

EXAMINING GUATEMALAN PROCESSES OF
VIOLENCE AND PEACE:
A Review of Recent Research*

Edward L. Cleary
Providence College

OF CENTAURS AND DOVES: GUATEMALA'S PEACE PROCESS. By Susanne Jonas. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 2000. Pp. 299. \$65.00 cloth, \$25.00 paper.)

DICTATING DEMOCRACY: GUATEMALA AND THE END OF VIOLENT REVOLUTION. By Rachel McCleary. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999. Pp. 298. \$49.95 cloth.)

VIOLENT MEMORIES: MAYAN WAR WIDOWS IN GUATEMALA. By Judith Zur. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1998. Pp. 338. \$55.00 cloth.)

GUATEMALA AFTER THE PEACE ACCORDS. Edited by Rachel Sieder. (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, University of London, 1998. Pp. 269. \$19.95 paper.)

A FINGER IN THE WOUND: BODY POLITICS IN QUINCENTENNIAL GUATEMALA. By Diane M. Nelson. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999. Pp. 427. \$55.00 cloth, \$22.00 paper.)

RETURN OF GUATEMALA'S REFUGEES: REWEAVING THE TORN. By Clark Taylor. (Philadelphia, Pa.: Temple University Press, 1998. Pp. 228. \$59.95 cloth, \$19.95 paper.)

After years of virtual silence on Guatemala, the country has become the subject of an abundance of studies and interpretations. These works vary in scope and usefulness to readers, with some interpretations inevitably contested. The six books under review here, however, display an uncommon complementarity. All of them address in one form or another the peace process that began formally in December 1996.

The fact that the Guatemalan Peace Accords were occurring at all exceeded the expectations of many long-term observers in the late 1980s. It

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would have been enough if the shooting had stopped and the massacres had ended. Peace accords promised more than the cessation of armed violence among the army, guerrilla forces, and state-sponsored terrorists. In undertaking the accords, all Guatemalans, the army included, pledged themselves to enact new social arrangements that could grow into more stable and equitable ways of interacting and dealing with ethnic relations.

This situation contrasted markedly with the early 1980s, when a traveler entering Guatemala could find few reliable guides who were willing to speak openly. Even outside the country, many academics with close ties to Guatemala were unwilling to put their observations into print. Not until 1988 was the silence broken, when books like Beatriz Manz's *Refugees of a Hidden War* and Richard Carmack's edited *Harvest of Violence* began to appear.

Academic and other observers of Guatemala were reluctant to endanger in any way those whose lives had become intertwined with outsiders. Some academics shifted their attention entirely to new geographic areas. But a sizable number of distinguished students of Guatemala banded together, especially through the Guatemalan Scholars Network. Their get-togethers at the Latin American Studies Association Congresses or annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association were the more public expression of innumerable informal contacts among these scholars.

Anthropologists, historians, and political scientists have formed the backbone of academic study of Guatemala. Some, like Richard Adams and Kay Warren, created studies that were soon recognized as classics. Their work and those listed in the acknowledgments of the books under review here established a baseline for further substantial research and stimulated an unusually large number of students who are now training another generation of scholars, including Mayans. They are providing new voices expressing a range of theoretical viewpoints, including Marxist perspectives. Two of the six books under review, Susanne Jonas's *Of Centaurs and Doves* and Rachel Sieder's *Guatemala after the Peace Accords*, provide comprehensive treatments that will serve as the spine of the discussion that follows.

No one was in a better position than Susanne Jonas to write the best work to date on the Guatemalan peace process. *Of Centaurs and Doves: Guatemala's Peace Process* rests on more than thirty years of living in the country and shuttling back and forth between Guatemala and California. Of her many writings on Guatemala since 1974, *Of Centaurs and Doves* is her masterpiece, and readers will be grateful for it. Her goal in writing the book was to assemble an adequate account of contemporary Guatemala via binational and multiple perspectives. This undertaking required ten years of high-strung, sometimes dangerous research that kept Jonas on an emotional roller coaster. She remained in constant contact with Guatemalans and interviewed many of the international actors who shepherded the peace process. Jonas also read the mountains of documents produced during the peace negotiations.

To gain a comparative perspective, she interviewed participants in peace processes in other countries.¹

Virtually every longtime observer of Guatemala would agree that something about Guatemala got into one's blood and stayed there. Jonas was drawn into the vortex of a volcano that exploded into a civil war. That war cost two hundred thousand lives and created a million refugees out of a population of some ten million Guatemalans. Jonas's work was dangerous because the Guatemalan army has always regarded researchers as suspects. Threat of reprisal by the army or paramilitary forces was even greater for Guatemalans and foreign residents in Guatemala. Nor has the danger disappeared with the signing of the peace accords. Authors of recent works like Judith Zur felt it necessary to use fictitious names for the places they describe and persons they interviewed.

All the authors under review here discuss the special difficulties encountered in understanding present-day Guatemala. The complexities include multiple ethnicities, classes, religions, indigenous languages, possibly distinct cultures within a pan-Maya world, gender shrouded in timeworn ways of indirect discourse, mistrust of outsiders, and death threats for those who investigated the established order too closely. The longstanding cleavages in Guatemalan society were only compounded by state-sponsored terrorism. This campaign of violence achieved its intended effect: fragmentation and public silence. By the mid-1980s, Guatemala provided no public space for democratic debate about who should control the country or who should benefit from the state's resources.

The Beginning of Internal War

Violence began to descend on Guatemala after the period from 1944 to 1954, which Jonas calls "the democratic nationalist revolution." CIA-sponsored army and civilian allies brought a bloody end to reformist experiments. Armed insurgency in the early 1960s drew the United States further into Guatemalan life. U.S. military missions helped shape Guatemala's army into an internal killing machine, the first modern counterinsurgency military in Latin America. The horror began as the army turned, often indiscriminately, on its own citizens.

The military almost defeated the revolutionary movement in 1966–1968 but failed in the end. One merit of Jonas's approach is her attempt to describe all sides of the conflicts. In *Of Centaurs and Doves*, she analyzes the large and small failings and injustices of the insurgents, as well as those of

1. Two other recent edited works further illuminate the Guatemalan case and provide a comparative perspective. See *Repression, Resistance, and Democratic Transition in Central America*, edited by Thomas Walker and Ariel Armony (2000); and *Comparative Peace Processes in Central America*, edited by Cynthia Arnson (1999).

the military and their allies. The insurgents regrouped after their near collapse. The ruling class also regrouped and diversified by including the upper ranks of military officers. They thus redefined the alliance between the governing elites and the army to the military's benefit. A fuller account of the army would have included its increasing economic reach in enterprises, such as military ownership of a bank and its branches throughout the country, parking garages, and stores, and informal military takeover of land in El Petén and elsewhere. The army and the state became increasingly fused. The military also took charge of more than forty semi-autonomous state institutions and purchased a television channel.²

When the insurgents challenged the army in the early 1980s, they drew furious attacks and massacres of thousands of possible insurgent supporters. The government violence did not center on guerrilla hamlets or urban safe houses but extended over most aspects of Guatemalan life. As a consequence, Jonas notes, normal electoral politics lost almost all meaning. Even typical labor organizing, like the celebrated case at Coca-Cola, came to have murderous implications.

The central group dominant in Guatemala from 1954 until the peace accords rejected even the mild reforms proposed by the Christian Democrats, the Catholic Church (via cooperatives and credit unions), and other sectors. Through its paramilitary forces, the army had a hand in killing some four hundred Christian Democratic leaders and more than a dozen parish priests and teaching brothers. A great silence enshrouded Guatemala. Beginning in the early 1980s, most academics ceased publishing anything that would endanger informants.

During this Holocaust-like period, the idea of protective accompaniment fostered by the Peace Brigades International and one of the Guatemalan widows' group was created. Liam Mahony and Luis Enrique Eguren have detailed in *Unarmed Body Guards* (1997) the story of hundreds of foreigners who moved in with Guatemalans who had been threatened with death. The fact that massacres were occurring at a high rate was incontestable, but newspapers like the *New York Times* tried to keep the figures as low as possible, largely under pressure from officials at the U.S. State Department.³

The Long Search for Peace

Jonas centers her attention in *Of Centaurs and Doves* not on the past violence but on the actors and motivations that led to the signing of the peace accords. The strength of her account lies in showing the wide range of actors responsible for this achievement. Jonas's treatment gives ample space

2. For more detail, see George Black's essay "Military Rule in Guatemala," in *The Politics of Antipolitics*, edited by Brian Loveman and Thomas Davies (1989).

3. See Jonas's mini-history of statistics in the notes to the first chapter.

to transnational actors and an internal peace movement beyond the major contenders, the insurgents and the forces of the military and ruling elite.

Hopes for ending violence and bringing a measure of peace to Guatemala emerged in Central America through the Esquipulas meetings of regional heads of state. When the Esquipulas II Peace Accords of 1987 did not bring immediate progress, Catholics and Lutherans formed an international ecumenical peace delegation. The group persuaded an influential sector of the Guatemalan army to allow the Comisión Nacional de Reconciliación (CNR) to hold talks with the united guerrilla group, the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (UNRG), in Oslo in March 1990. In the next step, the UNRG met separately with five sectors of Guatemalan society. It met with representatives of the religious sector of Guatemalan society in Quito in September 1990. This meeting established an agenda of political and other issues to be resolved in a peace settlement.

Jonas believes that beginning in early 1990, both the UNRG and the Guatemalan government were finally willing to admit that the war could not be won militarily by either side. Contentious factions in each sector, however, guaranteed that the process from 1990 to the accords in late 1996 would be arduous and convoluted.

The Oslo initiative demonstrated a small but important step taken through the cooperation of many transnational actors. Lutheran pastors in the United States and Scandinavia convinced the Lutheran World Federation to form a peace team and sponsor a variety of mostly behind-the-scenes efforts. Connections of state churches of Norway and Sweden helped bring their governments into the process. The Vatican's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the Guatemalan Catholic bishops, the Catholic Episcopal Secretariat for Central America, and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops all joined in the cooperative effort. This venture was later widened and deepened.

Rodolfo Quezada Toruño, Bishop of Zacapa, became chief delegate of the Catholic Church to the Comisión Nacional de Reconciliación (CNR) and its president as well. Bishop Juan Gerardi Conedara, auxiliary of Guatemala City, became Quezada's backup. Prominent neo-Pentecostal layman Jorge Serrano Elías (later a controversial president) also served on the CNR. It promoted an unusual initiative in 1989 by sponsoring the *Diálogo Nacional*. This dialogue opened the way for Guatemalan civil society to enter the national discussion. Some sixty organizations took part, with many participants coming from six church groups.⁴

Rachel McCleary provides an invaluable account of a key event in contemporary Guatemalan history, which occurred in May and June 1993. *Dictating Democracy: Guatemala and the End of Violent Revolution* shows thor-

4. Bruce Calder has described the participation of the religious sector in papers presented to the Latin American Studies Association International Congresses.

oughly how these months turned into an extraordinary period when the elected president Jorge Serrano attempted in an *autogolpe* to take over the other branches of government. McCleary demonstrates how the economic elite, embodied in the main private-sector organization, the Comité Coordinador de Asociaciones Agrícolas, Comerciales, Industriales y Financieras (CACIF), convinced the army not to intervene but to insist on following a constitutional path, as interpreted controversially by the judiciary.

Much can be learned from *Dictating Democracy*, despite its limited focus as a monograph. The work is not history wrapped in the full accounting of the context that propelled the elite agreement. Nor does it take into enough account the various actions of the international and domestic actors who were part of the peace process.

Jonas points out the importance as well as the limitations of the army-elite agreement: "This bilateral phase was a necessary first stage in Guatemala, given the strong resistances by the army and big business (CACIF) to any negotiations with the UNRG" (p. 42). But she also makes clear that the pact provided space and time for the coalescing of other political forces in civil society with a keen interest in resolving the substantive issues and with enough accumulated strength to be taken seriously.

This process nonetheless ran up against the limits of operating in a purely Guatemalan context, without the added weight of the United Nations and the international community to overcome strong internal resistance. The importance of the international community became obvious during "the Serranazo" in May and June of 1993. Major countries like the United States and Germany threatened to withhold trade as well as aid unless constitutional order was immediately restored. According to Jonas, "Faced with the threat of economic sanctions, CACIF (previously divided over the Serranazo) was persuaded to abandon the pro-golpe forces and leaned on the army as an institution to do likewise" (p. 42).

When the *Diálogo Nacional* collapsed after two years, the vibrant civil sector stepped forward with a new initiative for peace in 1994. Religious groups and popular organizations, now numbering in the hundreds, formed the *Asamblea de Sectores Civiles* (ASC). This group proposed consensus positions on peace issues and decided whether or not to ratify accords completed in high-level negotiations.

Many leaders and participants came forward to form the peace movement. Movement members struggled to create a national constituency for peace that would be actively aware of the peace negotiations. In a society with no experience in open reporting in the media, movement participants pressured press and radio directors to report peace negotiations. They also marched in demonstrations, held ecumenical services, and discussed refugee concerns, resettlement, and human rights.

The signing of accords went on from 1991 to the extremely tense period in late 1996, when hearts almost gave out waiting for the signatures

to be affixed before the New Year's deadline. Jonas describes in an early chapter of her book each of the documents, their content, and the contentions surrounding them. She notes that the missing accord was one delineating women's rights. The impact of this regrettable omission can be measured in Judith Zur's accounts of indigenous women and their quadruple burden of being women, widowed, indigenous, and poor in Guatemala. Zur brought unusual sensitivity and her training in family therapy to *Violent Memories: Mayan War Widows in Guatemala*. She was aware that the method she employed might be psychologically harmful to subjects in that the life-history approach could induce confusion rather than illumination (p. 21). She too faced ethical questions of endangering others in interviewing them under the gaze of those carrying on state-sponsored terrorism. Her volume complements Linda Green's excellent *Fear as a Way of Life: Mayan Widows in Rural Guatemala* (1999).

Zur integrates poignantly information about local communities and their involvement in the war, giving haunting details of ambushes and murders. The crux of *Violent Memories* is the chapter on women's lives as widows. Readers meet women forced to take on traditionally male roles to varying degrees, as the system of economic and labor support they had come to expect was destroyed. Zur then calls attention to the widows' attempts to form new meaning in their lives. Her fieldwork was completed and her dissertation accepted before the final peace accords. But her conclusion that K'iche' people are still paying dearly for the psychological and economic costs of the disaster that befell them seems true.

Implementation Wars

Jonas concentrates in the first half of *Of Centaurs and Doves* on describing how it was possible for a peace process to emerge. The optimism shown becomes muted in the second half, which deals with what she calls "implementation wars." Some of the major issues to be dealt with in the phase since late 1996 to the present are ably presented in Rachel Sieder's edited volume. Less than a year after the peace accords were signed, the Institute of Latin American Studies at the University of London sponsored a conference. The resulting volume, *Guatemala after the Peace Accords*, features contributions by key Guatemalans, including the current president, Alfonso Portillo Cabrera, as well as by experts on Guatemala, some writing in Spanish. Because the conference took place so soon after the agreement, however, it could not provide a comprehensive assessment but rather an account of the challenges and opportunities as then perceived.

Guatemala after the Peace Accords concentrates on demilitarization, indigenous rights (seven of fourteen chapters), and political reforms. Two contributions on the military have special worth because of the expertise of

Jennifer Schirmer and Edgar Gutiérrez. They consider comprehensively what some observers believe is the central issue: what is the role of the army in peacetime? Both point out that the Guatemalan army has interests that continue to impel it to monitor society. Even more, the collapse of civilian police forces brought the army into play for “internal defense.” Schirmer and Gutiérrez are rightly skeptical of such a role.

David Stoll also addresses militarization, but from the vantage point of human rights, land rights, land conflict, and memory in Ixil. He finds the military not very important in the lives of Ixil peasants in 1997. His target is not the military but the human rights movement. Stoll believes that participants in the movement are being deployed too broadly and “blind us to the complexities that need to be taken into account” (p. 56). He argues that human rights groups stake out partisan positions and would be better off being mediators rather than advocates. Stoll discusses the profound difficulties in determining what took place, in establishing memory. The quasi-judicial nature of human rights work, he believes, skews the task of establishing memory because the approach “holds out the hope that a more or less objective version of events can be established” (p. 55). Frank LaRue, a highly respected Guatemalan human rights lawyer, squared off against Stoll. The ensuing discussion brought sparks from the conference audience about Stoll’s depictions of the army and the human rights movement.

The largest section of *Guatemala after the Peace Accords* deals with indigenous rights. Demetrio Cojtí Cuxil, one of the foremost Mayan intellectuals in Guatemala, proposes several reforms of a state that continues discriminatory practices, especially against indigenous persons. Roger Plant, who served in the United Nations Mission to Guatemala, points out the difficulties in implementing the ramifications of indigenous policy for twenty-three language groups in a small country with limited resources.⁵ Sieder demonstrates how customary law offers a more legitimate and accessible rule of law than the system currently in place, which is authoritarian and discriminatory.

Another section of *Guatemala after the Peace Accords* deals with the delicate issues of establishing the truth about what human rights abuses occurred and seeking justice. The discussions were useful at the time but now must be guided by the documents of three groups dealing with truth and memory: the Catholic Church, a nongovernmental human rights group (the Centro Internacional para Investigaciones en Derechos Humanos), and the UN-sponsored Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico.

5. Plant also published “Indigenous Rights and Latin American Multiculturalism: Lessons from the Guatemalan Peace Process,” in *The Challenge of Diversity: Indigenous Peoples and the Reform of the State*, edited by Willem Assies et al. (n.d.). This volume was the product of a symposium held at the University of Amsterdam.

The investigations of these three groups are crucial to understanding the conduct of the war, the compromises involved in establishing a public memory, and the rage that threatened the lives of some involved in the truth-telling process. Once armed conflict between the UNRG and the Guatemalan army ceased, some members of the peace movement were determined to establish a public record of gross human rights violations. A nongovernmental project of the Centro Internacional para Investigaciones en Derechos Humanos collected thousands of testimonies through mass-based, largely indigenous organizations. Better known was the Catholic Church's initiative in establishing the *Recuperación de Histórica Memoria Interdiocesana* (REHMI). The painstaking effort expended in compiling the report was enormous. The report was issued by Orbis Books in 1999 in an English-language summary entitled *Guatemala: Never Again*. Two days later, the chief spokesman for the project, Bishop Juan Gerardi, was beaten to death. Other project leaders were threatened and intimidated.

The Catholic Church's report was reinforced by the internationally sponsored Commission for Historical Clarification's *Guatemala: Memory of Silence* (1999). The example set by the Salvadoran military forces in agreeing to a truth commission in that country influenced the Guatemalan military to agree in 1994 to a truth commission for Guatemala. Many months passed before the commission took up its work, however. Only the careful tutelage of the United Nations and its security arrangements allowed the commission to conduct its sensitive interviews and publish a report.

The report dropped like a bombshell when its conclusions were announced to thousands at the Teatro Nacional in Guatemala City. The report detailed acts of extreme cruelty and assigned culpability to the forces responsible, but not to the individuals. Ninety-three percent of the violations were attributed to the Guatemalan military or state-backed paramilitary forces. Three per cent were attributed to the guerrilla forces.

The commission made it clear that the group that had borne the greatest brunt of the violence was the indigenous population. The report stated, "agents of the State of Guatemala, within the framework of counter-insurgency operations carried out between 1981 and 1983, committed acts of genocide against groups of Mayan people" (CMC 1999, 41). Further, "the majority of human rights violations occurred with the knowledge or by the order of the highest authorities of the state" (CMC 1999, 38).⁶

The Guatemalan Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico figures prominently in Priscilla Hayner's long-awaited comparative study of truth

6. For those adept at reading Spanish, the nine volumes of the Truth Commissions are available through F & G Editores in Guatemala City. In English, only the conclusions and recommendations have been provided by the Commission for Historical Clarification in Guatemala City (CMC 1999). Both Spanish and English versions of the conclusions and recommendations are available at <<http://hrdata.aaas.org/ceh>>.

commissions, published recently as *Unspeakable Truths: Confronting State Terror and Atrocity* (2001). The greater weight of the Guatemalan accomplishment becomes apparent when stacking up what was done in Guatemala and in other countries. Guatemala was fortunate in having a larger budget, staff, and organizational resources than most of the other countries. But the unfinished aspects of the Guatemalan commission's efforts also come to mind in early 2001, as forensic teams are digging through areas of Alta Verapaz and elsewhere in hopes of bringing closure to this aspect of Mayan suffering.

The heroic efforts of Clyde Snow and other forensic anthropologists were highlighted at the national meeting of the American Anthropological Association in November 2000. In an invited session entitled "Uncovering the 'Disappeared,'" Snow and his colleagues made it clear that the work of establishing what happened during Guatemala's years of terror is far from over. Even so, Guatemala as well as Argentina have taken a major step forward in establishing their own teams for the task. Fredy Peccerelli heads the efforts of the Foundation for Forensic Anthropology of Guatemala.

Jonas devotes a chapter in *Of Centaurs and Doves* to the role played by the United States in Guatemalan violence and the postwar period. Her take on this relationship reflects more than thirty years of trying to establish what the United States did publicly and secretly. Books written on the U.S.-Guatemalan relationship in the twentieth century, especially since 1954, now comprise a notable subfield.⁷

It may be that not enough is known about activist Kate Doyle and the National Security Archive's contributions to the Guatemala Truth Commission and other efforts to clarify the United States' involvement in other countries' affairs. Over the last fifteen years, the National Security Archive has operated as a nongovernmental organization in Washington, D.C.. In the process, the group gained considerable expertise in the arcane world of applying for the declassification of U.S. government material. The archive made thousands of requests and obtained large quantities of material. To aid in research for the Guatemalan Truth Commission report, the archive used two to six persons a day for five years looking over materials available in the Washington area and through presidential libraries in other parts of the United States.

Beyond delineating aspects of U.S. involvement, the National Security Archive furnished eight thousand pieces of data on the Guatemalan military. These data helped to establish budgets and force strength and to track where Guatemalan officers were based at any given time, what units

7. See the bibliography in Schirmer's *The Guatemalan Military Project* (1998). Harvard University Press recently reissued the invaluable *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* (1999), by Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer. Stanford University Press brought out Nick Cullather's *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954* (1999).

were in the region when massacres occurred, and similar details in the years from 1960 to 1996. The Guatemalan military has not been forthcoming with such records.⁸

Two accounts have been published of a well-known case involving a U.S. citizen caught up in the Guatemalan violence. Jennifer Harbury detailed her struggle with both the Guatemalan and United States governments for information about her husband in *Searching for Everardo* (1997). She previously published an eminently readable account of her attempts to make contact with the guerrillas in *Bridge of Courage* (1994).

Issues That Remain

In the final section of the Sieder collection on political reform in Guatemala, Anna Vineguard compares the insurgent UNRG with other guerrilla groups that attempted to turn themselves into effective parties. She notes the consistent failure of Latin American leftist parties to provide viable alternatives to the so-called neoliberal agenda. Vineguard may have set the standard for success too high. One could argue that the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) in Brazil and similar parties are hardly failed enterprises and are carrying out programs of social justice that free-market proponents would rather ignore. The most poignant chapter in *Guatemala after the Peace Accords* appears in this section. Rosalina Tuyuc, an indigenous woman and vice-president of the Guatemalan Congress at the time of the London conference, recounts the small advances made by indigenous groups in Guatemala, her struggle to be heard as a member of the Congress, and the ongoing intimidation through violence or direct threats to family members.

Sieder provides an excellent summary for the first stage of the peace implementation process, describing internal events and external factors. The major themes presented remain salient: demilitarization, reframing the nation-state, participation and representation, accountability and historical memory, and citizenship.

Diane Nelson enters deeply into these themes in *A Finger in the Wound: Body Politics in Quincentennial Guatemala*, the product of fourteen years of thinking about reframing the Guatemalan nation-state and participation. She focuses on Mayan organizing and state-society responses as well as ladino and Maya struggles to form state policy. Nelson demonstrates unusual analytical sophistication on race and ethnic relations, gender relations, and state-civil society relations. She depicts vividly the past hostility of the state or governing classes to Mayan cultures and the recent slight opening. The book is suffused by considerations of gender. After finishing it, readers

8. Kate Doyle described the situation in a paper presented to the Latin American Studies Association, 24–26 Sept. 1998 in Chicago. Information about Guatemala is available at <www.nsarchive.org>.

will never again be able to ignore this crucial component of Guatemalan society.

A Finger in the Wound offers a Marxist, feminist, and postmodern interpretation of Guatemalan society. Nelson's analysis builds on the work of Carol Smith and Brackette Williams, who have insisted that ethnicity and nation cannot be understood without investigating the state. Nelson also engaged in "committed anthropology" by seizing every chance she could to talk or write about the unjust situation in Guatemala.

Nelson thus provides an important new voice. She is a beguiling writer, although the long volume contains too many personal asides. Her use of metaphorical language is helpful in understanding complex issues such as the meaning of the state in Guatemala. Her honesty is also engaging. She describes her project as relational and deeply partial, in both senses of being incomplete and extremely subjective. Nelson is well aware of her ambiguous position in Guatemala as a gringa anthropologist.

Doubts creep in nevertheless about some of the broad and unqualified statements that Nelson sometimes makes about Guatemalan society: "Mayan relations with the [Catholic] Church are also ambivalent." Or, "Maya are similarly ambivalent about the growing power of Protestant (usually fundamentalist) Christianity" (p. 140). Empirical evidence about religion is not incorporated well in Nelson's sometimes sweeping generalizations.

Did Marxist analysis with its real or imputed record of dealing perfunctorily with religion get in the way? Nelson's treatment of religion is less effective than another Marxist analysis of Guatemalan religion in Linda Green's *Fear as a Way of Life: Mayan Widows in Rural Guatemala* (1999). Green devoted an entire chapter to religion that looks carefully at what anthropologists and other researchers have found about religion in Guatemala. Green's dialectical method also adds to understanding of nuances of grass-roots religion.

Nelson states that the role of the Guatemalan army is the structuring but absent presence of *A Finger in the Wound*. The central role of the army is never in doubt in Susanne Jonas's study, but Jonas disagrees with views that the army initiated the peace process or turned the peace accords into its own project. She thus disputes the view expressed by Jennifer Schirmer in *The Guatemalan Peace Project: A Violence Called Democracy* (1998) over army domination of the peace accords. Overestimating the army's role in the peace process underplays the role of other actors. Accepting the rhetoric of army officials at face value also implies that civil actors have a relatively hopeless task in front of them.

In discussions about civil actors in Guatemala at the American Anthropological Association meeting in November 2000, some expressed the fear that individuals and organizations making up Guatemalan civil society seem to be weakening through fragmentation. In contrast, Clark Taylor's *Return of Guatemala's Refugees: Reweaving the Torn* shows Guatemalans re-

building their lives through cooperation.⁹ His book provides a valuable, albeit incomplete, account of the heroic community of Santa María de Tzejá. Its members suffered persecution, dispersion to other parts of Guatemala, and exile to Mexico, but they are rebuilding their community lives since returning to Ixcán. Santa María de Tzejá was created in 1969 as a colonization project in the Ixcán jungle. The Catholic diocese of El Quiché was represented by Luis Gurriarán, a Spanish priest from the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. Members of this missionary congregation and other foreign missionaries in the diocese were attempting to establish an orthodox Catholicism through Catholic Action and moderate reform through cooperatives and credit unions.

By emphasizing cooperatives, the community of Santa María de Tzejá improved over thirteen arduous years until military violence destroyed the village and its main buildings in 1982. Half the community sought life in exile in Mexico, while the other half dispersed in Guatemala. Anthropologist Beatriz Manz encountered Santa María in 1973. After the 1982 massacre, she dared to return to the military-controlled village area to survey the situation, traveling back and forth between Santa María and refugee camps in Mexico and carrying photos and news. These efforts helped to sustain hope and make reentry easier. Manz continued to observe exiled community members in Mexico and early on published *Refugees of a Hidden War* (1988). She still serves as a key ally and advocate for Santa María de Tzejá.

The community reestablished itself beginning in 1994. The first year was filled with tension over unresolved issues between returnees and those who stayed in Guatemala. But the experience of living in a wider world in Mexico had convinced exiles of the value of education. The new primary and middle schools, with a strong teacher corps, became central integrating factors in the community. The schools also served as magnets in the region, drawing students from neighboring villages. Taylor tells his story from the point of view of an outsider, framed by his academic discipline of community service. He ends by outlining the lessons learned from the Santa María experience. Perhaps the greatest was the sustaining power of hope nurtured in community.¹⁰

9. Other recent works on Guatemalan exiles include a joint publication by Canadian and Guatemalan scholars. See *Journeys of Fear: Refugee Return and National Transformation in Guatemala* (1999), edited by Liisa North and Alan B. Simmons; and *Voices from Exile: Violence and Survival in Modern Maya History* (1999) by Victor D. Montejo, a well-published Mayan scholar.

10. This book was published as *De la memoria a la reconstrucción histórica* (Manz, Oglesby, and García Noval 1999). A fuller story of this heroic community will be unfolded in Beatriz Manz's "Terror, Grief, and Recovery: Genocidal Trauma in a Mayan Village in Guatemala," in *Annihilating Difference: The Anthropology of Genocide*, edited by Alex Hinton, in press, University of California Press. In their 1999 book, Manz, Elizabeth Oglesby, and José García Noval develop the crucial factors of memory and context further than Taylor does.

The light shone on Guatemala by the works reviewed here illumine both the peace processes and the institutional weaknesses that remain. Violence, especially common crime and a measure of paramilitary terrorism against human rights advocates and members of the judicial system, continue. But the fragile peace holds.

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