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## JOSE EFRAIN RIOS MONTT: A GUATEMALAN NIGHTMARE

Ryan J. Melson

136 Pages

In Guatemala, dictator Efraín Ríos Montt's seventeen month regime, from 1982 to 1983, had countless human rights violations. After being deposed from leadership in 1983, Ríos Montt's supporters have displayed enduring loyalty to him. As a result of this, Ríos Montt's beliefs and desires have held considerable political and social weight in Guatemala's political and social spheres. Ríos Montt's political and social power in Guatemala has given him impunity within the justice system. The Guatemalan justice system has created a fractured state, and paved the way for more violence.

**KEYWORDS:** Guatemala, Human Rights, Ríos Montt

JOSE EFRAIN RIOS MONTT: A GUATEMALAN NIGHTMARE

RYAN J. MELSON

A Thesis Submitted in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

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2016

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JOSE EFRAIN RIOS MONTT: A GUATEMALAN NIGHTMARE

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R. J. M

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: DISMEMBERING CIVIL SOCIETY

“In Guatemala things are more easily seen and felt than elsewhere. This is a regime that violently imposes the law of survival of the strongest; this is a society that condemns most people to live as if in a concentration camp; this is an occupied country where the imperium shows and uses its claws and teeth. Dreams inevitably fade into nightmares and one can no longer love without hating, fight for life without killing, say Yes without also implying a cry of No.”<sup>1</sup> –Eduardo Galeano

Since 1931 to the present day, the Guatemalan government has been entrapped in a power struggle over who would establish dominion over the military, the economy, the religion, and the poor. The goal of the Guatemalan elite was earnestly focused on maintaining the status quo feudal economy that impoverished the majority of Guatemalans. When that system was on the verge of crumbling in 1954, the elite used any means necessary to retain their role as the overlord to the campesinos, or peasants. As a result of maintaining this economic system that benefitted the elite, impoverished Guatemalans experienced a wide scale of events. Campesinos are economically, politically, and religiously oppressed by the elite. Guatemalans would peacefully revolt through the ballot box, gain a democratic state, and have it overthrown by means outside of their control. Many campesinos were without agency and fell victim to a power struggle that created a thirty-six year civil war. They witnessed genocide, and a revolving door of leaders frightening citizens into displacement. They created guerrilla

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<sup>1</sup> Eduardo Galeano, *Guatemala: Occupied Country* (New York: Modern Reader

groups who lost sight of their original intentions of fighting against the military government. They watched as their communities were ruptured beyond repair, and the elite hierarchy, feudal economic system, and draconian institutions reasserted themselves as omnipotent.

Leading up to the overthrow of the democratic elected regime of Jacobo Arbenz, from 1950 to 1954, Guatemalans have primarily lived underneath autocratic rulers since the colonial era. Autocracy allowed very little socioeconomic mobility, which created a Guatemalan state that had vast inequities. The disparity of wealth has long been a theme in Guatemala since the conquest. Wealth inequality is still relevant today in Guatemala as the richest 20% of the population accounts “for more than 51% of Guatemala’s overall consumption.”<sup>2</sup> Wealth disparity is part of the Guatemalan economic fabric. Not being in the elite portion of the wealth spectrum in Guatemala will nearly ensure being poor or very poor. Simply put, the majority Guatemalans have lived, and continued to live, in unbearable conditions.

During the years of the dictator Jorge Ubico, from 1931-1944, frustration set into poor communities. They recognized that the system was rigged for the elite to continue to prosper, and they wanted opportunities such as education, land, jobs, and to not be beholden to their overlords. In 1944, Guatemalans forced Ubico to resign. Going to the ballot box, Guatemalans finally were able to experience what a true democracy looks like. Democracy was the first step towards rewriting a political, economic, and social system in which all Guatemalan citizens could take part in. When the democratically

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<sup>2</sup> *The CIA World Factbook*, s.v. “Guatemala” (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2015), 307.

elected regime of Juan Jose Arévalo was incapable of providing massive changes for the impoverished throughout his six year term as president, the Guatemalan people peacefully and democratically elected Jacobo Arbenz, even though he would face various coup attempts.

President Arbenz, in accordance with the land decree in 1952, was set on creating agrarian reform for the enormous amount of poverty-stricken individuals in his nation. While this provided unforeseen opportunities to those who had only been accustomed to living in poverty, it took away from those who had held dominion—some for centuries, some for decades. Channeling their wealth and influence, the elites within Guatemala, with the support of the United States, helped stage a coup against the individual who brought democracy to a land who had only know autocracy. Now, autocracy was free to reign supreme again, and this time the elite would attempt to ensure that subversives would never threaten their power again.

Guatemala's history of repressing the poor, instability within the government, maintenance of a feudal economy, pandering to the United States, and fostering corruption and impunity is all well documented. Present day Guatemala continues to be torn by these same institutional problems, just under a different name. Recognizing these observations of Guatemalan society, how does someone make sense of what has actually occurred? Guatemala, past and present, can be understood through the life of José Efraín Ríos Montt. A man who had a seventeen-month stint (1982 to 1983) as President of Guatemala, he epitomized the old Guatemalan society and paved the way for a new Guatemala. Through Ríos Montt, past oppression paired with the devastation he

implemented ushered Guatemala into the depravity the people are faced with today. Ríos Montt embodies why poor Guatemalans have always lived in a state of deprivation, and how they continue to live within a fractured civil society.

When human beings in a society are oppressed for as long as their collective memory recalls, they eventually take new approaches to alter the social order and overthrow the establishment. When Guatemalans brought about democracy in 1944, they were exposed to a representative governance they had yearned for. After the overthrow of President Arbenz, democracy no longer existed. Many Guatemalans reacted in a way that they had deemed necessary in order to maintain the fragile democracy that remained. Guatemalans recognized that their only way to regain democracy would be through violent means. Many of the insurgent guerrilla groups had a vision of democracy for all Guatemalans, some would lose sight of their original goal. The government could not allow these subversives to establish a popular movement that would ultimately be able to topple the military government and, more importantly, the feudal economy that the elites in Guatemala had no intention in losing. The target of the military government became poor Guatemalans. Consisting of Mayans and ladinos, these human beings apparently had nothing to lose because they were already living in poverty or extreme poverty. Since the military government had identified poor Guatemalans as the most likely to join a revolution, they had to eliminate this enemy that they fabricated.

Because Ríos Montt wanted to assert his authoritarian control, to create a nation pure in its allegiance to the Christian God, and fortify the feudal economy that reigned under President Jorge Ubico from 1931-1944, he believed Guatemala needed to be

cleansed. Ríos Montt invoked his interpretation of the Christian God, and thought that everyone who did not follow him was the ultimate enemy. In an attempt to recapture the system that ruled Guatemalans for centuries, Ríos Montt's mission turned into an effort to eliminate those who he and other military officers deemed as most likely to join guerrilla groups who opposed the military government. In the context of Cold War politics, conservative evangelicals in the United States supported Ríos Montt's initiatives, and in turn endorsed his cause for cleansing through private donations that were encouraged by President Reagan.

With his distorted version of religion, Ríos Montt was successful in cleansing Guatemala of those who posed the largest threat to the retention of a draconian and unjust political, social, and economic system. Atrocious human rights violations were committed under Ríos Montt's watch and brief tenure as the President of Guatemala. Equally as appalling is the fact that Ríos Montt has not been convicted of these violations since the Guatemalan civil war ended twenty years ago in 1996. Even though he has been on trial for his egregious violations, he has not admitted responsibility for the genocidal actions committed during his regime. With no conviction and no admission, Guatemala, as a nation-state, has been unable to heal from this destruction of civil society. A successful prosecution of Ríos Montt would be a step forward in the national healing process; however, since this has not occurred, the nation has become more fragmented and paralyzed by terror.

The decade of democracy that lasted from 1944 to 1954 in Guatemala was a brief interlude for Guatemalans to see what a civil society was supposed to look like.

However, Guatemalans growing up during the Ríos Montt regime had no recollection of what a civil society was supposed to entail. Combining this persistent impunity with not convicting Ríos Montt of slaughtering Mayans and poor ladinos, some Guatemalans have found it acceptable to terrorize their fellow citizens for their own economic gain. This has paved the way for local gangs to thrive in trafficking narcotics. Bleak economic prospects herd the parentless youth into the hands of these criminal organizations. With the extreme amount of money that these local gangs acquire, they resort to violence as the most effective means of retaining their wealth. Once localized gangs, Barrio 18 and MS-13 are now transnational criminal organizations who do not fear retaliation and punishment from the government because of the wealth, power, and fear they impose over Guatemala's government, police force, and citizens. The transnational criminal organizations have perpetuated the violence that has been in Guatemala since the 1954 coup of Arbenz.

Habitual violence, habitual economic depravity, and habitual failure of government are characteristics that become ingrained into Guatemalan political culture. Guatemalans have faced repetitive persecution, a feudal economy that protects the elite, and self-serving, corrupt dictators. Imbedded within the minds of poor Guatemalans is a historical past in which there are massive social, economical, and political disparities. The campesinos are unable to climb out of the never ending pit of injustices that the elite imposes on them. Countless Guatemalans have come to realize that the Guatemalan government cannot produce changes that represent and benefit the poor. In addition to this, the need to escape the repetitive violence and corruption becomes paramount to Guatemalans who want more out of life for themselves and their families. Many

Guatemalans are looking for fundamental human rights, but the systemic societal violence hinders the most basic dignity for humans.

Under the regime of Ríos Montt, displacement of Guatemalan citizens became prominent. From the beginning of his reign into the present day, Guatemalans are continually displaced and looking for personal security. Economic gain is secondary to Guatemalans who are concerned mainly about their personal safety—from being murdered, disappeared, raped, etc. Guatemalans migrate to the southern border of the United States hoping to fulfill what has been lacking in their lives: democracy, equality, freedom, and life. However, Guatemalans are met with an enormous amount of animosity and resistance upon their arrival to the United States. Thinking that the United States is a land of hope and promise, these migrants are denied, disrespected, and seen as unlawful. The lack of understanding who these Guatemalans are and why they have come here, has led U.S. citizens to have false impression and ideas. Taking the time to figure out who these individuals are and why they have made this voyage to the United States is crucial to offering a more humane approach to these Guatemalan refugees.

Since the colonial era, Guatemala has been a nation dominated by the caste system. Whether that be through the Spanish crown, oppressive dictators, or gangs, Guatemalans have endured a very long period of being held hostage in their homeland by the very few. The template for hierarchy in Guatemala has never faded out of sight. The only change to this hierarchy has been the names of the people who rule, and the names they go by.

An analysis of the legacy and main features of Ríos Montt's seventeenth month presidency illustrates many of the grave flaws in Guatemala today. The horrendous actions, the religious vision, and his prolonged influence on Guatemalan politics, Ríos Montt is the focal point to understand why violence is so prevalent in Guatemala today. Chapter two will be devoted to the historiography of Guatemala from 1931 until present day, allowing readers to comprehend the wider framework, in essence: what environment creates and allows Ríos Montt to thrive. The focus of the historiography will centralize around four major themes: Jorge Ubico's reign as president, the presence and initiatives of the United Fruit Company, the Mayan Indian community, and the role dictators played throughout—with a focus on the destruction occurred during Ríos Montt's era. Using a wide body of historical scholarship, the main focus of chapter two will be on the evolution of Guatemalan politics since 1931.

Chapter three will focus on who Efraim Ríos Montt is an individual. The main focus of this chapter will be on his background, military career, religion, and relationship with the United States. Establishing this framework of who he is a human being will be pivotal in understanding what would happen in Guatemala during his Presidential regime and how he still plays a role in Guatemala today.

Chapter four will focus on the human rights violations that occurred during Ríos Montt's seventeen month interlude as President. Within this context, we will be focusing on the definition of genocide, what guerrilla groups were present, the social programs Ríos Montt enacted, the massacres that occurred, and the impact on women. Understanding what made Ríos Montt lash out against subversive entities to his



governmental regime is important. More importantly, however, is emphasizing how these targeted acts of racism and sexism should be seen in light of what genocide is.

Chapter five will be focused on how Ríos Montt came back to power in the 1990's through present day. As a result of him returning to a congressional seat after the coup that ousted him as president, Ríos Montt has perpetuated a culture of impunity, a new wave of crime has come about, a broken social order remains in place, and hostile working environment for human rights advocates is commonplace.

In the conclusion, my main focus will be on how Ríos Montt created a culture of violence. Guatemalans yearn for peace and have not received it from their government, so they make a harrowing journey to the United States in order to gain the security they are longing for. Rethinking the social nexus for asylum will be imperative to providing for these refugees, as well as policy makers in the U.S. to emphasize graciousness and clemency, not hatred toward those who are calling for our help.

Using contributions from historians, sociologists, anthropologists, journalists, non-profit organizations, this paper blends this wealth of resources together to show the central issues plaguing contemporary Guatemala.

## CHAPTER II

### INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES IN GUATEMALA

“All they do in Guatemala is give orders and kill.”<sup>3</sup> –Pope John Paul II

The autocratic ruler Jorge Ubico reigned supreme over Guatemala from 1931 to 1944. With this thirteen year reign as Guatemala’s leader, Ubico served the longest tenure as President in Guatemala since he took power in 1931. Ubico was sympathetic to the Guatemalan elite and foreign businesses. Within this approach, Ubico neglected the vast majority of the population. Many Guatemalans found themselves within the poor or very poor socioeconomic range. The campesinos and urban students would eventually become fed up with Ubico neglecting them in order to favor the rich, and they would force him out of power.

In order to understand the inequalities in the Guatemalan society, it is imperative to understand the role of the United Fruit Company. For historian Ronald M. Schneider, Guatemala was known for coffee and bananas. Unlike the coffee market, bananas were an export commodity that held its price value well. The banana market was much more lucrative because prices were stable, giving United Fruity Company a monopoly over this market. At the same time this took the wealth away from the Guatemalan citizens who needed it the most. While much profit went to shareholders of UFCO, the wealth that did

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<sup>3</sup> Jean-Marie Simon, *Guatemala: Eternal Spring, Eternal Tyranny* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987), 149.

flow into Guatemala went into the hands of the Guatemalan elite. UFCO reigned supreme over the profits entering Guatemala, and this meant that they controlled Guatemala's economy, politics, and social life.

Schneider is of the belief that part of Ubico's downfall was the "expropriation of the large German-owned coffee fincas."<sup>4</sup> As Guatemala joined the Allies in World War II, the main reason why Ubico expropriated the Germans land was to pledge loyalty to the United States. However, this group was part of the wealthiest people in Guatemala, and they had been Ubico's strongest support system. That policy of expropriation would prove to be detrimental to Ubico's administration, but also devastating for future leaders who employed it to obtain other land from the wealthy elite in Guatemala.

Starting with Arévalo, the opportunity for communism to seep into the Guatemalan government and masses was through his openness in allowing communism to be part of the democratic framework. Not stopping the growth of communism or discriminating against the Guatemalan Communist Party, Schneider thought, Arévalo "indirectly facilitated the growth and influence of the Communist movement."<sup>5</sup> With Arévalo opening this door to an ever growing base of communists, Guatemala was ripe for a communist revolution. Under Arbenz the strength of the communist party would grow, as they became part of a coalition, and if they were left unrestrained they would wind up dominating other political parties.

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<sup>4</sup> Ronald M. Schneider, *Communism in Guatemala 1944-1954* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., Publishers, 1958), 9.

<sup>5</sup> Schneider, 22.

The Communists achieved this domination over all other political parties, Schneider believed, because of the access and relationship the party had to President Juan Jose Arévalo's successor President Jacobo Arbenz, which began in 1950. Because of the close relationship between the two, the communist party had "a chance to shape government policies and a free field for their propaganda."<sup>6</sup> As long as the communist party was able to get Arbenz to agree with their policy ideas, they would have full support of the majority of Guatemalans because of Arbenz's popularity. The communist party would then have influence over other parties, mainly because no party wants to support a minority's agenda. Schneider believes that it was the communists who inflated the anti-Yankee rhetoric in Guatemala, which continued to intensify the divide between them and the United States. With the Guatemalan Communist Party driving up the animosity towards UFCO and U.S. business, the United States believed that it was time to covertly intervene—mainly because overt intervention would have shown nations throughout the world the United States was politically intervening to satisfy their own interests in a foreign land.

In complete contrast to later interpretations of President Arbenz's regime (1950 to 1954), Ronald M. Schneider was convinced that communism was flourishing in Guatemala and needed to be stopped in order so that the Soviet Union did not infect the entire continent with the "red plague." Written a few years after the intervention, Schneider's book *Communism in Guatemala, 1944-1954* presents the idea that the overthrow of Arbenz was essential to maintaining capitalism not only in this country, but throughout the entire continent.

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<sup>6</sup> Schneider, 41.

Schneider saw the Mayan Indians as resistant to participating in a fully functional modern state, and he blames them for their own economic status. However, as “many Indians were being affected, however slightly, by the social and economic programs of the government”<sup>7</sup> the communists gained popularity within the poorest portion of the Guatemalan society. Gaining the poverty-stricken Mayans as supporters was crucial because they represented a large percentage of people in the Guatemalan society. This portion of the population was generally not accessed because they wanted to be left alone, so when the communists were able to tap into the consciousness of the Mayan Indians, they gained a critical portion that they would need for their movement to be successful. What Schneider did not take into account was the possible unwillingness of the Mayan community to change their entire identity to align with U.S. economic interests. Schneider has the perspective of an ardent capitalist, instead of understanding important factors in the lives of Mayans.

Understanding these factors, Schneider believes, made it imperative for the United States to intervene not only to end communism in Guatemala, but to protect democracy, preserve U.S. companies abroad, and to end hostility towards the U.S. government. For Schneider, the United States did what was necessary to halt the obnoxious “red plague,” and this was seen as a victory for the United States in the Cold War.

The bulk of Schneider’s sources relied heavily on the Guatemalan Communist Party documents and sources sympathetic to the ideas of the Dulles brothers. Using

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<sup>7</sup> Schneider, 46.

resources from the Communist Party in Guatemala would help Schneider draw conclusions about how there was communism in Guatemala. However, the size of the Communist Party in Guatemala was a fraction of the actual population. These documents from the Communist Party were meant to ignite something past its actual relevance to the Guatemalan state. Yes, communism was present in Guatemala. However, it was not a major emphasis in Arbenz's politics. The sources from journals sympathetic to the State Department's viewpoints were all based on information that was meant to have the Arbenz regime look like fervent communists. The documents from the Communist Party in Guatemala and the resources being used in the United States made intervention into Guatemalan politics look imperative.

Contrasting Schneider by taking an approach centered around Guatemalans who enjoyed democracy, in their book *Guatemala: The Politics of Land Ownership*, Thomas and Marjorie Melville point to the strata of classes in Guatemala as the driving force to understand what happened to Guatemala after the overthrow of President Arbenz. When the October Revolution commenced, the socioeconomic order was close to being permanently altered. However, once the October Revolution was forcibly ended a decade later, the elite portion of the Guatemalan society returned order to the ways of old. Clinging to a system that maintained the former establishment's power was the only option that the Guatemalan elite sought to restore. Because many poor, working class Guatemalans had a taste of democratic freedoms, civil liberties, and human rights their appetite would become insatiable for them. Since peasants were a majority of the population, the Guatemalan elite would have to find some way of insulating themselves from a future uprising.

Continuing the dismantling of the policies that Arévalo and Arbenz implemented, Castillo Armas, the CIA's handpicked candidate, and Ydígoras Fuentes, who became president after Castillo Armas was assassinated, began the implementation of anti-Communist policies. Ydígoras Fuentes would take the Schneider playbook into operation in order to retain the support of the United States. The Melville's show how Castillo Armas returned the land expropriated by the government, with compensation for the monetary value the government, back to their former owners, and new owners formed the landed oligarchy: the Guatemalan military. Purchasing this land at a fraction of the cost of what the government paid was not the biggest problem. The "correct distribution of these lands could substantially help to solve the agrarian problem"<sup>8</sup> that was at hand. Instead, the problem exacerbated the tumultuous state of owning land in Guatemala. Since the new leaders agreed with Ubico's policies, they decided to further entrench Guatemala into the draconian policies that were in place before 1944. Landless Guatemalans continue to live with the perpetual violation of their fundamental human rights, after a heartbreaking situation which they had to learn to believe violations would cease with the democratic revolution in 1944.

While the Mayan community in Guatemala is very large, relative to other countries, they were never able to form a cohesive unit to push back against the Guatemalan elite. The Melville's argue that if Mayans could have mobilized around the central cause of attaining land during the October Revolution, then there was no possible way the Guatemalan elite would have reestablished the feudal economy. However, due

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas Melville and Marjorie Melville, *Guatemala: The Politics of Land Ownership* (New York: The Free Press, 1971), 129.

to cultured differences around the languages, customs, and cultures in the Mayan culture, it was nearly impossible for the Mayans to unite as one unit. Further, a 500 year history of annihilation of Mayan ideas, culture, and civilization, meant that the large portion of Mayans were fearful of countering governmental authority. Mayans were “almost always restrained by a natural stoicism and a prudent fear”<sup>9</sup> of their government, and could never gain the support necessary to cohesively unite to end the feudal lord’s reign of power in Guatemala.

The Melvilles had a novel idea of a Mayan uprising against the military government. A united Mayan base would serve as a formidable challenge to the establishment in Guatemala. While the Mayans consisted of half of the population in 1954, they still did not have the resources that would have allowed them to rebel successfully against the military government. In terms of ammunition, wealth, and food, the Mayans stood no chance even with a united effort against the military. Their socioeconomic background would have been a steep challenge that they would have inevitably lost without external support.

As a former employee for the United Fruit Company, Thomas P. McCann in his book, *American Company: The Tragedy of United Fruit*, is sympathetic to the founding fathers of United Fruit Company. Minor C. Keith and Andrew Preston were the main pioneers who paved the way for United Fruit to have the infrastructure to create an organization with immense power. For McCann, the individual that put United Fruit into a place of real prominence is Samuel, “the Banana Man,” Zemurray. After the Great

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<sup>9</sup> Melville, 24.



Depression and mismanagement of the board nearly lost Zemurray his wealth and bankrupted the company, he came out of retirement to run the United Fruit Company. For McCann, after Zemurray took control of UFCO, “he shaped the company’s operations to his own image: tough-minded but fair, responsive and responsible.”<sup>10</sup> The company molded itself to Zemurray’s characteristics.

As an employee, McCann believed Zemurray was good at his craft and did not take advantage of others. Mainly, growing UFCO was about Zemurray’s skills as a businessman. He was better at doing business than his competitors, who would eventually be his colleagues. While Zemurray may have been a fair-minded businessman, his company took on a different image when he passed away.

Preserving the interests of the United Fruit Company—and U.S. business in general—is something that both McCann and Schneider believe. Each one asserts that UFCO has done more good than bad for Guatemala because it has brought a healthy and steady cash flow to the United States. Since they are U.S. citizens, they believe that U.S. interests should be the priority. The priority should not be centered around how other nations are impacted by U.S. business.

What influence did communism have in Guatemala? And, was the United States response justified? These are the two colossal questions in the overthrow of a democratically elected government. In *The Hovering Giant*, Cole Blasier explains that Arévalo had nothing to do with communism, but that changed under Arbenz. Essentially,

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas P. McCann, *An American Company: The Tragedy of United Fruit* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1976), 22.

not only did Arbenz allow the communist party to have a place in a democratic society, he also gave them direct access. Pairing this with the fact that the communists had direct control of the labor organizations made their power exponentially greater than it had been at any point in Guatemala's history. The national peasant union had "some 400,000 peasants whose organization was under Communist influence and control."<sup>11</sup> The enormous portion of the population that had nothing to lose and the most to gain, was now under the influence of communistic labor leaders. Convincing all of these members to be communist would be nearly impossible. What concerned the United States was the factor that communist labor leaders had the opportunity and platform to welcome new members with open arms. In a Cold War game of perception and proxy, the United States could not allow penetration of the Soviet ideology in their own hemisphere.

While these organized individuals were under the control of the communist party leaders, Blasier makes it clear that not all of those people were communists. Schneider lumped these individuals as all enthusiastic communists; whereas, Blasier is attempting to make the clear distinction that this was not the case.

In *Guatemalan Caudillo*, Kenneth Grieb believes that Jorge Ubico was sympathetic to the Mayan Indian community. Grieb makes the argument that there was a strong relationship between the Mayan community and Ubico. Grieb argues that "Ubico professed a special concern for the Indian, noting that he was the key to the economy

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<sup>11</sup> Cole Blasier, *The Hovering Giant: U.S. Responses to Revolutionary Change in Latin America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1976), 155.

since he furnished the bulk of the agricultural labor.”<sup>12</sup> Without the Mayan Indian labor, there would be a complete shortage in agricultural exports. During the first half of his tenure as President, Ubico spent a lot of time visiting the Mayan communities. Creating warm friendships with Indians, Grieb believes Ubico was not as self-serving as he is made out to be, a view later scholars contradict.

Central to Grieb’s argument is the passage of Ubico’s vagrancy law in 1934. The vagrancy law “directly changed the status of all peons in the republic.”<sup>13</sup> In a debt peonage system that had been in place since the colonial days, the Mayan Indians now had an opportunity to create their own wealth, sort of. Out of fear people would not work, everyone was required to work. If Mayans were found to be not working at all, they would be arrested. In order to find work, many Mayans went back to the same people that had been their overlords in the debt peonage system. Grieb reconciles his belief of Ubico’s benign treatment towards Mayan Indians with this new system of employment by focusing on how the implementation process was unsustainable. People had to work, and their only jobs could come from their previous masters. Grieb believes that Ubico made a sincere effort to help out a group of people that he did indeed care about.

Ending debt peonage, in principle, was a major feat to advance in the inclusion of Mayan Indians into the Guatemalan society. According to Grieb, another reason Ubico cared about the Mayan Indian community was because of the National Pawnshop created

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<sup>12</sup> Kenneth Grieb, *Guatemalan Caudillo: The Regime of Jorge Ubico, Guatemala 1931-1945* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1979), 35.

<sup>13</sup> Grieb, 38.

in 1938. What this did was to “provide a means of credit for the lower classes who were not eligible for bank loans.”<sup>14</sup> Since banks had no interest in lending money to the poorest part of the population, Ubico gave Mayan Indians an opportunity to receive some sort of funding. The lack of jobs throughout the country is Grieb’s primary concern; he does not believe that Ubico was out of touch with minorities, specifically the Mayan Indian community.

Within the context of the Cold War, the United States government saw Arbenz and the implied thought that the Guatemalan society was moving toward communism. Preventing the “red movement” from plaguing the western hemisphere, a few high-ranking officials in the United States decided the best action would be to overthrow the Guatemalan leader responsible for allowing and encouraging the Soviet ideologies. However, In *The CIA in Guatemala* Richard H. Immerman shows that the United States lacked an understanding of what was occurring in Guatemala. Immerman paints a much different description than Schneider’s belief that the U.S. had overwhelming evidence of communism in Guatemala.

The U.S. government drastically misunderstood Arbenz’s intentions for the Guatemalan government. In order to create an environment for capitalism to prosper, Guatemala would be much better suited to have a redistribution of the land and wealth. The difference between the rich and the poor—the majority of Guatemalans were poor—was too stark to have capitalism flourish. Immerman recognizes that the only way in which capitalism could flourish was to provide a way in which poor Guatemalans could

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<sup>14</sup> Grieb, 41.

subjectively understand the basic concepts of capitalism. The goal was for all Guatemalans to have an opportunity to have success. The only way to do this was through a redistribution of uncultivated land. As alarming as this was to the United States government, their idea of what was occurring in Guatemala was superficial at best. In order for this to be carried out effectively, the Guatemalan government had to take the center role of “supervising this modernization.”<sup>15</sup> In order to create economic and capitalistic growth, government intervention to redistribute land was pivotal. While this approach may seem paradoxical, this policy was necessary for Guatemala to modernize. The Eisenhower administration saw this approach as hypocritical, and lacked any trust that Guatemala would get out of socialistic, or even communistic, tendencies.

More generally, the U.S. public saw the claim to the uncultivated land of UFCO as a communist attack against private property. Taking land from a privately owned corporation who had paid for that land was something straight out of the communist playbook, many U.S. citizens thought. In contrast, the majority of the Guatemalan public agreed with Arbenz to expropriate UFCO’s uncultivated land because the role this company had in promoting Yankee imperialism.<sup>16</sup> Poor Guatemalans saw the uncultivated land of UFCO as an opportunity for them to become prosperous and successful—even able to rise above dire poverty, while not having a detrimental impact on UFCO’s business operations. Also, they believed that the uncultivated land was symbolic for Yankee hegemony over Guatemalan citizens, meaning the Yankees owned significant portions of uninhabited and uncultivated when the majority of Guatemalans

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<sup>15</sup> Richard H. Immerman, *The CIA In Guatemala* (Austin: The University of Texas, 1982), 63.

<sup>16</sup> Immerman, 73.

could not afford food. Two contrasting beliefs resulted from this policy of expropriating uncultivated land. Ultimately, this would have disastrous repercussions.

This growing tension between Guatemalan nationalism and anti-U.S. sentiments created fractious relationships between Arbenz and Eisenhower, more specifically Allen Dulles and the CIA. The United States government understood what was occurring in Guatemala, but they “could not comprehend their implications or their seriousness.”<sup>17</sup> As Immerman shows, the only way the United States knew how to approach this action that still gave UFCO extreme power over Guatemala and the banana industry, was to mobilize the CIA into covert action. Conceding this land, in the U.S. mindset, would have looked like a sign of weakness for a president that always embodied strength. Also, if UFCO land was expropriated by the government, then there could be a possible avalanche of other U.S. entities in Latin America being taken over by that particular nation’s government. Psychologically, the United States thought that if they conceded to the Guatemalan government, they would be losing to the Soviet Union in the Cold War.

In *Inevitable Revolutions*, Walter LaFeber believes that the United States made Latin America countries become dependent on U.S. capitalism. This dependency became prevalent and perfected under the Ubico administration. Eight years into Ubico’s administration, “nowhere had the U.S. system better proven its effectiveness and power than in Guatemala.”<sup>18</sup> The reason that the United States had proven to have such major influence in Guatemala was due in large part to Ubico’s understanding that if he gave

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<sup>17</sup> Immerman, 85.

<sup>18</sup> Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1984), 75.

U.S. companies carte blanche on the Guatemalan banana empire, the rail network, and communication network, he would remain in power indefinitely. Ubico made the assumption that his reign as Guatemalan president would be limitless, with United States support. Maintaining power was key to Ubico, and U.S. support ensured longevity.

Ubico complied with U.S. interests in order to keep his position as the dictator of Guatemala, so he was loyal to the United Fruit Company. McCann believed that Sam Zemurray was an ethical man who did not take advantage of Guatemala. As LaFeber emphasizes, the U.S. economic model proved to be efficient in Guatemala. Ubico would have to employ favorable policies towards Zemurray and UFCO, in order for the Guatemalan economy to function smoothly. Zemurray's clear support from Ubico and Ubico's longevity as dictator provides transparency to the level of ignorance Zemurray had about how the Guatemalan people were suffering or his implicit understanding of the impoverished conditions the people were living in.

After the United States coup left Guatemala more unstable than it had been under Arbenz, the United States began sending more foreign aid to fix the problems they created in Guatemala. Paradoxically, the United States supported aid to military regimes in Guatemala. In contrast to the promotion of democracy, LaFeber emphasizes how much Guatemala mattered to the United States in this time of turmoil. For instance, "Between 1954 and 1970 the United States pumped more dollars into Guatemala than into any other Central American nation."<sup>19</sup> Guatemalan aid took precedence over the other Central American countries throughout this period. More specifically, the U.S.

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<sup>19</sup> LaFeber, 166.

supplied \$35 million directly to the Guatemalan military from 1967 to 1976. Within that ten-year period, the U.S. allowed the Guatemalan military to grow in strength and numbers. Creating democracy was not the objective of the United States; instead, the U.S. focused on the maintenance of key economic institutions. Providing military aid to autocratic leaders became a priority so that those leaders would be able to retain their power through oppression, thus upholding U.S. economic interests, such as the United Fruit Company.

The indigenous Mayans of Guatemala have faced an extremely long period of poverty and persecution by the Guatemalan elite. The Mayan community predominantly resides in the rural portions of Guatemala, many in the western highlands. Very few Mayans lived in the urban environments. Mayan Indians were unable to find work in the cities because they had no education and faced discrimination by ladinos, as well as persistent language and cultural barriers that persist. Since the majority of Guatemalan land was owned by very few, the Mayan scope of opportunities was lessened over time. Dependency on those with the land and wealth was inevitable for the poor in Guatemala, especially so for Mayan Indians. Equating this to a feudal economic system, the Mayan Indians were subservient to the will of the Guatemalan elite.

Since colonial times, the Mayan Indians have been a major target of persecution. Mayan Indians have very little land in Guatemala, but the land they did own was the land that their ancestors had cultivated for centuries. When the Guatemalan government realized there were oil reserves underneath portions of these lands<sup>20</sup>, they allowed

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<sup>20</sup> LaFeber, 258.



multinational corporations to purchase the land and the Indians were to be removed. LaFeber believes that this united Mayan Indians, except they had nothing to defend themselves. As a result, the most deprived people in the nation became even more disadvantaged from this experience. The Guatemalan government was appealing to the U.S. by allowing multinational companies come in and drill the land for oil reserves, while a group of oppressed individuals received even more subjugation.

Women have never had legal equality in Guatemala. This especially holds true for Mayan women. Rigoberta Menchú learned this lesson from her mother. In her own book *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, Menchu remembered her mother's advice that "an Indian woman is only respected if she's wearing her full costume."<sup>21</sup> The Mayan communist has been given little respect since the colonial days, and this statement shows just how little Mayan women mattered to Guatemalan military leaders. Mayan women had to be dressed up to gain respect within the Mayan community, even though the Mayan community was given no respect by Guatemalan society at large. Painfully, Guatemalan women learned this lesson that Rigoberta Menchú learned as a child from her mother.

Among the Guatemalan poor, there is a major rift that stems along the lines of race. Impoverished ladinos do not see impoverished Mayans as equals. Instead, there are major barriers between each group, centralizing around race. Menchú believes the "ladino minority thinks its blood is superior, a higher quality, and they think of Indians as a sort of animal."<sup>22</sup> Instead of directing blame to the government, many within the

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<sup>21</sup> Rigoberta Menchú, *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* (Brooklyn: Verso, 1984), 248.

<sup>22</sup> Menchú, 196.

impoverished ladino community have championed the military government's racist ideology towards Mayan Indians. Looking at Mayan males as possible subversives, and Mayan women as inferior humans to them, the military government was successful in spreading its disastrous thoughts about other human beings to the poor ladino community. Forgetting that they had severe economic issues created by the Guatemalan elite, destitute ladinos channeled their rage into racist sentiments towards the Mayan community.

Honing in on the Civil War period, *Guatemala: Eternal Spring, Eternal Tyranny*, by Jean-Marie Simon, presents the brutal repression of the Guatemalan dictators with insights from individuals who experienced the Guatemalan military's wrath during this period. Since the overthrow of Arbenz Guatemala has been on a path of hostility towards those who were thought to be subversive. The Mayan community and the poor were considered subversive, or had the most potential to become subversive. At no point was this aggression carried out on Mayan Indians than under the regime of autocratic leader, José Efraín Ríos Montt.

Guatemala had been plagued with years of violence since the CIA overthrow in 1954. People did not think conditions could get much worse in Guatemala, but in 1982 they realized that it could. Efraín Ríos Montt embodies many disdainful characteristics of the old Guatemalan society, and his persistence in power provides one tool to comprehend why Guatemala cannot move into the modern political, economic, and social world. In an attempt to maintain the old institutional order that Schneider explained so

clearly, Ríos Montt takes drastic measures to purify the country in the image that he sees best. As a result of this, he created unparalleled damage to Guatemalan politics.

Ríos Montt is the epitome of a repressive leader who persecutes human beings. He forced Mayans into hiding, and over 200,000 Guatemalans would eventually flee the country.<sup>23</sup> A mass movement of this sort, Simon shows, is not a common movement. Since the poor, and almost every Mayan was extremely poor, were seen to be threatening because they had nothing to lose, Ríos Montt decided to purge the Mayan Indian communities. Defenseless, the Mayan Indians were unable to protect themselves against a military that was bent on searing terror into the minds of the poorest people within his own country. As LeFeber showed the vulnerabilities of the Mayan community in terms of economics, at the same time the Mayans were just as vulnerable to the military.

The acts of genocide committed against the Mayans in Guatemala were truly appalling. More appalling, for Simon, was the support for the Ríos Montt regime in the United States. While having knowledge of what egregious human rights violations were being committed in Guatemala, the United States supplied the Guatemalan military with “\$20 million, mostly in equipment and services.”<sup>24</sup> Not only is this money significant, but it also allowed the machine of the Guatemalan military to continue to churn. Also throwing support behind the Ríos Montt regime were evangelicals in the United States. Posing as a devout Christian, his military was receiving private donations to continue unforgiveable violations against their own citizens. The facade of Christianity allowed

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<sup>23</sup> Simon, 114.

<sup>24</sup> Simon, 121.

Ríos Montt to gain the monetary support he needed to allow his military to have carte blanche over the dehumanization of poor Guatemalans.

With the overthrow of Ubico and popular election in 1944, a democratic opening appeared—an opportunity for the Mayan peoples to have their rights recognized and respected. As Jorge Ubico lacked the intent to establish major change in rural areas for the Mayan Indians, the poor helped the counter-movement to liberate them from the seemingly eternal bonds of oppression. As Piero Gleijeses writes in *Shattered Hope*, the Mayan Indians did not receive the sort of new beginnings they had anticipated when Arévalo was elected. While the elites in Guatemala proved to be a major obstacle for this land reformation, Arévalo was not particularly interested in being the central instigator in the upheaval of Guatemalan land distribution.<sup>25</sup> As the Mayan Indians still lived in economic servitude to their employers, the people who gave them a small portion of the land to call their temporary home, they would have to be patient until the next election to find the ultimate change they sought.

Not wasting anytime to provide relief for the Mayan community, President Jacobo Arbenz issued Decree 900. In order to give Mayans and the poor a chance to achieve economic success in this imbalanced economic environment, Arbenz's main goal was to help the poor. Gleijeses emphasizes that Arbenz not only sought land reform for Mayan Indians, but he also sought to extend credit and promote literacy to this impoverished community. Within this trifold plan of land, credit, and literacy, Arbenz believed these were all interconnected and equally important. In order to reestablish the agrarian order,

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<sup>25</sup> Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944-1954* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991), 47.

and allow for an equal playing field among all socioeconomic backgrounds, Arbenz was well on his way to achieving his vision for all of Guatemala. In lopsided fashion, the vast majority of Guatemalans were pleased with their leader; however, the minority of Guatemalan elites and foreign diplomats perceived of this much differently.<sup>26</sup> President Arbenz, not President Ubico—like Grieb thought, actually committed to change that would have immense benefits to the Mayan community.

For the United Fruit Company, having a dictator in power meant that they would prosper as their power within Guatemala increased, and their power would not be questioned. Paul J. Dosal, in *Doing Business With Dictators*, depicted the United Fruit Company as a business that understood the need to control multiple sectors of the Guatemalan government in order to have unrestrained power. A banana market monopoly would not provide necessary leverage over Guatemalan leaders, and United Fruit recognized this problem. Understanding that there are only a handful of sectors within a nation that gives whoever owns them control over the government, the United Fruit seized this opportunity. Taking majority ownership, or “42.6 percent of the company,”<sup>27</sup> of International Railways of Central America, the United Fruit Company had cornered the transportation market.

Once the United Fruit Company was able to manipulate the transportation market, they were able to eliminate competition, set very reasonable prices for transporting their goods, and have the opportunity to manipulate Jorge Ubico. As a result of this, “United

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<sup>26</sup> Gleijeses, 170.

<sup>27</sup> Paul J. Dosal, *Doing Business With The Dictators: A Political History of United Fruit in Guatemala, 1899-1944* (Maryland: SR Books, 1993), 193-194.

Fruit deliberately stifled and eliminated competition along the Pacific coast, and it did so with the tacit approval or at least ignorance of Ubico.”<sup>28</sup> Dosal argues that Ubico had two options in regards to United’s banana and transportation monopoly: agree to it or plead ignorance. Agreeing or allowing, by deliberately ignoring what UFCO was doing, were both ways to continue this mode of appeasement to U.S. foreign corporations. The tentacles of the United Fruit Company, now known as “El Pulpo,” were wrapped around the Guatemalan government and they could cause major pain at any point in which they wanted to. In other words, UFCO established control over the Guatemalan government—LeFeber agrees with Dosal on this issue. Yet this dominance would be threatened in years to come.

David Stoll shows how the military regime made the Catholic Church out to be a subversive group against the government in his book *Between Two Armies*. In it, we learn that the military leaders had a different preference of religion and because its clergy advocated liberation theology’s preferential treatment to the poor they perceived the Catholic Church to be waging a holy war against the military government. The Catholic Church had built its biggest network in the western Guatemalan highlands. This happened to be the area in which a large portion of Mayan Indians lived. Because the Mayans were so poor, the Catholic Church would have the most work to do in this area. Since the “Catholic clergy became the main source of human rights reporting, selective kidnapping of their local leaders turned into general persecution.”<sup>29</sup> The most deprived people in Guatemala were the Mayans. Many in the Catholic Church supported the

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<sup>28</sup> Dosal, 197.

<sup>29</sup> David Stoll, *Between Two Armies in the Ixil Towns of Guatemala* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1993), 171.

Mayans in order to help them is logical given the extreme poverty in Guatemala's western highlands. As it championed evangelical Protestantism, the military government with the Christian Democratic Party provided an atrocious justification to eliminate the extremely poor communities in the western highlands.

The Mayans are spread out throughout all of Guatemala. Not being in one region of the country has created difficulties in trying to unite the entire Mayan community in Guatemala. The largest difficulty has been through the Mayan language. Since the Mayans are spread out throughout Guatemala, there are twenty-one different languages used by the large Mayan community.<sup>30</sup> Because of this vast number of dialects, the Mayans have been unable to unite to preserve their culture. In *Unfinished Conquest*, Victor Perea portrays that the Mayans were forced to change their innate characteristics in order to fit in the way in which the Guatemalan military wanted them to fit in. Since this change was imposed on them, Mayans have lost their identity—this has been present since the time the Spanish conquered them, but even more so during the civil war from 1960 to 1996. While Menchu has attempted to preserve Mayan identity, many Mayans have attempted to assimilate into ladino culture in order to quell racial hostilities. In this state of no identity, Mayans have been plagued with even more severe economic consequences. In addition to this, Ríos Montt's regime brought about the forced Christianization of some Mayan communities, out of fear that if they did not comply with this spiritual transformation they would be killed.

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<sup>30</sup> Victor Perea, *Unfinished Conquest: The Guatemalan Tragedy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 2.

Since this Mayan identity was lost, there has been a movement to bring back the Mayan culture. Rallying around what happened to the Mayan communities during the Civil War, more specifically during the Ríos Montt regime, Mayans are trying to tell their stories. By doing this, they are creating a sense of a community. Perea believes that this unity of Mayans can possibly occur because of the efforts of Rigoberta Menchú and others, but it is hard to be optimistic when barriers of economics, race, land-ownership, and a lack of justice still exist.

Perea shows that even after the evidence of what happened underneath Ríos Montt's supervision and direct orders as President, many Guatemalans still support his endeavors. The sect of zealous evangelicals believe that he is still the one to make Guatemalan pure. Since he gained power within Congress, he "polarizes Guatemala's political and religious institutions."<sup>31</sup> Politically, his presence in Congress means that he and others will not be prosecuted for their gross violations of human rights. Guatemalans who were ravaged from his regime cannot get the justice and recognition of the crimes they committed. With him controlling politics, many Guatemalans can never be served justice for the crimes he, and others, committed during the civil war. The spiritual, evangelical support he continues to amass allows Ríos Montt to maintain his immense power and keep Guatemala divided by his supporters and those who are seeking justice.

In *The Banana Men*, Lester D. Langley and Thomas Schoonover are quick to give praise, like McCacnn, for Samuel Zemurray building the United Fruit Company into a mega-enterprise; however, they indict Zemurray's methodology as a factor in gaining that

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<sup>31</sup> Perea, 330.



power to contributing to the overthrow of President Arbenz. Langley and Schoonover both recognize that the United Fruit Company is responsible, along with the U.S. government, for overthrowing a legitimate government. What they are most focused in on is Zemurray's "bribery and the subsidizing of revolution"<sup>32</sup> in the past. These ruthless measures established precedence to how the United Fruit Company continued their standard operation procedures after Zemurray passed away in 1951. The climate in which Zemurray built made the United Fruit Company an economic powerhouse, but with that came skeptical methods of attaining that influence.

Taking this from a different perspective, Jennifer Schirmer in *The Guatemalan Military Project* believes that from 1944 to the present day, the Guatemalan military developed a system of rule focused on using terror and they labelled that system democracy. Guatemala's military machine had a different definition for the term democracy, but as long as they fought in the name of democracy to achieve their goals, they would have the backing of the United States. In order to have a democracy, the military government thought they needed to impose their vision of a democratic country. While their idea of a democracy was different than how people in the United States view democracy—a society in which everyone is equal under the law, they believed coercion was the best way to reaffirm the existence of a feudal hierarchy. The cycle of military leaders that took over following the overthrow of Arbenz would always have a different version than the United States form of democracy.

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<sup>32</sup> Lester D. Langley and Thomas Schoonover, *The Banana Men: American Mercenaries and Entrepreneurs in Central America, 1880-1930* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 171.

Ironically, many conservative evangelicals in the United States believe that capitalism and Christianity are intrinsically linked with one another. Through his Christian Democratic Party, Ríos Montt took this idea seriously in order to promote the private sector. Schirmer alludes to this unlikely alliance of Christian beliefs, the military apparatus, and the promotion of free market ideas in order to promote a democratic nation-state. Having all three of these vastly different institutions fully functional would allow for a more democratic nation. Creating a strong private sector would become pivotal to the military complex of Ríos Montt's administration. Creating production in peasant regions like Ixil became a main priority for the military government. In consultation with US-AID, the Rios Montt administration was given the advice to create "a commercial market of lands."<sup>33</sup> As peasants could never pay for their own land, this advice was another major misperception of the peasants in Guatemala. It became imperative to force these ideas on all Guatemalans who did not already agree with them, but there was still a lack of basic understanding of the poor Guatemalans and a continued the method of forcibly installing the military's beliefs on the peasants.

In his book *Thank God They're On Our Side* David F. Schmitz asserts that the United States had to choose between two evils in Guatemala: military dictators or communism. Looking at it from this perspective, the United States chose to side with the former. The Guatemalan democratic government was thought to be so fragile that it was better to support someone who would stop communism, instead of leaving a delicate political system open to communistic corruption. Supporting a dictator who was anti-

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<sup>33</sup> Jennifer Schirmer, *The Guatemalan Military Project: A Violence Called Democracy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 72.

communist was antithetical to the U.S.'s supposed goal of promoting freedom and democracy throughout the world. Yet getting Castillo Armas to power would prohibit the assumed continued spread of communism in Guatemala's political system.

Within this scope, Schmitz emphasizes that the strategy of supporting a dictator left the U.S. vulnerable to supporting a leader who had questionable objectives. This susceptibility is exactly what the U.S. would fall prey to. Military leaders in Guatemala would use this to their advantage. Having "an anticommunist stance was all a strongman needed to be deemed a protector of the democratic way of life."<sup>34</sup> Similar to Schneider's belief, the United States would prefer a caudillo over a left candidate in Guatemala. The blueprint was laid for any military leader to gain power, as long as they seemed competent, had a vision, and voiced pro-U.S. rhetoric. Now, Guatemalan caudillos were in an even better place to continue their elitist vision for the country, and preserve the status quo that had favored them for centuries.

Similar to the Melvilles, *The Time of Freedom* by Cindy Forester shows how the October Revolution, 1944-1954, was an unprecedented revolution among the campesino workers in Guatemala. For so long these civilians lacked the voice, autonomy, or wealth necessary to speak out against the dictatorial regimes. The fight against inequality was under way in Guatemala with the resignation of Jorge Ubico. The masses in Guatemala were pushing back against the institutions that held them in their poor, landless state for centuries. For once, the majority of Guatemalans finally had an opportunity for their

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<sup>34</sup> David F. Schmitz, *Thank God They're On Our Side* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 198.

government to work for their interests, not just creating more wealth and influence for the elites.

The Guatemalan elite tried to find every viable reason to not allow their land to be expropriated through Law 900. As a result of this, campesino workers rose up to fight against the landowners who were finding clever reasons to avoid expropriation. Forester argues that “campesinos cannot be viewed as unconscious actors in national history.”<sup>35</sup> With this belief, Forester is in stark contrast with Schneider’s view that the campesinos were nothing but communists. Looking back on Guatemalan history, individuals may be critical of the Guatemalan workers for not rising up against the elite to alter their situation. Campesino workers did rise up against the oppressors, and they were quelled by forces much larger than themselves: the Central Intelligence Agency.

The rebellion of the campesino workers had immediate and long-term implications. Immediately, their rebellion against the feudal masters was to show the desire for equality amongst Guatemalans. The expectation of an improved system was what the campesino workers struggle embodied. However, the long-term implications illuminated the dichotomy between the elites, who controlled the military, and the vast majority of the indigenous peoples in Guatemala. The rift between these two groups became crystal clear after the CIA overthrew the Arbenz regime. Those anti-establishment individuals became the focus of maltreatment, and, eventually, of the genocides beginning in 1982. Forester is convinced that the ending of the October Revolution in 1954 “explains the violence that escalated into the holocaust of the

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<sup>35</sup> Cindy Forester, *The Time of Freedom: Campesino Workers in Guatemala’s October Revolution* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001), 196.

1980s.”<sup>36</sup> The battle over who should own land, and who might have anti-establishment ideas in order to gain freedom from the feudal system, is the main issue that enhanced the divide between the Guatemalan elites and the poor. Retaining the feudal society was crucial for the elite because it maintained their position of privilege, power, and vast wealth. As a result, the elite would take desperate measures to keep that system in tact.

Forester also makes a provocative claim that the “revolution suffered the misfortune of coming to fruition when United Fruit had U.S. military, political, and intelligence resources fully at its disposal.”<sup>37</sup> The implication is that had the Guatemalan revolution come during a time when United Fruit did not have these powerful influences, then the Guatemalan revolution would have been sustained for a period longer than ten years. This idea has significant merit behind it. Without United Fruit in Guatemala, the U.S. most likely never gets involved with Guatemalan affairs. As a revisionist historian, Forester would be inclined to think that Arbenz would have been able to serve out his tenure and fulfill his ideology in Guatemala. There is no reason to not believe that the government would have transferred peacefully to the next elected president after Arbenz, and it would have most likely been someone of the same mindset as Arbenz, striving to carry out justice for poor Guatemalans.

Victoria Sanford’s provocative book *Buried Secrets: Truth and Human Rights in Guatemala* exposes the depth in which the Guatemalan government went to maintain its power, and how they made their best effort to demolish any entire race of human beings. The hatred towards Mayans was latent, but never put into practice until Ríos Montt

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<sup>36</sup> Forester, 2.

<sup>37</sup> Forester, 97.

injected his intolerance. What happened under Ríos Montt was an attempt to completely wipe the earth clean of Mayan Indians in Guatemala, which resulted in genocide for the Mayan community. Under Ríos Montt, “the Guatemalan army committed genocide against the Maya with the intention to destroy the Maya in whole or in part and that genocide was both the means and the end, and furthermore, genocide was also the planned intent.”<sup>38</sup> These barbaric actions cannot be forgotten in Guatemala.

Unfortunately, the devastations in which Guatemalans have been afflicted with is an issue the country will have to continue to face going forward.

Time after time, Sanford, like Jean-Marie Simon, is highlighting the plight of Mayan women during La Violencia. Racism was evident in the massacres of Mayan communities; whereas, sexism was not as visibly seen. The particular case of Sister Dianna Ortiz shows how little many Guatemalan men in the military think of women, especially Mayan women, in Guatemalan. During her trip to Guatemala in 1989, Sister Dianna was kidnapped. Throughout being imprisoned, she “was burned with cigarettes, raped, and place in a pit of rats and decomposing bodies with other still-breathing torture victims.”<sup>39</sup> Former U.S. Ambassador to Guatemala, Thomas Stroock would not investigate what happened to Sister Dianna. Questioning whether Sister Dianna’s claims were actually true, Ambassador Stroock forcefully instructed that information regarding the physical injuries she had suffered be left out of the Inter-American Commission’s Annual Human Rights Report in 1996.<sup>40</sup> Sister Diana, a nun from the United States, was

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<sup>38</sup> Victoria Sanford, *Buried Secrets: Truth and Human Rights in Guatemala* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 155.

<sup>39</sup> Sanford, 58.

<sup>40</sup> Sanford, 59.

not given justice for the actions Guatemalan military members committed against her. Her pain is what poor Guatemalan women confront when seeking justice, equality, and dignity from the majority of the male community in Guatemala.

In *Bitter Fruit*, Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer believed that the support of the Ubico administration predominantly came through the elites in Guatemala. His base support “was the landed aristocracy, Guatemala’s traditional governing class.”<sup>41</sup> In addition to the Guatemalan elite, Ubico pandered to U.S. companies. Agreeing with LaFeber, Schlesinger and Kinzer realize that Ubico catered to entities that would prolong his reign in Guatemala. Indulgently serving the Guatemalan elites and foreign business would ultimately have repercussions to Ubico’s reign as President. Schlesinger, Kinzer, and LeFeber all disagree with Grieb on his claim Ubico helped the Mayan community. Since Ubico catered to economic entities with major influences, he had to neglect the Mayans.

The Ubico administration had been voted out in 1944, there became real hope for democracy. As Schlesinger and Kinzer show, President Arévalo lacked the vision for real change in Guatemala. Intelligence was not an issue with Arévalo, but there was “no cohesive program”<sup>42</sup> during his tenure. Even though he was very capable of providing more for the Guatemalans who elected him, Arévalo served to be a major disappointment for realigning Guatemala to favor all individuals, not just the elite. Guatemalans who propelled Arévalo into the most significant role in Guatemala recognized Arévalo could

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<sup>41</sup> Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005), 27.

<sup>42</sup> Schlesinger and Kinzer, 42.

not provide the necessary change that Guatemalans sought. Arévalo's intelligence and lofty expectations quickly flipped to looking for someone capable of lessening the economic gap.

The new leader Guatemala elected was President Jacobo Arbenz. President Arbenz was a progressive individual who sought land reform. His goal was to reset Guatemala's social, economic, and political structure by giving every Guatemalan citizen a chance to participate fairly and fully. This approach directly impacted the United Fruit Company's interests. Also, this policy was created by Arbenz during the Cold War era; and was quickly taken as a "Red invasion" in Central America. The United States became proactive, allowing Allen Dulles and the CIA to overthrow the Arbenz regime for a leader who was more in line with maintaining U.S. businesses and interests.

Schlesinger and Kinzer echo Talbot's argument about Allen Dulles having a central role in maintaining United Fruit Company's investments in Guatemala. The major fear, according to Schlesinger and Kinzer, was not to allow the next Guatemalan leader "nationalize or in any way disrupt the company's operations."<sup>43</sup> The priority of CIA director Dulles was to guarantee that the next leader would not have qualities like Arbenz. A new Guatemalan leader that represented U.S. business interests was the main objective, not someone who represented the majority of people in Guatemala. At no time did Allen Dulles consult the Guatemalan people in his selection of a new leader. To him, the interests of the majority of Guatemalans was secondary to his own interests.

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<sup>43</sup> Schlesinger and Kinzer, 120.



Greg Grandin attributes the imperial legacy of the United States to the overthrow of President Arbenz. In *Empire's Workshop*, Grandin believes that the threat of the United States hovering over Guatemala forced the Guatemalan military to avoid supporting Arbenz during the overthrow.<sup>44</sup> If the Guatemalan military intervened during the overthrow of Arbenz, then he would have remained in power, UFCO would have had to give up their land, and vast portions of the population would have had land. Since they did not get involved, the Guatemalan military believed they would not receive the wrath of Eisenhower and the U.S. military. Many Guatemalans became fearful of stopping an overthrow of their own government. They did this out of fear of retribution from the United States. The mental anguish of not being able to stop a planned invasion by the United States became a realization for many Guatemalans who backed the government. The Guatemalan military had to concede to whatever plans the United States had in store for the leader of their nation, or they would be subject to the U.S. military and economic sanctions.

Understanding the indigenous Mayans, Edward F. Fischer and Peter Benson in *Broccoli and Desire* explore the harsh realities the Mayan community continues to face today. The Mayan community is still plagued by the economic barriers in present day Guatemala. Many Mayan Indian communities reside in Guatemala's highlands, which is just northwest of Guatemala City. The Mayans in these lands suffer from severe poverty. In order to create a better life, some Mayans have branched out into growing food, specifically broccoli. In agreeance with Perez, the Mayan identity would have to change

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<sup>44</sup> Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, The United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2006), 44.

in some aspect in order to adjust to the economics capitalism employs. Selling broccoli “has brought some added cash, but only for some of the farmers.”<sup>45</sup> Mayans are attempting to get creative in what they harvest in order to have some monetary flow. However, very few can succeed from this because the U.S. economic market ultimately dictates the price they receive in return for broccoli, and whether they even decided to import the Mayan crops. Mayans continue to seek a better life, but they are continually thwarted by the confines by powers outside of their sphere of influence.

The Guatemalan elites have perceived the Mayan community as people who lack reason and the capacity to be productive members of the society. Today, the pan-Mayan movement is attempting to give Mayans a voice that has long been quieted. Fischer and Benson believe that this movement will allow Mayans to gain a better hold within the Guatemala society and a louder voice in the world. The mission of pan-Mayans are twofold: first, to have a unique, representative, and powerful voice within Guatemala; secondly, to show the world that the Mayan community belongs among the diverse human race. The leaders of this movement have stressed “cultural unity among all of Guatemala’s Maya peoples.”<sup>46</sup> Uniting all Mayans proves to be the most difficult challenge to this process. Language barriers, displacement of Mayans, economic interests, and fear of being persecuted are all factors that Mayans have to deal with in making themselves respected on the national and global level. Challenges still face the Mayan community, but mobilization for equality is underway.

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<sup>45</sup> Edward F. Fischer and Peter Benson, *Broccoli and Desire: Global Connections and Maya Struggles in Postwar Guatemala* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 44.

<sup>46</sup> Fischer and Benson, 147.

Similar to Simon's book, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit* by Virginia Garrard-Burnett passionately explains the role in which José Efraín Ríos Montt used his vision of Christianity to justify seventeen months of terror to the Mayans. In order to restore the honor of God in Guatemala, the military would need to exterminate all Mayans. Ríos Montt managed to instruct the military to slaughter the Mayan community, and create an environment where Mayans were apprehensive about being Mayan. In order to avoid the death sentence from Ríos Montt's regime, Garrard-Burnett believes Mayans would assimilate to the poor ladino lifestyle and culture. Doing this at least provided a blanket of security from the military, even at the expense of the Mayan identity.

Looking more closely than Simon on this subject, Garrard-Burnett assesses the Ríos Montt ideology as one that is focused on creating morals, while ridding the society of those who may seem unlikely to conform or are already not conforming. Forcefully insisting a "national moral reckoning"<sup>47</sup> for the people of Guatemala, Ríos Montt expected everyone who would remain alive to uphold this virtuous lifestyle, while not holding himself to the same standard. Being principled through a biblical worldview was the key to a functional society, Ríos Montt thought. In order to achieve this system he deemed sensible, Guatemalans had to make the adaptations of being subservient to God and Ríos Montt. Obedience would be key to a functional society, while agitators must be extinguished. For Ríos Montt, the Mayans and poor ladinos represented an abnormality that was unhinged and could lack the skills to adapt to his view.

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<sup>47</sup> Virginia Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 66.

Ríos Montt's destruction forced many people in those communities to seek refuge in areas outside of the guerrilla's reach. The options including going into exile (internally and externally), join the guerrillas, or seek solace in the military run refugee camp. The latter option put them at the direct mercy of the military, but allowed them to stop interaction with guerrillas. Some of the people that had to flee from the military, whether they were former guerrilla members or were survivors of military massacres, went on to live in "comunidades de población en resistencia (CPR) in remote and inaccessible areas of the country."<sup>48</sup> In order to avoid being killed by the Guatemalan military, more than 20,000 people lived in isolation for up to a decade to escape the violence. Garrard-Burnett is pointing out the beginnings of the mass displacement of individuals in Guatemala. Civil society as Guatemalans knew it, which was hardly ever civil, had evaporated.

The most crucial dimension to Ríos Montt was his personal belief that religion must be purely evangelical Protestantism. For his nation to be prosperous, he believed that it needed to be cleansed of all people who could infect the purity of the religion. Since some portions of the Catholic Church in Guatemala believed in liberation theology, Ríos Montt did not support their endeavors. The goal of liberation theology is to extend help to the poor. Guatemala has no shortage of impoverished human beings, so the people who practiced liberation theology in the Catholic Church would have numerous individuals who needed their help. Directly connecting to the Catholic Church to the individuals who were most likely to be subversive (the poor) Ríos Montt had extra incentive to persecute Catholics. While "the number of Catholics who died on Ríos

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<sup>48</sup> Garrard-Burnett, 98.

Montt's watch increased,"<sup>49</sup> he did not kill the priests. Instead of killing the priests, as both Garrard-Burnett and Stoll point out, he found other ways to quiet them and make them non-existent in the public eye. Not killing priests gave the military government under Ríos Montt better status than his predecessor, the Lucas regime, which meant that he could point towards human rights improvements. While human rights were actually significantly worse throughout the country, Ríos Montt could point to the fact that Catholic priests were no longer being subject to murder. The result of his program: Catholic priests were no longer being slaughtered, and Catholicism was no longer a religious entity that could provide good services to the poor.

The United States government did not formally give military aid to Guatemala during the presidency of Ríos Montt. Knowing the egregious human rights violations that the Ríos Montt regime was committing against their own citizens, the U.S. Congress would not back a bill to give aid to Guatemala. However, this did not stop the Reagan administration from giving their support to Ríos Montt's band of slaughterers. With the evidence of abhorrent acts of genocide being committed, the Reagan administration had an "unapologetic and obdurate defense of the regime."<sup>50</sup> Reagan had intelligence on what was occurring in Guatemala, so why did he continue to endorse Ríos Montt? As Garrard-Burnett provocatively argues, within the Cold War context Ríos Montt's openly Christian beliefs would squash communism in Guatemala. Ríos Montt was the ideal example of a leader the United States could support because his Christian beliefs meshed with those of conservative evangelicals in the United States. Reagan did not want to lose

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<sup>49</sup> Garrard-Burnett, 128.

<sup>50</sup> Garrard-Burnett, 158.

the Cold War, so he supported a tyrant who would purge Guatemala of Communism and could relate to his party's religious base.

Historically, the United States has been supportive of dictators in Central America. In the grand scheme of support lent to caudillos, Reagan's support of Efraín Ríos Montt is a continuation of these policies—and it shows Reagan's preferential treatment for military regimes in Central America during his reign in the 1980's. Within the larger context of U.S. policy in Central America, it is not abnormal for the United States to support someone like Ríos Montt, especially someone who portrayed fervent evangelicalism like he did.

With more recent scholarship and the opening of declassified documents, James M. Colby believes Zemurray was not as ethical in his practice. In *The Business of Empire*, Colby says that Zemurray “arranged the overthrow of at least one president of Honduras, and he now orchestrated a similar removal of Cutter as head of United Fruit.”<sup>51</sup> Unlike McCann's viewpoint, Zemurray was ruthless in his actions to build a more dominant United Fruit Company. Being a fair-minded leader would have meant that Zemurray would not have flexed his majority share of UFCO and just took over the company. Zemurray did not come to power democratically within UFCO, and he did not care for democratic tendencies in Honduras. Zemurray took matters into his own hands, and achieved change through his influence and power.

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<sup>51</sup> Jason M. Colby, *The Business of Empire: United Fruit, Race, and U.S. Expansion in Central America* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2011), 183.

In *The Devil's Chessboard*, David Talbot refreshes the perspective on why the overthrow of President Arbenz's was inevitable. The crux of Talbot's main argument is that too many influential people in U.S. politics were too intrinsically tied to the United Fruit Company's interests that they were not willing to cede any portion of their enterprise over to the Guatemalan government or people. Specifically, Allen and John Foster Dulles served as the highly influential policy makers in Washington D.C. The powerful sphere of influence cannot be overstated in Talbot's argument. Along with this political power the Dulles brothers shared, just as Schlesinger and Kinzer showed, they had a special interest in the United Fruit Company.

During their tenure at the law firm of Sullivan & Cromwell, the Dulles brothers represented the interests of the United Fruit Company. Eventually, Allen Dulles would wind up serving as a board member. They had reason to protect their former client, who they had a special involvement, to maintain United Fruit's investments in Guatemala. After President Ubico had been ousted, UFCO officials and the Dulles brothers became wary about the transitional government. Transitioning to a democracy made these high-ranking officials uneasy about the continued influence and wealthy of UFCO. President Arbenz had pushed the Dulles brothers and United Fruit too far when he called for land redistribution.

Connecting this to communism, Talbot shows, was the way in which the Dulles brothers would be able to not only convince Eisenhower, but also persuade the general public in the United States. The United States could not get involved militarily without creating immense hostility, because it would have violated international law, and possible

uprisings against U.S. interests in Latin America. As a result of this, covert operations were the only approach that could be taken in attempting to overthrow this regime. Covert operations ensured plausible deniability for the Eisenhower administration, and that was crucial to formally abide by international law. Even though President Arbenz was clearly not affiliated with communism or the Soviet Union, Allen Dulles led a CIA smear campaign of Arbenz's beliefs.<sup>52</sup> Differing from Schneider on this point, Talbot, Immerman, and Grandin do not dispute how the U.S. made Arbenz appear to be a communist, even though he was not. Ultimately, because Arbenz went against a U.S. company that was so near to the Dulles brothers, the easiest way to make him a pariah was to say he was a closet communist during the Cold War. In the heart of McCarthyism, the Dulles brothers had a perfect opportunity to maintain the United Fruit Company.

With such egregious human rights violations committed against the Mayan community, how does Guatemala move forward? Guatemala cannot move forward without the persecution of Efraín Ríos Montt. The starting point of this instability came directly from the CIA overthrow of the Arbenz regime. David Talbot believes this “was the beginning of a blood-soaked era that would transform Guatemala into one of the twentieth century's most infamous killing fields.”<sup>53</sup> In a direct line from the Arbenz overthrow, Guatemala would experience one of the world's most brutal dictators.

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<sup>52</sup> David Talbot, *The Devil's Chessboard: Allen Dulles, the CIA, and the Rise of America's Secret Government* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2015), 251.

<sup>53</sup> Talbot, 262.



Within this historical narrative, I am focused on how Rios Montt has shaped social life and politics in Guatemala. The seventeen months he spent in office brought on the current socio-political structure that is menacing to ordinary Guatemalans. Rios Montt is the symbol for impunity in a land where injustices are committed frequently. The human rights violations that were committed under his leadership have left the indigenous Mayan population without trust for the government. After a coup took him out of the presidency, he made a spectacle of himself by continuing with his insurgent political movement to transform Guatemala. His large body of support has allowed him to continue to have political clout. The political divisions he and his supporters have created paved the way for transnational criminal organizations to have immense power, influence, and wealth. Rios Montt inherited a fractured nation. With that in mind, he somehow managed to make the fractures permanent.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE CHARACTERISTICS OF EFRAIN RIOS MONTT

“I know that President Rios Montt is a man of great personal integrity and commitment. His country is confronting a brutal challenge from guerrillas armed and supported by others outside Guatemala. I have assured the President that the United States is committed to support his efforts to restore democracy and to address the root causes of this violent insurgency. I know he wants to improve the quality of life for all Guatemalans and to promote social justice.”<sup>54</sup> –Ronald Reagan

In order to make sense of what occurred in Guatemala during and since the Rios Montt administration in 1982, it is imperative to understand Efraim Rios Montt’s background, beliefs, and dialogue with the United States. Being aware of what composed, and continues to compose, Rios Montt is crucial in recognizing how his policies fit with his ideological beliefs. This chapter will focus on four main themes: the influence of the School of Americas, his military career before taking over as president, what role his spirituality played in his life and in Guatemala, and his bond with President Reagan and evangelicals in the United States.

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<sup>54</sup> John Woolley and Gerhard Peters, “Ronald Reagan’s Remarks in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, Following a Meeting with President Jose Efraim Rios Montt of Guatemala” (speech, San Pedro Sula, Honduras, December 4, 1982), The American Presidency Project (Santa Barbara, CA: UC Santa Barbara, 1999), <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=42069> (accessed February 16, 2016).

## **School of Americas**

After World War II had ended and the United States was increasingly seeing the Soviet Union as a military and ideological threat to U.S. global interests, the U.S. government created a training grounds in order to combat the spread of the beliefs of the Soviet Union. Since the U.S. was fearful of being taken over by communism and atheism, they decided this new training facility would be best served if it was exclusive to the Western Hemisphere. Recognizing that many Latin American countries could become fertile grounds for Soviet ideology, the United States wanted to have individuals versed and well-prepared to fight those with communistic tendencies. Combatting the Soviet Union would produce the School of Americas.

The School of Americas served as a training base for promising individuals in Latin American countries who are aspiring to have the most up to date military training in the United States. “Since 1946, more than 57,700 officers, cadets, and non-commissioned officers from Latin America and the United States have been trained at the School of Americas.”<sup>55</sup> A more updated report shows that SOA had “trained over 64,000 Latin American soldiers in counterinsurgency techniques, sniper training, commando and psychological warfare, military intelligence and interrogation tactics.”<sup>56</sup> The goal is to have these individuals help defeat those who attempt to overthrow the values of the

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<sup>55</sup> Richard F. Grimmett and Mark P. Sullivan, “United States Army School of the Americas: Background and Congressional Concerns,” Foreign Affairs and National Defense Division (Washington DC, 1994), <http://fas.org/irp/crs/soa.htm> (accessed March 10, 2016).

<sup>56</sup> “What is The SOA?”, SOA Watch (Washington DC, 1998), <http://www.soaw.org/about-the-soawhinsec/what-is-the-soawhinsec> (accessed March 10, 2016).

United States. The volume of people that have gone to the School of Americas shows how much of an impact this training has had on military's throughout Latin America.

The course catalog for the School of Americas, now the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC), has a wide range of courses being offered for the 2017-2018 school year. Within these courses, students will have the chance to learn the most up to date tactics in the classroom, will receive a hands on experience in combat, and will have a working knowledge of how to find drug laboratories.<sup>57</sup> U.S. commanders “may prescribe additional training and education programs that directly support U.S. policies in the Western Hemisphere.”<sup>58</sup> Teaching tactics that work for the United States will not necessarily translate to individuals from a different land. Issues that divide individuals in Latin American countries will not be similar in appearance to the problems that exist in the United States. Thus meaning, the agendas for everyone who attends the SOA, now known as WHINSEC, will have major disparities.

Since there has been a major outcry that the School of Americas, or WHINSEC, does not teach human rights and democracy to its full capability, there has been a major effort by the school to put that notion to rest. Making the effort to teach a specific course

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<sup>57</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation: Course Catalog*, (Washington DC, March 17, 2015, pg. 9), <http://www.benning.army.mil/tenant/whinsec/content/PDF/WHINSEC%202017-2018%20Course%20Catalog%20%28English%20Revision%20as%20of%2025%20Mar%2015%29.pdf> (accessed March 11, 2016).

<sup>58</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation: Course Catalog*, (Washington DC, March 17, 2015, pg. 11), <http://www.benning.army.mil/tenant/whinsec/content/PDF/WHINSEC%202017-2018%20Course%20Catalog%20%28English%20Revision%20as%20of%2025%20Mar%2015%29.pdf> (accessed March 11, 2016).

in democracy and human rights shows that WHINSEC is attempting to amend what was lacking in the past. Courses in human rights were generally offered at the SOA, but individuals were not forced to enroll. Even if individuals decided to take a human rights course does not translate to them understanding how to be humanitarian. More than likely, humanitarian ideas were received differently on a case-by-case basis. In other terms, the meaning of being humanitarian was an elastic clause that could hold drastically separate meanings.

Those who receive training at the School of Americas are sure to develop connections with military members in the United States, mainly due to the fact that this is a loyalty program. In order to receive foreign aid from the United States, Latin American countries would send military members to receive the training at this school. This would showcase the good relationships between their country and the United States. Upon its inception, the School of Americas was focused on subverting communist beliefs at all costs.

With this large base of graduates, the School of Americas has graduated many prominent military leaders in Latin America. The notorious graduates have received their status through inflicting merciless pain on their own citizens. Many of these individuals who have graduated from the School of Americas have delivered terror within their homeland, using the principles that were taught to them at Fort Benning. The methods individuals were taught do not intentionally force these individuals to inflict harm onto their population. However, a significant amount of those who have graduated feel empowered by their training to conquer evil. That evil is subjective to them, within the larger goal of serving the interests of the United States.

In 1950, Efraín Ríos Montt attended the School of Americas.<sup>59</sup> With his training at the School of Americas, Ríos Montt gained the skills the U.S. deemed necessary to become a military leader in the Guatemalan ranks. Within the Guatemalan context, the United States had become highly frustrated and cautious about what the Guatemalan government was allowing and intending to do with the land situation. Also, the United States would have an enormous desire to have someone ready and able to combat these tendencies that appeared to be communistic to the Eisenhower administration. A young, moldable Ríos Montt would be the ideal candidate for the United States to have within the Guatemalan military and political arenas.

### **Military Career**

Growing up in the Ubico era, Efraín Ríos Montt recognized what would be the quickest way for someone to gain status in Guatemala. Joining the military provided separation from poor ladinos, job security, and an opportunity to climb the military ranks into prestigious positions. In 1943, Efraín Ríos Montt joined the Guatemalan Army.<sup>60</sup> From a young age, the military was natural pairing for Ríos Montt. As a result of this love for the military, he would accelerate through the ranks.

Graduating from the military's Polytechnic Institute, Efraín Ríos Montt would serve in various positions before becoming the Chief of Staff. Upon gaining this

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<sup>59</sup> "Notorious Graduates From Guatemala," SOA Watch (Washington DC, 1998), <http://www.soaw.org/about-the-soawhinsec/soawhinsec-grads/notorious-grads/239-notorious-graduates-from-guatemala> (accessed March 10, 2016).

<sup>60</sup> David Bird, "Guatemala's New Chief: Efraín Ríos Montt," *The New York Times*, March 25, 1982, A12, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/121918935/8EAB1ABB46B547BFPQ/1?accountid=11578> (accessed January 27, 2016).

position, some within the Guatemalan military recognized his quick ascendancy, and were fearful that he would win the 1974 election if he remained in the country. Not wanting to spoil the presidency for General Laugerud Garcia, the government smeared Rios Montt by insinuating he had liberal leanings in the right wing country. In 1973, Guatemala “exiled him to a post in Washington, where he was director of studies for the Inter-American Defense College.”<sup>61</sup> Unknowingly, the Guatemalan government actually benefitted Rios Montt by sending him back to the United States. Serving in this new role, Rios Montt was able to continue further his relationships with military leaders in the United States. These relationships would become highly important in the years to follow. For the time being, Rios Montt’s popularity in Guatemala increased, setting the stage for the 1974 Guatemalan elections.

Identifying the popular support in Guatemala, Rios Montt decided to return home and run for president. Once again, Rios Montt would be labeled a communist by his opponent General Laugerud Garcia, however Rios Montt had the popular backing. As was the case since the overthrow of Arbenz in 1954, the people would not receive their democratically elected president. The Guatemala government “declared General Laugerud Garcia the victor by 41.1 percent of the votes cast to General Rios Montt’s 31.1 percent.”<sup>62</sup> Enraged, many Guatemalans, following the lead of Rios Montt, began protesting the election.

Believing the election was rigged, which it was, Rios Montt actively spoke against the illegitimate government for taking the election from him. Unrest ensued from

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<sup>61</sup> Bird, *Guatemala’s New Chief: Efrain Rios Montt*, A12.

<sup>62</sup> Bird, *Guatemala’s New Chief: Efrain Rios Montt*, A12.

Rios Montt's supporters because they recognized the election had been stolen from underneath him. The protesters were "hoping that the disturbances will cause the military to intervene to reverse the official result."<sup>63</sup> Understanding that violent action could be taken against the protesters, Rios Montt began cautioning the open opposition of the rigged election. Not wanting to lose his supporters to a likely military crackdown, the general called for peace. Inciting riots against the government was something Rios Montt urged the people not to do. As the citizens listened to Rios Montt, Laugerud Garcia became the de facto president. However, the allure of becoming president would prove to be too enticing for Rios Montt.

Ignored by the military junta for the 1978 election, Rios Montt yearned for the presidency with a greater craving. General Lucas Garcia would take over the hand-picked choice of the military in 1978, even though there were elections. Lucas Garcia's handling of Mayans, priests, and the poor was abhorrent. Bringing terror to many Guatemalans was the specialty of Lucas Garcia. Recognizing what Lucas Garcia was doing to Guatemalans, General Rios Montt sensed an opportunity for his long-awaited dream. With the oppression Lucas Garcia brought to many people in Guatemala, these individuals would welcome change. Out of fear of persecution, they could not advocate publically for this change, but they would be open to anyone, especially someone who they had voted for in the recent past. When Lucas Garcia was re-elected Guatemalan president in 1982, Rios Montt seized the opportunity.

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<sup>63</sup> "Guatemala Vote Brings Turmoil," *The New York Times*, March 11, 1974, A7, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.libilstu.edu/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/120094010/8BDDEAD55BC64557PQ/1?accountid=11578> (accessed February 3, 2016).



Several weeks since the presidential elections took place in 1982, General Efraín Ríos Montt participated in a coup, overtaking General Lucas García. Being the dominant participant of the March 23 coup, Ríos Montt established a three person junta to run Guatemala. Ríos Montt had more popularity out of the three generals because he had already run in the national elections. This familiarity with Ríos Montt and his will to become president made him the recognized leader of Guatemala. Attempting to show restraint for the presidency, by looking like the liberator of Lucas García, Ríos Montt was overtaken by his temptation for this position of presidency—which was always his intention since he acted on the coup. Officially making his position known to Guatemala on June 9, 1982 Ríos Montt would be the sole commander, in principle. General Horacio Maldonado Shad and Colonel Francisco Gordillo resigned their positions in the junta, but “flanked”<sup>64</sup> each side of Ríos Montt during this announcement. Serving as mere placeholders inside the military junta, these generals portrayed their loyalty, while also showing how insignificant their role was within the military junta. Efraín Ríos Montt was the orchestrator of the coup and the individual who held the power. Vindication for Ríos Montt was finally had.

Sketching one version of the story was simply a veneer for the truth behind the reasoning for the coup, and why the generals stepped down. Creating an alibi for the coup of Lucas García, Ríos Montt was inside of a church praying when he received news that the military had surrounded the presidential palace. At the time, and he would later

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<sup>64</sup> “Guatemalan Assumes Sole Power, Ousting Other Members of Junta,” *The New York Times*, June 10, 1982, A8, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/122072242/21D12E7828C34484PQ/1?accountid=11578> (accessed February 4, 2016).

convince much of the public, Rios Montt was unaware that a coup was going to occur. In contrast to this publically accepted story, Rios Montt met on March 13<sup>th</sup> “with the young officer and political leaders of the right-wing National Liberation Party”<sup>65</sup> to finalized the logistics of the coup. Adding to this, the generals that voluntarily resigned, did so with a cash payout. These removed junta leaders “were offered \$50,000 to remain quiet”<sup>66</sup> and to vacate their position, so Rios Montt would have sole power in name. Rendering himself as a man of integrity, General Rios Montt meticulously planned the overthrow and bribed the generals to have sole power of Guatemala. The script he orated to Guatemalans frequently could not be further from what had actually occurred. Needing the support of the people, Rios Montt had to give the appearance that he was not a political opportunist. Instead, the script made him look like an altruistic savior for the oppressed Guatemalans.

Fearing violence from subversives, Rios Montt called for a state of siege in Guatemala. The goal of this state of siege was to bring normalcy to Guatemalan society. Guatemalan citizens would suspend their civil liberties and human rights in exchange for safety. Military law became societal law, no exceptions. The threat of subversives to the new Guatemalan ideology Rios Montt instituted needed to have protections from opposing visions of this new Guatemala. Cracking down on insurgents, Rios Montt prepared to paralyze the actions of renegades. Anyone who falls in the “suspected

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<sup>65</sup> Raymond Bonner, “A Guatemalan General’s Rise to Power” *The New York Times*, July 21, 1982, A3, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/122009587/F079B6E712FB4D73PQ/1?accountid=11578> (accessed February 4, 2016).

<sup>66</sup> Bonner, “A Guatemalan General’s Rise to Power,” A3.

rebels”<sup>67</sup> category can be subjected to death if they were convicted by the military court judges. These suspected rebels would be tried on the grounds of committing subversive acts against the government. Proving one’s innocence in an era where security cameras, cell phones, and the Internet would nearly be impossible, seeing as evidence would be based off of opinions of witnesses. Capital punishment is the most severe punishment humans are faced with in any criminal justice system. Making the leap directly to the death penalty to preserve law and order shows how inclined Rios Montt was to preserve the legitimacy of his government.

In accordance with the state of siege, the government called for a censorship on all media outlets. Rios Montt “banned political activity and ordered censorship of all news about leftist guerillas fighting for power.”<sup>68</sup> Limiting the recruiting platform from which subversive groups were operating, Rios Montt was attempting to thwart more individuals from joining the rebel causes. Attaching imprisonment to writing, reading, and printing scandalous articles would caution many Guatemalans from participating in these actions. Comprehending what was occurring to individuals who were found guilty of subversive activities by the military courts, Guatemalans were fearful of coming into contact with information that the government deemed leftist propaganda.

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<sup>67</sup> “Guatemala’s President Declares State of Siege,” *The New York Times*, July 1, 1982, A5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/122046765/E1E2B6E5F984A14PQ/1?accountid=11578> (accessed February 11, 2016).

<sup>68</sup> “Guatemala Censorship Order,” *The New York Times*, July 7, 1982, A3, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/121981305/DD6E88ADA77D492DPQ/1?accountid=11578> (accessed February 5, 2016).

While Rios Montt was part of the military institution in Guatemala, he was not accepted fully by many military members. For a man who had the popular support in the 1970's, why did the military not concede to Rios Montt? Rios Montt had been loyal to the military, was trained at the best Guatemalan institutions, had contacts and past relationships to the U.S. military, but he differed in one significant aspect: religion. Contrasting members of the military's religious practice became the main source of friction with Rios Montt. The dawn of Guatemala's religious dissent had been born.

## **Religion**

Envisioning Guatemala as a nation that should be ran by a patriarchal, god-like figure, Ríos Montt thought that his religion could serve as a model for Guatemala. Implementing a church hierarchy into politics, Ríos Montt saw himself as the zealot who was anointed by his creator to rule over the Guatemalan people. General Rios Montt “is a born-again Christian who belongs to the Christian Church of the Word, a fundamentalist group based in California.”<sup>69</sup> Growing up in Roman Catholicism, Rios Montt made the conversion to this brand of Christianity. Differing from many people in the military and country, Rios Montt was a bit of an outcast for being evangelical. When the military had accused him of being too liberal, they were referring to Rios Montt's belief in the evangelical brand of Christianity that people in the United States practiced. Distancing himself from his nation's heritage of Catholicism, Rios Montt was ostracized

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<sup>69</sup> Raymond Bonner, “Guatemala Junta's Chief Says God Guides Him,” *The New York Times*, June 10, 1982, A9, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/122013037/2BC1FCE21D5640A7PQ/1?accountid=11578> (accessed February 6, 2016).

by many people in the military. By far, religion was the most important aspect of Rios Montt's image.

On a weekly basis, Rios Montt would present himself in pastoral fashion to his country. Rios Montt "preaches to the Guatemalan people every Sunday night on a nationwide broadcast about love, the family, abstinence, from alcohol and other moral issues."<sup>70</sup> As the president of the country, Rios Montt made it a point to lecture his people on the importance of religion. By showing his values on a weekly basis, he believed Guatemalans would be convinced to join his religion. Clearly, Rios Montt had an idea of how he wanted the country to operate. No individual would devote that amount of time attempting to proselytize a nation with an opposing preference of religion. Although, it should be noted, being this adamant about Christianity would play nicely inside the nation they looked to for financial aid.

By showing his devotion to these fundamental evangelicals in the United States, Rios Montt, the ultimate strategist, positioned himself to gain support from evangelicals in the United States. The large base of evangelicals in the United States would see a leader in Guatemala aligning with their vision on how life should be lived. Being an evangelical leader in Latin America, Rios Montt was in rarified territory. Hoping that evangelical Christianity would spread through Latin America would be a major victory for evangelicals in the United States. Within the Cold War context, an evangelical spread in Latin America would be seen as a major victory.

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<sup>70</sup> Bonner, "Guatemala Junta's Chief Says God Guides Him," A9.

Branding this as a familial rift, Ríos Montt was convinced that he “needed to discipline his unruly brood into obedience to his will.”<sup>71</sup> Implementing his beliefs was not complicated. The challenge was in getting citizens to conform to his desires. Knowing that his ideas would be divisive among some groups in Guatemala, the patriarch would have to bring retribution for his dissenting children. Ríos Montt’s church in California intended to go to Guatemala to “work with Guatemala’s Indians and peasants.”<sup>72</sup> The goal of this mission was to grow the base of evangelicals in Guatemala. Throughout large portions of Latin America, and this holds true in Guatemala, Catholicism is the dominant religion. Ríos Montt and his church hoped to make those in the Mayan communities and other poor Guatemalans convert to this fundamental brand of Christianity. Change is difficult for human beings anywhere in the world, but especially to people who are being encouraged to change their religious preferences because the commander in chief demands them to.

Thinking that he had the power of God behind him, Ríos Montt proclaimed that the long troubled nation was about to embark into a period of prosperity and tranquility. This was known as “La Hora de Dios para Guatemala,” or God’s hour for Guatemala. The ever-growing protestant base in the country believed in this new chapter for their country. Gaining the prodigious label of being “the most Protestant country in all of Spanish-speaking Latin America,”<sup>73</sup> Ríos Montt was sure to get the support of the United States. Even more importantly, as more Guatemalans became convinced that being evangelical was pivotal to a new Guatemala, they played right into Ríos Montt’s ability

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<sup>71</sup> Garrard-Burnett, 74.

<sup>72</sup> Bonner, “Guatemala Junta’s Chief Says God Guides Him,” A9.

<sup>73</sup> Garrard-Burnett, 75.

to judge the nation in whatever way he wanted to. Catholicism would continue to have an impact, but the divide between Protestantism and Catholicism has allowed Ríos Montt to continue to have influence in the political world today.

To many, the difference between Catholicism and Ríos Montt's evangelical beliefs may seem insignificant at first blush. Most people may think that they are both forms of Christianity, so why would it be such a major issue for the zealous general to impose his beliefs on his nation. Catholicism is rooted in structure and doctrine. True Roman Catholicism will have a similar setup, no matter if one is London or Buenos Aires. The dogmatic approach the church hierarchy uses creates standardization. Also, the most significant distinction is the Catholic belief that the Pope is infallible. The Church of the Word, of which the church Ríos Montt was a member, believes in "unquestioned acceptance of the Bible as the literal word of God; a missionary responsibility to reach out and carry the word to others; a decentralized structure with autonomous congregations and little distinction between clergy and laity."<sup>74</sup> Each religion believes that Jesus Christ is their God, however they have vastly unique approaches in the way they worship their God.

At a superficial view, these differences may seem trivial to people not familiar with religion. In the Christian community, they are stark differences. Forms of Christianity all have similar beliefs that they need to reach out to the underprivileged and people who are in need of help. However, Christians cannot agree over whether churches

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<sup>74</sup> Robert Lindsey, "Church Denies It Has Political Goals in Guatemala," *The New York Times*, August 14, 1983, 3, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/122097095/66CE728FA1654139PQ/1?accountid=11578> (accessed February 15, 2016).

should be centralized or decentralized—or whether a relationship with God is through a mediator, the Pope, or a private relationship with that individual person and God. For Christians, this distinction matters. Do they want to believe the pope, bishops, cardinals, and priests, or do they have a pastor who delivers the message of Jesus Christ and you must decide an individual whether or not you have a relationship with Him. What type of relationship one is to have with God is a subject followers of Jesus Christ cannot come to a consensus about. Deep divisions exist in regards to style of worship, and one of the reasons why Rios Montt had major enemies, paired with an extremely devoted base of followers.

### **Relations with the United States**

In light of Rios Montt's enthusiastic rhetoric about his evangelical beliefs and his past history of serving in the School of Americas, the Reagan administration approved of Rios Montt's coup in 1982. While the U.S. Congress had major reservations about supporting the Guatemalan government with financial aid, relationships seemed to improve between the United States and Guatemala during the Rios Montt-Reagan era. A religious individual with a strong military background would go on to receive major support from U.S. evangelicals.

During the Lucas Garcia government, the Reagan administration “had been supplying no military assistance to Guatemala.”<sup>75</sup> Lucas Garcia committed massive human rights violations during his tenure as president. Distancing itself, the United

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<sup>75</sup> Alan Riding, “U.S. Seeks To Improve Ties With Guatemala,” *The New York Times*, April 21, 1982, <http://www.nytimes.com/1982/04/21/world/us-seeks-to-improve-ties-with-guatemala.html> (accessed March 5, 2016).



States government came to the decision that they did not want any sort of attachment to Lucas Garcia and his unforgivable actions against his own people. When Rios Montt usurped Lucas Garcia, the United States quickly was interested in a reunion between the two countries, specifically because of who the new leader was.

Stephen W. Bosworth, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs, believed Rios Montt would bring better times to Guatemala and Guatemalans. Bosworth thought the Rios Montt coup ““may have ended the political paralysis which had gripped the country.””<sup>76</sup> The prevailing sentiment among many in the United States echoed Bosworth. President Ronald Reagan and his administration would quickly look to mend a strained relationship between Guatemalan and the United States. Politically, Reagan could not align himself with an oppressive leader who did not openly promote U.S. interests. With his U.S. military training background and evangelical beliefs, Rios Montt was someone Reagan could support publically in the U.S. and further his Cold War agenda.

Part of friendly relationships would include the United States sending aid to Rios Montt’s military. With Reagan’s support, Rios Montt most likely interpreted that he may receive funding from the U.S. Immediately Rios Montt was said to be continuing policies of the Lucas Garcia government. President Reagan concluded that Rios Montt had ““been getting a bum rap.””<sup>77</sup> In the face of pressure from human rights groups, the international press, and indigenous groups denouncing Rios Montt’s actions, the Reagan

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<sup>76</sup> Riding, “U.S. Seeks To Improve Ties With Guatemala.”

<sup>77</sup> Anthony Lewis, “Abroad at Home; Howdy, Genghis,” *The New York Times*, December 6, 1982, <http://www.nytimes.com/1982/12/06/opinion/abroad-at-home-howdy-genghis.html> (accessed March 5, 2016).

administration was set to find funding to heal what had been a tenuous relationship with a nation the U.S. had been politically and economically friendly with before 1944.

How would Rios Montt be able to regain the trust of the United States in order to receive the funding that he longed for? Cleverly, Rios Montt understood progress in bettering conditions with Guatemalans would be the start. U.S. military aid to Guatemala would be a major relief to the Guatemalan government. Governmental money could be allocated to other necessary projects in Guatemala if they received this desired U.S. assistance. Claiming the insurgents movement was nearly defeated, Rios Montt wanted a unified Guatemala. Now, his next task was “reconstructing Guatemala’s impoverished countryside.”<sup>78</sup>

For a large sum of money to be invested into a project, the investor must see a tangible plan and a track record of success. By focusing on aiding the impoverished community, the supreme leader appeared to demonstrate compassion for struggling citizens. To this point, Rios Montt believed the insurgency movement was all but dead. If this claim proved to be fact, then he would be viewed as a strong leader who was one step closer to ending the civil war that had plagued Guatemala since 1960. This pitch was likely directed towards the United States, rather than his nation. Intending that Congress to see this as a reason to support this evangelical, military leader in Guatemala, he was proven wrong. Some members of Congress were suspicious of Rios Montt’s claims, and feared military aid would be used to abuse the impoverished. Representative

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<sup>78</sup> Richard J. Meislin, “Guatemalan Chief Says War Is Over,” *The New York Times*, December 11, 1982, 7, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/122083260/F1648B931E9E4070PQ/1?accountid=11578> (accessed March 5, 2016).

Tom Harkin of Iowa stated in response to the Reagan administration's support of Rios Montt, "We should not reward the Government of Guatemala for being particularly effective in its brutality nor for simply moving the Government's violence into the countryside where it may be more difficult to see but is still horribly real."<sup>79</sup> However, Rios Montt's speech did not fall on deaf ears. Evangelicals in the United States would take Rios Montt's words to heart, and decided the cause he was supporting was just.

Being an ardent evangelical and a staunch opponent of communism, Rios Montt gained support from evangelical base and the military apparatus, specifically the commander in chief, in the U.S. General Rios Montt sought a new Guatemala in his evangelical and military image, with no space for communism to operate. Claiming an unlikely ally, Rios Montt believed Pope John Paul II was "an ally in [the] anti-Communist crusade"<sup>80</sup> in Guatemala. The Pope had never openly supported, and would never support, Rios Montt's crusade against communism. Playing the game of politics, Rios Montt used this statement as a justification for the ongoing violence in his country. Whether his goal was to fight communism or not, Rios Montt wanted to prove to the United States that world figures like the Pope were in support of his actions, even though the Pope did not support Rios Montt's entire program of violent repression towards the

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<sup>79</sup> Bernard Gwertzman, "U.S. Lifts Embargo On Military Sales To Guatemalans," *The New York Times*, January 8, 1983, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/122135815/E8BC19068ABD432FPQ/2?accountid=11578>, (accessed May 13, 2016).

<sup>80</sup> "Guatemalan Calls Pope an Ally," *The New York Times*, March 6, 1983, 14, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/122335027/7B9183F302DC42A0PQ/1?accountid=11578> (accessed March 21, 2016).

Mayans. Giving the appearance, regardless of the reality, would have the ability to sway some important individuals.

Since financial support from the United States was central to Rios Montt's idea of creating a new Guatemala, he would have to convince influential people in the United States to support him. Avoiding Congress, Rios Montt went the most important figure in U.S. politics: the President. President Reagan needed a tangible reason to place his support behind the religious leader. Rios Montt's word would prove to be sufficient. He declared to President Reagan that he "would rid Guatemala of Government death squads."<sup>81</sup> Until 1982, human rights records in Guatemala had been atrocious. Rios Montt's predecessor Lucas Garcia was known for barbaric tactics against Guatemalans.<sup>82</sup> Since Rios Montt strongly professed his Christianity, President Reagan was convinced of his sincerity in creating a significantly improved human rights record.

Guatemala's relationship with the Reagan administration began to sour in March of 1983, effectively ending any potential aid from Congress. Pope John Paul II embarked on a journey to see this alleged progress in human rights. Approval from Pope John Paul II could have a transformative impact on how the U.S. Congress felt about allocating military aid to Guatemala. Before arriving, Pope John Paul II pleaded for clemency in

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<sup>81</sup> "Guatemala Is Said to Pledge Elimination of 'Death Squads,'" *The New York Times*, December 7, 1982, A14, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/122083740/31B5C139393B43BFPQ/1?accountid=11578> (accessed March 14, 2016).

<sup>82</sup> General Lucas Garcia served as the leader of Guatemala from 1978 to 1982, before Rios Montt usurped him. The Guatemalan Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH) "found that 81 percent of all serious violations were committed between 1979 and 1982, including the vast majority of massacres." (Rothenberg, pg. xxx) Over the course of 36 year civil war, the overwhelming majority of serious violations against humanity came underneath the administration of Lucas Garcia, making him the most brutal leader in Guatemala's civil war.

response to subversives who had been sentenced to death by the military tribunal. Rather than taking this plea into account, “six were executed on the eve”<sup>83</sup> of the Pope’s arrival.

Similar timing to this even, President Reagan “recalled [the U.S.] Ambassador in protest against the murder of a Guatemalan anthropologist on an American-sponsored aid project.”<sup>84</sup> Also, the Guatemalan army arrested a U.S. citizen for aiding the guerillas. Rios Montt “decided that he will not intercede to free them.”<sup>85</sup> Any individual from, or related to, the United States who was treated poorly by Guatemala, or any country for that matter, has the potential to prove anger amongst many U.S. citizens. Deciding not to provide leniency towards individuals with U.S. connections would not win Rios Montt sympathetic feelings in Congress. All of these instances spelled doom for Rios Montt’s hopes of receiving military aid from Congress.

While Congress was opposed to Rios Montt, the Reagan Administration thought differently even after these actions had been committed. Richard B. Stone, U.S. Ambassador to Central America, toured through ten Latin American countries, including Guatemala. After the visit, Stone praised Rios Montt’s regime. Believing Rios Montt had made ““positive changes””<sup>86</sup> to Guatemala, Stone repeated the sentiments of

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<sup>83</sup> “Confession Time in Guatemala,” *The New York Times*, March 21, 1983, A14, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/docview/122174531/834CCF5C74F74B2EPQ/1?accountid=11578>, (accessed February 18, 2016).

<sup>84</sup> “Confession Time in Guatemala,” A14.

<sup>85</sup> “An American Is Seized By the Guatemalans,” *The New York Times*, January 27, 1983, A5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/docview/122148471/22159CA1CC564600PQ/1?accountid=11578>, (accessed February 18, 2016).

<sup>86</sup> “Special Envoy Praises Guatemala,” *The New York Times*, June 13, 1983, A10, ProQuest Historical Newspapers,

President Reagan. The Reagan administration continued their adoration for Rios Montt. Reagan “ended a six-year embargo on arm sales and military aid imposed by the Carter administration because of the Government’s alleged human rights violations.”<sup>87</sup> This embargo proved that President Reagan was ignoring the human rights violations occurring in Guatemala, something his predecessor, President Carter, did realize. With a majority in the house, Democrats were able to push back against Reagan’s agenda. In the midst of this opposition, Reagan still lifted the embargo. Either way, releasing the embargo on Guatemala showed the Reagan administration’s confidence in Rios Montt.

The Guatemalan government seized the opportunity to build their army. They purchased “\$4 million worth of spare parts for American-made helicopters being used by the Guatemalan Army against leftist rebels.”<sup>88</sup> This was an unprecedented action, a reversal of President Carter’s actions towards Guatemala a few years before this time. However, President Reagan believed there was nothing to fear with Rios Montt. Reagan believed Rios Montt’s intentions towards Guatemalans were good. Selling the Guatemalan government weapons was a major sign of trust from the Reagan administration. The purchase of American parts was “to rehabilitate American-made helicopters for use against guerillas.”<sup>89</sup> Instead of purchasing helicopters that were ready for action, they bought semi-ready helicopters for a fraction of the price it would have

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<http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/docview/122150560/23F2191C93A54EA5PQ/1?accountid=11578> (accessed March 17, 2016).

<sup>87</sup> “Special Envoy Praises Guatemala,” A10.

<sup>88</sup> “U.S. Expected to End Long Freeze on Military Aid For Guatemalans,” *The New York Times*, January 3, 1983, A3, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/docview/122127469/F0E8C53A22E443E0PQ/1?accountid=11578> (accessed May 13, 2016).

<sup>89</sup> Bernard Gwertzman, “U.S. Lifts Embargo On Military Sales to Guatemalans,” 1.

cost for fully functional helicopters. The amount of helicopter parts that \$4 million purchase, gave the Guatemalan army superiority over the Guatemalan skies. Thus, the Guatemalan army would have the best access to “subversives.”

Efraim Rios Montt has unique characteristics for a Guatemalan leader. With a long career of military service, his evangelical Christianity, and his relationship with the United States, the general was unlike many of his predecessors. Rios Montt’s rhetoric was focused on a unified, “new Guatemala.”<sup>90</sup> In order to create an updated version of Guatemala that fit into his vision, Rios Montt took unprecedented measures. As the following chapters will indicate, the actions the religious general would take has left his country fractured until this day.

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<sup>90</sup> “Guatemalan Calls Pope an Ally,” 14.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ACTIONS OF EFRAIN RIOS MONTT

“We know and understand that we have sinned, that we have abused power, and we want to reconcile ourselves with the people.”<sup>91</sup>—Efrain Rios Montt, March 21, 1983

Building a new Guatemala would not happen by chance. Fearing insurgents who resided in the rural areas, Rios Montt was convinced they posed a direct challenge to this authority. Rios Montt saw any subversive as a terrorist threat. These individuals labeled as terrorists sought to return their nation back to the brief decade of democracy from 1944 to 1954. Guatemalans sought more for their nation, like having the ability to participate in elections where their vote mattered. Restoring democracy would be significantly challenging because the Guatemalan military assumed control over the nation’s wealth, politics, and military sectors. Victory for the democratic insurgents would only come if they defeated the Guatemalan military. Taking this as a direct threat to his regime, Rios Montt would counteract terror with terror. A new Guatemala was on the horizon.

#### **Guerrilla Groups in Guatemala**

After the overthrow of Arbenz in 1954, portions of the Guatemalan population were enraged because their beloved president had been overthrown. Contentious beliefs

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<sup>91</sup> “Confession Time in Guatemala,” A14.



towards the overthrow led to more than spoken words. Some Guatemalans believed their voices had been silenced, making violence inevitable. Wanting to suppress dissenting voices, Carlos Castillo Armas, the U.S. backed dictator, treated any challenge as an existential threat to his power. In July of 1957, three years after taking over, Castillo Armas was assassinated.<sup>92</sup> For the rest of the 1950's, change would occur rapidly in the Guatemalan government, leaving Guatemalans most susceptible to violence.

Leading to the beginning of the civil war in 1960, guerrilla groups were now fully at war with the Guatemalan government. The Guatemalan military wanted to control everything in Guatemala. The rebels stunted their ability to do this. Declaring war against the rebels allowed the military complex in Guatemala to be working at full force. However, the disunity within the military would allow for a prolonged war against the many guerrilla groups in Guatemala. Identifying the locations of the guerrilla groups, or who was actually a guerrilla, proved to be most challenging to the Guatemalan army.

The Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) served as the catalyst for Rios Montt to begin his distorted maneuvers against the Mayans in the Ixil region. The EGP was a left wing guerrilla group in Guatemala during the civil war. The EGP wanted to liberate the Ixil Mayans from a lifetime of systemic persecution. The only way they could do that was to rebel forcefully against that very system. When the EGP attacked military installations, Rios Montt, in his tumultuous and tentative state position as the leader,

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<sup>92</sup> "Guatemala Chief is Assassinated by Palace Sentry," *The New York Times*, July 28, 1957, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/docview/113963700/A152F38A81CF432CPQ/16?accountid=11578> (accessed May 15, 2016).

needed to assert his strength against these subversives. Not to be outdone by a leftist guerrilla group, Rios Montt began his scorched earth policy against the Mayans of Ixil.

The CIA knew in the middle of February 1982 what the intentions of the Guatemalan government were towards the guerrillas. The military was to “eliminate all sources of resistance.”<sup>93</sup> Individuals who supported the army’s efforts would be relocated to a refugee camp. Preferential treatment would be given to those who supported the army’s efforts. However, this was not the idea that the army had about the Indians in the Ixil region. The CIA knew that the Guatemalan army believed “that the entire Ixil Indian population is Pro-EGP.”<sup>94</sup> The Guatemalan army used this as their justification for attempting to clear out the Mayans in the region, through death or forced displacement.

This became the predominant policy Rios Montt used in order to install massive amounts of fear into Guatemalans. Whoever had considered joining the guerrilla groups would have to seriously consider whether they wanted to risk death. Many would be supporters of the guerrilla movement did not join out of fear the military would act in discriminatory ways.

The EGP was a militant organization, fighting against what they believed were the unjust practices of the military government. In the early 1980’s, the EGP attempted to gain more recruits in the heavily poverty stricken areas of the country. The tension

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<sup>93</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, Secret Cable, *Counterinsurgency Operations in El Quiche* (Washington DC: February 1982), <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB11/docs/> (accessed February 20, 2016).

<sup>94</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, Secret Cable, 3, *Counterinsurgency Operations in El Quiche* (Washington DC: February 1982), <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB11/docs/> (accessed February 20, 2016).

between the EGP and military government was over who would get the most impoverished region of the country to side with their cause. The government became increasingly frustrated and they labeled this as terrorism and decided Guatemala did not need these citizens.

In an effort to combat the new reforms of Rios Montt, several guerrilla groups combined to form the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union (URNG). The Guatemalan Army of the Poor (EGP), the Organization of the People in Arms (ORPA), the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR), and the Guatemalan Labor party (PGT) are all of the guerrilla organizations that merged into the URNG. With the uniting of these different guerrilla groups into this one organization, the Rios Montt administration was frightened by the numbers and perceived power of this organization. Even though the URNG did not have the resources to defeat the military, they could pose a viable threat to overthrowing the establishment if only they could get enough support nationally. However, Rios Montt would not allow this to happen, and “Villages collaborating with the guerrillas were systematically destroyed.”<sup>95</sup>

The government believed the guerrilla groups were communist. Stopping communism became priority number one for Rios Montt’s justification in preventing his nation from falling to the communist menace. Were the guerrilla groups really communist? Truly, this is hard to verify. The most logical conclusion is that the guerrillas did not know what communism fully was. The guerrillas wanted to get back to the democratic institutions that were in place during the Arbenz regime. These guerrillas had no connection to the Soviet Union in this Cold War atmosphere. In the name of

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<sup>95</sup> Stoll, *Between Two Armies In the Ixil Towns of Guatemala*, 110.

creating security and preventing the spread of communism, the Guatemalan army's genocidal actions are even more scandalous because the guerrillas had no relationship with the Soviet Union.

The guerrilla groups in Guatemala never defeated the Guatemalan military. How could Guatemala go from a nation that overwhelmingly supported progressive democracy in the elections of 1944 and 1950 to a nation who obeyed military governments? Transitioning from equality back to oppression was not met without resistance. However, the Guatemalan elite had been self-serving since Spain colonized the Mayans in the colonial era. The support of wealthy Guatemalans cannot be understated during the thirty-six year civil war. The Guatemalan elite wanted to maintain their status quo lifestyle. As a result of this, they would give the necessary funding to the Guatemalan government in order to preserve their way of life.

More broadly, the role of capitalism played a major part in this. Corporations from the United States, like United Fruit Company, served their interests, which were U.S. interests. Wanting to protect its own people and economic wealth, the United States sought to preserve the interests of UFCO in Guatemala. Directing the overthrow in 1954, UFCO and the U.S. government believed democracy produced leaders who may not be bound to U.S. interests. Democracy, social justice, land reform, and labor rights in Latin America ensured less protections for U.S. business interests. In the post 1945 Cold War era, the United States looked at human beings being on the side of communism or capitalism. Since the U.S. created the Guatemalan government of 1954, anyone who opposed them was seen as being for communism. This black and white divide would continue throughout the civil war.

With the deck stacked against them, the guerrilla groups had little room for error if they wanted to defeat the Guatemalan military and take back their country. Lacking weapons, the food and supplies, and the financial backing to provide for mass quantities of people to follow their effort, the guerrillas faced a steep climb to defeating the military, who had the financial backing from the elites and the U.S. With distinct cultures and dialects, the guerrilla groups were split into several factions. The lack of unity was another major obstacle, and aided the fragmentation of the guerillas.

Taking twenty-two years to unite, in March of 1982 “Guatemala’s four main guerrilla groups have called on all opposition forces to join them in a broad political front to topple the army-backed regime of Gen. Romeo Lucas Garcia.”<sup>96</sup> Uniting in the spring of 1982 was a positive sign, but it was much too late to defeat the Guatemalan military. Even if the guerrillas would have been united from the outset of the civil war, they would have likely lost to the military.

The guerrillas wanted to be treated as human beings. They were fighting against intolerance and repression. After Arbenz was overthrown, they recognized it would take more than peaceful protests against the government to reclaim their democratic ideology. Efraim Rios Montt understood what the guerrillas stood for. Rios Montt did not want the land reforms and labor rights that the guerrillas sought. He wanted to maintain the economic hierarchy for the elite, continue to force his religion on the masses, and for the

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<sup>96</sup> “Guatemala’s 4 Main Rebel Groups Join Forces,” *The New York Times*, March 3, 1982, A13, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/docview/121929858/F9E1F23D850A486DPQ/1?accountid=11578> (accessed March 2, 2016).

military to have a role in every portion of the society. Recognizing this, Rios Montt understood that he needed to take drastic actions in order to preserve his despotic power.

### **Social Programs**

Controlling the rural areas of Guatemala would become the central strategy for the Guatemalan army. The guerrilla groups had gained the most amount of support in the rural areas, because the people suffered the most. Showing care for those in rural areas became very important to the Rios Montt administration in the battle for who the rural population would support.

The Mayans and Ladinos who took the social programs that Ríos Montt offered to them found the supreme leader gracious for providing them with food, clothing, and weapons. For instance, “Hoping to befriend the Indians, Rios has ordered the Army to distribute food to the ‘friendly’ populace following operations. Similarly, a new code of conduct admonished the largely illiterate soldiers not to steal ‘even a pin’ from the civilian population.”<sup>97</sup> Continuing and opening further bloodbath on Guatemalan soil, Ríos Montt instituted his “*fusiles y frijoles*” (rifles and beans) campaign. The overarching goal of this program was to create national unity. For Guatemala to go forward, “a New Maya for the New Guatemala”<sup>98</sup> had to be made.

The social programs being offered by Rios Montt in 1982 served two main purposes. The first purpose was to create a distinction between who was on the side of

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<sup>97</sup> U.S. Department of State, Secret Report, *Guatemala: Reports of Atrocities Mark Army Gains* (Washington DC: Circa late-1982), <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB11/docs/> (accessed February 8, 2016).

<sup>98</sup> Garrard-Burnett, 72.

the government and who was not. Not wanting more pressure from human rights groups, Rios Montt saw this as an opportunity to decipher who was subversive and who was not. Also, the social programs allowed for Rios Montt's idea of a new Guatemala to come about. The poverty ridden portion of Guatemala was pivotal to the labor force.

*Fusiles y frijoles* was a social program that offered Mayans an opportunity to “live under government control (*protección*) and also be pumped for information about the guerrillas or other intelligence.”<sup>99</sup> Within this controlled environment, Mayans were fed, clothed, and put to work in this new effort to create national unity. The Mayans were coerced into believing that they needed to be completely loyal and faithful to this new Guatemalan nation-state because of what they had been given. Those Mayans who did not come to refugee camps were considered subversive, and Rios Montt believed they must be supporting the EGP. In essence, any Mayan who was not in these resettlement camps after their implementation became a target to kill, torture for information, rape for pleasure, or displace to unfamiliar lands.

Gaining support from citizens in the rural portions of the country, the military needed to provide a way to gain their trust. Since the majority of Guatemalans were impoverished in the rural areas they would support anyone who gave them aid. With the resources to do so, the Guatemalan military capitalized on the vulnerabilities of the poor, which they created. Many of the poor communities would then support the military because they gave them food, supplies, and housing. Even though the military government should have been responsible for the well-being of their citizens constitutional rights, they were buying support in rural communities through these social

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<sup>99</sup> Garrard-Burnett, 72.

programs. By convincing individuals in the rural areas to join the social programs, the Guatemalan military would shrink the amount of recruits for the guerrilla armies. More importantly, the Guatemalan military was convinced that those who did not use the social programs did not support the government. With this, any Guatemalan not participating in the social programs would be considered to be subversive and then subject to death.

Within this idea of national cohesiveness, the Indian would have to be taken out of the Mayan. The social programs served the Guatemalan government as an opportunity to modernize who the Indian was. Often, Mayans were limited on education, stuck to Mayan cultural norms, and had little interest in participating in capitalism. In order for the new Guatemala to be successful, the Rios Montt regime relied on those in poverty as a source of cheap labor. Within these camps, the military government would be able to impose these principles on the Mayans who were arriving.

### **Response To Guerrilla Groups**

While it is highly unlikely that every individual who did not use the social programs was against the government, the Rios Montt administration believed this to be the case. With a clear enemy in mind, now was the time Rios Montt would end the existential threat to his new Guatemala. Rios Montt believed that a unified Guatemala would come about through his enemy's elimination. Since the religious leader found his main enemy, destruction would pave the way to unification. A new Guatemala was imminent.

Slightly northwest of Guatemala's capitol is the El Quiche region. Notoriously, El Quiche has had a very high indigenous population. The Mayan community that



resided in El Quiche was the majority of the population. Not surprisingly, El Quiche was one of the poorest regions of the nation. Having a high level of very poor people also meant this region was fertile ground for anti-government activity. To stop this region from potentially spreading its ideas to the rural communities in the rest of the nation, the Guatemalan military devised a plan to destroy this movement.

The Guatemalan military devised a strategy to eliminate the enemy and create a new Guatemala. Operation Sofia was a mission devised by the military when Rios Montt took over in 1982. The main objective of this mission was to implement a scorched earth policy on the Mayan communities in El Quiche. Not only this would strike fear in the Mayans, but subversives might be less inclined to fight back against the government. Using these scorched earth techniques was believed to be the quickest way in ending the ongoing civil war.

However, Operation Sofia did not end the civil war—it continued for another 14 years. The records that Kate Doyle, contributor to the Guatemalan Project at the National Security Archive, provided evidence “to the killing of unarmed men, women and children, the burning of homes, destruction of crops, slaughter of animals and indiscriminate aerial bombing of refugees trying to escape the violence.”<sup>100</sup> The 359 pages of documents that Ms. Doyle has uncovered show the level of appalling violence the Guatemalan military committed against the Mayans in El Quiche.

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<sup>100</sup> Kate Doyle, *Operation Sofia: Document Genocide in Guatemala*, 1 (Washington, DC: National Security Archive, December 2, 2009), [http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB297/sofia\\_part1\\_pp001-100.pdf](http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB297/sofia_part1_pp001-100.pdf) (accessed March 2, 2016).

The scorched earth policy carried out in El Quiche was under the direction of General Efraín Ríos Montt. Kate Doyle says, “The records make clear that ‘Operation Sofia’ was executed as part of the military strategy of Guatemala’s de facto president, Gen. Efraín Ríos Montt.”<sup>101</sup> The goal of operation Sofia was to “exterminar a los elementos subversivos en el área.”<sup>102</sup> Once all subversive elements were eliminated, there would be no threat in the El Quiche region. Being complicit to the demolition of Mayan communities in El Quiche is deplorable, but ordering the events that occurred in El Quiche is more significant. The mark Ríos Montt left on El Quiche is indelible, with Mayans feeling the damage and suffering inflicted by Operation Sofia’s policies.

Rural areas were difficult for the military government to manage because of Guatemala’s geography. This is especially the case in the northern portion of the country, which borders both Mexico and Belize. Geographic complexities, such as the very mountainous and highly forested areas in northern Guatemala can provide challenges to a government looking to consolidate the nation into one unified body. With these major obstacles looming for the military government, Ríos Montt believed that fear would create order in northern portion of his country. Since Northern Guatemala is more difficult to access, this region would be difficult to get under control. Creating peace in the north would bring Guatemala one step closer to unification.

In order to thwart his biggest threat, Ríos Montt understood the importance the Kaibiles—the Guatemalan special forces—would need to play. The brutal massacre in Dos Erres on December 6, 1982 came about because the government had the Kaibiles

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<sup>101</sup> Doyle, *Operation Sofia: Document Genocide in Guatemala*, 1.

<sup>102</sup> Doyle, *Operation Sofia: Document Genocide in Guatemala*, 3.

establish a base in Mariscal Zavala. The sole mission of the Kaibiles' base was to "seek and destroy guerrilla elements."<sup>103</sup> The twenty specialized troops that were part of this force had quick access to the alleged guerrillas, and the best supplies that the Guatemalan military could afford. As Kaibiles are "a ranger type unit,"<sup>104</sup> their missions would be far from humanitarian. The Kaibiles have little governmental constraints and oversights. They operate with a freedom that is different from the special forces that we have in the United States. The result from either is full destruction of their enemy, whether they gain information or not.

Dos Erres was a "brand new village, established no more than two years ago,"<sup>105</sup> and is located in the northern portion of Guatemala. The Kaibiles suspected the people of Dos Erres to be part of guerrilla units. In October and November, there had been "ambushes of army patrols"<sup>106</sup> around the Dos Erres area. Even the slightest appearance of complicity with guerrilla units, whether credible or not, would put the Dos Erres village in incredible danger. The government wanted to create fear in supposed

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<sup>103</sup> U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency, Confidential Cable, *Army Establishes A Strategic Reaction Force*, (Washington DC: The George Washington University, November 19, 1982, 1), The National Security Archive Guatemalan Project, ed. Kate Doyle, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB316/19821119.pdf> (accessed December 13, 2015).

<sup>104</sup> U.S. Embassy in Guatemala, Secret Cable, *Guatemalan Counter Terrorism Capabilities*, (Washington DC: The George Washington University, December 10, 1982, 2), The National Security Archive Guatemalan Project, ed. Kate Doyle, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB316/19821210.pdf> (accessed December 13, 2015).

<sup>105</sup> U.S. Embassy in Guatemala, Secret Cable, *Alleged Massacre of 200 at Village of Dos R's, Peten*, (Washington D.C.: The George Washington University, December 28, 1982, 1), The National Security Archive Guatemalan Project, ed. Kate Doyle, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB316/19821228.pdf> (accessed December 12, 2015).

<sup>106</sup>U.S. Embassy in Guatemala, Secret Cable, *Alleged Massacre of 200 at Village of Dos R's, Peten*, 2.

subversives, and Dos Erres was their next target. In early December of 1982, the Kaibils went into this village and decimated the civilian population in this scorched earth policy of Ríos Montt's. In this atrocious action, the special forces "dumped them [the people] into the well, and covered the well over."<sup>107</sup> After this massacre in Dos Erres, people went into Dos Erres to check to what had really occurred. What they found was "no signs of life."<sup>108</sup> Ultimately, what the Kaibiles did in Dos Erres was a complete travesty, another massacre committed under the Ríos Montt regime.

A direct message from the American Embassy in Guatemala shows who was supplying the Guatemalan army with weapons. When the Guatemalan military did a sweep of Dos Erres for any signs of life, they were "carrying galil rifles."<sup>109</sup> Galil rifles were invented and made in Israel.<sup>110</sup> While the guns the army used may seem trivial, this was quite significant because of who Ríos Montt worked with. There were "six Israeli intelligence/security advisors working with the presidential intelligence unit, the general archives and supporting service of the presidential staff."<sup>111</sup> Israel's special interest in helping Ríos Montt and the Guatemalan army is quite curious. What did Israel have to

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<sup>107</sup>U.S. Embassy in Guatemala, Secret Cable, *Alleged Massacre of 200 at Village of Dos R's, Peten*, 2.

<sup>108</sup>U.S. Embassy in Guatemala, Secret Cable, *Alleged Massacre of 200 at Village of Dos R's, Peten*, 2.

<sup>109</sup>U.S. Embassy in Guatemala, Secret Cable, *Alleged Massacre of 200 at Village of Dos R's, Peten*, 3.

<sup>110</sup>The Military Factory, *The Competing Soviet AK-47 was Good Start for the Israelis When Developing their Galil Assault Rifle*, [http://www.militaryfactory.com/smallarms/detail.asp?smallarms\\_id=23](http://www.militaryfactory.com/smallarms/detail.asp?smallarms_id=23)(accessed February 10, 2016).

<sup>111</sup> U.S. Embassy in Guatemala, Secret Cable, *Guatemalan Counter Terrorism Capabilities*, 2-3.

gain out of Guatemala? While there is no real concrete answer, Israel was involved in Guatemala during Rios Montt's tenure.

### **Attack on Women**

Torture in Guatemala was not limited to massacres, displacement, and the scorched earth policy. In addition to these policies of Rios Montt, his army also conducted in gruesome behavior towards women. The sinister actions committed against Guatemalan women have prolonged the pain and suffering of this war-torn nation. Any citizen the government thought was subversive was under intense scrutiny and subject to violence, but women were targeted.

In Sepur Zarco, in the eastern portion of Guatemala, a community had its male population decimated by the army. When the army came back to that area, the women were forcibly raped.<sup>112</sup> This trend was widespread in Guatemala throughout the civil war, and constitutes as a war crime. Doctors Without Borders states: "Women and girls are singled out because the harm and humiliation inflicted on them not only hurts them but also deeply harms and humiliates their families and often the entire community."<sup>113</sup> The lack of concern for women, and women's rights was evident in the way in Rios Montt governed Guatemala. The Guatemalan military was also patriarchal by design, so they were clearly against giving women equal rights in their society.

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<sup>112</sup> Nina Lakhani, "Guatemalan Soldiers to Answer Civil War Sexual Slavery Charges in Historic Trial," *The Guardian*, January 29, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/29/guatemala-military-sex-slavery-trial-civil-war-sepur-zarco> (accessed January 29, 2016).

<sup>113</sup> "Enough is Enough, Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War," Doctors Without Borders, March 7, 2004, <http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/news-stories/ideaopinion/enough-enough-sexual-violence-weapon-war> (accessed May 14, 2016).

The Guatemalan Truth Commission Report outlines the impact in which rape had on the Mayan women during the civil war:

Torture and rape were two of the human rights violations that most contributed to generating and maintaining terror during the armed confrontation. These violations always involved an intention to destroy the victim's identity and dignity in the most profound and intimate ways. Their systematic use in Guatemala reflects a profound moral degradation of the direct perpetrators as well as those that ordered and enabled these practices.<sup>114</sup>

The rape culture has fractured societal norms in Guatemala. There has been little, if any, justice for the women who were forced into the unthinkable. Many of the men that committed these appalling acts towards women will never face retribution because the way in which the Guatemalan legal system operates. The psychological trauma that is associated with individuals who have experienced rape is something that cannot be wiped away easily. Mayan women still have the physical, mental, and social scars from the monstrous actions of the Guatemalan military.

The fear of being ostracized from communities, families, and spouses, women have had to deal with this severe issue internally. Mayan women "were pressured into remaining silent."<sup>115</sup> In a nation attempting to heal after 1996, women suppressed what crimes were committed against them. Women wanted to be accepted into their community, they feared the government's ability to protect them from potential retribution from their attacker, the language and cultural barrier provided challenges, and

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<sup>114</sup> Rothenberg, 153.

<sup>115</sup> Patricia Galicia, "Breaking The Silence," *Development and Cooperation*, <http://www.dandc.eu/en/article/how-raped-women-guatemala-found-courage-talk-about-their-fate> (accessed February 4, 2016).

they wanted to forget what had happened. These women need a truth commission where their loved ones are non-judgmental, the former military members do not still have political sway, and they feel comfortable enough speaking in public about something so personal. Sadly, the Mayan women in Guatemala may never be able to have the injustices committed against them re-written because of the tumultuous state in which the Guatemala political and legal state continues to be in.

The members of the Guatemalan military that partook in the mass rape of Mayan women are detestable human beings. Simply put, these Guatemalan soldiers who committed these disturbing acts thought they had immense power over another human being with no fear of being punished. The “military structures provided army soldiers and civil patrollers with the violent context and immunity from punishment they required to display their power over women.”<sup>116</sup>

### **Genocide in Guatemala?**

Recognizing the actions that Rios Montt committed in Guatemala, it is fair to ask whether or not genocide was committed. Genocide is:

the crime under international law of committing any of the following acts with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group as such: (a) killing members of the group; (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruct in whole or in part; (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; or (e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> *Guatemala: Never Again!*, REMHI: *The Official Report of The Human Rights Office, Archdiocese of Guatemala* (USA: ODHAG, 1999), 77.

<sup>117</sup> James E. Clapp, *Dictionary of the Law* (New York: Random House, 2000), 200-201.

Within this definition, Rios Montt should be held responsible for what occurred in Guatemala. After he was removed as the supreme leader in Guatemala, the general would have supporters and adversaries to this central question: Did Rios Montt commit genocide in Guatemala? The polarity inflicted by this question has fractured the Guatemalan state to this present day.

### **Coup (Again) in Guatemala**

The way in which General Efraim Rios Montt acquired power in Guatemala left many military general unsettled with him as their supreme leader. The religious differences were too much for many generals to handle. As this was nothing new, the religious leader was ostracized by powerful military generals. Many important people within the military did not object to the style in which Rios Montt gained power, but they opposed the individual.

Loud rumblings against Rios Montt started surfacing in June of 1983. After taking power in March of 1982, there was a national election. “Annulling the results of the national elections March 1982,”<sup>118</sup> Rios Montt promised an election would come when Guatemala began showing national stability as he framed it. Quite a few Guatemalans understood the rationale for holding off on voting. With no end in sight, prominent Guatemalans became more vocal in their opposition to the president. In the middle of June, “pressure has mounted on the President to keep his promise, with church

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<sup>118</sup> Barbara Crossette, “Tension High in Guatemala As Chief Is Pressed on Vote,” *The New York Times*, June 20, 1983, A6, ProQuest Historical Documents, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/docview/122178798/F1427B4F081B4A89PQ/1?accountid=11578> (accessed February 18, 2016).



leaders publically petitioning him to get the military out of government.”<sup>119</sup> In addition to this, other church and military leaders called for an election. Facing mounting pressure, Rios Montt continue to promise that a national election would be held shortly.

Rios Montt also felt the pressures of an oncoming coup in early July, 1983. Around the Army Day celebration, Rios Montt cancelled “a military parade, and sources say soldiers have been restricted to their barracks.”<sup>120</sup> In response to the postponement of the national election, military leaders had planned and were ready to carry out a coup against the nation’s leader. In response to the attempted coup, Rios Montt would “suspend many civil liberties.”<sup>121</sup> The suspension of civil liberties gave the military the ability to dictate what citizens were able to do. Taking away more civil liberties did not bode well for the president who was apprehensive to hold an election.

Without an imminent national election and with the suspension of more civil liberties, Guatemalan military leaders decided to take action. On August 8, 1983, the coup of Efraim Rios Montt “installed Defense Minister Oscar Humberto Mejia Victores as provisional President.”<sup>122</sup> With that Rios Montt was ousted from the position that he had always coveted.

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<sup>119</sup> Crossette, “Tension High in Guatemala As Chief Is Pressed on Vote,” A6.

<sup>120</sup> “Nation/world: Coup fear speeds plan for Guatemala election,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 1, 1983, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 12, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/hnpchicagotribune/docview/175882329/982CE3624B4C4F5BPQ/1?accountid=11578> (accessed January 20, 2016).

<sup>121</sup> “Nation/world: Coup fear speeds plan for Guatemala election,” 12.

<sup>122</sup> Philip Taubman, “U.S. Wary on Coup Implications; Says It Hopes for Democratic Rule,” *The New York Times*, August 9, 1983, ProQuest Historical Documents, A11, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/docview/122291341/57C5690A6D6C4A04PQ/1?accountid=11578> (accessed January 20, 2016).

## **Continuing His Reign**

Unquestionably, the modus operandi that the military enforced from 1982 to 1983 was dictated to them by their supreme leader and purification zealot: Efraín Ríos Montt. The general took drastic measures to unite Guatemala. The plan of attack he committed to would leave many Guatemalans homeless, dead, raped, and divided. The economically poor became poorer. Those who had been mentally tormented by the civil war faced some of their most challenging times during these seventeen months. Many Mayans lost their cultural identity out of forced conformity. Ríos Montt's policies left Guatemala broken, even more broken than it had been when he took over.

Being overthrown as the supreme leader of Guatemala, Ríos Montt did not go away quietly. Immediately, he began plotting his return to the national scene, longing to reclaim his role as Guatemala's leader. Doing just that, Ríos Montt would resurface in a major way into Guatemala's political scene.

## CHAPTER V

### RESURFACING POWER AND ITS RAMIFICATIONS

“We haven’t discussed the fact that in our own hemisphere we have the danger of nation-state failures because of drug traffickers in Honduras and Guatemalan and El Salvador.”<sup>123</sup> –Martin O’Malley

Efrain Rios Montt’s power did not cease to exist after he was ousted as Guatemala’s president. In fact, his power within Guatemala grew. Creating his own political party, the Guatemalan Republican Front (FRG), the passionate evangelical drew in enough people to establish credibility. When peace came to Guatemala in 1996, the national outlook was vastly different from what people had felt in the revolutionary days of Arevalo and Arbenz. As one war concluded in 1996, a new war was just beginning. Some Guatemalans recognized how lucrative the illicit drug market was. With the growing amount of people getting involved in this market, the government had a new enemy. Citizens in the United States were paying top dollar to attain illicit drugs, and Guatemalan served as a transportation hub for the transnational criminal organizations in South America and in Mexico. Seizing the opportunity to defeat this violence, Rios Montt re-entered the political sphere.

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<sup>123</sup> Michael Oleaga, “Democratic Debate Recap: Martin O’Malley Leads on Immigration,” *Latin Post*, January 18, 2016, <http://www.latinpost.com/articles/109118/20160118/democratic-debate-recap-martin-omalley-leads-on-immigration-puerto-rico-debt-crisis.htm> (accessed February 3, 2016).

## **How Rios Montt Came Back To Power**

Overthrown in 1983, Rios Montt took some time re-collect himself and figure out what his next path to power would be. As it had stood, no individual who had taken part in a coup could run for president of Guatemala. Many Guatemalans were also fearful of military leaders during the civil war coming back to power. A majority of Guatemalans wanted to move into a new chapter in Guatemala's history.

Without a question, Rios Montt had monumental differences with the political parties in Guatemala. Since this was the case, he created his own party. The Guatemalan Republican Front (FRG) was born shortly after he was overthrown in 1983. In 1985, fearing Rios Montt might actually gain enough support to become the president once again, Guatemala's congress created a new constitution that was strictly meant to prohibit the former leader's return to power. Within this constitution, "Article 186 bars 'the leader or leaders of a coup d'état, armed revolution or similar movement' and 'those who as a consequence of such acts become chief of state' from running for President."<sup>124</sup> The Rios Montt rule was meant to keep him from regaining the presidency. When he attempted to run for president in 1990 and 1995, the judicial system blocked him from running for president.

After the courts ruled against Rios Montt in 1995, the outlook for him to return to power was bleak. But the backing from members of his party put him back into the

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<sup>124</sup> Larry Rohter, "Guatemalan Ex-Dictator on Rebound: Deposed in 1983, Gen. Efraim Rios Montt is eyeing the presidency," *The New York Times*, May 28, 1995, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 14, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/docview/109455835/B39C5D527C0B44C8PQ/1?accountid=11578> (accessed February 18, 2016).

spotlight. The Guatemalan Republican Front nominated Alfonso Portillo to be their candidate for President. As Rohter observed, Mr. Portillo was merely a placeholder for the all-powerful Rios Montt. When he was “handed his party’s nomination, Mr. Portillo has given the impression that his would be some sort of co-presidency with General Rios Montt. Almost all Republican Front posters, leaflets and ads featured both men, who frequently campaign together, and Front supporters have been given T-shirts that read, ‘Portillo to the presidency, Rios Montt to power.’”<sup>125</sup> Clearly, the campaign trail showed who held the power in their relationship.

With the military controlling the electoral process, the election was most likely not stacked in Mr. Portillo’s favor. Many military generals detested the idea of Rios Montt regaining the presidency. Mr. Portillo only lost the election by a margin “31,000 vote(s).”<sup>126</sup> The two previous elections had been decided by at least a half million votes; the tide of popularity was trending in the direction of the Guatemalan Republican Front. Not only was this the “closest election in Guatemalan history,”<sup>127</sup> Mr. Portillo ran on a platform of returning Guatemala to the same policies that Rios Montt had ruled the nation with from 1982 to 1983. Although he failed to win the 1995 election, Mr. Portillo gained

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<sup>125</sup> Larry Rohter, “Guatemala Election Becomes Vote on Former Dictator,” *The New York Times*, January 7, 1996, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 8, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/docview/109600965/DC980D3166C84A3APQ/1?accountid=11578> (accessed February 20, 2016).

<sup>126</sup> Larry Rohter, “The Specter In Guatemala: Iron-Fisted General Looms Large Again,” *The New York Times*, January 10, 1996, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, A5, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/docview/109600757/8B836E75602E4D31PQ/1?accountid=11578> (accessed February 20, 2016).

<sup>127</sup> “The Americas,” *The New York Times*, December 28, 1999, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, A6, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/docview/110110108/E13379499743422BPQ/6?accountid=11578> (February 20, 2016).

enough support to become the nominee for the Guatemalan Republican Front in the 1999 election, the first post-war election.

In 1999, support for Rios Montt from the Protestant minority was going strong. Mr. Portillo became the president of Guatemala by “capturing 68 percent of the vote”<sup>128</sup> in the election. In reality, this election was a victory for Rios Montt, who became the de facto leader of Guatemala once more.

Ensuring stability for Rios Montt, Mr. Portillo changed the head of national security, an individual Rios Montt knew well. In 2001, Mr. Portillo appointed a new “former defense minister, Eduardo Arevalo Lacs.”<sup>129</sup> Removing Interior Minister Byron Barrientos due to a scandal, Mr. Portillo replaced him with Arevalo Lacs who had been held responsible for a massacre of 300 Mayan Indians in 1982, under Rios Montt’s watch. Arevalo Lacs had never spoken out against Rios Montt for the atrocities that occurred in the seventeen months he led the country. This loyalty was being rewarded by the former general. In addition, this gave the Guatemalan Republican Front more security.

The Guatemalan Republican Front failed to make an impact on the lives of the Guatemalan citizens who elected them. President Portillo also failed to provide security to Guatemalans in search of protections from the criminal organizations. Under President

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<sup>128</sup> “The Americas,” *The New York Times* A6.

<sup>129</sup> “Guatemala Move Defended,” *The New York Times*, December 7, 2001, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, A3, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/docview/92120497/80E080C95552481C/PQ/1?accountid=11578> (accessed March 3, 2016).

Bush in 2003, the United States “decertified Guatemala’s anti-drug efforts”<sup>130</sup> because the Guatemalan government did not show it could effectively stop the movement of drugs. This led Guatemala into a predicament where a “suspension of almost all U.S. aid and the denial of support for efforts to win loans from multinational banks.”<sup>131</sup> The leaders of the Guatemalan Republican Front were too self-serving during their time in office. Since change was not visible, citizens who were mobilized behind the Guatemalan Republican Front in 1999 would change their support in 2003.

Support for Efraín Ríos Montt was spreading throughout the country. Building on the popularity his political party had, the former president decided to run for the presidency. In July 2003, Ríos Montt attempted once again to fulfill his vision of a new Guatemala. The former general’s “registration came less than 24 hours after the Constitutional Court, the country’s highest court, ruled in his favor, ending a judicial crisis over legal challenges filed in a lower courts by opposition parties.”<sup>132</sup> Once the civil war ended in 1996, many Guatemalans did not want to see military leaders from the civil war come back to power. However, this did not stop Ríos Montt from trying.

Voters would weigh in with their opinion in the 2003 election, and it was not in favor of the general. Mr. Oscar Berger defeated Ríos Montt easily. Ríos Montt only

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<sup>130</sup> Steve Kettmann, “Guatemala fails to pass U.S. anti-narcotics test,” *SF Gate*, February 1, 2003, <http://www.sfgate.com/politics/article/Guatemala-fails-to-pass-U-S-anti-narcotics-test-2637388.php> (accessed March 3, 2016).

<sup>131</sup> “Bush reviews aid in drug war,” *The Washington Times*, January 20, 2003, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2003/jan/20/20030120-010408-2342r> (accessed March 3, 2016).

<sup>132</sup> David Gonzalez, “Former Dictator to Seek Guatemalan Presidency,” *The New York Times*, August 1, 2003, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, A3, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/docview/92665721/5F9ED415C6024984PQ/1?accountid=11578> (accessed February 21, 2016).

captured 17 percent of the vote, while Mr. Berger captured 38.4 percent of the vote.<sup>133</sup> Many voters believed Rios Montt's party had "ran the most corrupt and least effective government they had known."<sup>134</sup> Banking on the success his political party had in the 1999 election, Rios Montt believed that he would win. Yet the people voiced their displeasure with his pawn, Mr. Portillo, at the ballot boxes, but they also voiced their displeasure with Rios Montt's presence hovering over their nation. Without the scandals that occurred in Mr. Portillo's government, Rios Montt may have been able to convince more of the general population to believe in him again. The former leader had a base of ardent supporters, who continues to support him, but Mr. Portillo's government needed to do something to give confidence to those who believed the Guatemalan Republican Front would bring long awaited change. Instead, the party was involved in numerous scandals. These scandals proved to be too much in 2003.

With Guatemalans focused on ridding themselves of governmental corruption, the gangs continued to grow in size, power, and influence throughout the country.

### **New Enemy: The Role of Transnational Criminal Organizations**

In the world of the narcotics, terrorism occurs in many forms. The cartels in Guatemala and throughout the region, have ancillary methods of amassing more wealth than they get from the profit-heavy narcotics industry. Extortion, human trafficking,

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<sup>133</sup> Sara Silver, "Ex-dictator loses bid to lead Guatemala, *FT.com*, November 11, 2003, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/docview/228810429/284D02A3330A46FCPQ/6?accountid=11578> (accessed May 17, 2016).

<sup>134</sup> Tim Weiner, "Ex-Guatemalan Dictator's Political Career Screeches to a Halt," *The New York Times*, November 11, 2003, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, A9, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/docview/92420627/AC3B2D7643E4A7BPQ/1?accountid=11578> (accessed February 23, 2016).



kidnapping, prostitution rings, selling children, etc. are all other forms in which the cartels have extended their operations. The profits these transnational criminal organization have made on narcotics and their other illicit business ventures have given them an unprecedented amount of influence over Guatemalan and Guatemalans.

The vast number of different criminal organizations operating in Guatemala has fractured the nation. Understanding who these criminal organizations are gives a background of why Guatemalan politics are centered around the elite's needs and not the needs of all Guatemalans. Criminal organizations are not often sentenced for their wrongdoings. This level of impunity explains why Efraim Rios Montt has never been prosecuted for the violations that occurred during his tenure.

The thirty-six year civil war left over 200,000 Guatemalans dead, internally displaced, or forced to migrate to other nations. In the years since the end of the civil war, life has become more precious in Guatemala. These higher levels of violence have left Guatemalans with “a pervasive sense of insecurity and hopelessness.”<sup>135</sup>

Why do criminal organizations go to Guatemala? Guatemala offers them a perfect concoction of not getting caught. The “geographic position, large ungoverned spaces, civil war, and corruption have made it ideal for moving illegal narcotics.”<sup>136</sup> This blend makes Guatemala fertile for wealthy criminal organizations to become even wealthier and attain even more power than they already have. Rios Montt helped create

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<sup>135</sup> “Guatemala: Squeezed Between Crime and Impunity,” *International Crisis Group*, June 22, 2010, 5, [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/latin-america/33%20Guatemala%20---%20Squeezed%20Between%20Crime%20and%20Impunity.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/latin-america/33%20Guatemala%20---%20Squeezed%20Between%20Crime%20and%20Impunity.pdf) (accessed February 23, 2016).

<sup>136</sup> “Guatemala: Squeezed Between Crime and Impunity,” *International Crisis Group*, 18.

this environment in Guatemala, and the illicit narcotics industry has taken advantage of the ability to have impunity for wrongdoing.

### **Who are these Criminal Organizations?**

In Guatemala, there are two criminal organizations that hold the most sway over what occurs in the social, political, and economic spheres of the nation. The Mara Salvatrucha, MS-13, and the Barrio 18, M-18, are transnational criminal organizations with immense power, wealth, and ability to instill fear into Guatemalans, and people of Central America. Having the ability to run their operations *carte blanche* in Guatemala, many Guatemalans with no affiliation to either gang have come to the realization that they are no longer safe in Central America. Each group has distinctive qualities, but they are centered around the same characteristics. Both groups look for retention and continual growth of their enterprise, while making sure their operations are isolated from the government's reach. Understanding each group is the key to recognizing the level of terror many Guatemalans deal with on a daily basis, while also seeing how their methods are similar to past oppressive institutions.

### **MS-13**

The Mara Salvatrucha gang originated their criminal network in the United States—more specifically, in Los Angeles. During the civil wars in the 1980's in Guatemalan, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, “refugees flooded northward.”<sup>137</sup> Finding decent paying jobs was very difficult for these refugees. These refugees were proud of

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<sup>137</sup> “MS-13 Profile,” *InSight Crime*, 2, <http://www.insightcrime.org/el-salvador-organized-crime-news/mara-salvatrucha-ms-13-profile> (accessed February 3, 2016).

their Salvadoran, Nicaraguan, Guatemalan, or Mexican identities; their precarious economic state weighed on their consciousness. Settling in L.A. communities that were diverse and had many other refugees coming from other war torn countries, many of these young, male refugees began trying to imitate the Mexican gangs operating in L.A. The Mexican gangs had money, so many young emulated the lifestyle they led. Out of this environment, the MS-13 originated.

Mara Salvatrucha had to expand their operations to Central America because they were deported from the United States. Their criminalized activities include “extortion, kidnapping, and controlling the neighborhood illegal drug market.”<sup>138</sup> In the process of doing their business, they have created some criminal relationships with the Zetas and the Sinaloa Cartel. These two Mexican cartels use the MS-13 to sell, move, and collect money from their illicit drug franchise. In return, the MS-13 are able to transport their human cargo throughout the routes that the Zetas and Sinaloa Cartel have carved out in Mexico to the United—of course, this is in addition to the cut of money they receive with illicit drugs.

MS-13 is non-traditional in the sense that they have no overall hierarchy. Some would think that their “lack of an overt, formalized hierarchy, manifested through decentralization”<sup>139</sup> would eventually split into many factions. MS-13 is an immensely powerful organization because of this lack of hierarchy. Authorities have a difficult

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<sup>138</sup> “MS-13 Profile,” *InSight Crime*, 3.

<sup>139</sup> John P. Sullivan and Samuel Logan, “MS-13 Leadership: Networks of Influence,” *The Counter Terrorist*, August/September 2010, [http://digital.ipcprintservices.com/display\\_article.php?id=428186](http://digital.ipcprintservices.com/display_article.php?id=428186) (accessed February 12, 2016).

pinpointing the leaders of MS-13; hence the organization cannot be defeated by the “kingpin” strategy that has been employed by Mexican governments. The system in which they have established has allowed them to become criminal powerhouses.

Members of the MS-13 are open, and take pride in, who they are and what they do. Like their arch-rival, Barrio 18, the MS-13 puts a major emphasis on getting “tattoos as a means of building social identity, displaying allegiances, and sending messages.”<sup>140</sup> Members openly flaunt their allegiances to MS-13 with little fear of governmental reprisal. More disturbingly, the tattoos provide background as to how MS-13 interact with people they kidnap and kill. In order to gain more prestige, they must kill. The tattoos add to the mystique of these gang members who have also been known to be bloodthirsty and maul their enemies.

The major caveat to the MS-13 is their presence beyond Guatemala. With operations in El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, and the United States, MS-13 is a transnational criminal organization. Transnational criminal organizations reach in the “global environment—that is, their criminal activity activities transcend borders.”<sup>141</sup>

In order to stay relevant in this transnational criminal world, MS-13 techniques have evolved. Trying to function with the Guatemalan security forces being fully conscious of MS-13 gang member characteristics has left MS-13 with the choice to adapt or continue with the status quo. Choosing the former, MS-13 has undergone more

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<sup>140</sup> James Bargent, “Hidden Meanings of Honduras Mara Gang Tattoos Explained,” *InSight Crime*, September 3, 2014, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/hidden-meanings-honduras-mara-gang-tattoos> (accessed February 21, 2016).

<sup>141</sup> Celinda Franco, “The MS 13 and 18<sup>th</sup> Street Gangs: Emerging Transnational Gang Threats?,” Congressional Research Service, January 30, 2008, 9, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34233.pdf> (accessed January 22, 2016).

clandestine operations. One of these efforts has been to dress in a professional manner. In doing this, they have been able to have meetings with “upscale businesses and later extort them.”<sup>142</sup> With this, they are able to build a rapport with elite businessmen, gain more detailed information about them, and then rob them of their wealth. Alongside this, MS-13 has been proactive and made sure to “legally register their vehicles and arms.”<sup>143</sup> They do not register either in their own names, but they are giving the authorities less of a reason to give them unwanted attention.

### **Barrio 18**

Posing an equivalent of a threat as the MS-13, the Barrio 18 has an enormous presence in Guatemala. In many ways, Barrio 18 mirrors MS-13, and vice versa. Barrio 18’s origins began in the United States. The presence of MS-13 in Central America grew enormously during the 1990’s when the United States expanded the nexus in which immigrants could be deported back to their homeland. Trying to rid the country of these gangs, the United States government imposed this policy “aggressively to gangs in California.”<sup>144</sup> The mass majority of the members of the Barrio 18 resided in California. Upon deportation back to their homeland, they would encounter governments that would not have the strength to halt the enterprise they sought to expand.

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<sup>142</sup> Christopher Looft and Elyssa Pachico, “MS-13 Guatemala’s More ‘Elegant’ Gang: Report,” *InSight Crime*, August 8, 2012, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/ms-13-guatemalas-more-elegant-gang-report> (accessed February 12, 2016).

<sup>143</sup> Christopher Looft and Elyssa Pachico, “MS-13 Guatemala’s More ‘Elegant’ Gang: Report.”

<sup>144</sup> “Barrio 18: Profile,” *InSight Crime*, 2, <http://www.insightcrime.org/honduras-organized-crime-news/barrio-18-honduras> (accessed February 22, 2016).

Barrio 18 are involved in extortion, kidnapping, and the drug trade. They impose fear on the Guatemalan citizens by showing their extreme use of exemplary violence. The MS-13 is accustomed to “avoiding practices such as killing children, carrying out indiscriminate attacks, and tattooing readily visible areas of their bodies,”<sup>145</sup> while Barrio 18 does not follow these same norms. Barrio 18 is less sophisticated in their tactics compared to MS-13.

The violence between MS-13 and Barrio 18 is not diminishing. Last January, former President Perez Molina mentioned that death toll increased from 484 in 2014 to 488 in 2015.<sup>146</sup> This extension of *la violencia* has continued past the civil war. Tension is fierce between these two groups because they are operating the same territory. MS-13 operates more territory than Barrio 18 in Guatemala, but the territory that Barrio 18 does work in tends to be in the same regions as the MS-13. Throughout Guatemala City, each group is fighting for control.<sup>147</sup> Civilians with no affiliation to either side are in danger of losing their lives. The rivalry between these two gangs has exacerbated the idea that a civil society can be achieved in Guatemala.

## **Zetas**

The Zetas originated in Mexico as former special forces for the Mexican government, trained by the U.S. When they split from the government, they became the

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<sup>145</sup> Kyra Gurney, “Mapping MS13, Barrio 18 Territory in Guatemala City,” *InSight Crime*, September 10, 2014, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/ms13-gang-barrio-18-guatemala-city-map> (accessed March 2, 2016).

<sup>146</sup> Por G. Contreras, “Presidente Otto Perez justifica violencia,” *Prensa Libre*, February 3, 2015, [http://www.prensalibre.com/noticias/justicia/Presidente-justifica-violencia-rivalidad-pandillas-inseguridad\\_0\\_1297070292.html](http://www.prensalibre.com/noticias/justicia/Presidente-justifica-violencia-rivalidad-pandillas-inseguridad_0_1297070292.html) (accessed March 3, 2016).

<sup>147</sup> Kyra Gurney, “Mapping MS13, Barrio 18 Territory in Guatemala City.”

military enforcer of the Gulf Cartel. They have “superior training, tactics, and ruthlessness,”<sup>148</sup> which allowed the Gulf Cartel to become the most powerful cartel in all of Mexico. When the Gulf Cartel began losing power, the Zetas split off and began controlling the criminalized network of drug transportation that their former employer had. As more profit made them gain enormous power in Mexico, they looked to expand the territory that they had built.

Expanding into Guatemala, the Zetas needed to cooperate with traffickers who had connections. The man they found was Horst Walther Overdick, later known as El Tigre. The network El Tigre had established ranged “from Congress to the local police and military.”<sup>149</sup> El Tigre presented the Zetas with an opportunity to expand their network dramatically. This also benefitted El Tigre because he would be able to expand his wealth, and also remained under the protection of this military group.

Some Kaibiles, the special forces group in Guatemala during the civil war, decided to join the ranks of the Zetas. The Zetas like having “ex-soldiers”<sup>150</sup> as members a part of their operations. The Kaibiles were also feared by the indigenous Guatemalan people, and the territories where the Zetas were operational had a significant population of Mayans, given their operations in the highlands. The psychological torture that the Kaibiles had committed on the Mayans cannot be understated.

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<sup>148</sup>Steven Dudley, “The Zetas in Guatemala,” *InSight Crime*, September 8, 2011, pg. 3, [http://www.insightcrime.org/media/k2/attachments/insight\\_crime\\_the\\_zetas\\_in\\_guatemala.pdf](http://www.insightcrime.org/media/k2/attachments/insight_crime_the_zetas_in_guatemala.pdf) (accessed February 12, 2016).

<sup>149</sup> Steven Dudley, “The Zetas in Guatemala,” 5.

<sup>150</sup> Steven Dudley, “The Zetas in Guatemala,” 7.

In 2010, President Colom said that Guatemala was full of Zetas.<sup>151</sup> This statement by President Colom would hold true as to what happened in the northern provinces of Guatemala next. Running their illicit industry in northern Guatemala was lucrative, so they claimed the land as their own. This led President Colom to call for a state of siege in the region, meaning the military had full control to combat the Zetas. This “month-long state of siege in Alta Verapaz”<sup>152</sup> was a showdown between the Guatemalan military and the Zetas. This shows that the Zetas believe they have enough power to be able to spread their criminal operation into lands owned by other nations. Alarming, the Zetas are able to control territory in Guatemala because their influence has penetrated all levels of Guatemalan police and military forces.

Los Zetas have the capability to strike fear into any human being. People in the Peten region of Guatemala know this experience firsthand. In May 2011, the Zetas showed their strength and dominance over the Peten region by slaughtering 25-30 Guatemalans in this northernmost province. The people of the Peten region are “strongly independent and distrustful of the Guatemalan government”<sup>153</sup> because of the government’s violation of human rights during the civil war. However, it seems that the Guatemalan government would be the lesser evil in this situation, as the Zetas impose fear off of their reputation alone. The savagery of the killings and the messages they left

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<sup>151</sup> “Guatemala is ‘full’ of Zetas,” *WikiLeaks*, September 20, 2010, [https://wikileaks.org/gifiles/docs/91/914906\\_guatemala-ct-mexico-guatemala-is-full-of-zetas-says-colom-.html](https://wikileaks.org/gifiles/docs/91/914906_guatemala-ct-mexico-guatemala-is-full-of-zetas-says-colom-.html) (accessed February 17, 2016).

<sup>152</sup> Rory Carroll, “Drug Gangs seize parts of northern Guatemala,” *The Guardian*, January 7, 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jan/07/narco-gangs-guatemala> (accessed February 22, 2016).

<sup>153</sup> “Guatemala,” *WikiLeaks*, May 19, 2011, 1, [https://wikileaks.org/gifiles/docs/35/350323\\_guatemala-for-c-e-3-links-.html](https://wikileaks.org/gifiles/docs/35/350323_guatemala-for-c-e-3-links-.html) (accessed May 13, 2016).



show that the Zetas are showing their dominance over this region, it serves as the ideal base for drug smuggling, extortion, kidnapping, and human trafficking.

El Tigre was a mastermind at shipping the Andean cocaine to the United States, where it consumed in enormous quantities. However, El Tigre was arrested in 2012 by the national police force, and was extradited to the United States in the same year. The U.S. government charged El Tigre with “distribuir una substancia controlada,”<sup>154</sup> the distribution of controlled substances. Catching and extraditing El Tigre was a major step forward for the justice system in Guatemala. This is also a significant blow to the Zetas operations in Guatemala. However, the Zetas were able to find new connections in Guatemala and their presence lives on.

### **Broken Social Order**

Illicit drugs have brought back recurring trends in Guatemalan history. Death and displacement have been common in Guatemala since the beginning of the civil war in 1960. During the years of Rios Montt, and his predecessor Lucas Garcia, death and displacement were common violations inflicted upon among poor Guatemalans. After August 8, 1983, the killings and displacement in Guatemala quieted down. The cessation of the civil war in 1996 was supposed to give many Guatemalans a chance to escape the violence. Yet with many individuals realizing they could profit heavily from narcotics, Guatemala would not receive the longed for peace, nor justice.

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<sup>154</sup> “Comunicada de Prensa,” Embajada de los Estados Unidos, December 10, 2012, 1. [http://photos.state.gov/libraries/guatemala/788/pdfs/pbs40\\_20121210.pdf](http://photos.state.gov/libraries/guatemala/788/pdfs/pbs40_20121210.pdf) (accessed March 11, 2016).

The violence of the drug trade is unprecedented, even for Guatemalans who had to experience the years of Rios Montt. The local gangs, who have turned into transnational criminal organizations, run many parts of life in Guatemala. Getting on the wrong side of either the MS-13 or Barrio 18 will cause irreparable harm to that individual, and the individual's family. Young males are forced to either join gangs or face the wrath of them; young women can either marry into the gang or worry about being kidnapped, raped, or murdered. The local branches of these gangs install monumental fear into the poor because the government is unable to protect them. With a broken society, a corrupt political system, and a military that does not have the resources of the local gangs, the environment is ripe for opportunists. Efraim Rios Montt has been able to re-insert himself into the political sphere by preying on the chaotic state of Guatemala.

Not only did Rios Montt resurface in Guatemalan politics, he also resurfaced in U.S. politics through an unlikely figure: his daughter.

### **U.S. Connections, Abuse, and Fraud**

Interestingly, a member of the U.S. House of Representatives married the daughter of Efraim Rios Montt. Zury Rios Sosa, the daughter of the former Guatemalan president, married Congressman Jerry Weller of Illinois. In 2004, she dropped the Montt in her last name. At the time, Rios Sosa was a member of the Guatemalan Congress<sup>155</sup> and was a major advocate for her father.

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<sup>155</sup> Andrew Zajac, Oscar Avilia, and Jim Tankersley, "Inside Rep. Weller's Nicaragua Land Deal," *The Chicago Tribune*, September 7, 2007,

What is interesting about former Congressman Weller is his unique purchase during his time in Congress. In 2002, Weller “began looking for land he could subdivide into parcels that would attract buyers looking for prime ocean-view property at relatively low price”<sup>156</sup> in Nicaragua. Not disclosing all of his land holdings in Nicaragua, Weller was profiting handsomely off of purchasing this land and re-selling it. As a U.S. citizen, it is in Weller’s rights to take his private money and purchase whatever he wants. However, when you are a politician, purchasing land in a foreign country and profiteering heavily is questionable. Weller made himself the “go-to guy for interests seeking a conservative advocate on Latin American issues in the Republican-controlled House.”<sup>157</sup> Ethically, this is a complicated issue.

Weller was in a position where he could advance policy to favor his private interests in Nicaragua. For instance, he promoted the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), which narrowly passed through Congress. CAFTA appeared to help people in Central Americans by providing them food. However, hidden in the bill was “additional legal protection for American investors”<sup>158</sup> like Weller. He did not disclose his holdings with Congress. Also, since his wife, and father-in-law, have a great amount of clout in Guatemala, they would most likely have contacts in Nicaragua. This would further advance the wealth of the Weller-Rios Montt union. Zury Rios Sosa’s

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<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi-wellersep07-story.html> (accessed March 15, 2016).

<sup>156</sup> Andrew Zajac, Oscar Avilia, and Jim Tankersley, “Inside Rep. Weller’s Nicaragua Land Deal.”

<sup>157</sup> Andrew Zajac, Oscar Avilia, and Jim Tankersley, “Inside Rep. Weller’s Nicaragua Land Deal.”

<sup>158</sup> Andrew Zajac, Oscar Avilia, and Jim Tankersley, “Inside Rep. Weller’s Nicaragua Land Deal.”

uncle and brother held prominent positions in Guatemala. Zury Rios Sosa's uncle, Mario Rios Montt, was "a Catholic bishop who has headed the church's human-rights office in Guatemala, and her brother, Enrique Rios Sosa, who was Guatemalan army chief of staff until 2003, when he came under investigation for embezzlement."<sup>159</sup> Mario Rios Montt never challenged his brother's, Efraim, human rights record. The family had prominent connections throughout Central America, and the Weller-Rios Montt unification was set to profit heavily off of these connections.

In 2008, thirteen Mayans went to Spain, who has non-partisan judges that investigate human rights, in order to have their case heard about the tactics employed by the Guatemalan military during Ríos Montt's regime. "The Spanish National Court issued arrest warrants and extradition orders in 2006, in the end unheeded; and heard testimony of victims and experts in 2008 and 2009."<sup>160</sup> Kate Doyle observed and wrote summaries about what happened in the courtroom. One of the witnesses discussed what life was like growing up as a child in Guatemala. The man pointed out that the military used a "convent as a center for interrogation and torture."<sup>161</sup> While it is certainly perverse to use a convent as torture center, the individual who testified that he was

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<sup>159</sup> Andrew Zajac, Oscar Avilia, and Jim Tankersley, "Inside Rep. Weller's Nicaragua Land Deal."

<sup>160</sup> Emi MacLean, "Judging A Dictator: The Trial of Guatemala's Rios Montt," Open Society Justice Initiative, November 2013, 2, <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/judging-dictator-trial-guatemala-rios-montt-11072013.pdf> (accessed May 18, 2016).

<sup>161</sup> Kate Doyle, "Summary of Genocide Proceedings before the Spanish Federal Court: Round One February 4-8, 2008," (Washington D.C.: The George Washington University, July 2, 2008, 2), The Guatemalan Genocide Case, July 2, 2008, The National Security Archive Guatemalan Project, ed. Kate Doyle <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/guatemala/genocide/round1/summary1.pdf> (accessed December 12, 2015).

tortured, and his mother was raped. This led these individuals to flee into the mountains, but life was so unbearable in the mountains they came back and his mother was eventually killed.

One witness said that the military came through an area they had suspected to have guerrilla groups and the military burned their house down. This is the lived experience of Rios Montt's scorched earth policy. Fleeing to a region where he suspected there would be less violence for his family, they built a new house. The army found this location, and burned his second house down. Growing increasingly frustrated, he decided to join a guerrilla unit in the mountains. When he realized that his family was unable to feed themselves, he went back to support them.<sup>162</sup>

Another testimony came from Juan Manuel Jerónimo, who survived a massacre in July of 1982. The army entered his village, and his mother told him and his brother-in-law to run and hide because they expected the army was coming for males who could be guerrillas. When they came back the next day, most of the people in the village had been killed, including all of his family.<sup>163</sup> In this massacre, he lost his wife, children, mother, and his other relatives.

The testimonies that these individuals gave show the level of barbarism at play with the Guatemalan army during Rios Montt's tenure. This level of cruelty occurred before and after this regime, but the amount of institutional racism against the Mayan

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<sup>162</sup>Kate Doyle, "Summary of Genocide Proceedings before the Spanish Federal Court: Round One February 4-8, 2008," 3.

<sup>163</sup>Kate Doyle, "Summary of Genocide Proceedings before the Spanish Federal Court: Round One February 4-8, 2008," 9, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/guatemala/genocide/round1/summary1.pdf> (accessed February 3, 2016).

community that occurred while Ríos Montt led the nation was unparalleled. These stories still haunt the Mayan community today because there has been little recognition for the actions committed and the lack of justice as a result.

In 2011, former president Portillo, Ríos Montt's placeholder, was acquitted of embezzlement charges. Knowing the corruption within the judicial system, "Guatemalan prosecutors, assisted by a special United Nations commission, accused Mr. Portillo, along with his defense and finance ministers, of having illegally transferred \$15 million to the Ministry of National Defense in 2001."<sup>164</sup> After this, the money was taken out in cash and laundered in U.S. banks. The United Nations support for the Guatemalan prosecutors show how important it was to get Mr. Portillo convicted of stealing money from Guatemalans. Mr. Portillo was able to evade incarceration.

### **Claudia Paz y Paz**

Impunity has been the standard rule for those who commit egregious human rights violations in Guatemala. However, a strong, human rights attorney has sought to amend the injustices committed. Claudia Paz y Paz was presented with almost insurmountable odds to get Ríos Montt sentenced to a prison sentence that was appropriate for the crimes he committed in the Ixil region. Getting Ríos Montt convicted for his barbaric actions was a monumental achievement for Paz y Paz. Paz y Paz believes that the victims who were able to confront Ríos Montt "recovered part of the dignity that was stolen when they

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<sup>164</sup> Elisabeth Malkin, "Guatemalan Court Acquits former President of Embezzling," *The New York Times*, May 11, 2001, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, A13, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/1634236024/6340E8E224CC44A4PQ/1?accountid=11578> (accessed February 3, 2016).

suffered so many human rights violations.”<sup>165</sup> She also believed that it could help heal the nation.

Getting a trial against Rios Montt was not simple. After he lost congressional immunity in 2012, he was indicted. It took until early 2013 before a trial date was set.<sup>166</sup> The testimony from the Ixil survivors displayed the amount of injustices committed against the Guatemalan people during the Rios Montt tenure. The scars and memories that the Ixil people showed and horrifically recounted would be hard to defend against. However, the defense testified that Rios Montt had developed social programs to protect the Mayans—citing Beans and Bullets and the displaced people settlements. The defense also suggested that Rios Montt was not fully aware of what his army was doing, attempting to make him removed from the actions committed against these individuals taking the stand.

On May 10, 2013, the verdict was given: “Rios Montt, former de facto head of state, was guilty of genocide and crimes against humanity, and sentenced to 80 years in prison.”<sup>167</sup> Rios Montt was to be transferred to prison immediately. The judges were convinced that there was significant evidence against Rios Montt to charge him with these crimes. In their mind, “Rios Montt had knowledge of the crimes, the tribunal noted that he authorized and implemented the military operational plans with regular reporting

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<sup>165</sup> “An Interview with Claudia Paz y Paz, Former Attorney General of Guatemala,” (interview, George Washington University, October 1, 2014), [https://giwps.georgetown.edu/Paz\\_y\\_Paz](https://giwps.georgetown.edu/Paz_y_Paz) (accessed January 27, 2016).

<sup>166</sup> Emi MacLean, “Judging A Dictator: The Trial of Guatemala’s Rios Montt,” 3.

<sup>167</sup> Emi MacLean, “Judging A Dictator: The Trial of Guatemala’s Rios Montt,” 12.

requirements, every fifteen days.”<sup>168</sup> What appeared to be a major victory for victimized Guatemalans and human rights in Guatemala was only briefly lived.

After this verdict was ruled by the Constitutional Court, “forceful messages from military and business interests in Guatemala explicitly intended to influence”<sup>169</sup> the judges on the Constitutional Court to change their decision. Many members of the military were fearful that they would be the next ones convicted of their crimes during the civil war, so they wanted to avoid that slippery slope. Businesses who were connected with and supported Rios Montt did not want him imprisoned. Garcia Gudiel, Rios Montt’s attorney, threatened that the former leader had “45,000 supporters willing and ready to ‘paralyze’ the country”<sup>170</sup> if the decision was not overturned.

On May 20, 2013, ten days after Rios Montt was sentenced to 80 years in prison for gross human rights violations, the Constitutional Court of Guatemala “overturned the ten-day old verdict and annulled the final days of the trial.”<sup>171</sup> When the constitutional court reversed its initial decision, it was a devastating moment for justice in Guatemala. Overturning the Ríos Montt conviction shows that impunity is fait accompli in Guatemala as long as the wealthy, right wing Guatemalans remain in power.

Within an overarching framework of instability, Ríos Montt continues to have a major network of political clout that allows him to be exonerated of the massive human rights violations he committed. The ominous power of Rios Montt impacted Claudia Paz y Paz, and justice in Guatemala. Because Claudia Paz y Paz took on Ríos Montt for his

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<sup>168</sup> Emi MacLean, “Judging A Dictator: The Trial of Guatemala’s Rios Montt,” 13.

<sup>169</sup> Emi MacLean, “Judging A Dictator: The Trial of Guatemala’s Rios Montt,” 16.

<sup>170</sup> Emi MacLean, “Judging A Dictator: The Trial of Guatemala’s Rios Montt,” 17.

<sup>171</sup> Emi MacLean, “Judging A Dictator: The Trial of Guatemala’s Rios Montt,” 17.



human rights violations, she became seen as an immediate threat the conservative establishment that still holds a vast amount of power in Guatemala. The powerful right in Guatemala forced Paz y Paz out of the attorney general position seven months before her term ended. The courts were persuaded by a wealthy businessmen, with Ríos Montt connections, that since Paz y Paz was appointed in place of Conrado Reyes that she should only be only able to serve four years from the time Reyes was appointed attorney general.<sup>172</sup> In addition to this, Paz y Paz “was not on the six-person shortlist”<sup>173</sup> for the attorney general position that was up for selection in 2014. Paz y Paz was not a mediocre attorney general, she was exceptional at creating a more just Guatemala and reducing rates of impunity. Through her work, Guatemala was healing. Cutting her term short and not considering her for re-election shows how entrenched in Ríos Montt’s regressive politics Guatemala actually is.

What is most horrifying about Claudia Paz y Paz being ejected from her attorney general position is the retaliation individuals are set to face if they take on the military—especially Ríos Montt. What happened to Paz y Paz will discourage future individuals who are seeking social justice in Guatemala. The difficulty to create a stable livelihood in Guatemala contributes to the reasoning why some will quit their pursuit of justice.

Between the Paz y Paz ejection from attorney general and the reversal of the

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<sup>172</sup> Nina Lakhani, “Claudia Paz y Paz Ousting Puts Spotlight on Guatemalan Justice System,” *The Guardian*, February 19, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2014/feb/19/claudia-paz-y-paz-guatemala-justice-system> (accessed February 4, 2016).

<sup>173</sup> Elisabeth Malkin, “Attorney General in Guatemala Excluded From Re-Election Bid,” *The New York Times*, April 30, 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/01/world/americas/attorney-general-in-guatemala-excluded-from-re-election-bid.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/01/world/americas/attorney-general-in-guatemala-excluded-from-re-election-bid.html?_r=0) (accessed February 4, 2016).

constitutional court's decision on Ríos Montt, the nation-state of Guatemala cannot escape the grasp of the omnipotent military leaders. Justice for Guatemalans who suffered during the civil may never come to fruition.

A nation-state has laws and a justice system to show that everyone underneath that governing body will have the same protections, regardless of socioeconomic disparities. For Guatemala, the Rios Montt trial was a test to see if the Guatemalan legal system was representative of all of its people. The original guilty conviction of Rios Montt proved that Guatemala was ready to take a gigantic leap forward into inclusivity and representation of all citizens. However, the Supreme Court decided to annul their verdict on Rios Montt. As a result of this, Guatemalan citizens are not all treated as equals in a system that institutionally fails its people time after time. Preferential treatment is still given to these high profile, villainous characters during the Guatemalan civil war.

Death, rape, torture, and displacement occurred throughout the Guatemalan civil war. These detestable qualities that the Guatemalan military imposed on the civilians is as disturbing as it is morally and ethically unacceptable. The lack of legal convictions has left wounds open, and this nation has been unable to heal from its past.

Today, we are twenty years removed from the Guatemalan civil war, and there are still no major convictions of the crimes committed in Guatemala. With over 200,000 people killed and over one million people displaced by the military in the 36 year civil war, how could no major figures be convicted of these crimes? In 1996, the Guatemalan judicial system passed an amnesty law that “will allow many human-rights offenders to

go unpunished.”<sup>174</sup> This law would dissolve, but the actions behind this law are continually practiced by the abusers in Guatemala. Since impunity is ingrained in the Guatemalan legal system, violence and corruption perpetually plagues Guatemala’s main societal institutions. Sadly, Guatemalans do not fear guilty sentences because the legal system is geared towards criminals getting away with their crimes. This had made Guatemala susceptible to a new wave of violence in a completely different sphere from the military.

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<sup>174</sup> Larry Rohter, “Guatemalan Amnesty Is Approved Over Opponents’ Objections,” *The New York Times*, December 19, 1996, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, pg. A13, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/109548455/77C6BF6E2D241D4PQ/1?accountid=11578> (accessed March 12, 2016).

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION: A FRACTURED NATION

“It is important that I state clearly that support for military forces or intelligence units which engaged in violent and widespread repression of the kind described in the report was wrong. And the United States must not repeat that mistake. We must and we will instead continue to support the peace and reconciliation process in Guatemala.”<sup>175</sup> –Bill Clinton

“We cannot deny the humanitarian crisis which in recent years has meant the migration of thousands of people, whether by train or highway or on foot, crossing hundreds of kilometers through mountains, deserts and inhospitable zones.”<sup>176</sup> –Pope Francis

Supporting peace and reconciliation and not repeating past mistakes are just goals that President Clinton and his administration clearly made transparent. However, the United States has failed on its efforts in each regard to correct the past support for injustice in Guatemala. Not only has the United States lacked giving aid to Guatemala to help rebuild their nation, we vehemently deny Guatemalans seeking security at our southern border.

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<sup>175</sup> Martin Kettle and Jeremy Lennard, “Clinton apology to Guatemala,” *The Guardian*, March 11, 1999, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/1999/mar/12/jeremylennard.martinkettle> (accessed February 3, 2016).

<sup>176</sup> Carola Sole and Jean-Louis de la Vaissiere, “At Mexico-US border, pope decries migrant ‘tragedy,’” *Yahoo*, February 17, 2016, <https://www.yahoo.com/news/pope-decries-global-human-tragedy-forced-migration-000043480.html> (accessed February 17, 2016).

When the civil war ended in 1996, it is difficult to say that there was a political vacuum left in Guatemala. Rather, the perpetuation of policies used by the military is more appropriate. The local gangs in Guatemala have used the military governments of the civil wars blueprints, but they have different endgames. One blueprint was used to retain power for the elite, the other is attempting to gain an enormous wealth for their illicit enterprise. Each is equally appalling for the Guatemalan citizens.

Efraín Ríos Montt's political longevity has fostered a society of impunity in Guatemala. Not being held accountable for the human rights violations he committed against the Mayans and other poor people, he paved the way for MS-13 and Barrio 18 to be fearless when it comes to harming anyone in their way.

Claudia Paz y Paz attempted to hold Ríos Montt accountable the devastation he caused so many families, but was blocked by the power he still holds over the country. Direct confrontation with Ríos Montt is career suicide.

### **2015-2016 Outlook in Guatemala**

Corruption has plagued and continues to plague Guatemala. However, there seems to be a turning point away from this corrupt past. Forcing President Otto Pérez Molina, who was aligned with Efraín Ríos Montt, to resign his position in September of 2015 was the first step in the right direction for Guatemala. Pérez Molina is “accused of leading customs fraud network”<sup>177</sup> in which he stole over 3 million dollars of the nation's

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<sup>177</sup> Oswaldo J. Hernandez, “From Guatemala's President to Prisoner In Less than 24 Hours,” *InSight Crime*, September 9, 2015, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/guatemala-president-otto-perez-molina-final-hours-trial> (accessed February 22, 2016).

money. Perez Molina wanted Guatemalans to sympathize with him because he said he was not guilty of this crime. However, pressure to resign his position proved insurmountable for the former military general. Getting Perez Molina to resign his position is not a trivial event. Getting the leader of the nation to rescind his position because of what he was accused of doing is major progress for the Guatemalan justice system. Finally, there is some form of accountability for illegal actions in Guatemala.

To kick start 2016, the justice system seems to be bent on combating corruption in Guatemala. In the city of Antigua, the former mayor and ten officials and private citizens were arrested for possible corruption. This charge is “illicit association, extortion and embezzlement.”<sup>178</sup> While the local gangs and cartels still seem to go unpunished for their actions, it seems that legal and justice system is fighting back against some forms of corruption in Guatemala. Hopefully this will pave the way for justice in other facets of the vast criminal system that is in Guatemala.

Violence, drugs, death, displacement, and money laundering are the features of Guatemalan society today. Efraim Rios Montt set Guatemala onto the path that Guatemalans are now enduring. Lack of faith in the government, military, judicial system, and economic prosperities have put Guatemalans in a predicament they cannot get out of. Restoring Guatemalans faith back into those institutions may never occur. What could change the opinions of Guatemalans would be to prosecute Rios Montt for his crimes against humanity while he is still alive. Since he is an elderly man, the timeframe to convict the former military general shortens by the day. While it would not

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<sup>178</sup> “Guatemala: Antigua ex-mayor among 11 arrested in graft case,” *Associated Press*, January 21, 2016, <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2016/01/21/guatemala-antigua-ex-mayor-among-11-arrested-in-graft-case.html> (accessed February 22, 2016).

cure the distrust Guatemalans have for their institutions, this would be a step in the proper direction to mend the seemingly irreparable wariness.

### **What is Occurring today at the U.S. Border**

In order to stem the flow of refugees coming to the southern border, the United States is paying Mexico to cut off the flow refugees coming from Central America. Mexican troops are at their southern border and are now deporting these refugees back to their homeland. The United States is paying for a barrier that will block these refugees from seeking asylum. Paying the Mexican government tens of millions of dollars to stop the flow of refugees from even getting to the U.S. border, President Obama's administration has employed and "outsourced"<sup>179</sup> another country to block the flow of refugees. Not only is this sad, this is in violation of human beings rights to seek asylum in the world.

For refugees attempting to flee violence in their homeland, the United States is a prime destination. However, the United States fails these refugees seeking security for their lives. From 2004 to 2013, the amount of refugees that the United States accepts has fluctuated from 11,200 to 17,300. Depending on the year, the United States accepts around 200 to 300 Guatemalan asylum seekers.<sup>180</sup> These numbers are abysmally low for a nation with vast quantities of land and resources like the United States. What can be done to accommodate individuals who need help?

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<sup>179</sup> Sonia Nazario, "The Refugees at Our Door," *The New York Times*, October 10, 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/11/opinion/sunday/the-refugees-at-our-door.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/11/opinion/sunday/the-refugees-at-our-door.html?_r=0) (accessed February 3, 2016).

<sup>180</sup> Department of Homeland Security, "2013 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics," August 2014, 49, [http://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/ois\\_yb\\_2013\\_0.pdf](http://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/ois_yb_2013_0.pdf) (accessed February 18, 2016).

In order for the United States to treat this desperate situation in a more humanitarian fashion, the U.S. government needs to expand the social nexus for refugees. Admitting 200 to 300 Guatemalans per year is simply not enough to match the severity of the situation in Guatemala. If Guatemala was a peaceful, prosperous country, 200 to 300 refugees per year would probably seem like too many. However, a country plagued with historic violence, institutional racism, preferential treatment to individuals similar to Rios Montt, and a justice system that fails them time after time, the United States has a moral and ethical obligation to ensure that these human beings are not sent back to their death.

Guatemalans are met with a major amount of animosity upon arriving to the United States. Many U.S. citizens have become very nativist, and anti-immigrant, in the way they approach humans coming to the southern border of the United States. Perpetuating nativist ideas, Presidential candidate Donald Trump does not believe the U.S. should participate in humanitarian activities, such as allowing refugees to reside in the United States. The key staple of Trumpismo is to build a wall on the southern border. The front running, conservative candidate has energized a base of supporters by “vowing to build a massive, impenetrable wall along the U.S.-Mexico frontier to keep out illegal Mexican immigrants.”<sup>181</sup> But this wall would not only keep out people from Mexico, this would keep out anyone from ravaged countries in Latin America. Trump’s focus is directly on keeping Mexicans out of the United States, forcing them to go through a long process to citizenship. To Trump, anyone coming to the border is “Mexican” in theory.

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<sup>181</sup> Jerry Markon, “Trump says building a U.S.-Mexico wall is ‘easy.’ But is it really?,” *The Washington Post*, July 17, 2015, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-on-the-us-mexico-border-building-a-wall-is-easy/2015/07/16/9a619668-2b0c-11e5-bd33-395c05608059\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-on-the-us-mexico-border-building-a-wall-is-easy/2015/07/16/9a619668-2b0c-11e5-bd33-395c05608059_story.html) (accessed February 2, 2016).



Trump conceptualizes anyone coming to the U.S. border as people who are illegally taking advantage of the U.S. immigration system. This is where Mr. Trump misses the point.

People who come to the U.S. border are not coming in an attempt to break the U.S. immigration system. These human beings need to urgently flee the corruption in their homelands in Latin America, so they attempt to get to the United States as soon as possible. Since the immigration process in the United States will not be done in an expedited manner, it becomes too risky for these people to continue to live any longer in their nation. Most of the time, people need to flee their nations without hesitation because of the crime, and they cannot take the chance of staying in their nation.

As is the case I have presented with Guatemala, Guatemalans have not been able to trust their government since the overthrow of President Arbenz in 1954. Middle-aged Guatemalans seeking refuge in the United States remember what Rios Montt did during his time as president from 1982 to 1983; while younger Guatemalans, as well as the middle-aged Guatemalans, are fleeing the violent ridden communities.

MS-13 and Barrio 18 understood Rios Montt's playbook. Have citizens fear you, rule as a caudillo would, and install your vision for how the country will proceed in its operational capacity. Mainly all citizens fear the local gangs in Guatemala. MS-13 and Barrio 18 are not afraid to kill anyone at anytime. Being unhinged in this way creates fear in the minds of the citizens. Not backing down from authorities or other gangs, each transnational criminal organization presents itself in caudillo like fashion. People afraid for their security, may join these gangs to be within the protections of these strongmen.

MS-13 and Barrio 18 have also made it clear their vision for Guatemala will continue at any costs. Growing their drug enterprise, which increases their wealth, will continue no matter what the Guatemalan or U.S. government does to prevent them from accumulating greater economic power. Their vision for Guatemala is to make large sums of money off of the drug industry.

### **Changing Course and Possible Solutions to the U.S. Refugee Crisis**

Sending Guatemalans back to Guatemala would be a travesty. Because the local gangs have so much power throughout Central America, it would be a death sentence for those being sent back. Refugees coming to the U.S. border is an issue that will not go away until the U.S. properly addresses the problems at hand. The U.S. could create solutions to the refugee crisis in one of several ways.

The United States could continue to send aid to nations that are in need. If aid is sent to corrupt nations in Latin America, how can the U.S. be assured that the people who are in need of the money receive it? When corruption is pervasive, for instance as it is in Guatemala, then it becomes very difficult to prove the money is going to causes that benefit the impoverished. This could also burden the U.S. financially, which would eventually slow down, or cease entirely, the amount of aid the U.S. gives to nations in Latin America.

Another option would be to continue to pay Mexico to secure its Southern border, which would lessen the amount of refugees making it to the U.S. border. Nationally, Mexico has many issues to deal with, especially with the cartels. Since the cartels operate large portions of Mexico, they will find ways to continue smuggling refugees to

the United States because it is a lucrative industry for them, with little attachment. Using Mexico in this capacity will also become very expensive. Over time, the United States will decide they need to allot money to other things, and this will prove to be financially too expensive to do for an extended period of time.

The United States could continue their policy of holding refugees in detention centers, pay the privatized system enormous sums of money, and then eventually deport many of those refugees back to their homeland. The refugees would continue to make this long, perilous trek to the United States in hope for a better life, only to realize they would be detained as prisoner and most likely be sent back to their homeland, where they will be seen as traitors to the gangs. This policy is economically expensive for the U.S. government, too.

These status quo options have not created positive solutions for the refugees or the United States. In contrast to these normative solutions, I am suggesting a humanitarian alternative. In a world where security is of utmost importance, this policy will keep security in the forefront while remaining humanitarian in its belief. The United States has the capability to properly vet refugees coming to the United States if resources are focused on doing so. I believe funding that is given to nations with a corrupt regime, the Mexican government, and privatized detention centers in the United States should be channeled into an expedited system to vet refugees. Within this policy, refugees who clear the background check will be admitted into the United States. With major portions of the United States underdeveloped, these new refugees can be settled into communities with the goal of creating economic growth.

This policy would have a much higher cap on refugees than there currently is, but would also realize there is limitations to the amount of people that can be let in. With German Prime Minister Angela Merkel setting the example to give humanitarian need to those who are in need, the United States must follow the path she set. Establishing funds that would put these new refugees to work would allow a quicker assimilation into the United States. The majority of the refugees coming to the United States speak Spanish, so they would be able to settle in quicker than individuals who are not from English or Spanish speaking backgrounds—even though the U.S. should embrace people from all throughout the world.

Embracing refugees would be different from what the U.S. is accustom to in recent memory. The benefits far outweigh the consequences, though. Refugees would be saved from their violent and corrupt homelands, they would have a great appreciation for what the U.S. did to help them, and they would be put to work to make better lives for themselves. The U.S. would become more diverse, unpopulated territories would be able to grow, and the economy would prosper as a result. Expedited backgrounds checks would give the U.S. an opportunity to ensure security for all U.S. citizens, so safety would not be compromised. Giving good-hearted people an opportunity to start a life in which their basic civil liberties were protected would only bode well for the U.S. as a country.

Impunity runs rampant in Guatemala. Efrain Rios Montt is the epitome of a corrupt, self-serving political leader. The religious military general has perpetuated the brokenness Guatemalan finds itself in today. Security is lacking as a result of this. Guatemalans have longed to have a nation which is able to protect their basic civil

liberties. Ironically, a nation that overthrew their democratically elected president in 1954 is the nation these individuals are coming to because its history of democracy. For many Guatemalans, democracy seems to be lost forever. Guatemalans who are seeking democracy, freedom, and security should receive those guarantees in the United States. Eduardo Galeano said, “The task seems to us more than ever necessary now that Latin America, smitten by treason and disillusion and defeat, needs to rebuild its own hopes as if it were a bombed city.”<sup>182</sup> This Latin American can be built within the United States democratic system.

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<sup>182</sup> Galeano, 21.

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