Pan-Mayan voice by rallying rural indigenous workers. The peace agreement clearly outlined objectives related to the native population, and it included a separate accord on land reform. The indigenous accord sought to address issues such as communal land restitution and legalization of untitled lands.[71] The lack of land reform in Guatemala and the effect it had on the majority of indigenous Guatemalans warranted the agrarian agreement. The document argued that in order to have a lasting peace, socio-economic development had to occur and "rural areas require an integral strategy that facilitates access by small farmers."[72] Like many academic assessments, the agrarian agreement cited broad injustice: "From the conquest to the present, historic events, often tragic, have left deep traces in ethnic,

[69] United Nations, *The Guatemalan Peace Agreements*, 65.

[70] Ibid., 65.

[71] Ibid., 77-78. While the *Agreement on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples* addressed the conflict surrounding land tenure, the URNG and the government committee recognized that land rights were more than an indigenous issue and therefore warranted a separate accord.

[72] Ibid., 65.

social and economic relations concerning property and land use."[73] The agreement focused on greater social rights, looking to secure not just indigenous rights but reform the economic injustice that affected all small-scale farmers.

Ultimately, the Guatemalan Peace Agreement and Indigenous Rights Accord served as a crowning achievement for the Pan-Maya struggle. Between 1986 and 1996, indigenous mobilization affected the agendas of the *ladino* left and right. The interaction and involvement of indigenous participants within the Popular Left, guerrilla organizations, and native grassroots movements created an atmosphere in which a pro-indigenous agenda developed among the broader revolutionary struggle. Initially topics such as human rights, land, and labor fueled participation and cooperation between the left and the indigenous communities. But as the grassroots indigenous efforts intensified and international awareness grew, cultural and ethnic rights took center stage as the government and the URNG negotiators finalized the peace accord.

Conclusions

As the military ceded some power in favor of democratic elections in 1986, a new period of indigenous activism emerged. In part, continued rural violence and the conscription of indigenous men into the PAC created a surge in native mobilization. The URNG opened a dialogue of peace as its armies fell into a stalemate and other Central American revolutions ended. Despite deep divisions, the class-based revolution evolved into a

[73] Ibid., 108.

socio-ethnic reform movement. URNG ideology shifted to include the native position addressing the long-standing inequality of the indigenous population. Grassroots organizations like the CUC paved the way for new native organizers to form coalitions. These groups consisted of smaller local and regional movements that long felt the hardships of civil unrest and centuries of elite *ladino* racial domination. Initially, the indigenous population mobilized alongside the political left. As the movement grew, independent native organizations took a distinct native agenda beyond the initial scope of the Popular Left.

Organizations created and/or dominated by the Maya like GAM, Majawil Q'ij, and COPMAGUA, propelled an indigenous voice previously suppressed by the *ladino* society. In 1980, a meeting took place at Iximché, the ancient capital of the Kaqchikel Maya. This gathering was an effort of various groups including the CUC, the Committee for Labor Unity (CNUS) formed in 1976, and the Democratic Front Against Repression (FDCR). The aim at the time remained the "unification of the peasants as a social class, independent of their Indian or Mestizo origins."[74] By the 1996 signing of the peace agreement, a significant change had occurred. The Maya, imbedded within the Popular Left, as well as independent indigenous groups, forwarded their own program centered on an ethnic agenda. The class-based distinction of the early period gave way to ethnic social reform that ultimately enabled the indigenous people of Guatemala to win acknowledgement in the peace agreement and a separate native rights accord.

[74] Alberto Fuentes Mohr, Committee for the Defense of Human Rights in Guatemala, "Declaration of Iximché," February 14, 1980, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 129, 1.02.03.

While Susanne Jonas' work, *Of Centaurs and Doves*, examines the period of peace negotiations, her study focuses on the URNG's efforts. The URNG helped to solidify a place for its indigenous supporters within the negotiated framework; however, the massive indigenous mobilization between 1986 and 1996 ensured government and URNG attention to ethnic-rights in the final peace accord. As the Guatemalan Peace Agreement became a reality in December of 1996, indigenous efforts entered a new phase filled with new challenges.

Chapter 4:
Divide and Conquer: Indigenous Disorganization and New Challenges to the Pan-Maya Movement

Introduction

1996 appeared to be a turning point for both Guatemala and the Mayan population, as the government and the URNG rebels signed the Peace Agreement and the Indigenous Rights Accord. Despite the potential goodwill generated by the pacts, the Pan-Maya movement split over ethnic versus human-rights in the post-1996 era. Observers believed the strongest position for the Pan-Maya movement was to hold a steady course, parallel with the Popular Left and encompass all disenfranchised *guatemaltecos*. While human rights advocates followed the successful 1990s model, a break with other Mayan activists occurred nonetheless. Some Pan-Mayanists argued for a stronger position centered on native rights, separate from *ladino* issues. This belief followed on the heels of indigenous activism in the late 1980s and 1990s. The split among Mayan organizations, activists, and communities, coupled with outside pressures weakened and divided the indigenous movement.

In the post-civil war era, other challenges to the Mayan movement surfaced. The native population emerged from the conflict with a plethora of local and national organizations to lobby Guatemala's elected leaders. Despite this hopeful position, the end of armed conflict ushered in a new era of tribulation. Rural and urban violence, globalization, and continued racial and social inequalities worked against the indigenous initiative since the

signing of the 1996 peace agreement. As the guerrilla community surrendered arms and the government disbanded the Patrullas de Defensa Civil, or PAC, the rise of both narco-traffickers and street gangs brought a new wave of terror to the nation. During the 1990s, Guatemala served as a prime location for the transshipment of cocaine. The high rate of corruption and a weak judicial system offered a safe haven for the multi-billion dollar business. Guatemala's lack of infrastructure and economic hardships allowed for a flourishing narcotics trade to take hold. The rise of youth gangs further exasperated the situation as *pandilleros* organized just as effectively as well-established crime syndicates. The Mayan population faced the increased threat of narco-violence as traffickers and gang members invaded rural and urban areas. While many Mayans mobilized peacefully, lobbying for protection and rights within Guatemala, some communities took a vigilante approach, thereby weakening the peace initiative. The new post-war violence and lack of government attention to social ills ultimately forced some Mayan communities to react aggressively outside the judicial system. They lost patience with the government's inability to protect them and uphold their rights.

Likewise, globalization affected the indigenous struggle. As Guatemala sought to rebuild itself following the civil conflict, new avenues of development emerged. Some indigenous farmers moved away from traditional agriculture by producing specialty crops for export. Edward R. Fischer, Carol Hendrickson, and Peter Benson study the impact of globalization within Guatemalan indigenous communities in: *Tecpán Guatemala: A Modern Maya Town In Global and Local Context* (2002) and *Broccoli and Desire:*

Global Connections and Maya Struggles in Postwar Guatemala (2006).[1] These studies discuss the divergent practices of native communities seeking to better their lives through a globalized export economy. Furthermore, Walter E. Little's study, *Mayas in the Marketplace: Tourism, Globalization, and Cultural Identity* (2004), examines the impact of tourism on indigenous culture.[2] Overall, these monographs help illustrate the changing views of the modern Maya. Indigenous farmers and artisans now have independent entrepreneurial options that allow levels of freedom outside the collective organizations that were crucial in the 1980s and 1990s like the Comité de Unidad Campesina (CUC). Globalization provided opportunities for self-employment and small-scale local agriculture, outside of large unions like the CUC, which had fought against the landed oligarchy and the government. While collective efforts remain an option, some indigenous choose to embrace independent work and trade within a global economy.

Finally, the continued social and racial inequalities of Guatemala hampered the Pan-Maya movement. Five hundred years of inequality between the *ladino* and native communities created seemingly insurmountable obstacles. The timetables in which the government had to implement the peace agreement withered away. Racial discrimination among native and non-native communities persisted, and traditional obstacles such as insufficient aid and lack of land tenure legislation plagued the overall struggle, resulting

[1] Edward R. Fischer and Carol Hendrickson, *Tecpán Guatemala: A Modern Maya Town in Global and Local Context* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2002); Edward R. Fischer and Peter Benson, *Broccoli and Desire: Global Connections and Maya Struggles in Postwar Guatemala* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006).

[2] Walter E. Little, *Mayas in the Market Place: Tourism, Globalization, and Cultural Identity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004).

in a weakened Pan-Maya movement. Furthermore, disunity among the Maya themselves revealed itself fully in the anemic support of Rigoberta Menchú in the 2007 presidential election. Although Menchú shared ethnic ties with over 50 percent of the electorate, the Maya failed to rally behind her campaign.[3]

The combined effects of a divided movement, coupled with the emergent challenges of the post war years, have left the Pan-Maya movement and the indigenous population struggling to maintain their earlier success. Endemic violence and economic and social challenges impede the Mayan initiative of the last twenty years. Today, the Pan-Maya movement struggles to unite twenty-two ethnic Mayan enclaves and to overcome the historical divisions between native and *ladino* society.

Part 1: The Divide

The collaboration of the Popular Left and the Maya during the late 1970s and 1980s began a grass-roots network that fought for basic human rights. Groups like the CUC and Grupo de Apoyo Muto (GAM) struggled for land, labor, and human rights. While these groups remained open to all Guatemalans who suffered from repression and the archaic justice system, the indigenous population filled the rank and file. As an outgrowth, direct Mayan mobilization developed around an ethnic and cultural agenda. These two positions melded together during the peace process but broke into divergent camps following the 1996 agreement. Ultimately, the divergent views over human rights versus

[3] Carlos Menocal, **"**Manos limpias fueron insuficientes para convencer," *Prensa Libre*, September 11, 2007.

cultural rights created a schism among the Guatemalan Maya. Ethnic, linguistic, and social barriers proved difficult to overcome as the Maya struggled in the post-civil war era. The writings of Mayan scholars illustrate these two perspectives.

During the 1980s, the plight of the Guatemalan Maya became part of the larger Central American civil war discourse. Disseminated accounts like *I, Rigoberta Menchú,* propelled a wide body of literature from scholarly efforts to magazine and newspapers articles describing the atrocities directed towards the native population.[4] Anthropologist and Mayan ex-pat Victor Montejo fled the violence of the early 1980s and immigrated to the United States.[5] Montejo, a Pan-Mayanist, believes in promoting a Mayan ethnic identity, yet focuses his work on the broader issues related to human rights and the thirty-six year civil war. Montejo's 1987 work, *Testimony: Death of a Guatemalan Village*, describes the destruction of village life in Tzakaká in Huehuetenango.[6] Montejo's subsequent work raised international awareness, bringing to light the atrocities carried out by the military. *Voices from Exile: Violence and Survival in Modern Maya History*

[4] Montejo, *Voices From Exile*, 17-18. Montejo contends that the growing Western scholarship from the 1970s onward has brought attention to the plight of the modern Maya. Scholars ranging from "linguists, ethnologists, archeologists, epigraphers, and ethnohistorians have made Maya civilization a focus of world attention."

[5] Ibid., 8 -11; Mary Jo McConahay, "American Maya Goes to Guatemalan Congress," *Pacific News Service*, December 29, 2003. Victor Montejo traveled from Guatemala to the United States in November of 1982 on a tourist visa, performing translation work and giving lectures. As his visa was set to expire, he learned that he was on a government death list and was forced to live as a refugee in Mexico. It is here that he laid the groundwork for *Testimony: Death of Guatemalan Village*. Montejo immigrated to the United States, earning a doctorate in anthropology, continuing his academic and activist work regarding the Guatemala Maya.

[6] Montejo, *Testimony: Death of a Guatemalan Village*.

(1999) studied communities that fled the violence.[7] Similar to the scholar's earlier work, *Voices from Exile* focuses on the human rights abuses suffered by the Maya and speaks of the powerful indigenous resistance. During the Civil War, hundreds of thousands fled to Mexico, and one million more faced internal displacement, becoming refugees within their own nation.[8] Montejo discusses how grass-roots human rights organizations aided the Mayan populace living in exile.[9] The fieldwork conducted for his monograph, stems from his travels and time spent in refugee camps in the Mexican state of Chiapas.

While still a proponent of ethnic traditions and rights, especially considering the difficult transition many Guatemalan Maya experienced as refugees, Montejo, advocates a broader agenda centered on human rights.[10] This mind-set prompted many Mayan activists to join the Popular Left.[11]

As an anthropologist living and working abroad, Montejo's publications raised awareness among foreign NGOs and scholars alike. His most recent work, *Maya Intellectual*

[7] Montejo, *Voices From Exile*.

[8] Ibid., 131. Montejo estimates that in the period from 1981-1983 alone more than 100,000 Maya fled across the border to Mexico.

[9] Ibid., 39. Montejo finds early Catholic Action and the U.S. Agency for International Development facilitated the explosion of human rights activism in the 1980s.

[10] Ibid., 133-204. Chapters 7-9 outline the cultural and ethnic difficulties, which the refugee Maya faced while living in Mexico. Many feared speaking in their native tongue or wearing their traditional dress until the Permanent Commission of Representatives of Guatemalan Refugees in Mexico (CCPP) stepped in and organized the exiles. The CCPP helped orchestrate the first return of exiles in 1987-1988 protecting their human rights by sending watchdog representatives across the border. The repatriation took years with many never returning to their original homes.

[11] Chapter Three outlines the growth of the Popular Left and the Mayan struggle in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Reacting to the extreme violence of the government, human rights groups filled their ranks with many indigenous who suffered at the hands of growing military reprisals.

Renaissance: Identity, Representation, and Leadership (2005), centers on the Pan-Maya movement and the disorganization now facing the struggle.[12] He states, "At the beginning of the present millennium, the Maya are weakened and badly organized both politically and economically."[13] While his earlier work remained hopeful of the indigenous struggle in Guatemala, Montejo recognizes the diminished political and economic clout of the Maya following the peace agreement and the division of Mayan leadership. He believes that, "Our government should focus its attention on the necessities and deficiencies of public service in education, health care, and community development."[14] Montejo believes that once the divide between *ladino* and Mayan communities is broken, the indigenous communities will forge a strong ethnic identity. In 2003, Montejo was elected to Guatemala's national congress. His work in political office, heading indigenous councils, demonstrated Montejo's desire to insert Mayan needs into mainstream *ladino* political culture.[15] He advocates "an end to the racist treatment Mayas experience and the construction of a new interethnic relationship as a means to achieve a more pluralistic Guatemalan nation."[16] Montejo urges cooperation between the indigenous and *ladino* society, forging an economic and political future that rebuilds the Guatemalan social infrastructure. This goal follows the Popular

[12] Montejo, *Maya Intellectual Renaissance*.

[13] Ibid., 184.

[14] Ibid., 209.

[15] Mary Jo McConahay, "American Maya Goes to Guatemalan Congress," *Pacific News Service*, December 29, 2003.

[16] Montejo, *Maya Intellectual Renaissance*., XIII.

Left/indigenous model, central to the 1996 Peace Agreement and Indigenous Rights Accord.[17]

In contrast to Montejo, other Pan-Mayanists support an ethnic-based movement.[18] Scholars like anthropologist Demetrio Cojtí draw upon the successes of the 1990s when Mayan intellectuals and organizations united in an effort to push for lasting peace during the civil conflict. Cojtí believes in specific ethnic and cultural rights for the Maya, taking a more direct indigenous position within his study*, El Movimiento Maya (En Guatemala)* (1997).[19] Activists like Cojtí believe in re-creating a Mayan "greatness," taking back the classic Maya whom the *ladinos* have built a nationalist agenda around and reinventing and uplifting the modern Maya.[20] Cojtí recognizes divisions within the modern Maya consciousness. He believes that three groups exist: the rural uneducated Maya who are "culturally pure;" the proletariat Maya who identify with the Popular Left; and the intellectual Maya who work to raise Mayan consciousness.[21] Intellectuals like Cojtí seek the empowerment of the Maya by raising cultural awareness and shining light onto indigenous language, education, culture, and religious practices. In contrast to "popular" organizations like the CUC and leaders like Montejo who fight for human rights and a

[17] Gálvez Borrell and Esquit Choy, *The Mayan Movement Today,* 89.

[18] Cojtí Cuxil, "Higher Education and the Mayan Movement in Guatemala," 313-330. Cojtí identifies indigenous leaders and scholars helping the Pan-Maya movement within Guatemala, including himself, Rosalina Tuyuc, and Otilia Lux among others.

[19] Cojtí Cuxil, *El Movimiento Maya*.

[20] Ibid., 49.

[21] Ibid, 52.

greater political voice, Cojtí and his allies strive for ethnic and cultural autonomy, and, above all else, the preservation of Mayan society.

Nonetheless, Cojtí, like Montejo, meets resistance in moving a Pan-Maya agenda forward. Cojtí claims the culture clash between indigenous and *ladino* society, is the root difficulty: "The Maya civilization of the classic period is exalted but contemporary indigenous culture is undervalued or ignored."[22] Cojtí argues that Guatemala's education system lacks a useful intellectual structure for the Mayan movement. Although higher education is not necessary for local organization, Cojtí finds the lack of advanced educational training has a detrimental effect on community organizers.[23] Furthermore, *ladino* political leaders believe it is indigenous peoples' responsibility to affect meaningful state change. Cojtí cites Montejo's appointment to governmental positions affecting indigenous affairs. He argues that the government placed a Mayan activist in a position to mitigate any failed objectives and relieve pressure on the *ladino* political system.[24]

Although both intellectual camps united during the peace process, they separated in the post 1996 era. At a moment when the Maya needed to remain strong, the intellectual leadership pursued different agendas. The conflict over pushing a direct, ethnic-based

[22] Cojtí Cuxil, "Higher Education and the Mayan Movement in Guatemala," 313-330. While the chapter centers on Guatemalan higher education and indigenous access to it, the broader theme of the Pan-Maya ethnic struggle is prevalent throughout Cojtí's writing.

[23] Ibid., 323.

[24] Ibid., 327.

agenda versus broader social reforms for the Maya left the movement disorganized and unable to deal with the congressional implementation of the Indigenous Rights Accord.[25] Without strong leadership and a well-planned agenda, the Pan-Maya movement suffered in the post-Peace Agreement period, as new challenges affected the indigenous population. The movement faced new pressures including heightened violence, changing economic conditions, and continued inequality within the nation-state. These challenges created further division in the once united Pan-Maya struggle.

Part 2: New Challenges

Violence & Mob Justice: Guatemala, the New Wild West

As Guatemala transitioned to peace following the guerrilla insurgency, the elected governments and the Maya alike faced unforeseen pressures. Endemic violence continued to hamper the political process and the post-civil war reconciliation. Postwar violence is a complex issue centered on youth gangs known as *maras*, the international drug trade, and growing civil unrest. The deportation of illegal immigrant convicts from the United States fueled the rise of youth gangs in Guatemala. Newly deported criminals employed the tactics they learned from Latino gangs in the U.S. prison population to create a criminal organization that eventually became a well-oiled syndicate within a weakened judicial system. Powerful gangs operating in North and Central America such as Mara 18 and Mara Salvatruchas have expanded their operations into well-organized

[25] "The Mission Ends: MINGUA Leaves Guatemala," *NotiCen: Central American & Caribbean Affairs*, December 2, 2004.

international syndicates running drugs, prostitution, and extortion. These criminal enterprises use violence without any discerning care or thought of consequence, threatening security in places such as Guatemala.[26] Rising gang violence in Guatemala has made the country one of the most dangerous places on earth.[27] Furthermore, as the United States began to counter the shipment of cocaine and marijuana through the Caribbean basin, South American drug cartels increased delivery through the loose borders of Central America, turning Guatemala into a crucial transit location.[28] The increase in drug and gang-related violence has threatened indigenous communities, as the annual murder rate now tops six thousand in a nation of thirteen million.[29] The destabilization of Guatemala has some native communities and individuals turning towards extrajudicial methods. In these instances, mobs armed with clubs, pitchforks, or even firearms have attacked local civil authorities, landowners, and suspected criminals, taking justice into their own hands. To the disenfranchised Maya, the failed state has created conditions in which violence appears to be the only way to reclaim basic security, lash out at corruption, and fight for land rights. Such actions ultimately tarnish the work of the Pan-Maya movement and Popular Left organizations like the CUC.

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[26] Ginger Thompson, "Guatemala Bleeds in Vice of Gangs and Violence," *The New York Times*, January 1, 2006.

[27] Leonardo Cereser, "Quinto lugar de la lista negra," *Prensa Libre*, June 18, 2006. *Prensa Libre* published what they called the "Black List" of UN Development statistics. Guatemala ranked fifth for violence in Latin America with 44 homicides per 1000 inhabitants. Examining the larger graph, one sees that areas of concentrated violence correlate with the rise in drug and gang culture. As such the graph shows that the Petén department homicide rate of 324 deaths per 1000 remains the highest in all of Latin America.

[28] Peter Dale Scott and Jonathan Marshall. *Cocaine Politics: Drugs, Armies, and the CIA in Central America* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1991), 187-189. Scott and Marshall argue that, while Guatemala is not a drug capital, it has become Central America's "principal way station" for the transshipment of cocaine into the North American market.

[29] Ibid.

Indigenous people, *ladinos*, and tourists alike have daily, visual reminders of the endemic violence within Guatemala. In many urban areas, young men dressed in military camouflage patrol the streets while holding menacing M-16 rifles.[30] The lack of personal security remains a constant problem for citizens. The majority of indigenous rely on public transportation, whether they work in rural hamlets and the agricultural sector or in larger towns and cities. While relatively affordable mass transit exists, security since the end of the civil war has grown problematic, placing new pressures on the public service.

Violence along bus routes has long plagued Guatemala, but the influx of gang extortion schemes has driven the risk up substantially. From January to June of 2005, transportation authorities logged more than 32,000 general crimes and assaults, and the slaying of fourteen drivers.[31] Victoriano Zacarías, a member of the drivers' union, believes that large national gangs like *Mara Salvatrucha* and *Dieciocho* are growing in number and are connected with the drug problem, posing a threat to the security of bus drivers. He explained to a *Prensa Libre* reporter that, "Gang members rob bus drivers in the morning for drugs, then again in the evening," in order to fuel growing addictions.[32]

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[30] Juan Carlos Llorca, "Guatemalan Military Seizes Drug Plagued Provence," *Associated Press,* December 19, 2010. On a 2005 research trip, I witnessed the presence of armed soldiers on the street. I questioned some local educators raising the point that the 1996 Peace Agreement ended military patrols in civilian areas. Their response indicated that the urban violence and local police corruption had increased so dramatically that the military was called in for extra security in areas of tourism, government, and commercial interests. On December 19, 2010 the Guatemalan government sent military troops to the department of Alta Verapaz due to increased drug violence spilling over from Mexico. This increase of criminal activity is related to the Zeta drug gang, which has overrun many Guatemalan towns.

[31] Carlos Menocal, "Panico en el transporte," *Prensa Libre*, July, 11 2006.

[32] Carlos Menocal, "Pánico en el transporte" (includes a quote from Victoriano Zacarías), *Prensa Libre*, July 11, 2006.

Extortion schemes strangle bus driver unions, as workers are forced to pay kickbacks to gangs to continue operating their routes. An anonymous *Velotax* representative claims that, "Gang members want a 150 quetzal (US $20) bribe paid daily, or we [the drivers] will face consequences."[33] These consequences are often paid in blood, as the increased violence targets the drivers and passengers of the public transportation system. On June 22, 2008, in the particularly violent Zone 18 of Guatemala City, gang members killed another bus driver, prompting the union to halt bus service until more police arrived.[34] The native population faces threats when riding these buses and disruption to their daily routine when services in high-risk areas are cut. Many Maya are forced to commute or migrate great distances for labor opportunities, as major violence from the drug underworld further destabilized the post-peace era.

The influx of cocaine and marijuana transshipped through Guatemala and the rise of local cartels further threaten the security of the Maya and the state. The judicial system remains slow, corrupt, and inept, hampering governmental efforts to combat drug traffickers. Vice President Rafael Espada recognized the problem: "They are moving in because Guatemala is a paradise for drug traffickers. It's a poor country with a lot of corruption, and the judicial system is very weak."[35] Guatemalan police suffered a defeat on July 23, 2007, when transporting drug kingpin, Cornelio Chilel, from a San Marcos

[33] Gema Palencia, "Paran servicio de buses en zona 18," *Prensa Libre*, June 23, 2008. Velotax is a transport company.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Sarah Grainger, "Mexican drug gang menace spreads in Guatemala" (includes a quote from Rafael Espada), *Reuters*, February 18, 2009.

penal system. Twenty armed men halted the police motorcade, opening fire with AK-47 rifles.[36] The men freed the drug kingpin, dealing a blow to the Guatemalan police and judicial system. While security forces bear the brunt of this battle, the drug conflict often spills into civil society. At times, buses are set ablaze with innocent passengers still aboard. Given the lack of personal security, the native population often finds vigilantism necessary. The lack of judicial confidence has led to cases of mobs patrolling markets and neighborhoods and at times creating bloodshed.[37] Additionally, violence over land disputes has often spiraled out of control as governmental resolve failed to materialize.

Land tenure was a serious issue for the indigenous population throughout the twentieth-century, despite the brief success of the 1952 Agrarian Decree 900.[38] The Civil War only exacerbated land issues, as many native farmers fled their small plots, losing them to government resettlement initiatives, *ladino* farmers, or the displaced.[39] In this new era of turbulence following the agreement, many indigenous inhabitants petitioned for land

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[36] Aroldo Marroquín and Lorena Seijo, "Hombres armados liberan en San Marcos a presunto narco," *Prensa Libre*, July 24, 2007.

[37] Ángel Revolorio, "Se cuidan solos," *Prensa Libre,* July 31, 2009; Ángel Martin Tax, "Reclaman seguridad," *Prensa Libre*, July 23, 2009. In July of 2009 a group of armed indigenous and *ladino* merchants began patrolling a Retalhuleu market in order to stem rising gang violence and robberies. The market was robbed 15 times without a police arrest. Furthermore gang violence directed towards women in the Department of Alta Verapaz prompted a rally of 300 primarily indigenous women demanding justice.

[38] Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*; Melville and Melville, *Guatemala: The Politics of Land Ownership.* Both Gleijeses and the Melvilles examine the Agrarian Decree 900 enacted in 1952 under the leftist government of Jacobo Árbenz. The land reform looked to expropriate only large fallow holdings, paying the owners in government bonds. Although the reform benefited poor *campesinos,* the swift repeal following the 1954 CIA-inspired coup reversed the reform progress of the previous decade. The Melvilles further trace the failed agrarian programs in the post-coup regimes.

[251] Kevin Clarke, "New road, same old path? Guatemala's new highway is one small sign of hope. But will this be a road to peace and prosperity?," *U.S. Catholic*, (November, 1 2002): 40-45.

reform through grass-roots organizations like the CUC. Despite this peaceful approach, some Maya have sought recourse outside legal structures via land invasions, seizures, and squatting. These actions disrupt due process, hampering the inroads made by grass-roots organizations.

As displaced indigenous populations returned to reclaim lost land, conflicts often developed. This difficult reality is evident in the "Ixil Triangle," an area in the Quiché Department that experienced great hardship and atrocities during the civil war. In accordance with the peace agreement, military patrols of the Ixil region ceased. This, however, had a balkanizing effect, as old land feuds among indigenous populations erupted with no military to check civil unrest.[40] In the Department of Sololá, violence broke out on June 29, 1997 when the village of San Juan Argueta attacked Barreneche, La Concordia, and La Esperanza, burning homes and leaving nine dead and fifty others wounded. The inter-ethnic violence was a product of a 60-year land feud dating back to the 1930s.[41]

Between August and September of 2004, a group of *ladino* and indigenous *campesinos* in Champerico, the southwest region of Retalhuleu, clashed with private landowners and police. The government deployed special units to remove the squatters and protect local

[40] "Guatemala: Violent Land Conflicts Highlight Sluggish Implementation of Agrarian Peace Accords," *Noticen: Central American & Caribbean Affairs*, August 21, 1997.

[41] Ibid.

business interests, claiming that the invaders possessed heavy arms.[42] As the estimated mob of 3,000 disbanded, a mêlée unfolded, and government forces opened fire, leaving nine dead and forty-five wounded. Wilfred Morales, an ambulance worker on the scene, said, "This is like the war of the 1980s."[43] Political analyst, Miguel Ángel Sandoval, contends that the government's action, "demonstrates the absence of *campesino* rights."[44] Following these events, the issue of land rights developed in other parts of the country. A mob of disgruntled *campesinos* in the heavily indigenous Department of Alta Verapaz occupied Guatemala's primary hydroelectric plant, protesting their loss of farmland to the energy project.[45]

Despite the often-violent conflicts over land and security, many indigenous activists continue to work within civil society, hammering away at the slow judicial process. On July 18, 2007, a group of 500 squatters marched on Congress, demanding that their ownership of land, occupied since 2003, be formalized. Rubén Darío Morales, president of the Guatemalan Congress, announced to the crowd, amid cheers, that, "Everyone has a right to a place to live." Andrea Barreda, a member of the Morales party, claimed, "All we want is to open the doors of Congress so that the people can hear our demands."[46]

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[42] Reuters, "7 Squatters Die in Police Clash in Guatemala," *The New York Times*, September 1, 2004. A follow-up investigation discovered that the mob had only a few weapons, none of which were fired.

[43] "Guatemala Regresses to Violent *Campesino* Evictions" (includes a quote from Wilfred Morales), *Noticen: Central American & Caribbean Affairs*, September 9, 2004.

[44] "Guatemala Regresses to Violent Campesino Evictions" (includes a quote from Miguel Ángel Sandoval), *Noticen: Central American & Caribbean Affairs*, September 9, 2004.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ana Lucía Blas, "Piden legalizar tierras invadidas" (includes a quote from Rubén Darío Morales and Andrea Barreda), *Prensa Libre*, July 19, 2007.

During an election year, peaceful protests such as the 2007 rally can gain lawmakers' attention; nonetheless, violent action and media sensationalism surrounding such initiatives diminish their effectiveness.

As frustration among the indigenous population mounted, desperate individuals escalated tensions. In 2008, a dramatic increase of indigenous *campesino*-led violence erupted in eastern Guatemala, attracting global media attention. On February 14, authorities arrested Ramiro Choc, an indigenous activist belonging to Encuentro Campesino, for land invasion and kidnapping. After his arrest, a group of his followers stormed the police station in Livingston, Guatemala, a popular tourist area on the Caribbean coast. During this incident, supporters held twenty-nine police officers against their will. The two-day standoff ended with the release of the officers, on the condition that the government would open talks on land legalization with the indigenous community.[47] On March 14, a group of indigenous *campesinos*, frustrated with the government's inability to address their land needs, took four Belgian tourists hostage, this time sending a stronger message to the government. The leader, Roberto Xol, explained that the Belgians were "cared for ... have food ... and were made conscious of the struggle in the Izabal Department."[48] While Guatemalan security forces liberated the Belgians one day later, the incident demonstrated the tenuous situation regarding indigenous land rights.

[47] "Áutoridades no descartan uso de la fuerza en Livingston," *Prensa Libre*, February 22, 2008.

[48] "Guatemalan Campesinos Kidnap Belgian Tourists to Restart Land Talks; Government Bends" (includes a quote from Roberto Xol), *Noticen: Central American & Caribbean Affairs*, March 27, 2008.

This particular episode, although ending relatively peacefully, had the potential to spiral out of control. Ultimately, the event hurt the region during the tourist season, damaging local economies and tarnishing the peaceful work of grass-roots organizations. Daniel Pascual, a spokesman for the CUC (the primary land-rights advocate for the region and country), issued a statement denying any involvement: "They don't belong to our organization." However, the CUC sympathized with the plight of the landless by stating, "We believe the way they have manifested their disagreement is not the right way, but, at the same time, we understand it is the only way the government is going to pay attention to them, because the dialogue in this country is already exhausted."[49] While the CUC distanced itself from the violent action, the organization used the events to help illustrate the growing tensions among the landless *campesinos*. Further political turmoil ensued as Ricardo Gatica of the Interior Ministry called the Encuentro Campesino members terrorists and vowed to hunt them down, yet denied that the death of Mario Caal, a farmer, was retaliatory.[50]

Such intense conflict between *campesinos* and the government tarnished the hard-won peace efforts of thousands and spawned potential governmental retaliation reminiscent of the civil war. The Pan-Maya movement suffers twofold in the post-peace era as gangs and narco-traffickers continue to destabilize a country with limited resources, and indigenous vigilantism sullied the Pan-Maya image. As the embattled and divided Pan-

[49] "Guatemalan Campesinos Kidnap Belgian Tourists to Restart Land Talks; Government Bends" (includes a quote from Daniel Pascual), *Noticen: Central American & Caribbean Affairs*, March 27, 2008.

[50] "Campesinos que retuvieron a Belgas demandarán al Estado de Guatemala," *Prensa Libre*, March 18, 2008. Land activists believe that the death of farmer/activist Mario Caal was of extra-judicial nature, carried out in retaliation for the *campesino* violence.

Maya movement struggles into the new millennium, further problems arise from free trade and globalization.

Pressures of Globalization

Like violence, globalization played a negative role in the trajectory of the Pan-Maya movement. As indigenous communities engaged in business ventures, tied to the capitalist/free trade model, Popular Left coalitions such as the CUC, as well as other rural unions, lost some effectiveness. Agricultural independence provided opportunities in which native farmers no longer relied on large plantation day labor. Export crops allowed Mayan communities to increase individual productivity on traditional holdings, lessening the need for migratory employment. Likewise, native populations that transcended cultural boundaries, earning a living from the Guatemalan tourist industry, operated without the need for a collective political voice. Self-employment and self-empowerment removed these Maya from the *ladino* controlled wage labor, hence creating another challenge for the Pan-Maya movement.

Anthropologists Edward R. Fischer and Carole Hendrickson study the impact of globalization within a Kaqchikel Maya community in their 2002 study, *Tecpán Guatemala: A Modern Maya Town In Global and Local Context*. Fischer and Peter Benson followed up this work with *Broccoli and Desire: Global Connections and Maya Struggles in Postwar Guatemala* (2006), a study of changing global markets. Together, these works illustrate the altered cultural boundaries that affect the rural Mayan

population. New export opportunities prompted traditional farming communities to adapt to foreign consumer appetites.[51]

Fischer's study examines traditional Mayan agricultural staples such as corn and beans and the impact of new, export-driven crops such as broccoli and carnations. Traditional indigenous crops provided slim profit margins for small-scale producers selling within the domestic markets. New crops like broccoli and strawberries offered international markets, in which larger economic rewards were possible. Today, Guatemala supplies the United States with broccoli during the off-season, when California fields are not in cultivation. Indigenous communities began growing broccoli, seeing larger returns in their agricultural production, even though native communities often did not consume broccoli. Excess broccoli harvests appeared throughout Guatemala's regional and local markets, illustrating the impact of globalization. Crop diversification brought new revenue to independent Mayan farmers, potentially lessening some need for organizations like the CUC, which protected workers' rights on a regional and national scale. The CUC remained a union that challenged large landowners and the government bureaucracy. Independent entrepreneurs, in contrast, worked for themselves, integrating into global markets as proprietors.[52]

Furthermore, as more farmers shifted to independent economic initiatives, the struggle for land tenure became more complex. While some communities reacted violently,

[51] Fischer and Hendrickson, *Tecpán Guatemala;* Fischer and Benson, *Broccoli and Desire*.

[52] Fischer and Benson, *Broccoli & Desire*, 25-31.

diminishing the peaceful efforts of the Maya movement, others used different strategies. Ever adaptive, the native people remain acutely aware of the global context in which national economies operate. In an area where small Mayan land holdings once proved disadvantageous, entrepreneurism enabled these communities to participate and succeed within the global marketplace. Farmers now plant non-indigenous crops as a means of improving their economic conditions.[53] Fischer's study examines the communities surrounding the village of Tecpán and the growth of export agriculture that has taken place over fifteen years. While the region succeeded in cooperative organization among indigenous farmers and the Popular Left during the civil war, globalization now shifted power to independent farmers. Today, small-scale Mayan farming produces nontraditional export crops such as snow peas, Brussels sprouts, strawberries, raspberries, carnations, and especially broccoli, providing alternatives for economic livelihood.[54]

The crop diversification trends go beyond the region of Fischer's study. Much like Tecpán's gradual transformation over the last fifteen years, agricultural communities around the country, including the Izabal Department, began the cultivation of export crops. The expanded global market after the peace agreement has shown other farmers the potential of export agriculture. Farmers in Izabal followed a similar model as the Tecpánecos, diversifying crops while still producing traditional staples like beans and corn. In fallow acreage, strawberries provide new avenues of economic opportunity,

[53] Ibid., 10-11.

[54] Fischer and Hendrickson, *Tecpán Guatemala*, 136-143.

prompting more *ladino* and indigenous growers to draw upon the export economy rather than the CUC's strategy of collective protest and organization.[55]

Indigenous farmers benefit by selling these crops to exporters at a higher profit. Additionally, others gained the ability to work as day laborers within their home regions, avoiding exploitation on coastal plantations. The avoidance of nomadic labor ultimately lessens the clout of the CUC which champions the migratory *campesino*. Fischer finds that, with the exception of the carnation industry, the Mayan planters are able to produce their own products, generating larger economic yields than traditional agriculture like corn and beans. This, in effect, created more incentive to turn toward the globalized marketplace altering traditional Mayan practices.[56]

Outside of agriculture, the indigenous population has integrated itself into the Guatemalan tourist industry. With the signing of the 1996 Peace Agreement, the Instituto Guatemalteco de Turismo (INGUAT), the national tourist agency, stepped up its efforts to promote tourism. INGUAT helped increase both the number of visitors and revenue, making Guatemala a direct competitor to Costa Rica in the Central American tourist industry.[57] While Costa Rica offers lush Caribbean white-sand beaches and dense rainforests, INGUAT uses the Maya as a primary attraction. The Guatemalan government

[55] Edwin Perdomo, "Rambután, un cultivo exótico," *Prensa Libre*, June 11, 2006.

[56] Fischer and Benson, *Broccoli & Desire*, 72-87. Chapter 3 focuses on opportunity versus cultural modification and how the Maya have used the agro-export diversification to create new avenues of opportunity.

[57] Eduardo Smith, "País está entre los que más crecieron," *Prensa Libre*, July 21, 2007.

long employed the ruins of Mayan archeological sites, like the world-famous Tikal and the colorful dress of the modern Maya to lure in foreign visitors. For the past sixty-odd years, Guatemala developed a tourist trade centered on an idealized past.[58] The Maya are revered for their scientific and engineering achievements, having built magnificent city-states before Spanish arrival. While the government celebrates these past achievements, the modern Maya remain an exploitable commodity. A 1983 political cartoon illustrates Ríos Montt, the then-genocidal dictator, inviting tourists to photograph the Maya, while behind his back he lobs hand grenades at them.[59] Such drawings provide a poignant insight into the long-held racial views of Guatemalan elites.

Nonetheless, the Maya have looked beyond their exploitation and have used Guatemala's tourism for their own financial ends. Having perfected weaving, pottery and other artisan crafts over the centuries, today's Maya actively participate in the local tourist boom, selling their goods to foreign travelers and exporters.[60] Walter E. Little's monograph, *Mayas in the Market Place: Tourism, Globalization and Cultural Identity*, examines the astute business sense of indigenous traders and their ability to integrate themselves successfully into the tourist economy while preserving their ethnic identity. Their efforts have created an entrepreneurial spirit outside of indigenous politics and the Maya

[58] Little, *Mayas in the Market Place*, 12.

[59] Artist and date unkown, obtained in, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 135 1.02.01.

[60] Little, *Mayas in the Marketplace*, 83-86. Items from trouble dolls to beanbags produced in Guatemala can be found in US and European shops. While these items are often purchased by wholesale distributers in Guatemala, some collectives operate their own international distribution networks.

movement. Like native farmers following an independent course, artisans challenged the Pan-Maya momentum.

Many indigenous artisans have banded together, not as a political federation, but as a cooperative economic unit. While ethnic and human rights are the focus of the Pan-Maya initiative, co-ops seek the financial empowerment of their members. In 1998, following the end of the civil war, Yolanda Yat formed an indigenous artisan guild with six members. Ten years later, the Nu'kem collective had more than 400 participants striving to better their situation through the production of articles sold in the tourist industry.[61] While Yat's association started on her own initiative, the Guatemalan government at times supported indigenous economic collectivization in its effort to bolster tourism. In 1997, the government helped organize the women street vendors of Chimaltenango into La Asociación de Artesanas de Balanyá. The collective generated national and international sales of hand-woven blankets and comforters. After the economic downturn following September 11, 2001, the women took it upon themselves to rebuild their business without much government support. Artisan guild member Lucía Coroy Sirín said, "The buyer is looking for a style and that depends a lot on culture."[62] These co-ops exist throughout Guatemala, showcasing indigenous entrepreneurship.

Globalization provided options for rural native entrepreneurship. Native farmers and handicraft artisans found individual opportunities when integrating themselves into a neo-

[61] Byron Dardón G., "Creatividad que gana mercados," *Prensa Libre*, June 23, 2008.

[62] Vinicio Jiménez, "Piden apoyo para elaborar alfombras" (includes a quote from Lucía Coroy Sirín), *Prensa Libre,* July 22, 2007.

liberal marketplace. The emergence of global opportunities provided indigenous entrepreneurs the ability to generate new income streams through *minifundo* crop diversification and the tourist industry boom. These openings challenged the growth of the Pan-Maya movement by diluting the need for local and national organizations like the CUC, a group that fought for land reform and migrant workers' rights. Furthermore, despite cooperation between the Maya and the *ladino* left, social and ethnic divisions persisted.

Inequality and Division

Although new challenges like violence and globalization placed pressure upon the Pan-Maya movement, traditional inequality further hampered progress in the post-peace era. The agreement was a crowning achievement; however, the potential for greater indigenous equality withered away as both *ladino* and Mayan society stubbornly perpetuated the status quo. The native population continued to struggle over internal ethnic divisions among the twenty-two Mayan linguistic groups as well as the historical rift between native and *ladino* communities. Despite a sense of hope among the Maya, the government failed to fully implement the Indigenous Rights Accord, signed with the URNG rebels, nor was it ratified in the constitution.

Two and a half years after the ground-breaking peace agreement's confirmation in December 1996, voters rejected the constitutional change outlined within the document. Although Guatemalan Congress approved the reform package in 1998, the amendments had to pass a voter referendum. Reports indicate that only 18.1 percent of registered

voters participated, soundly defeating the resolutions put before them. The most crucial amendment taken from the peace agreement, the indigenous rights and identity proposal, fell to a resounding 63 to 31 percent defeat. Alvarado Pop, an indigenous activist, believes that the vote represents a failure of both the Maya and the state: "The politically unaware do not want to vote for something they do not understand."[63] Those politically aware voted against the reform, believing that the measures would ultimately widen the ethnic divide.

The setbacks regarding the implementation of the peace process continued when the MINUGUA (UN Verification Mission) left Guatemala in 2004 with only 25 percent of the agreement initiated. Mario Polamco of GAM fears that the departure of MINUGUA will lead to "setbacks in human rights."[64] The government's reluctance to prosecute army officials for genocide slows the reconciliation process. Those speaking out regarding the past are attacked, and clandestine cemeteries and secret documents continually come to light.[65] The effects of the civil war remain a present reality for the large indigenous population that suffered the brunt of the atrocities. Mayan communities exist in a state of division as ex-PAC members, many of them indigenous, seek

[63] "The Mission Ends: MINGUA Leaves Guatemala" (includes a quote from Alvarado Pop), *NotiCen: Central American & Caribbean Affairs*, December 2, 2004.

[64] "The Mission Ends: MINGUA Leaves Guatemala" (includes a quote from Mario Polamco), *NotiCen: Central American & Caribbean Affairs*, December 2, 2004.

[65]"Human Rights Advocate Bishop Juan Gerardi Murdered as U.N. Pulls Rights Observers out of Guatemala," *Noticen: Central American & Caribbean Affairs*, April 30 1998. One of the most prominent cases of retaliatory actions remains the murder of Guatemalan Bishop Juan Gerardi, head of the archdiocesan human rights office. Bishop Gerardi was murdered in his home on April 26, 1998. The attack came three days after Gerardi announced three years of findings linking the Guatemalan government and paramilitary death squads with the majority of civilian deaths during the 36 year civil war.

government compensation for their efforts. In contrast, Mayans on the opposing side of the civil conflict desire justice and clarification regarding the loss of family members and land. The lack of unity within Mayan communities is a troubling prospect for the reconciliation process and the hopes of moving forward toward a Pan-Mayan agenda of cooperation and unity. These continued divisions make political and social change an arduous process.

The 2007 electoral season offers a poignant case study regarding the divisiveness of Guatemalan politics and the limitations of the indigenous community. Rigoberta Menchú became Guatemala's first indigenous presidential candidate, forming the Encuentro por Guatemala (EG) political party. The electoral race showcased new possibilities for the indigenous peoples of Guatemala, raising one of their most famous into the limelight as a presidential hopeful. Optimism ran high for Menchú before the election. In a 2006 Gallup poll, 86.5 percent of Guatemalans agreed that the nation needed a new type of leader and direction. Furthermore, out of a list of prominent Guatemalan figures, Menchú ranked at the very top with 95.5 percent of respondents knowing her and with 66.6 percent believing her to be a good person, more than anyone else on the list.[66] Having won the 1994 Nobel Peace Prize for her human-rights work, she continued her efforts to raise awareness, to help those affected by the civil war, and to prosecute those who committed atrocities during the conflict. Even so, Menchú trailed throughout the

[66] Angel García, "Identificados, queridos y rechazados: Los Guatemaltecos dieron su percepción sobre figures de la política," *Prensa Libre*, June 18, 2006.

electoral season and garnered a mere 3.09 percent of the national vote.[67] Despite the recent achievements and victories of the Maya, a unified force failed to materialize, illustrating both the divisiveness and controversy still surrounding Menchú and the lack of unity among the indigenous population as a whole. Ex-mayor Rigoberto Quemé Chay of Quetzaltenango, a large city in the western indigenous highlands, stated before the election, "There has to be a renewal of leadership. At this moment, there is fragmentation, and the objectives of the organizations are not political."[68] It is this split among indigenous society that perpetuated traditional Guatemalan political divisions. Menchú ran a simple campaign based on honest values, but she lacked the monetary funds to launch an effective national campaign. Furthermore, her core Pan-Mayan voting bloc failed to unite.[69] Mayan scholar Demetrio Cojtí Cuxil blames the loss on "legitimacy." He argues that an indigenous leader with the support of the non-indigenous population is "considered illegitimate, while rural community leaders accepted by the native population are rejected by the *ladino* whole."[70] Menchú's international support delegitimized her among the Mayan voting base. The lack of political unity at the grass-roots level and the divisions among the Maya themselves led to Menchú's defeat.

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[67] Carlos Menocal. **"**Manos limpias fueron insuficientes para convencer," *Prensa Libre*, September 11, 2007.

[68] "Little Prospect of an Indigenous President in Guatemala" (includes a quote from Rigoberto Quemé Chay), *NotiCen: Central American & Caribbean Affairs*, February 16, 2006.

[69] Marc Lacey. "Complex Defeat for Nobel Winner in Guatemala," *The New York Times*, September 11, 2007. Deep divisions within the Mayan community exposed themselves during the 2007 electoral campaign. Individual Mayan communities did support Menchú as some analysts had expected. Instead, due to divisions, she was seen as an outsider having spent much of her adult life in exile, and some Maya even felt that she had not given back to Mayan communities perceiving her as wealthy. Unfortunately for Menchú jealousy, cultural perceptions, and a lack of political nuance resulted in a resounding defeat.

[70] Cojtí Cuxil, "Higher Education and the Mayan Movement in Guatemala," 327.

While the Maya struggled to gain a political voice, their living conditions continued to worsen. The standard of living and equality also remained skewed within Guatemala. The Human Development Index of Guatemala in 2000 had a .619 ranking out of 120 nations, the lowest number in Latin America.[71] The numbers are far more transparent when examining the different departments of Guatemala. The region surrounding the capital had a number of .829, far exceeding that of the national average. This area, although containing a substantial indigenous population, is the epicenter of wealth and Guatemalan development. The urban metropolis is the primary hub of education, health, and public services. The HDI ranking of the primarily indigenous department of Alta Verapaz reveals an index number of .355, below the national average of impoverished Haiti (.440).[72] The division of wealth between the indigenous and *ladino* populations illustrates a major fault line within the nation.

The 500-year racial divide between the indigenous and the *ladino* populations proved a difficult barrier to overcome. Economic, political, and social inequality created friction among *ladino* and indigenous groups. Low morale and a weakened political presence dishearten the Mayan community amid increased violence and the added pressures of globalization. This continued state of inequality and division has adversely affected the Pan-Maya movement and its quest for greater rights.

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[71] The Human Development Index (HDI) was developed by the United Nations to measure relative quality of life throughout the world. The index compiles a variety of statistical data, life expectancy, infant mortality, literacy, and other factors.

[72] Fischer and Hendrickson, *Tecpán Guatemala,* 29.

Conclusions

The current Pan-Maya movement remains divided over ethnic and social issues, while outside pressures of violence, globalization and racism further complicate the situation. Mayan intellectuals like Victor Montejo and Demitrio Cojtí support a stronger "Mayan" Guatemala but believe in different strategies. While internal conflicts facilitated the collapse of an indigenous initiative after the signing of the peace agreement, both new and old challenges whittled away at a unified Mayan movement. The influx of gang and narco-violence perpetuated indigenous vigilantism, destabilizing peaceful efforts. Furthermore, the globalization of Guatemala provided new economic opportunities, lessening the need for unionization and collective indigenous organization. Finally, the failure of the state regarding indigenous social development and race relations exasperates an already broken community.

Destabilizing forces left the Maya disorganized. The social and economic realities of the indigenous population remain as dire as ever. While the Maya suffered extreme hardships during the civil war, grass-roots mobilization united many. The Popular Left and independent Mayan organizations fought for and achieved some basic rights for Guatemala's indigenous communities. The combined efforts helped win an Indigenous Rights Accord within the 1996 peace agreement. Unfortunately the Pan-Maya movement lacked cohesion by the time of the 2007 presidential run of Rigoberta Menchú. The stunning loss highlighted the deep-rooted divisions within Guatemala's indigenous society. Rather than follow the example set by Bolivia's indigenous community, the

Mayan majority failed to put aside interethnic difference.[73] While the 1996 Peace Agreement and Indigenous Rights Accord served as a watershed moment, the Pan-Maya movement suffered a series of setbacks more than a decade after the signing. The indigenous struggle within Guatemala continues amidst economic, social, and ethnic hardships faced by the Mayan majority.

[73] Carlos Valdez, "Bolivian voters back pro-indigenous constitution," *AP World Stream*, January 26, 2009. In 2005, the Quechua and Aymara speaking people of Bolivia supported the grass-roots Aymaran candidate Evo Morales for president. Despite ethnic divisions in Bolivia, the people united against political opposition reaffirming the indigenous position.

Chapter 5:
The Pan-Mayan Movement through a Bolivian Perspective

Indigenous activism in Latin America empowered millions of native people during the twentieth century. Movements emerged at the grassroots, regional, and national levels creating significant change throughout the region. Not surprisingly, a wide body of scholarship studies the various successes and shortcomings. Indigenous communities have struggled for social and political rights while facing economic injustice and violence brought on by civil conflict and domestic policies. These tribulations have in some nations created a roadblock, and in others have facilitated the advancement of indigenous rights.

The 1996 Guatemalan peace agreement, a watershed victory for the Pan-Maya movement, addressed indigenous rights following a bloody civil war. Despite initial success, the post-peace era brought a new struggle for the movement. The rise of a globalized economy, narco-violence and continued ethnic division hampered organizational momentum. In stark contrast, Bolivia, a nation with similar ethnic divisions and social underdevelopment, demonstrated great success. The 2005 presidential victory of Juan Evo Morales Ayma brought an Aymaran coca farmer to the highest public office. His presidency is a beacon for all native peoples struggling for representation. Clearly, Bolivia's indigenous movement represents the potential of native activism throughout Latin America. A comparative examination of the two nations reveals why the indigenous communities of Bolivia have fared far better in their organizational efforts than those of Guatemala.

Both nations suffer from similar social problems such as inadequate land distribution and a poor education system, yet the success of indigenous activism in Bolivia outshines that of the Guatemalan Pan-Maya movement. While the Maya struggled with ethnic unity, Bolivia's indigenous communities successfully politicized their position through peasant labor unions and created a strong voting block despite interethnic differences. The divergent success of each nation results from developmental differences in three distinct periods: inclusion and disenfranchisement during the 1930s to 1960s, grassroots mobilization from the 1970s to 1990s, and neoliberal challenges and indigenous leadership beginning in the 1990s until the present.

During the 1930s, both Guatemala and Bolivia integrated the indigenous population beginning the process of state inclusion. By the 1940s and 1950s, the left helped enfranchise the native population. The Guatemalan Revolution brought land reform and the end of discriminatory labor practices that targeted the Maya. In Bolivia, the MNR sought to control the native population through land reform. Furthermore, state sponsored unionization in Bolivia brought indigenous workers into direct contact with mestizo trade unions. The counterrevolutionary period of the 1950s and 1960s created the first shift in trajectory as disenfranchisement took effect. The Guatemalan right reversed previous social reforms dedicated to uplifting the Mayan population. In contrast, the Bolivian right under General René Barrientos Ortuño continued indigenous enfranchisement, using land reform as a means of appeasement. The Bolivian model temporarily placated native communities, weakening ethnic identity in favor of class-

based reform. This period continued a tradition of cooperation between indigenous communities and leftist labor organizations begun by the MNR. In contrast the Guatemalan Maya suffered disenfranchisement, creating disillusionment towards the government and the left.

Between the 1970s and the 1990s, both Guatemala and Bolivia's indigenous population successfully organized at the grassroots level. Mobilization in each country culminated in a national effort that championed indigenous rights. Again, the trajectory of these indigenous movements varied between nations. The Guatemalan Maya, having experienced state disenfranchisement during the counterrevolution, suffered two-fold as the nation fell into civil war. During the 1970s, Mayan enclaves became battlegrounds as the Guatemalan military targeted potential subversives. As the conflict expanded during the rule of General Lucas García and General Efraín Ríos Montt, thousands of indigenous people lost their lives and homes. Native communities reacted through grassroots campaigns within labor and human rights organizations as well as independent indigenous organizations.

In Bolivia, state patronage ended by 1970 when the government canceled its co-operative alliance with the indigenous population. Already integrated within *mestizo* trade unions, native activists pressured the state regarding land and labor reform, civil liberties, and natural resources.[1] Without the pressure of civil conflict faced by the Maya, Bolivia's indigenous communities streamlined grassroots mobilization creating strong regional

[1] José Antonio Lucero, *Struggles of Voices: The Politics of Indigenous Representation in the Andes* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008), 64-65.

movements. Unlike Guatemala, these movements maintained a close relationship with the left without dividing over ethnic versus class-based rights.

By the turn of the twenty-first century, both Bolivia and Guatemala's native communities had integrated with the left, pushing an indigenous agenda amidst neo-liberal challenges. The Maya achieved a dialogue within the 1996 Peace Agreement at the culmination of a thirty-six year civil war. The final document included an Indigenous Rights Accord addressing the broad problems of ethnic and social discrimination. However, globalization weakened the Pan-Maya movement following the peace settlement. In contrast, neo-liberal challenges in Bolivia strengthened rather than weakened native activism. Indigenous and non-indigenous alike rallied to protect coca farming, water rights, and gas leases from the government's neoliberal policies. With broken leadership and a divided movement, the Maya fell into disorganization amidst narco-violence and independent economic initiatives. Bolivia's divergent path during the military's counterrevolution created a early link between the Bolivian left and indigenous society. As such, inter-ethnic organization and strong leadership flourished, allowing for a more effective indigenous movement in the twenty-first century.

Indigenous Inclusion and Disenfranchisement: 1930s-1960s

The twentieth century ushered in a period of indigenous activism in both Guatemala and Bolivia. At the beginning of the century, both states' native populations lived and worked in virtual slavery, supporting the landed oligarchy. State building and armed

conflict initiated a period of native inclusion. Following indigenous incorporation into the nation-state, revolutionary periods in Guatemala and Bolivia ushered in social reform directly benefiting the native population. Despite positive change, counterrevolution swept through and altered the course of indigenous activism, sending each nation's native communities on a different path. The Guatemalan Maya suffered a period of disenfranchisement as the right-wing counterrevolution severed indigenous ties to the left. The repeal of Decree 900 damaged state ties to the native communities. Furthermore, leftist sympathizers were forced underground by 1960 as the nation fell into civil war. The dismantling of the opposition coupled with military rule shattered ties between the left and indigenous communities. In contrast the Bolivian counterrevolution led by René Barrientos indirectly protected the relationship the left had developed with indigenous communities. Rather than abandon land reform and patronage, the Barrientos administration formally strengthened ties with the indigenous community through the Military-Peasant Pact. The critical events surrounding incorporation, enfranchisement, and counterrevolution directly shaped the future trajectory of indigenous activism.

The first half of the twentieth century marked a period of transition for both Guatemala and Bolivia as the economic crisis of the 1930s took hold. Guatemalan leadership shifted control of the indigenous population from landowners to the state in order to streamline national development during a period of economic stagnation. This state patronage during the Jorge Ubico dictatorship (1931-1944) brought a sense of national identity and inclusion to the Mayan population. As outlined in Chapter Two, policies like road construction helped create an infrastructure to grow the domestic economy and middle

class, as well as to link the rural Maya with coastal agricultural concerns and the country's capital. Despite paternalism and discriminatory labor policies, the Ubico era brought a period of subordinated inclusion for the Maya.

In contrast, global depression brought war to Bolivia in a fight for natural resources during the 1930s. In her book, *A Revolution for our Rights*, Laura Gotkowitz argues that the first half of the twentieth century marked the beginning of an important alliance between the Bolivian Left and the indigenous population.[2] In 1932, conflict erupted along the Paraguayan/Bolivian border over the unproven oil reserves in the Gran Chaco. As the war expanded between the two nations, the Bolivian government and large landowners preyed upon the indigenous population. Conscripted rural peasantry served in the military's lower ranks, as the war demanded larger forces to face the resilient Paraguayan army. In addition, the government siphoned food supplies from remote villages, as indigenous merchants carried produce to market. Bureaucrats cited quotas forcing farmers to give up their supplies in support of the war effort. Landowners further targeted the indigenous population, selectively choosing labor agitators as well as those with prized land holdings to fill the military draft. Despite the efforts of the Bolivian military, Paraguayan forces prevailed. The war became a national embarrassment when Paraguay received two-thirds of the disputed land following the 1935 cease-fire. Although the native communities faced impressments and economic

[2] Gotkowitz, *A Revolution for our Rights*. Gotkowitz work contends that the indigenous struggle for rights in Bolivia throughout the first half of the twentieth century facilitated the MNR Revolution in 1952.

hardship, the war ultimately served as a conduit for social change. The conflict served to connect the Bolivian left with the indigenous population.[3]

Gotkowitz finds that the native population thereafter began entering the left's populist discourse. The conflict fostered anti-army and oligarchy sentiments amongst the indigenous population. Large groups of indigenous veterans became "socially dislocated" as a result of the conflict. Gotkowitz argues that many rural *campesinos* relocated to urban areas following the armistice, creating a potent urban political force. Both La Paz and Cochabamba grew by more than 30 percent.[4] The influx of inhabitants and increasing social demands prompted a populist reform movement from above. The 1938 constitutional convention showcased the growing importance of the indigenous communities. While conservative factions ignored the needs of the native communities, the populist left considered land reform. While the convention ended without significant reforms or direct indigenous representation, the post-Chaco era marked a shift towards native inclusion.[5]

During the 1930s, the Guatemalan and Bolivian indigenous communities served as a state resource, integrating into the national landscape as agricultural peons or foot soldiers.

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[3] Ibid., 105.

[4] Ibid., 107.

[5] Ibid., 127-130. The constitutional convention failed to change the state policy regarding Bolivia's indigenous population. There was no re-conceptualization of indigenous society in Bolivia. The debates, however, did foster intellectual discourse within the political left. The simple rewording of the moderate constitution to include the abolition of domestic slavery set the precedence for indigenous workers to question the control of the hacienda system.

These communities nonetheless lacked suffrage, land reform, and labor rights. In Guatemala, the Ubico administration turned the Maya into a subjugated state labor resource. Bolivia's Aymara and Quechua-speaking communities also suffered widespread loss following the Chaco War, as wealthy landowners seized land holdings. Sweeping changes by the middle class mitigated the indigenous suffering in both nations during the 1940s and1950s, enfranchising the native population for the first time.

Social reform can transform a nation when the ruling oligarchy cedes power to the middle class. The Guatemalan middle class, supported by liberal army officers, overthrew the Ubico dictatorship in 1944. The decade-long revolutionary period brought significant change to the Mayan majority. Guatemalan leadership recognized the need to provide social support for the indigenous population. In 1944, Juan José Arévelo became Guatemala's first democratically-elected president and subsequently ended Ubico's vagrancy laws. His successor, Jacobo Árbenz (1951-1954), enacted Agrarian Decree 900, a land reform package that offered the rural poor an opportunity for economic empowerment. For the first time, Guatemala's 1944-1954 revolutionary period brought social change without exploitation of the indigenous population. Incorporated into the nation during the 1930s, the Maya benefited from the *ladino* movement of the 1940s and 1950s.

Farther south in 1952, a broad Bolivian coalition took power from the oligarchy. Following the Chaco War, rural unrest grew as indigenous communities joined peasant leagues and mineworker unions. Gotkowitz contends that during this period, the native

communities joined the class-based struggle, merging indigenous activism into the broader political movement.[6] The expanded middle class sought revolutionary change through the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR) party. Similar to Guatemala's 1944 political leadership, the MNR aligned itself with military officers between 1943 and 1946. In 1946, a right-wing military coup forced the MNR to regroup. During this period, the MNR adopted an "inclusive" agenda and built a platform similar to the Mexican Partido Revolucionario Institucional.[7] The organizational success of the MNR created a stable power base on which to lead the 1952 revolution.[8] In power, the MNR recognized the needs of the disenfranchised lower class, taking on land reform, universal suffrage, and the nationalization of mines. These reforms received broad support. The state takeover of tin mines gave the revolution nationalist clout among the middle class, while suffrage and land reform effectively co-opted the indigenous *campesinos*.[9] The MNR adapted rapidly to changing conditions in the countryside. As the indigenous population organized into local peasant leagues, the MNR successfully deflected race conflict by shifting towards class-based reform. Land seizures and rural

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[6] Gotkowitz, *A Revolution for our Rights*, 132.

[7] Eric Selbin, *Modern Latin American Revolutions* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), 34-36; Herbert S. Klein, *Bolivia: The Evolution of a Multi-Ethnic Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 192. Selbin contends that MNR leadership used the institutionalization policy of the Mexican Revolution as an end goal for Bolivia. Klein argues that following the Chaco War, indigenous rights became a political issue in the wake of rural unrest.

[8] Carlos Toranzo Roca, "Let the Mestizos Stand Up and Be Counted," in *Unresolved Tensions: Bolivia Past and Present*, ed. by John Crabtree and Laurence Whitehead (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008), 43. The MNR was successful in incorporating the indigenous population into the revolutionary struggle by negating its indigenous identity in favor of rural *campesino* identity.

[9] Postero, *Now we Are Citizens*, 35-37. The MNR unified support from the unorganized middle class, mineworkers, and rural peasant class. Through the support of state sponsored peasant leagues, the MNR maintained a viable working relationship with the indigenous population.

violence threatened stability, yet the MNR controlled unrest through social reform, political co-option of local leaders, and rhetoric that shifted indigenous identity away from indigenous activism and towards a rural proletariat.[10] Universal suffrage and land reform served as tools for transforming the indigenous population. As such, the MNR's inclusive platform managed the native population through a process of class-based appeasement and reform. As in Guatemala, Bolivia's non-indigenous leaders recognized the need to implement social change for the rural peasantry. Nonetheless, counterrevolution brought each nation to a distinct crossroad.

Guatemala experienced a CIA-supported coup in 1954. Following Árbenz's resignation, Carlos Castillo Armas assumed the presidency with the backing of the United States. His tenure in office shifted Guatemala into a rapid counterrevolution, reversing the social reforms of the previous decade and weakening the government's relationship with the left. In the words of Piero Gleijeses, "There was no way that the United States could have replaced Árbenz with a with a centrist, moderate government…for the center and moderates supported Árbenz."[11] The Castillo Armas administration returned expropriated land holdings to wealthy elites and large corporations like the United Fruit Company. In 1960, the struggle between the right and left erupted when President Ydígoras Fuentes' centrist policies satisfied neither political camp. Disgruntled ex-military officers lead an unsuccessful coup after the president allowed US operatives to train Cuban exiles on Guatemalan soil. Following the left's failed attempt to take power,

[10] Christopher Mitchell, *The Legacy of Populism in Bolivia: From the MNR to Military Rule* (New York: Praeger Publishing, 1977), 45-49.

[11] Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 381.

civil war broke out. Guerrilla forces skirmished against the military, while right wing paramilitary squads terrorized suspected anti-government elements. The reversal of land reform, coupled with the violence of the guerrilla conflict, brought unprecedented hardship to Guatemala's Maya. The severed connection between the *ladino* left and the Maya would last decades until extreme violence and repression forced both sides to work together. Counterrevolution, while devastating to the Mayan communities, created far less hardship for Bolivia's indigenous population and did less to damage the indigenous relationship with the left.

In Bolivia, General René Barrientos Ortuño ended the MNR-Bolivian revolution in 1964 with a CIA-approved military coup. A destabilized political system found MNR president Víctor Paz Estenssoro at odds with teachers and miners unions over pay increases. Although the Bolivian constitution precluded a second term, Paz sought to amend the document to further his political ambitions. Meanwhile, General Barrientos, a similarly ambitious leader, took advantage of his popularity within military ranks and the popular class. Unlike Guatemala's post-revolutionary leadership, Barrientos continued indigenous patronage as a strategic state policy. The general followed the key points of the MNR-initiated land reform through the Military-Peasant Pact of 1966.[12] The agreement intensified agrarian reform, further co-opting the indigenous population in the wake of the military takeover. Barrientos recognized the need to placate the rural masses as the MNR had. The state policy of shifting indigenous identity towards a class-based *campesino* identity forged a tradition of cooperation between indigenous and non-

[12] Lucero, *Struggles of Voices*, 64-65.

indigenous society. Barrientos succeeded in using his charisma to win support among the rural indigenous. He spoke fluent Quechua and often traveled to remote villages by helicopter delivering speeches and dedicating public works. Furthermore, Barrientos courted rural leadership creating a public relations machine so strong that the middle class could not challenge the seemingly endless support of the indigenous.[13] By solidifying support among the indigenous population and continuing reform that directly benefited the lower class, Barrientos achieved the support needed to buffer against middle class opposition.

The Bolivian counterrevolution followed the same corporatist model that the MNR had maintained since 1954. Barrientos and the military engaged the peasantry from a corporatist model that allowed power to flow from the top down. As in the MNR model, the government funded and supported peasant leagues as a means of courting favors with local indigenous leadership.[14] The Barrientos government continued to bypass indigenous rights through a policy of economic appeasement. While both the right and left understood the necessity of incorporating the needs of native communities, neither side wished to address indigenous rights directly. It was far more advantageous to diffuse the native population into a class-based discourse. Rather than address the concerns of the rural indigenous, the issue shifted to the rural peasantry with state patronage being the political solution. Bolivia's indigenous population had organized

[13] Mitchell, *The Legacy of Populism in Bolivia*, 97-99. Mitchell argues that Barrientos was an astute politician who played the middle class off of the indigenous population while placating the military and Bolivian upper class.

[14] Ibid.

into rural peasant leagues during the 1920s and 1930s. By the 1940s and 1950s native rights entered into the political discourse as class-based reform. While Guatemala's Mayan population suffered civil unrest and social inequality, Bolivia's indigenous avoided the hardships of civil war. Even so, the needs of the indigenous majority faltered as military governments focused on developing the eastern lowland region of Bolivia. By the 1970s, largely undeveloped lands, populated by lowland native communities, faced an onslaught of settlement from highland indigenous in need of work, as well as petroleum and logging concerns. NGOs helped organize grassroots movements to challenge the intrusions, leading to the 1982 creation of the Confederación Indígena del Oriente de Bolivia.[15] The same ethnic questions that arose during the 1938 constitutional convention remained in place nearly three decades later as the indigenous population struggled for rights. Elite society still viewed the native communities as backward, yet recognized the need to placate the population through land reform and social integration.

Bolivia and Guatemala's large indigenous peasantry entered the twentieth century as disconnected peons. State policy and war incorporated the indigenous people into their respective nations, while middle class reform brought further enfranchisement. Guerrilla movements in Guatemala and the MNR's social platform in Bolivia represented a potential threat to the right during the Cold War.[16] Military counterrevolution in each nation created a divergent path for indigenous activism. The Maya suffered disenfranchisement and civil conflict, while Bolivia's indigenous avoided massive state

[15] Postero, *Now we Are Citizens*, 44-47.

[16] Streeter, *Managing the Counterrevolution*, 233-240. Streeter finds similarities between Guatemala and Bolivia at the height of the Cold War when tensions provoked a reaction by the right.

violence. Instead, Bolivia's General Barrientos advanced the MNR policy of diminishing ethnic identity by turning the indigenous population into "*campesinos.*" In both nations grassroots activism developed in reaction to the state and the lack of basic rights. The absence of conflict in Bolivia allowed the native communities to explore mobilization without the threat of direct reprisal and to remain tied to class-based issues. As nominal democracy returned in the 1980s, Bolivian and Guatemalan indigenous communities increased pressure on their governments for ethnic, social, and political rights.

Grassroots Mobilization: 1970s to 1990s

State repression and neglect mobilized the left's fight for basic rights in Bolivia and Guatemala. Both nations possessed a large indigenous population rooted in pre-Columbian traditions. While attempting to integrate the indigenous population into the national landscape, the Bolivian and Guatemalan governments reacted differently. While the Guatemalan government reversed positive social change achieved during the revolution, the Bolivian Right continued the paternalistic appeasement policies of the MNR, transforming the indigenous population into a rural peasantry. Positive change occurred only when grassroots indigenous activism challenged the state. Cooperation between the left and indigenous communities fostered a pro-indigenous initiative in both nations. However, the Guatemalan Pan-Maya movement narrowed its focus directly on indigenous rights by the late 1980s and 1990s, while Bolivia's native population maintained a broad initiative within labor unions and the political left. Bolivia's indigenous/*campesino* ties developed by the MNR and maintained during the

counterrevolution facilitated grassroots cooperation challenging the state. Bolivia's social conflict intensified amidst increased taxation, government austerity, and the state-sale of natural resources concessions to private interests. Following decades of cooperation between the indigenous and the Bolivian left, popular protest facilitated social change. In 1990, the "March for Territory and Dignity" united a broad cross section of the Bolivian popular class. The efforts of indigenous activists brought the struggle for ethnic rights to the national level.[17] The steady infusion of indigenous rights into Bolivian politics brought success, rather than the anemic state of Guatemala's Pan-Maya movement.

In Guatemala the ability to overcome ethnic discrimination and isolation proved difficult. The Maya endured underdevelopment and armed conflict. As outlined in Chapter Three, civil war and lack of social development spawned Mayan activism within the Popular Left. Mayan communities joined *ladino* labor and human rights efforts in a fight for basic rights. Labor unions like Comité de Unidad Campesina (CUC) and human rights organizations like Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (GAM) initiated cooperation between *ladino* and Mayan communities. The CUC united rural agricultural workers with small-scale farmers and fought for land reform and labor rights. Its efforts won wage concessions against the landed elite in the 1980s.[18] While social and economic injustice prompted the CUC to act, state violence fueled human rights work. During the civil war, military

[17] Brysk, *From Tribal Village to Global Village*, 153-154. Hundreds of protesters marched from the Amazonian lowlands 600 miles to La Paz. Along the way many communities supported the march, and the activists received widespread media coverage.

[18] CUC, February 11, 1989, CIRMA, Infostelle, Signatura 4, 1.02.01. In February of 1980 the CUC led a southern agricultural strike with 50,000 workers winning a concession to raise wages by $1.30 a day.

repression targeted Mayan villages and in many cases, destroyed them. The GAM toiled to raise awareness and fight military repression. Volunteers worked to help families of the disappeared and seek justice for the many atrocities. Human rights efforts helped initiate peace talks between the government and guerrilla leadership. Mayan cooperation within Popular Left organizations like the CUC and GAM initiated further grassroots development as the 1980s progressed. The hardships of civil war prompted independent Mayan organizations to seek specific ethnic rights within the nation.

Mayan activism evolved from grassroots actions of the late 1970s through the 1990s as social conditions deteriorated. The cooperative efforts of the left and the indigenous communities empowered and re-enfranchised the Mayan population to create an independent movement that focused on greater indigenous rights. Organizations like Coordinación de Organizaciones Del Pueblo Maya de Guatemala (COPMAGUA) and Coordinación Maya forged a national presence from the grassroots movement. Small regional grassroots organization united in support of broad indigenous aims. These organizations helped promote a distinct indigenous agenda within the Guatemalan political sphere, as the Thirty-Six year civil war came to a close.[19]

In contrast, the Bolivian government mitigated ethnic identity through a policy of state appeasement and indifference. Whereas human rights, land reform, and social justice moved the Maya towards an ethnic platform, deteriorating economic, labor, and social

[19] As discussed in chapter five, grassroots organization developed into national organizations that petitioned for indigenous rights and representation during the peace negotiations. The cumulative effort of these national organizations and the hundreds of grassroots organizations won the placement of a specific Indigenous Rights Accord within the 1996 Peace Agreement.

conditions prompted a broader Bolivian initiative. Following the end of the Military-Peasant pact in 1970, the Bolivian government focused on developing the eastern lowland region. There, failed development strategies of past administrations coupled with a weak state infrastructure wrecked the Bolivian economy, prompting austerity measures. In 1985, the Bolivian government enacted the "New Economic Policy." The new laws addressed hyperinflation by severing remaining corporatist ties with indigenous communities.[20] Key elements of the IMF-approved restructuring plan included currency devaluation, an increase in domestic oil and gas prices, a tax overhaul, and a re-privatization of state enterprises. The first three measures proved unpopular across a broad social spectrum, and the privatization of mines forced massive layoffs, radicalizing a large portion of the popular class.[21] State austerity and restructuring, coupled with rising pressure from grassroots activists, allowed indigenous reform to piggyback with leftist class-based mobilization.

After the PMC ended in 1970, indigenous intellectuals spoke out against the state, demanding ethnic rights. Fausto Reinaga, author of *La Revolución Indía,* called for the indigenous population to rise up against social oppression.[22] His work promoting *indianismo* via the Bolivian Indian Party, (PIB) failed to attract substantial support, yet his writings served as a basis for the larger indigenous struggle of the 1980s and 1990s.

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[20] Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America*, 182-182. The NEP Decree 21060 ended any remaining ties the MNR government had originally forged with indigenous communities in the 1950s.

[21] Postero, *Now we Are Citizens*, 126.

[22] Fausto Reinaga, *La Revolución Indía* (Bolivia: Ediciones PIB, 1969); Lucero, *Struggles of Voices*, 81. State/indigenous relations broke down in the late 1960s and early 1970s prompting indigenous intellectuals to challenge past alliances.

The idea of indigenous nationalism struck a cord among the rural and urban communities, as state failures encouraged a new generation to mobilize.

A movement known as the Kataristas, grew from the work of intellectuals like Reinaga. Young Aymaran men adopted a pro-indigenous stance looking to unite urban and rural societies.[23] Like the Pan-Maya movement of the 1980s and 1990s, the Katarista movement struggled over basic rights versus ethnic reforms. The urban intellectual wing of the Katarista movement sought to pursue solely indigenous ethnic and cultural rights. In contrast, the rural Katarista movement recognized the injustice faced by the indigenous communities, but did not wish to focus entirely on ethnic rights. Instead leaders chose to continue Bolivia's tradition of indigenous-leftist cooperation, focusing on broader political aims that addressed land and labor reform and economic underdevelopment.[24]

So, in the 1970s and 1980s, Bolivian indigenous movements organized from the grassroots level into strong regional movements. The eastern lowland communities faced an influx of settlers and capital investment looking to exploit previously undesirable lands beginning in the 1970s. By the 1980s, settlers and corporations encroached on indigenous lands, seeking logging, petroleum, agricultural, and mineral resources. The

[23] Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America*, 154-156. Taking its name from the late colonial Tupac Katari movement, the Kataristas supported ethnic rights in Bolivia.

[24] Ibid., 167-170.

indigenous communities of the lowland faced mounting pressure from settlers who were encouraged by the Bolivian government to open up and expand the Amazonian region.[25]

In 1982, the Confederación Indígena del Oriente Boliviano (CIDOB) united a coalition of native peoples demanding the end of "ethnic homogenization."[26] The CIDOB emerged from a loose network of local grassroots organizations founded in the eastern lowlands. These indigenous communities united through networks initiated by religious missions and NGO organizations. Initially the CIDOB focused its attention on the Chaco and Santa Cruz region, but by 1990 had encompassed the entire Amazon region inclusive of thirty ethnic groups. The 1990 March for Territory and Dignity showcased the organizational strength of the movement. Lowland communities marched to La Paz, claiming that government expansion policies threatened to destroy indigenous communities and culture. Other disenfranchised groups with broad class-based social agendas, including the *cocaleros*, miners, and indigenous communities of the Altiplano, duly noted their success. With the culmination of the protest march, President Paz Zamora issued decrees in protection of community land. Bolivia's regional movements bore witness to the effectiveness of collective action.[27]

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[25] Ibid., 193-195. Between 1967 and 1993 the government helped redistribute 3-5 million hectares of land in the highlands at the same time that land redistribution reached 25-30 million hectares in the lowland region.

[26] Xavier Albó, "The "Long Memory" of Ethnicity in Bolivia and Some Temporary Oscillations," in *Unresolved Tensions*, 23. The CIDOB, formed in 1982, would eventually unite all of the lowland indigenous communities.

[27] Brysk, *From Tribal Village to Global Village,* 125.

Like the distinctly indigenous movements of the Kataristas and the CIDOB, leftists labor unions with high indigenous participation joined in grassroots organization. Mining and agricultural unions developed a politicized indigenous base, addressing the inadequacies of the government, while simultaneously incorporating a native rights platform. Trade unions like the Central Obrera Boliviana (COB) formed a pan-indigenous labor union to overcome ethnic divisions.[28] The cocalero union sought the protection of coca farming based on ethnic and cultural rights of production despite the Bolivian government's tendency to acquiesce to US anti-drug policies.[29] The absence of armed conflict allowed Bolivia's native communities to incorporate indigenous rights into a broad social platform following the model of leftist cooperation.

In contrast, the Pan-Maya platform in Guatemala developed amidst a background of civil war violence and human rights violations. While the Maya movement grew within the Popular Left, leadership and organizations remained divided over class versus ethnic reform. The Pan-Maya movement struggled for representation in the 1996 Peace Agreement, a difficult battle that brought a symbolic victory rather than tangible political capital. By 1997 Bolivia's Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) elected four indigenous *campesinos* to National Assembly seats, paving the path towards greater political

[28] Lucero, *Struggles of Voices*, 64.

[29] Postero, *Now we Are Citizens*, 196-199.

participation.[30] Bolivia's indigenous community found stronger footing working within a leftist coalition, advancing indigenous concerns through broader social reform.

Neoliberal Challenges and Leadership: 1990s to Present

Indigenous activism in Latin America experienced tremendous growth during the post-Cold War era of neoliberalism. Despite enormous potential, Guatemala's Pan-Mayan movement stumbled in the new millennium. As outlined in Chapter Five, the indigenous struggle in Guatemala suffered a split over social versus ethnic rights. In contrast, Bolivia's Aymara and Quechua speaking communities unified amidst deteriorating economic and labor conditions. Again, Bolivia maintained the link between indigenous activism and a class-based social agenda electing leadership that would support both social change and ethnic rights, a key component lacking within Guatemala.

The divided Guatemalan Pan-Maya movement struggled with ethnic identity and the effects of globalization in the post-peace agreement era. Indigenous leaders split support over social versus ethnic rights. The schism occurred at a critical juncture for the Mayan struggle, as the country moved beyond the civil war and experienced the new challenges of a neoliberal, globalized world. Increased narco-violence spreading from South America and the rising gang terror targeted the weak Guatemalan judicial system. Mayan communities became more isolated and divided as the new violence sent shockwaves

[30] Albó, "The 'Long Memory' of Ethnicity in Bolivia and Some Temporary Oscillations," 28. The election of four deputies created a watershed moment for the Movimiento al Socialismo party. MAS is a coalition political party of rural indigenous, trade unionists, urban workers, and middle class leftists.

through their communities in the post-peace era. Inclusive labor organizations like the CUC worked to unite the Maya and *ladino* population to advance social reform. However, new global opportunities in farming and manufacturing lessened the need for Mayan participation. The native population reverted to local ethnic and geographic divisions and found independent economic opportunities.

While globalization and a neoliberal economy stifled the Pan-Maya movement, Bolivia experienced a resurgence of political activism as Aymara and Quechua communities joined a diverse coalition of poor and middle class citizens. As in Guatemala, the new millennium ushered in a period of significant change. Scholarship such as Nancy Postero's *Now We Are Citizens* and Alison Brysk's *From Tribal Village to Global Village* examines Bolivia's indigenous communities within a neoliberal context. Both scholars contend that deteriorating economic conditions in the 1980s, coupled with the cooperation between the left and native populations, served as a catalyst for indigenous activism.

Brysk argues that despite state-directed land reform in Bolivia, outside factors mitigated economic and social development for the majority of indigenous people. Inadequate transportation, technology, credit, and literacy impacted the native communities. Specifically, without the means to market and to sell agricultural products and adapt to changing economic conditions, indigenous community suffering increased.[31] Likewise, Postero finds that elite attempts to restructure the state economic model failed. The

[31] Brysk, *From Tribal Village to Global Village*, 148. Transportation costs for farmers often make up 30 percent of the final agricultural sale price.

resulting reforms of the 1980s and 1990s cost indigenous communities jobs, state resources, and protected markets for domestic goods.[32] Ultimately, the destabilization of the middle and lower classes challenged the neoliberal policies and political system of Bolivia's entrenched oligarchy. At the turn of the twenty-first century, neoliberal protest shook the nation. Indigenous and leftist activists followed the Bolivian tradition of cooperation in challenging the government.

Like Guatemala, Bolivia struggles from a lack of social services with the majority of people living in poverty.[33] In both nations, the end of military rule ushered in a period of neoliberal economic policies. In the late 1990s, the Bolivian government obtained development capital from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund by conceding to further austerity demands. In compliance, the Bolivian government sold Cochabamba water concessions in 1999 to Aguas de Tunari, a subsidiary of the Bechtel Corporation.[34] Postero finds at the very same time, the region received an influx of rural indigenous migrants. Cultural issues unfolded as many indigenous migrants felt a historic and cultural tie to the land, believing that affordable access to water was a human right. As a result of individual well drilling and a diminished water table, the

[32] Postero, *Now we Are Citizens*, 190-193. The Bolivian economic reforms reduced state jobs from 25 to 12.5 percent. The privatization of public sectors saw little increased revenue flow into the state, while at the same time placing greater financial stress on the poor.

[33] Fernanda Wanderley, "Beyond Gas: Between the Narrow-Based and Broad-Based," in *Unresolved Tensions*, 198; "Hardly a Dent in Guatemalan Poverty, As Wealth Distribution Becomes World's Worst," *NotiCen: Central American & Caribbean Affairs*, October 04, 2007. Bolivia's poverty rate outpaces the annual growth rate. Some 5.5 million Bolivians live in poverty and of that 3.5 million are destitute. As of 2006, 51 percent of Guatemalans live in extreme poverty.

[34] Postero, *Now we Are Citizens*, 193-194.

international consortium raised the price of water dramatically.[35] Poor Bolivian communities united in protest overcoming ethnic and cultural divisions. Relying on a tradition cultivated over decades, cooperative efforts challenged the government.[36]

Popular protest intensified as a result of the 2000 water conflict. The *cocalero* movement continued its fight against the government's support of the US, anti-drug campaign. In addition, lowland indigenous campaigns targeted gas and oil companies that exploited communities through government concessions. By 2003, popular protest manifested itself in the form of "gas wars." Centered in El Alto, the Aymaran community began to block roads in retaliation for the government-proposed pipeline and sale of Bolivian gas reserves abroad. The demonstration quickly gained the support of a diverse group including labor unions, student groups, and *campesino* organizations. The protesters believed that the Bolivian elite again squandered the resources of the citizens.[37] In 2005, the gas conflict again prompted mass strikes and road blockades from multiple sectors of Bolivian society. Indigenous communities from both the Altiplano and lowlands joined labor unions, student movements, miners and *cocaleros.* The unrest over gas and oil royalties paid by foreign corporations proved too great for President Carlos Mesa's

[35] Ibid.

[36] John, *Bolivia's Radical Tradition*, 234. John finds that a diverse group collectively organized against the government including militant housewives, student organizations, factory workers, and miners.

[37] Postero, *Now we Are Citizens*, 207-209. The mass uprising likened state policies to elite domination and control. From a historical perspective, the popular class leaders felt that the selling of gas reserves by the Bolivian government was similar to selling off silver, tin, and rubber.

administration to survive. In June of 2005, Mesa resigned, setting in motion the groundwork for incredible change.[38]

Indigenous activism in Bolivia and Guatemala struggles with globalization and the ability to overcome ethnic divisions. Strong leadership and unity are vitally important for a successful movement, but can have differing consequences.[39] Electoral results reveal stark differences. Bolivia's Evo Morales and Guatemala's Rigoberta Menchú attempted to bridge ethnic divisions and unify a political base. While Evo Morales won the Bolivian presidency in 2005, Rigoberta Menchú failed to win more than 3 percent of the national vote in Guatemala's 2007 election. Deep divisions within the Mayan community exposed themselves during the electoral campaign. Individual Mayan communities did not rally behind Menchú as some analysts had expected. Instead, due to inter-ethnic divisions, indigenous communities saw her as an outsider having spent much of her adult life in exile. Some even felt that she had not given back to the Mayan people, perceiving her as a wealthy elite. Unfortunately for Menchú, petty jealousy, misconceptions, and lack of political nuance brought a resounding defeat.[40] Her struggle at the electoral polls mirrors the uphill battle to overcome ethnic divisions within the Pan Maya movement.

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[38] Ibid., 206-215.

[39] Brysk, *From Tribal Village to Global Village*, 3-4. Alison Brysk contends that in the neoliberal era, leadership bridges the "tribal village with the global village" citing key activists such as Rigoberta Menchú of Guatemala, Randy Gorman of Ecuador, and Subcomandante Marcos of Mexico. While Rigoberta Menchú failed to unite broad support in Guatemala, Bolivia's Evo Morales won the Bolivian presidency in 2005, championing many issues of importance to the native community.

[40] Marc Lacey "Complex Defeat for Nobel Winner in Guatemala," *The New York Times*, September 11, 2007.

As a young woman, Menchú fled from violence during the civil war, and her story was published while living in exile. International fame facilitated her work as a peace advocate during the civil conflict. With the end of the Guatemalan conflict in 1996, Rigoberta Menchú served as a good will ambassador for the UN, worked to provide affordable medicine to poor Guatemalans, and sought to bring justice and the international courts to bear on those who committed atrocities during the civil war. In 1993, the Nobel committee recognized her body of work, by awarding her the Peace Prize. The money she received helped fund her human rights foundation.[41] Despite Menchú's efforts, Guatemala's indigenous wholly rejected her. Mayan communities believed that her years abroad left her disconnected from indigenous rural society. Regionalism came to bear during the 2007 campaign as local villages and entire Guatemalan departments rejected her candidacy.[42] Menchú's newly created and soundly rejected political party, Enquentro por Guatemala, attempted to bridge ethnic gaps, by addressing poor *ladino* and indigenous people alike. However, ethnic division within Guatemala remained too strong, thus hampering the Pan-Maya struggle.[43] While both *ladino* and Mayan society rejected Menchú's leadership, a majority of Bolivians united behind an Aymaran coca farmer.

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[41] "Guatemala: Rigoberta Menchú Steps Beyond Tradition to Move Indigenous Agenda," *NotiCen: Central American & Caribbean Affairs*, February 19, 2004.

[42] Marc Lacey, "Complex Defeat for Nobel Winner in Guatemala," *The New York Times*, September 11, 2007.

[43] "Little Prospect of an Indigenous President in Guatemala," *NotiCen: Central American & Caribbean Affairs*, February 16, 2006.

Born in the western highlands, Evo Morales migrated to Cochabamba in the late 1970s to grow coca. He joined the farmers cocalero union in 1981 as the United States began intensifying the anti-drug campaign. Recognizing the severe economic and social divisions within the country, he became a advocate for impoverished farmers. Unlike Menchú, Morales did not have to flee Bolivia and could directly participate in grassroots mobilization. His efforts made him a symbol for Bolivia's poor. Morales overcame Bolivia's strong cultural divide by blending ethnic rights with social justice. As leader of the Cocalero movement, he opposed the US anti-drug campaign. In his fight for equality, Morales promoted social activism within the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS).[44] MAS's political platform sought justice for all Bolivians regardless of identity. Like the growing grassroots indigenous movement, MAS integrated indigenous rights into a broader social platform crossing cultural and ethnic boundaries.

Morales united the indigenous and Bolivian left through MAS. Whereas Menchú proved a divisive force amongst the Maya, Morales succeeded in closing ethnic and social gaps among Bolivia's lower and middle class. Spreading a message of social reform, Evo Morales defeated the entrenched oligarchy and won the 2005 presidential election in the wake of popular protest. When the political right challenged Morales, Bolivia's left-wing coalition reaffirmed his victory, voting against a repeal referendum. Again, the long tradition of cooperation amongst the Bolivian left and indigenous communities

[44] Lucero, *Struggles of Voices*, 89-91. Morales adopted an anti-imperialist stance regarding the eradication of coca. He argued that farming the plant was part of Andean culture for millennia.

succeeded.[45] The native population learned to work within the confines of the political system, gaining an indigenous voice in the highest political office. Bolivia's indigenous became politically active when the state ended indigenous patronage without the civil conflict faced by the Maya. As such, the tradition of cooperation between the left and indigenous activists in Bolivia shifted focus towards economic and social rights for all Bolivians. The divisions within the Pan-Maya movement left the indigenous population disorganized in the face of the twenty-first century's challenges.

Final Thoughts

Evo Morales and MAS represent not only the interests of the political left but also those of the native peoples. Bolivia's indigenous population began the twentieth century as a politically and socially disenfranchised group. By the twenty-first century they transformed into a symbol of Latin American native empowerment. Bolivian success illuminates the possibilities of the Pan-Maya movement, as Guatemala's indigenous population continues to struggle for social and ethnic rights and a defined space within the political arena.

The state integration of the Bolivian and Guatemalan indigenous communities in the 1930s facilitated middle class support and enfranchisement during the reform of the 1940s and 1950s. Counterrevolution led native communities in each nation towards

[45] "Bolivia: President Evo Morales Strengthened as More Than 65 Percent of Voters Reject Recall Referendum," *NotiCen: Central American & Caribbean Affairs*, August 15, 2008.

different trajectories. The Maya suffered disenfranchisement and repression, while Bolivia's native population experienced state controlled inclusion. While the state hoped to mitigate ethnic identity and enhance state control, the process led towards native cooperation within the left, creating a base for future social activism. Both scenarios eventually promoted indigenous activism, yet in Bolivia native communities proved far more adept at maintaining an indigenous platform within a broad leftists social agenda. Unity and perseverance brought grassroots political victories, successful demonstrations against neoliberal policies, and eventually, a presidential victory. During the 1970s and 1980s the Pan-Maya movement also worked alongside *ladino* labor and human rights unions and developed independent grassroots organizations. Political recognition of the Maya briefly developed within the peace process and Indigenous Rights Accord; however, the Maya failed to adapt to the neoliberal challenges of the twenty-first century. Narco-violence, youth gang expansion, and neoliberal free enterprise disrupted the post-peace momentum of the Pan-Maya movement. Unlike Bolivia, Guatemala's indigenous suffer poor political participation and are hampered with continued ethnic division. With the failed candidacy of Rigoberta Menchú, the Maya still need leadership that can forward an indigenous platform within a broad coalition. Bolivia's indigenous had already united leftist social reform with indigenous rights over a long period, beginning first with the MNR, followed by the Military-Peasant Pact. The steady unbroken cooperation allowed for the indigenous population to unite in the face of neoliberal challenges. Positive change has occurred in Guatemala since the 1996 Peace Agreement including the indictment of former General Ríos Montt on charges of genocide.[46]

[46] Elisabeth Malkin, "Accused of Atrocities, Guatemala's Ex-Dictator Chooses Silence," *The New York Times*, January 26, 2012.

Nevertheless, the twenty-first century Mayan community continues to struggle for greater political, social, and ethnic representation.

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ABSTRACT

BASTA YA!: PAN-MAYAN ACTIVISM IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY GUATEMALA

by

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This dissertation examines the remarkable growth of the Guatemalan indigenous struggle in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and its post-civil war challenges. The Maya remain a divided people comprising twenty-two different ethnic groups struggling to form a unified position within Guatemala. While a great deal has been written on both modern Guatemala and its large Mayan population, the historiography fails to examine the impact that the thirty-six year civil conflict had on indigenous mobilization. Renowned anthropologists Kay B. Warren and Robert Carmack spent decades studying the Maya. Whereas their examinations focus on diversity and multi-ethnic challenges, my work centers on the Popular Left's effect on indigenous mobilization. On numerous trips to Guatemala, I found evidence to support my ideas surrounding both the eruption of indigenous activism in the late 1970s and the effect that the Guatemalan left had on the indigenous movement leading up to, and beyond the 1996 Peace Agreement.