Central America: The Struggle Continues

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Saying No To Neo-Liberalism

After more than a decade of “debt crises,” “structural adjustment” and “austerity measures,” Latin Americans have begun to turn the tide against the neo-liberal economic agenda.

In Venezuela, voters gave a majority to the Causa R and Convergencia parties, both defining themselves as opposed to the neo-liberal economic model.

In Honduras, the conservative Partido Nacional was voted out of office after promising to continue the military imposed structural adjustment policies.

In El Salvador, Panama, Mexico and Colombia, parties opposed to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) imposed austerity measures are expected to make strong showings in elections later this year. In Brazil and Uruguay, they are favored to win.

In Guatemala, last May, protests by grassroots organizations against the government’s vicious economic and human rights policies led the military to attempt a coup. While the generals do not officially occupy the Presidential Palace, the new President, Ramiro de Leon Carpio, has yet to heed the cry for fundamental change.

The popular sectors of Latin America are questioning an economic model that asks them to share the sacrifices of reduced state spending on health, education, housing, food and employment, yet are told that they must wait for the spoils of privatization and foreign investment to “trickle down.”

The IMF demand that debt payments must be the number one priority for Latin governments is ringing hollow. The original debt is more than twice paid yet Latin Americans owe more than ever.

Yet with billions of dollars now flowing from South to North, we must remember that the corrupt Latin American elites are not the only ones who profited. We too have benefited from the misery brought about by these policies. Now it is time to stand with those Latin Americans who are calling for change.

--Dan Fireside
CUSLAR Coordinator

The Committee on US-Latin American Relations (CUSLAR) is a project of the Center for Religion, Ethics and Social Policy (CRESP), based at Cornell University. Since 1965 we have worked in Ithaca and the surrounding areas to promote a greater understanding of Latin America and the Caribbean. We are particularly concerned with the role of the United States in influencing the social, political and economic conditions of the region.

The CUSLAR Newsletter provides our members and other concerned individuals with information and analysis on topics relevant to Latin America and the Caribbean. The positions of the authors do not necessarily reflect the positions of CUSLAR as an organization. The CUSLAR Newsletter committee cooperates with authors to reach mutually acceptable editorial decisions. If you are interested in writing for the Newsletter or working on the committee, please contact the CUSLAR office at G-29 Anabel Taylor Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853 (607) 255-7293. We welcome your suggestions and letters.

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Voices From El Mozote

Shelli McMillen

In June and July of 1993 Shelli McMillen assisted anthropologist Leigh Binford's research in El Mozote, El Salvador. It was in El Mozote where the U.S.-trained Atlacatl Battalion of the Salvadoran army massacred hundreds of civilians in December, 1981.

“After I bore my first seven children, I decided that they were all I wanted. But my mother said, no, that’s not enough; you may not yet have had the child who will care for you when you’re old. So I had seven more children. Of my first seven, the army murdered five, of my second seven, they murdered one.” Luisa told me this while we sat in her makeshift house in the town of El Mozote. She, her husband Francisco and their grandchild José returned there in August 1992, just seven months after the signing of the Peace Accords between the Salvadoran military and the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) guerrillas. They moved into one of the few houses left with its walls intact. A mixture of corrugated metal and baked tiles serves as a roof over the one-room house; the earth provides the floor.

Francisco was born in the area of El Mozote in the early 1920’s, before it became a town in the 1950’s. Luisa joined him from Honduras when they were married. They began their life together with very little. But through hard work, they accumulated more than the average resident of El Mozote who was financially destitute. Francisco grew corn and when he had a surplus, used that to buy animals. He then sold these and bought land. By the time the war began in 1980, they owned 25 manzanas (about 42 acres) of land, 14 cattle and kept bees for honey, which they sold. In 1975, Francisco joined the town’s newly created co-operative, one of the very few in the region. Their sons and three hired men attended the crops, so they were earning sufficient income to live comfortably with half a day’s labor.

Because of the guerrilla concentration in northern Morazán province since the late 1970’s, the military suspected all who lived there of being either guerrillas or guerrilla supporters.

Because of the guerrilla concentration in northern Morazán province since the late 1970’s, the military suspected all who lived there of being either guerrillas or guerrilla supporters. Civilians were considered just as dangerous as the guerrillas because they fed and clothed them. Without the civilians, the guerrillas could not have survived. In the twisted logic of the military, this made civilians a legitimate target. As a result, thousands were assassinated, “disappeared,” tortured and massacred.

“When the war started, we were afraid of everything,” Luisa and her daughter Raquel, who has also returned to Mozote, told me. “Planes flew overhead everyday. We would hear shots in the middle of the night and wonder who had just been killed.”

It was under these conditions that, according to former residents, the town itself started the “rumor” that El Mozote’s residents were Evangelical Christians. The military persecuted politically active Catholic clergy during the 1970’s and 80’s. Many people concluded from this that in the mind of the military, Catholics were subversives. Evangelicals, on the other hand, were considered to be politically neutral. In reality, only a few Evangelical families lived in El Mozote; several joined the church out of fear of army repression, but the majority remained practicing Catholics.

Politically, most former residents that I interviewed felt as Luisa did. “We knew what was happening, but not why,” commented one resident. Degrees of involvement in the war varied; some organized with the guerrillas, others did not. Most just tried to keep both sides happy in order to survive and sold supplies to both the military.

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Charles Temple

Frances Temple and I went to El Salvador in December, as a guest of the local Anglican Church. In the departure lounge of the Miami Airport, people greeted one another and spoke easily. The two other North Americans, it turned out, were guests of the same church as ourselves. Three hours later, the plane banked suddenly over the Pacific and dropped onto a runway by the ocean, just as the sky turned the color of peaches, and the day closed into evening.

A young man named José collected the four of us in a station wagon, and we began the hour-long climb up the modern highway toward San Salvador. We were chatting with José and the other two passengers when we came upon a small pine tree lying in the road in the right-hand lane. The woman next to me began talking of Christmas trees—but as we passed this tree I saw that it was there to divert traffic around a dead man and child who were lying in the road. Run over? Shot? The woman sitting to my left, unaware of the bodies, continued talking of Christmas trees. José shrugged and kept up his speed.

The road suddenly plunged us into a crush of city traffic. We inched past darkened buildings into the one area of bright light: McDonald’s, Wendy’s, Burger King, large banks and the Hotel Camino Real. The driver swept into the driveway past the armed guards. Behind us a jeep station wagon marked USAID was dropping off a camera crew. Our two fellow passengers said goodbye and walked into the hotel. In the country only an hour so far, the four of us already had very different impressions of El Salvador.

José drove us out of the lighted part of town, and into a warren of streets. Eventually he found what he was looking for:

I introduced myself to the secretary and asked to see Sr. López.

"No," she said, "it's not possible. They've killed him."

The Casa de Huéspedes Clementina. The Clementina, a modest guest house, is owned by an agricultural cooperative called FENACOA, and was named after an FMLN member, Josefa Clementina, who had been the bookkeeper of the cooperative. We learned that in February of 1992, while returning from a celebration of the signing of the ceasefire agreement, Josefa Clementina had been pulled from a bus and murdered by a death squad. Her photograph hung in the small lobby, over a mounted American made M-16 rifle, captured by the Viet Cong in 1971, and eventually used by the guerillas. She had piercing eyes.

The National University of El Salvador

I recognized the University immediately from one of the films I had seen on the war. I remember seeing someone falling down, shot, right here on this walk that leads to the biology department. But now the university looks much worse than it did in the film. An earthquake destroyed or severely damaged a good many of the buildings in 1986, and army shelling left many others pockmarked. During a long occupation in the mid-1980's, the army burned the books in the library, stole or smashed the typewriters, computers, lab equipment, and light fixtures, and stripped buildings of their wiring to sell for the value of its copper.

The university appears to be coming back, but slowly. Temporary shacks house administrative offices. Classes are held in the intact buildings, and some office machines are stored after hours in the damaged buildings, and wheeled out onto a covered walkway for use during the day. A new library, built with help from Spain, is nearly finished. It's not very big for a university with 32,000 students, but there are few books to be put in it.

On Thursday morning, December 8th, we met for an hour with the administrator in charge of international relations for the university. She explained the recent history of the university, and spoke of the years of occupation, during which the
professors and students kept classes going in their houses. "The university," she said, "is not the buildings."

Our next appointment was with the Vice Rector, who told us an interesting story. There are 32 different specialties offered in the university but every student must take a core of courses in the humanities. The intent is to develop students' understanding of the moral dimensions of their respective fields, and of the obligation placed on a person educated in a public university in a poor society. The university had a fine group of faculty in the philosophy department. But from the mid-1980's, they became targets of persecution by the military. Many were driven out, and some were killed. A colonel in the army was installed as head of the department. He ran classes and department meetings with a drawn pistol. Now that the war is over, the university wants to rebuild the Philosophy Department as the soul of the university. Rather than import philosophers from other countries, they have chosen to recruit 100 former students—those who studied in every area in the university before they went off to fight—to take a three year course of study in philosophy. From these will be chosen the next generation of professors in the department of philosophy.

My 3 p.m. appointment was with Mario Lopez, a dean in the Faculty of Humanities. I found his office with some difficulty, but arrived on time. When I introduced myself to the secretary and asked for Sr. Lopez, she looked at me strangely. I thought perhaps I had erred in expecting him to be punctual so soon after the siesta, so I said with a smile, "Isn't it possible to see him?"

"No," she said. "It's not possible. They've killed him."

At that very moment a woman came in with newspapers under her arm. She handed me one. A large headline said, "Ex-Comandante of the FMLN is Killed."

Mario Lopez' assistant came forward at that moment and insisted that I meet with her instead. Of course I tried to withdraw, but she wouldn't hear of it. I thought perhaps she was in shock, and that was probably true in part, but her attitude is also explained in the words from a revolutionary song: "With every death, our resolve just gets stronger."

Mario Lopez had been a teacher, and he had organized a teacher's group called ANDES, (Asociación Nacional de Educadores Salvadoreños). He had left university teaching to lead a brigade of guerrillas, who knew him fondly as "Comandante Venancio Salvatierra." With the peace, he had returned to civic life, and was helping to rebuild both the university and the country's education system. He remained active in politics, working with the legalized party of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN).

Mario Lopez was the third high-ranking official in the FMLN to be assassinated in the last several months. He was killed by four men armed with 45 caliber pistols, when he went to the house of his mother-in-law to check in on his young son. His wife was killed in 1988 in an Air Force bombing of an FMLN hospital. Mario Lopez' killers were almost certainly a military-backed death squad, and his murder came just twenty-four hours after the United Nations announced that it was launching an investigation into the continuing activities of the death squads.

Mario Lopez' death was distressing for many reasons. As one woman told us tearfully, "He was one of the best. They are killing the very best." His death was a tremendous loss to the university and to the educational community. And it marked a very dangerous turn in Salvadoran politics. The continued work of the death squads was bad enough for the fear and tragedy they caused, but it also ran the risk of provoking the former guerrillas into taking up arms.

We wondered if fighting would break out on Friday. It didn't seem likely, but the staff of our guest house—who were former guerrillas and FMLN members—said it might well happen. Camilo, the husband of one of the women at the guest house and a guerrilla leader, had been shot in the head at close range a few days earlier.

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NICARAGUA: THE POT BOILS OVER

Roger Burbach


A decade and a half after the ouster of the Somoza regime, Nicaragua is a country torn by political and social strife. The killing of ex-Sandinista soldiers in Esteli by Sandinista army units, the seizure of hostages by former Contras and then the counter seizure of UNO politicians by Sandinista adherents, the increasingly contradictory and often Machiavellian role played by Sandinista army chief Humberto Ortega, and the ever deepening tensions and debates within the Sandinista party itself—all these incidents or critical issues have placed Nicaragua on the brink of what appears to be an impending collapse.

Media coverage of what is happening in Nicaragua tends to blame the Sandinistas for the present disarray, ignoring the fact that the starting point for understanding Nicaragua's current chaos is the election of Violeta Chamorro in February, 1990. Even after the elections, the Sandinistas—-who won over 40% of the popular vote—remained the most consolidated and stabilizing political force in the country. President Chamorro and her son-in-law, Antonio Lacayo, who became the de facto prime minister, recognized this reality when they agreed to accept many of the changes that had occurred during the decade of Sandinista rule. These changes included the agrarian-reform program, the Constitution and government infrastructure created under the Sandinistas, and perhaps most critically, the existence and institutionalization of the Sandinista army.

But this modus vivendi was challenged almost immediately by the Contras, their backers in Miami, important factions of the governing Union of National Opposition (UNO) coalition, and the US government, all of whom were intent upon rolling back the revolution. The existence of the Sandinista army in particular was anathema to the foes of the revolution, particularly the CIA and the Pentagon, which were determined to dismantle and destroy an army that had inflicted heavy damage on the surrogate forces they had supported for the better part of the 1980's. This is why the Bush presidency, and now even the Clinton Administration, have been determined to remove all Sandinista influence within the army and turn it into a force that will not dare to challenge U.S. interests or dictates.

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While refusing to dismantle the Sandinista army and depose Humberto Ortega as head of the army, the Chamoerro government did decide to follow Washington's recipe on the economic front by implementing neoliberal policies. These policies hit hard at the public sector, threw many people out of work, and caused a depression in agricultural production, the mainstay of the Nicaraguan economy. In most Latin American countries, similar neoliberal measures were implemented during the course of the 1980's. By 1990 the state sector throughout much of the continent had been dramatically curtailed with only limited public resistance. But Nicaragua proved to be a different story. The revolution had awakened a popular and class consciousness that adamantly resisted the neoliberal measures. By July, 1990, Managua was paralyzed by massive strikes and demonstrations in the streets. On the surface, this general strike—with its takeover of roads and highways, and the erection of brick barricades—appeared similar to the popular insurrection that led to the toppling of the Somoza regime.

But unlike the late 1970's, the protesters did not have a revolutionary program or banner around which the population could coalesce and take political power. The Sandinista party leadership had not called for the general strike, and in fact many leaders believed that a period of social peace, and even austerity,
was necessary for the country to move forward. The Sandinistas were divided between the leadership which at times moved in tandem with the Chamorro government in quest of stability, and the popular sectors which were willing to take to the streets and even take up arms against the government. The dichotomy continues to this day to be a major fault line tearing apart the Sandinista party and the country as a whole.

To a certain extent, this is a conflict between the haves and the have-nots within the Sandinista movement. Many Sandinista leaders, in the infamous “piñata”, took over houses, lands and even government buildings and funds during their final days in office, putting themselves in a much better position to weather the neoliberal policies of the Chamorro government. The resources they appropriated were actually quite limited compared to what has been swindled by other governments in Latin America, like those of Carlos Andrés Pérez in Venezuela, Fernando Collor de Mello in Brazil, and even Violeta Chamorro, where, according to many in Nicaragua, corruption—though much less publicized—has reached proportions akin to the Somoza era. But by its actions, the Sandinista leadership severely damaged the moral and political authority that it once held. It had, after all, come into office as a “party of a new type,” a party that was supposed to be immune to the traditional forms of corruption.

The Sandinista army and the police—insurers of peace and stability in the country—were supposed to be above the political fray and infighting. Initially there was a clear consensus within the Sandinista party that the army had to remain intact and under de facto Sandinista control. But Humberto Ortega, the army and the police soon found themselves at the epicenter of the political and social earthquake tearing apart Nicaragua. During the strike and street uprisings of July, 1990, the army and the police stood largely on the sidelines, unwilling to repress the demonstrators and workers who paralyzed traffic and production. But as time went on, Humberto Ortega was driven to use the military to clamp down on the popular sectors that had once been his allies. The Chamorro government, backed by Washington, ordered Ortega to take over worker-occupied farms and factories, to repress street demonstrators, and to fight against dissident elements in the countryside who sometimes took up arms to protest the government’s grueling economic policies.

Compelled to support government policies, Ortega and the army became divorced from the popular sectors and the base of the Sandinista movement, the very forces that had given the army its legitimacy and strength in the long war against the Contras and the United States. Ortega himself, recognizing that he was objectively sustaining some of the very political forces he had once fought against, began to initiate clandestine operations designed to keep the far right in check.

Under the Sandinista government, the Interior Ministry was in charge of special operations and units designed to deal with the armed opposition and the old Somocistas. For instance, the assassination of Somoza in 1980 in Paraguay was orchestrated out of the Interior Ministry with the assistance of internationalist guerrilla units that had collaborated with the Sandinistas during the final stages of the war against the Somoza regime.

With the victory of Violeta Chamorro, Sandinista control of the Interior Ministry abruptly ended, and the army became the only institution with the capacity to deal with opponents of the revolution. There is little doubt that a Sandinista special unit assassinated Enrique Bermúdez, an old Somocista and the former military head of the Contras, in February, 1991. As one high-ranking civilian member of the Sandinista Front who was on the scene at the time of the assassination noted, “this was a professional operation. Only the army or elements linked to it could have done it so cleanly.”

And it is also likely—although no hard evidence exists—that Humberto Ortega and the head of military intelligence, Lenin Cerna, orchestrated the formation of the Ejército Punitivo de la Izquierda (the Punitive Army of the Left), which launched its activities in November, 1992 with the assassination of Arges Sigueira, head of the Association of Confiscated Property Owners, an organization bent on reclaiming for the "Miami boys" the lands and properties that had been expropriated under the Sandinistas. Led by Frank Ibarra, who may have been an active-duty officer at the time of the assassination, though the Army denies it, this small armed group carried out a few subsequent actions of limited importance, and is now inactive.

Humberto Ortega’s dual level of operating, instead of winning him allies and securing his hold over the military, actually turned all sides against him. The accidental slaying of 16-year-old Jean-Paul Ginie in 1990 by over-annoyed bodyguards of Ortega and the subsequent

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Nicaragua
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to the Interior Ministry. The National Directorate of the Sandinistas appears to have had no direct involvement; as Honey and Avirgan acknowledge, several months before the La Penca operation, the directorate even decided not to act against Pastora because the divisions he fomented within the Contras worked to the Sandinistas’ advantage. An Interior Ministry official at the time reports that Tomás Borge, a member of the directorate and the head of the ministry, was caught off-guard by the assassination attempt. According to this official, Borge launched an internal

There is no doubt that the Sandinistas overtly and covertly assisted many of the guerrilla movements in Central America, particularly the FMLN, which was fighting against a murderous regime that was fully backed and funded by the United States. With the defeat of the Sandinistas in the 1990 elections, many of these support operations were dismantled. Others continued, including some limited logistical backing and political support. Certainly sectors of the Sandinista leadership—particularly Humberto Ortega and Tomás Berge—knew of the arms cache that blew up in Managua. However, in light of the assassination of two high-ranking FMLN official in October and the very tenuous peace process in El Salvador, the Sandinistas should certainly not be faulted for looking the other way or even assisting the FMLN. Indeed such collaboration is in the long-term interest of the survival of the Left in a region where right-wing forces are still very deadly and capable of carrying out murderous activities and campaigns.

The uncovering of the arms cache has been used as the “smoking gun” by the press and the U.S. government officials to heap all kinds of accusations on the Sandinistas. One of the more
The insidious claims is that the Sandinistas were somehow involved in the New York bombing of the World Trade Center after the discovery of five fake Nicaraguan passports in connection with the investigation into the bombing. Charges that Sandinista leaders were involved in preparing documents for those who undertook the New York bombing are totally baseless. Indeed an FBI informant has admitted that the passports came from a ring in the U.S. Embassy in Managua.

Among the Sandinistas, it was not these charges but the rebellion in Esteli in July that tore at the heart and soul of the Sandinista movement. When Victor Manuel Gallegos, a popular retired officer of the Sandinista army, led 150 ex-Sandinista soldiers into Esteli to protest the policies of the Chamorro government and to demand land for his soldiers, he thought that the government and the army would negotiate with him, just as they had done with uprisings of a similar nature that have taken place all over Nicaragua since 1990.

But the takeover of Esteli occurred at a moment when Ortega was under increasing political attack by the right wing and the United States. When Chamorro and Lacayo told him to retake the city, he applied the maximum force in order to demonstrate his loyalty to the government. The result was over 40 dead, mainly ex-Sandinista soldiers who supported Gallegos. For Sandinistas this slaughter was shocking. It was simply incomprehensible that Sandinista soldiers, who had once fought together against the Contras, were now killing each other.

This incident has led to much soul-searching within the Sandinista party. For the first time, there is now serious discussion about renovating the party leadership. Humberto Ortega and his brother Daniel appear to be increasingly at odds over where the Sandinista movement should go. It was in fact Daniel who may have helped encourage the takeover of Esteli when a couple of days earlier he had suggested in a public speech that confrontational grassroots actions against the regressive social and economic policies of the Chamorro government were legitimate. There is some discussion in Managua whether this split between the Ortega brothers is real or simply being staged for popular consumption. But it makes little difference which view one takes. The fact is that Daniel is responding to a real rebellion at the base of the Sandinista party which is fed up with Sandinista leaders who collaborate with the Chamorro government.

It is clearly too early to tell whether or not a new form of democratization will take hold in Nicaragua. But even if the process of social upheaval continues, it is important to remember that ever since the era of modern social revolutions began with the taking of the Bastille in France in 1789, few revolutions have been neat or of short duration. Once new social and political forces are unleashed at the base, it is difficult to contain them and find a new equilibrium. The Cuban revolution, with its relatively short guerrilla movement and the quick consolidation of the revolutionary party, is the exception rather than the rule. And now that the concept of the vanguard party has largely collapsed, revolutions will inevitably be more complex and difficult. It is often forgotten that the other great twentieth-century revolution in Latin America, that of Mexico, began in 1910, and did not really consolidate until the government of Lázaro Cárdenas in 1934. The revolutionary bloodshed, turmoil and destruction in Mexico were much more severe and prolonged than they have been in Nicaragua.

We also need to remember that Nicaragua is still very much a part of Central America, where similar social processes have been set in motion. El Salvador and Guatemala may at present be less chaotic, but they are clearly in the midst of social transformations that will very likely lead to tumultuous and conflictive moments as they grope for a new social order that is more responsive to popular demands and interests.
Agricultural Modernization in Honduras: An Update

Tom Holloway

I recently returned from a study trip to Honduras which focused on technical aspects of tropical agriculture and rural development issues. The controversial Law of Agricultural Modernization continues to be at the center of debate over these issues [see CUSLAR Newsletter, Spring 1993]. One of the speakers who addressed our group was Rigoberto Sandoval Correa, a member of the Directive Council of the Liberal Party, which was in opposition to the National Party of (now former) President Rafael Callejas when the Modernization Law was approved. The Liberals won the national elections in November and their victorious presidential candidate, Roberto Reina, has recently taken office.

Sandoval Correa gave an overview of the historical process by which land was distributed in large grants to a few powerful landholders in the colonial era, and then again to foreign banana companies in the early twentieth century. Despite these past practices, largely due to its relatively low population density (unlike neighboring El Salvador, for example) Honduras has traditionally had large areas where public lands, controlled in principle by the state, predominated. In many such areas subsistence-oriented peasants have lived on public land as squatters for generations.

Under land reform programs since the 1960's the government was able to grant plots of public lands to reform recipients, often in remote and agriculturally marginal areas of the country, without impinging on the power or property rights of large landholders. Land reform efforts, provision in Honduras, common in Latin American land legislation, was that in forested land, even if held as private property, the trees themselves were considered part of the national patrimony, subject to regulation and protection by the state. Furthermore, legal tradition tracing its origin to paternalistic provisions of Spanish colonialism gave the state the authority to exercise a variety of controls over how land, as a "social good" was used and disposed of.

The main objective of the neo-liberal Law of Agricultural Modernization approved last year is to simplify land tenure into two basic categories: 1) public lands, including parks, nature preserves, and unoccupied areas (mostly mountains or the swampy lowlands in the eastern portion of the country); and 2) private lands, over which the owner will have the full and unobstructed right to use, sell, or rent as the owner sees fit. No longer would lands be held with restricted rights of use or sale, nor would the state have regulatory rights over privately held forest land, and the power of the government to expropriate private land would be severely limited to the minimum necessary for the

Under land reform programs since the 1960's the government was able to grant plots of public lands to reform recipients, often in remote and agriculturally marginal areas of the country, without impinging on the power or property rights of large landholders...The new law virtually assures that further land reform on the model of recent decades, meager as that has been in practice, will not take place.

never more than piecemeal, were intended to relieve social pressure in rural areas and show that Honduras was complying with one of the policy provisions of the U.S.-sponsored Alliance for Progress of the 1960's. An important legal condition of the some 200,000 hectares (about 500,000 acres) parceled out under land reform was that the grantees technically had only "use rights" and could not sell or rent the plots they received. This was intended to protect reform recipients from encroachment by large landholders, and ensure that the land thus distributed went for its intended purpose. Another traditional legal

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for investments that was central to the law's purpose could well prove illusory. As subsistence squatters are forced off newly privatized lands, as holdings are consolidated into larger units in order to facilitate mechanization and economies of scale, as more land is switched from production of basic foodstuffs for local consumption to export crops intended to bring in foreign exchange and profits for investors, large numbers of Hondurans will suffer. The economic growth and increased national income that are expected to result from these policies will be concentrated in the hands of national and foreign investors, and foreign creditors will be satisfied.

As a result of these policies, rural-to-urban migration will increase; foodstuffs will become even more scarce and prices will rise; nutrition, public health, and child mortality will worsen. In other works, the living conditions of large numbers of people will deteriorate even further from their already desperate situation. Building from increased levels of private misery and despair, the next step could be social unrest in the form of increased crime, demonstrations, strikes, and land invasions; followed by political disturbance which could take a variety of forms from the strengthening of groups aimed at violent political change to military repression. If the various scenarios are impossible to predict with any certainty other than what history has demonstrated in other times and places, that is a measure of the illusion of the Law of Agricultural Modernization as a guarantee of security for investments in the future of Honduras.

Sandoval Correa told us that the new administration would try to pass legislation to mitigate the worst features of the Modernization Law, but admitted that the options open to any government in Honduras were limited by both internal and external political and economic pressures. This is just one example in one small country of the recent emphasis on privatization, structural adjustment, and related neoliberal reforms which focus on cold numbers on balance sheets, leaving aside the human cost and the social and political ramifications of policies that seem so rational and fashionable in the short run.

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U.S. NATIONAL GUARD GOES TO GUATEMALA

Ann Peters
and Tom Joyce

The misuse of the New York National Guard should again be an issue for upstate New Yorkers. For the second year in a row, over 4,500 National Guard units from eight Northeastern States will be undergoing active training in Guatemala in two week shifts over a six month period. The Guatemalan military forces are generally considered to be the worst violators of human rights in the hemisphere, even worse than the militaries of Haiti or Peru. While many units are engaged in construction, armed units will include those from New York State. (Other National Guard units will be sent to neighboring El Salvador, where continuing death squad style assassinations threaten the negotiated peace.)

The National Guard units were originally designed as state militias controlled by the governors with only a strictly reserve capacity in the national Armed Forces. However, with the beginning of the mobilization for WWI, the Defense Department has occasionally taken control of the National Guard. Since the end of the military draft in 1973 the National Guard has become totally integrated with active forces. There are now over 400,000 people in the Army National Guard and over 100,000 in the Air National Guard, making the latter the world's fourth largest air force.

The New York National Guard has been training out of state since the 1960s, and units participated in the 1983 invasion of Grenada and the 1986 air raid on Libya. Since 1984, Guard units have also been sent to Honduras frequently in not so covert support of the Contra War and the militarization of Central America. While Honduras appeared to be transformed into one large military operation, people in the United States organized to protest National Guard (and regular military) operations in Central America and other conflicted areas.

Although U.S. governors have frequently fought for control of the Guard, Congress passed the Montgomery Amendment which took foreign deployment decisions away from the States. Governor Cuomo issued conflicting statements at the time, and there are continuing differences of opinion on the appropriate use of the National Guard at all levels of government.

U.S. National Guard troops are presently in Guatemala to participate in so-called "community development" projects together with Guatemalan military units. They will be leaving twelve Blackhawk helicopters, along with over 300 pieces of heavy construction equipment that can be used in road building and similar projects in Guatemala. At first glance this looks like a pretty harmless series of exercises, in the tradition of the US Army Corps of Engineers. The Pentagon cites a need for "constructive engagement" with the Guatemalan Military, and argues that U.S. training and joint exercises provide a democratic influence on Latin American military institutions known for political intervention in domestic affairs and violent action against their own citizens.

On closer examination, it is clear that these exercises also provide a cover for promoting the military and ideological agenda of the United States. After the U.S.-sponsored military coup in Guatemala in 1954, the U.S. went on to provide military training and other forms of support for the Guatemalan armed forces. U.S. "Green Beret" Special Forces units were trained in Guatemala on techniques to be used in the rainforests of Viet Nam. The Guatemalan military had close contact with concepts implemented by the U.S. in Viet Nam, such as the use of militarily controlled "strategic hamlets" imposed on civilian communities in areas of conflict. In the period of the "Alliance for Progress" of the 1960s, U.S. officials promoted a carrot-and-stick approach combining violent action against "subversive" community leaders with government- and military-sponsored community development programs throughout Latin America.

Social and economic conditions for the majority of Guatemalans have continued to be extremely harsh. Any protest is met with violence at the hands of...
of the armed forces. The concept of "disappearing" an assassinated person was first developed in Guatemala, as a form of psychological torture. The "scorched earth" campaign directed at farming cooperatives and indigenous Maya communities in the early 1980s produced thousands of refugees who fled Mexico or tried to hide in growing shantytowns around the larger towns and cities.

Under General Ríos Montt, in the early 1980s massacre survivors were organized into "Model Villages" (or "Development Poles") under army supervision. In return for food, and the promise of roads and schools, Model Village residents were expected to participate in paramilitary patrols and work gangs. Soon this system was pervasive throughout the Maya highlands, where all "adult men" are expected to serve in "Voluntary Civil Defense Patrols" without pay one day each week, and to report on any "subversives" in their community for the army.

Guatemala returned to civilian government in 1985 but can still be considered a militarized society. Although assassinations continue, a variety of citizens' groups have arisen to promote respect for human rights and a decent standard of living. The "Mutual Support Group" (GAM) of families of the disappeared, the National Council of Widows (CONAVIGUA) and the Council of Ethnic Communities "Ranujel Junam?"/"Everyone is Equal" (CERD) have taken leadership to defend human rights and to challenge absolute military power. The same issues have been raised in the United Nations and other international forums by Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchú, a Quiché Maya woman who has lost many family members to military violence.

Last year, the government's Human Rights Attorney, Ramiro De León, was named President after a failed internal coup by the previous president, Jorge Serrano. Guatemalans and U.S. government officials expected an improved human rights climate to follow. However, President De León, who was previously an outspoken critic of the armed forces, soon adopted the military's position on human rights issues, claiming that a large military with bases throughout the Maya highlands and the unpaid "voluntary" service in Civil Patrols were necessary to combat antigovernment forces. Local protests against militarism and the Civil Patrols continue to be met with violence. According to De León's successor at the Human Rights Office, military-sponsored tortures, assassinations, and disappearances have actually increased since he has been in office.

The Guatemalan military justifies its huge size and unrestrained power as "National Security" against internal subversion. As more and more Guatemalans live with hunger and malnutrition and without opportunities for a better education, a decent job or basic health care, both street crime and politically organized armed conflict continue. As such, many Guatemalans argue that land reform and the provision of social programs constitute the only long-term solution to the violence. The Army has responded by asserting that only the Guatemalan military is capable of carrying out efficient development programs. They propose that the Civil Patrols be reorganized as "community development" organizations, still under military control.

The U.S. National Guard will be going to Guatemala to provide machinery, technical assistance, labor and logistical support for these military-led "development projects". Many Guatemalans have objected to these projects as a simple continuation of cruel military control and political manipulation of their communities. The projects also lend support to the military's argument that they should control community development and local political life. One middle class Guatemalan explained that the National Guard's presence is seen as a joint military collaboration that will have a negative effect on human rights: "No one is deceived by this government talk of building roads - we all know what it means to have US troops coming to Guatemala." Guatemalan Congressional President Vinicio Villar Anleu also opposes the presence of U.S. troops in Guatemala, and charged President Ramiro De León with violating Guatemalan law by allowing U.S. troops to enter the nation without consulting the Guatemalan Congress and is calling on the Attorney General to sanction the President.

The presence of U.S. troops contributes to the Guatemalan army's control of the country's infrastructure and reinforces its campaign of winning the hearts and minds of the people. The Guatemalan army-whose history is one of destroying villages, not improving them-is the sole beneficiary as its psychological warfare is bolstered by the U.S. presence.

For more information, please contact CUSLAR at (607) 255-7293.

Spring 1994
CELEBRATION AND DENIAL IN MEXICO:
A PERSONAL ACCOUNT OF THE CHIAPAS UPRISING

Ulises E. Mejias

The illusion of Mexican social peace that was recently endorsed by the Salinas and Clinton administrations during the NAFTA negotiations was shattered in a couple of hours. January first welcomed Mexicans with the unpleasantness of an electric jolt. There had not been much time for New Year's celebrations in Villa Cocalito, a refugee camp for Guatemalans near Comalapa, where I was working on a documentary film about the Returners, the organized and collective return of some two hundred families after 12 years of refuge. We were busy and isolated. Actually, news of the nearby conflicts were not available to me until the morning of the 3rd. I was probably one of the last to be startled in my country. At the camp, people would gather around the few battery-operated televisions to watch the news. The coverage was poor, and information about the Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional (EZLN) was lacking. There was no solid information as to the nature of the movement or their objectives.

In some ways, it was unfortunate that I could not observe the reaction of my fellow countrymen. I was the only Mexican at the camp. My exposure was thus limited. Furthermore, the reactions of my hosts were varied. Some of them received the news with silent apprehension. This was not surprising, for I had lived with them long enough to begin to understand that violence was a scar in their memory. These people had seen the Guatemalan Army kill and torture their own because of supposed links to the guerrillas. We came to Mexico fleeing from that violence. It's a good thing we are leaving now, because things are just starting here," someone told me in a pessimistic manner.

I was troubled, but I was also curious. Being aware of the long history of conflicts between indigenous people and the government in Chiapas, I was still fascinated by the fact that this uprising seemed so organized. In the media, equal observations moved other people to seek a scapegoat—someone responsible for funding the EZLN. Meanwhile, everyone from the leftist opposition parties to the conservative business groups was busy condemning the violent actions. Some people like Alfredo Cristiani of El Salvador even went as far as to declare that it was lamentable that some groups still thought of belligerent actions as effective.

How peculiar, I thought. If misery and exploitation are still alive and well, especially in the marginalized state of Chiapas, what makes him think that people will not continue to sacrifice their lives for the justice they feel they deserve? History did not come to a standstill when NAFTA was signed. What is lamentable, I wrote in my journal, is that despite the attractive figures that the government punched out to show the investment increase and the overall growth of Chiapas— as if to say that people there had no business rebelling—the beneficiaries of that growth continue to be an incredibly small minority.

The government did not share my introspection, I guess, and the counterinsurgency campaign was set in motion. The first step according to standard procedures against armed movements was to disqualify the enemy. This was followed by the actual attempt to suppress the insurgents. (The ratio is something like 19 thousand army troops to less than two thousand guerrillas).

During my stay in Chiapas, it

cont. on pg 22
The Pastors-For-Peace U.S.-Cuba Friendship III school bus caravan visited Ithaca on February 23, collecting wheelchairs, baby food and other humanitarian aid donated by Tompkins County residents. More than a ton of material aid and over $1,500.00 were raised. The items collected were urgently requested by the Cuban Ecumenical Council for distribution in the Havana area. The aid is being sent to Cuba in open defiance of the U.S. embargo on trade with Cuba.

Why does the blockade against Cuba still exist? It was initiated by the United States in 1962 under the terms of the 1917 Trading With The Enemy Act. Over 32 years, with changing justifications and legal underpinnings, the U.S. has maintained and even expanded this embargo until it has become the most severely inhumane embargo in history-without even the exclusions mandated by international law for humanitarian supplies and medicine. As a result, eleven million Cubans suffer increased shortages of food, medical supplies, fuel and other daily necessities.

Most recently, with the enactment of the “Torricelli Bill”, the embargo was expanded to include extraterritorial application of U.S. laws. These extraterritorial provisions, which have been vehemently opposed by even close U.S. allies such as Canada, have increased hardship on the island. Under these provisions, for example, the U.S. recently required Heinz
Guatemalan Women Speak by Margaret Hooks (with a new introduction by Rigoberta Menchú), Washington, D.C., Ecumenical Program on Central America and the Caribbean (EPICA), 1993. 133 pp., $10.95 paper.

Through interviews with women from all sectors of Guatemalan society--campesinas to lawyers, domestic servants to students, nuns to guerillas-Mexico based journalist Margaret Hooks has produced a compelling narrative of their lives. 

With or without children, the women reveal in heartfelt language the personal price of working for change. Maria de los Angeles spent Mother's Day in a factory where she was participating in a three-week occupation. "Well for me that May 10 was the saddest day of my life," she says. "It was the first Mother's Day that I hadn't been with my children."

Guatemalan Women Speak contains excerpts from more than 40 interviews conducted in the late 1980s. Each account is preceded by an introduction that sets the stage with some grim statistics: one million people displaced by the massacres of the early 1980s...more than 45,000 widows, one hospital bed for every 500 Guatemalans...the highest infant mortality rate in Central America. The heart of the book, however, lies in the testimonios themselves. Hooks, who has written about Guatemala since 1984, elicits candor and an outpouring of emotion from her subjects, despite compelling reasons for them to remain silent.

The stories contained in Guatemalan Women Speak are not of coups or political assassinations but of everyday experience, as exemplified in the book's chapter titles "Earning a Living," "Being Indian," "Family Affairs," "Fighting Back." In these chapters, the women describe daily oppression, particularly in the form of racism. Margarita, a domestic servant in Guatemala City, speaks of "the disdain that always exists because you are Indian...I had to eat first, then the family ate; if I ate off a plate, then it mustn't be touched; these plates were theirs and this plate was mine-everything was kept separate." Says Elena, "It's drummed into you from an early age that because you are an Indian, you are inferior, illiterate, and ignorant...Indian women carry two or three times the load because we have to struggle against racism and sexual discrimination."

In her preface, Hooks notes a "nascent feminism" among Guatemala's indigenous women, who decry the machismo and the double standards pervading even the country's more progressive camps. Irma, a guerilla, recalls being reprimanded in front of her male compatriots for having two lovers. "It wasn't necessary to sit me down with the two men and confront me in front of everybody-it was horrible," she says. "And I wonder, if I were a man, would I have been treated in the same way for going out with two women?" "Many things can be changed," says Elizabeth, a student, "but some things are very deeply rooted, as is machismo in Latin America."

Though cognizant of their second-class status as women, and the burden of motherhood in a macho culture, the women of Guatemalan Women Speak seem ambivalent about their place in a changing society. "Some women here are confused about women's liberation," says Claudia, a kitchen assistant. "They think that liberation means the freedom to do whatever they please." A mother of five says, "I'm not sure about contraception."

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Sometimes I think the way the economic situation is these days you should avoid having more children." But later she says, "Contraception causes a lot of wantonness. There are women who want to make love and not have children. That is not correct for a woman. For me, we should have children and raise them. That is why God made us women and why we have husbands."

With or without children, the women reveal in heartfelt language the personal price of working for change. Maria de los Angeles spent Mother's Day in a factory where she was participating in a three-week occupation. "Well for me that May 10 was the saddest day of my life," she says. "It was the first Mother's Day that I hadn't been with my children."

Yolanda, a health promoter says, "One of my problems at the moment is my family. Their dream is that I should get married because it's getting late. I'm 25 and they are afraid I might miss the boat." A lawyer says, "I'm always complaining that I can't find any men here. This is so difficult to find in Guatemala where families are so close that most men are 'mommy's boys.' They tend to want to find a replica of their own mother in their wives... People never seem to really grow up, to truly become independent, and this has caused many of us who do become independent to have problems."

Most of the women of Guatemalan Women Speak have witnessed massacres ("the sickness" one woman calls them) and know that they too, could be killed for lesser crimes than speaking to a journalist. While I was doing the interviews, I realized that many of these women were taking a considerable risk by telling me certain things," Hook writes. "As one of the women interviewed here says... in Guatemala, anybody who asks for a salary raise or says that hunger or illiteracy exists, is accused of being a communist."

Hook says her goal in writing the book was "to break with the way in which Guatemalan women are usually presented-as exotic Mayan Indians in a picturesque setting or as the passive victims of a cruel repression-and to allow the women to become, as one of the women interviewed describes it, 'protagonists in our own struggle.'" Hooks is perhaps the most successful in achieving that goal through her interviews with the members of GAM (Mutual Support Group) and CONAVUGA (National Coordinating Committee of Guatemalan Widows) who speak openly of their pain as relatives of the 'disappeared.' "Living with the uncertainty of a loved one's whereabouts causes terrible anguish," says Ester, a GAM founder. "You have no appetite, you can't sleep at night because you are always on edge, thinking that your loved one could come home at any moment." Yet rather than break them, such suffering seems only to strengthen the resolve of women like Ester. "What some think is courage is not so," she insists. "It's love, love for the person who was taken away."

Testimonials like those in Guatemalan Women Speak could prove to be a formidable foe to the status quo. Novato Prize winner Rigobera Menchu writes in her introduction, "In many respects, these past years have raised incredible hopes for women who are indigenous. For the first time we have achieved something: we have been heard."

--Jill Goetz


In some ways, it is odd that Mexico: A Country Guide did not come out well before its 1992 publication date. That there is not much out there like it testifies to the very recent interest Mexico has acquired for most U.S. citizens. The Resource Center, compilers and publishers of Mexico: A Country Guide, produced this volume after a string of books on Central America. Their new interest in Mexico reflects a broader societal concern with events in that country that has emerged in the course of the negotiations and debate surrounding the North American Free Trade Agreement.

Mexico: A Country Guide is a useful, lively, straightforward and information-packed collection of essays covering virtually every aspect of Mexican economics, politics, and society up through 1991. The book is edited and largely written by Tom Barry, although a number of sections have been written by journalists and other experts. The book includes sections on Government and Politics, The Economy, Social Forces (which includes labor, the private sector, popular organizing, and nongovernmental

Continued on next page
Continued from previous page

organizations) and Social Sectors and Institutions (which includes Women and Feminism, Native People, Immigration and Refugees, Health and Welfare, Education, Communications and Religion). There is also an entire section on the Environment and a long section on Foreign Influence, which includes a discussion of U.S. economic security, and diplomatic relations with Mexico. In addition, the book contains a useful chronology, an index, and a full set of references by chapter. Unfortunately, it does not have a single bibliography at the end that could aid readers who want more information.

One advantage of this book over others is that such diverse topics are found between its covers. It is especially strong on material that seldom gets covered in more scholarly books on Mexican politics—the sections on women, popular organizing, nongovernmental organizations, native peoples, and the environmental movement, for example.

The essays are brief and eminently readable. Many contain some historical context but focus principally on Mexico during the presidency of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994). While this was certainly a strength of the book when it first came out, its “contemporary” focus may now be a drawback. Mexico is changing so rapidly, as the passage of the NAFTA, the uprising in Chiapas and the upcoming presidential elections demonstrate. Anyone who writes a book trying to capture the latest developments in Mexico invariably finds the book out-of-date at publication time. Nevertheless, this book remains a useful reference, especially for those who want a quick introduction to key developments in Mexico’s recent history. I know a number of professors who have used the book in their undergraduate courses to good effect, and activists will find it a valuable introduction as well. One looks forward to future books from the Resource Center.

--Maria Lorena Cook

Out of the Shadows: The Communities of Population in Resistance in Guatemala 1993 EPICA/CHRCLA Report

Possibly the best, most comprehensive, and up-to-date report on the Communities of Population in Resistance (CPRs) of Guatemala is the EPICA/CHRCLA Report that came out in the Summer of 1993. Out of the Shadows: The Communities of Population in Resistance in Guatemala. This 25-page report follows the struggle of the CPRs — to emerge from hiding and gain international recognition as civilian populations — providing background information tracing their roots from the 1960s. The report combines an historical account with personal testimonies, weaving a fact-filled, moving text.

Yet Out of the Shadows does more than tell the story of the CPRs’ brutal persecution; it advocates change in the Guatemalan government’s policies of repression. Through careful documentation of their various levels of social organization, the report lends credence to the CPRs’ claim that they are unarmed, civilian populations. And a discussion of the CPRs’ rights as displaced civilians according to international law attests to the illegality of the government’s policies. Specific violations by the Guatemalan government and military are also documented in the report, making it an all-around excellent source on the CPRs.

--Alison Hillman


Unfinished Conquest provides a compelling introduction to the complex reality of people’s lives in Guatemala over the violent decade of the 1980s. Through a collection of dialogues with local mayors, Maya activists, military officers, Maryknoll priests, parents and politicians, Perera, a Guatemalan-born journalist and writer who alternates living in his native country and the U.S., presents a personal account of how the violence of this nation has transformed the lives of these Guatemalans.
Perera’s account details his travels through Guatemala, describing the conversations he had, and the environments he encountered. In his travels, he is often accompanied by photographer Daniel Chauhe, whose black and white prints accompany the text. When not with Chauhe, Perera is usually travelling with other foreigners. This is a strategy used by many Guatemalans who have reason to believe that their name appears on death lists.

The book begins in Guatemala City, with Perera talking with those people who live and work in the city dump. The professional trash-pickers represent a cross-section of Guatemalan society, and provide an eloquent example of one survival strategy amid the violence of poverty and war.

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The stories Perera glean from the inhabitants of the city dump overlap in time and in content with those told by other people who have returned many times to visit that little community amid stench and buzzards. Still, it is clear that there is no single definitive story of the ongoing interaction among the trash pickers, the City and the other national and international players who are negotiating the policies that determine life at the dump. As a journalist, Perera relies on what the different players tell him. Unlike other chroniclers of the Guatemalan tragedy, he does not accompany a community to tell their story. Instead, here and throughout the book he assembles elements of various conversations into an essay on the reality of a community that is full of small unresolved contradictions. The tapestry that emerges reveals more about the truth of life in Guatemala than could be found in a more straightforward narrative.

While some of the anecdotes, themes and personalities are current, the bulk of the experiences and perspectives reflect Perera’s experiences in Guatemala during the late 1980s. This is particularly obvious in his cast of characters on the national political scene. Prominently missing is the vital political leadership found in the national directorates of Maya human rights organizations - people who have been active participants in the national dialogue on human and indigenous rights since 1990.

While Perera acknowledges the importance of Rigoberta Menchú, he does not profile other outstanding Maya women in leadership positions such as Justina Tzoc of CERJ (the Council of Ethnic Communities ‘Ranujel Junam’/’Everyone is Equal’).
March 9 "WOMEN AS REVOLUTIONARIES"
MAMA GOES TO WAR, Guillermo Centeno, 1984, 18 minutes
IN HER OWN LIGHT, Mayra Vilásis, 1986, 20 minutes
RIGOBERTA, Rebeca Chávez, 1983, 13 minutes
ONE MORE AMONG THEM, Rebeca Chávez, 1989, 31 minutes

March 30 "WOMEN'S WORK"
WHEN THE DANCE IS OVER, Gerardo Chijona, 1985, 10 minutes
SHE SOLD CANDIES, Gerardo Chijona, 1986, 13 minutes
CHAMPIONS, Oscar Valdés, 1985, 10 minutes
I AM A MARINA BACARAXI, Mayra Vilásis, 1986, 16 minutes
LIKE ONE VOICE, Miriam Tallavera, 1986, 28 minutes
OMARA, Fernando Pérez, 1986, 26 minutes
WOMAN IN THE MIRROR, Marisol Valdés, 1986, 7 minutes

April 6 "WOMEN ON CULTURE AND CREATIVITY"
I'LL GO TO SANTIAGO, Miriam Tallavera, 1986, 18 minutes
WE'VE GOT RHYTHM, Marisol Valdés, 1986, 13 minutes
PRAYER, Marisol Valdés, 1986, 9 minutes
BRIEF LANDSCAPE, Marisol Valdés, 1986, 20 minutes
MOTIVATIONS, Marisol Valdés, 1986, 13 minutes
ONE, TWO, THAT'S IT, Miriam Tallavera, 1986, 11 minutes

April 20 "WOMEN IN TIMES OF STRUGGLE"
MAMA GOES TO WAR, Guillermo Centeno, 1984, 18 minutes
WHEN THE DANCE IS OVER, Gerardo Chijona, 1985, 10 minutes
SHE SOLD CANDIES, Gerardo Chijona, 1986, 13 minutes
CHAMPIONS, Oscar Valdés, 1986, 17 minutes
CASTLES IN THE AIR, Rebeca Chávez, 1986, 10 minutes

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El Mozote
Cont. from Page 3

and the FMLN when they entered town. Many were ideologically on the side of the guerrillas, but were afraid that they were not strong enough to win and therefore didn't want their children getting involved. Some residents helped by donating food or other items to the guerrillas. Francisco gave them a gun and ten colones, a substantial amount for a campesino.

In 1981, Luisa and Francisco decided to move to Lourdes, located in Sonsonate, near to San Salvador, because they feared the violence of the war. They were not alone. Between the beginning of the war and the massacre, a good 60-70% of the inhabitants left for Lourdes, San Salvador, Gotera and elsewhere. Of Luisa and Francisco's children, all but four accompanied them. These four feared that if they left, their parents would lose everything they had worked so hard to gain. The Atlacatl battalion massacred them, their four spouses and 16 children. Two of the women were pregnant at the time. In Lourdes, life was no easier. Two of Luisa and Francisco's sons and their son-in-law were "disappeared" by security forces for the crime of having lived in northern Morazán.

Luisa and Francisco returned to Mozote after the war to reclaim their land, their only remaining possession. Thirteen years ago, they thought they were set for life; now they have to start over again, with almost nothing, and with so many of their children dead.

Again, they are not alone. El Mozote remained deserted after the massacre, but now people are slowly returning to rebuild their lives. Life is a daily struggle. Few have nearby water sources; they have to walk a long distance and carry the water back in jugs. The children walk an hour just to attend school in the town of Arambala. The 20 families who have repopulated El Mozote hope to receive money from the government to rebuild the church, the school and the co-op, but so far they have received nothing. Many more families want to return, but either lack the money or are afraid of the war starting again.

All who have returned continue to live with the horror of the massacre in their own way. Some try to forget, others can do nothing but remember. When Luisa lived in Lourdes, she joined COMADRES, a group composed mainly of mothers who protest the disappearance, arrest or assassination of their children. Each week, she traveled to San Salvador to help them. The work was dangerous because COMADRES continued to work openly when other groups went underground in response to the tremendous repression. I will always remember her standing in front of her grandchild, hands placed firmly on her hips, eyes afire with a mixture of pain, anger and incredible strength. "We no longer have fear," she said, "in the end we are all going to die."

In El Salvador
Cont. from age 5

weeks before as he walked his young daughter to preschool. The men of the guesthouse said it might be time to fight again.

Thursday night the students turned over cars and set them on fire. They slashed bus tires and paralyzed traffic near the university. Before 6 a.m. Friday, we were awakened by two fighter planes that shrieked over at rooftop level. Then came the menacing thrrob of helicopter gunships—eight of them, flying low with shielded machine guns pointed down at the neighborhood.

On Saturday, I participated in the funeral parade for Mario Lopez. It was a dramatic affair, with brigadistas in black berets and red bandanas waving red flags and shouting slogans, such as:

Elecciones,
Sin escuadrones
(Elections,
Without [death] squads)

¿Qué es lo que desea el pueblo?
¿Justice, y la paz!
(What do people want?
Justice and peace!)

I rode on the bus in the procession with students and other former guerrillas. The mass at the huge concrete cathedral was peaceful and moving. I was especially touched when the congregation held hands and sang the Lord’s Prayer, and again when people paused in the service to greet each other and exchange wishes for peace. Though the acoustics were bad, I caught phrases in the hymns about fighting for liberation and justice. The three priests who led the mass sang out with spirit. I recognized many administrators and staff from the university. They were not crying. One woman, a dean, wore the red kerchief of the FMLN.

We flew out on Sunday. On the leg from Miami back home, I reflected on the loss of Mario Lopez, a teacher, scholar, revolutionary, and builder. I thought of the death squads, the CIA, the School of the Americas, and the U.S. policy in Central America that had killed him.
was hard for me not to notice the mechanics of disinformation. It was in the TV coverage, in the newspapers and on the radio. The government’s agencies even claimed that the movements of the Zapatistas had been known for some time. Why the government didn’t take any form of action to avoid a bloody conflict escapes the reasoning of thousands of Mexicans. Maybe they thought a confrontation would be easier to administrate than real social reforms.

The repression tactics were less conspicuous, out of the reach of common civilians except for those caught in the crossfire. I was far too far away from the area of conflict to hear the Zapatistas’ gunshots, or the Mexican Air Force bombing the jungle. I was too close, however, to see the planes and the helicopters go by, or to meet people who had left their villages-Ocosingo, Oxchuc-leaving their possessions and sometimes their families behind, or to be stopped constantly by the army and the infamous judiciales, who frisked and interrogated all of us traveling by public transportation. I was not too far to see the fear in people’s faces, to see their nervousness as we approached a military post. It was clear, as someone has pointed out, that for the lower classes in Chiapas, government is a synonym of soldier.

Ethnic politics play an important part in the analysis of social movements in Central America. We cannot overlook the geographical, cultural and political connections between the Mayas of the Altiplano and the Mayas persecuted in Guatemala (although the EZLN is not exclusively a Maya movement). There are ancient links in some cases which were regenerated by the interaction between Guatemalan refugees and Mexican people after more than a hundred years of isolation brought about by the creation of the border. The struggle is similar, although the Guatemalan refugees decided to be cautious when commenting on the ‘violent’ ways of the EZLN. They expressed empathy towards the suffering of their brothers.

On the other hand, contrary to what some people outside of the conflict might believe, the EZLN cannot be called a popular movement. Some Mexicans-including people of Mayan descent-still prefer to be near a soldier’s machine gun than a guerrilla’s machete. If true to their revolutionary agenda, the most important fight that the EZLN would have to fight is against the prevalent alienation found in all strata of Mexican society, against the acceptance of exploitation, discrimination and marginalization. Unfortunately, for whatever reason, the signs of that fight are still not apparent.

Some people have tried to explain the events in Mexico by looking at the EZLN as an isolated, foreign-sponsored, fanatic guerilla movement. Others view it as the homogeneous logical response to 500 years of exploitation. From my personal experience, I can only say that we should neither define the EZLN uprising by isolating it nor by universalizing it.

Cuba
cont. from page 15

Corporation to force its Canadian subsidiary to cancel a contract to supply Cuba with baby food and Eli Lilly to act similarly to cancel its Canadian subsidiary’s insulin contract with Cuba. It is true unconscionable for us to withhold food and medicine: The dispute of the U.S. government is with Castro, and yet these actions punish eleven million Cuban men, women and children.

While our government pursues its pointless obsession with Fidel Castro, CUSLAR and the Tompkins County Interfaith U.S.-Cuba Friendship Committee are joining together in an act of citizen diplomacy, to reach out their hands across national boundaries and ideologies with help and support, and most of all with hope.

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Committee on US-Latin American Relations
CUSLAR Talks in March:
Monday 14:
"El Salvador Elections: Hope and Fear"
Rev. Joseph Fitzpatrick, S.J.
8:00 pm
Commons Coffeehouse
Anabel Taylor Hall
Co-sponsored by LASP and the SAFC

"Cuban Migration: The Hidden Agendas of Washington and Havana"
Ernesto Rodriguez
Monday 28
8:00 pm
Commons Coffeehouse

Sponsored by
LASP & SAFC

Tuesday 29
12:15 pm
153 Uris Hall

CUSLAR AND YOU!

Most Ithacans know that CUSLAR has been their voice in the struggle for peace, justice and human rights in Latin America since 1965. What you may not realize is how much we depend on your support to survive. Did you know that over 80% of our budget comes from our fundraising events and gifts from people like you? Year after year, CUSLAR has been Ithaca's link to Latin America with our Speakers Series, Latin American Film Festival, concerts, CUSLAR Newsletter, human rights network, school outreach program and our resource center filled with books, movies and periodicals on Latin America that you can't find anywhere else in Ithaca.

For almost thirty years you've been able to count on us to carry a message of solidarity to people struggling for justice in Latin America -- now, more than ever, we need to count on you to keep this vision alive. Please send in your donation with the coupon below. Thank you.

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