

Transnational Politics of Road Building in 1960s Petén, Guatemala

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Transnational Politics of Road Building in 1960s Petén, Guatemala**

**Barbara Bottini-Havrillay**

In the 1960s, as part of the US government's Cold War strategy to fight communism in Latin America, the US and the Guatemalan militaries performed joint road development efforts to open Guatemala's frontier region of Petén for agriculture and economic development. Two decades later, the same militaries that managed these road projects in Petén committed genocide against the indigenous Maya in other parts of Guatemala. While violence that took place in Petén is not considered genocide, it was part of a period in the civil war in which military violence was classified as genocidal by the UN. Despite previous findings that new roads in Petén were a catalyst of military violence, road building in Petén has yet to be studied comprehensively from this perspective. Drawing on oral history interviews with former US military advisors, photo albums, memoirs and newspaper articles collected at the Center for Mesoamerican Research in Guatemala, this study discusses how making roads in Petén assisted in creating the ideological preconditions and means of transport for the Guatemalan military. More precisely, this paper examines how road building and its military leadership improved the logistical capabilities of the military in Petén and reinforced eugenic ideologies about the "racial health" of the Guatemalan nation.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>CEH</b>	Comision de Esclarecimiento Historico (Commission for Historical Clarification)
<b>CIA</b>	United States Central Intelligence Agency
<b>EGP</b>	Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres (Guerrilla Army of the Poor)
<b>FAR</b>	Fuerzas Armadas Rebeles (Rebel Armed Forces)
<b>FAFG</b>	Fundacion de Antropologia Forense de Guatemala (Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation)
<b>FYDEP</b>	Empresa Nacional de Fomento y Desarollo de Peten (National Enterprise for Economic development of Petén)
<b>INTA</b>	Instituto Nacional de Transformacion Agraria (National Institute of Agrarian Transformation)
<b>MCA</b>	Military Civic Action
<b>MR-13</b>	Movimiento Revolucionario 13 Noviembre (Revolutionary Movement 13 <sup>th</sup> November)
<b>ODHAG</b>	Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Arzobispado de Guatemala (Human Rights Office of the Archdiocese of Guatemala)
<b>PAC</b>	Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil (Civil Patrols)
<b>PGT</b>	Partido Guatemalteco de los Trabajadores
<b>REMHI</b>	Recovery of Historical Memory Project
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNGC</b>	The United Nations Genocide Convention
<b>URNG</b>	Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity)
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development

## Chapter I. Introduction

Road

*Noun* \rōd\

- : A hard flat surface for vehicles, people, and animals to travel on
- : A process or a course of action that leads to a certain result

Certainly, one could go into lengthy reflections on why Nazi holocaust finally set in motion the mechanisms that legitimized the genocide discipline. In fact, the Nazis are considered to be among the first to use modern technologies to increase the efficiency of genocidal killing.<sup>1</sup> This goes back to thoughts of Hannah Arendt when she argues that the very instruments of modern era believed to facilitate human progress are also the ones helping to create the conditions for barbarities.<sup>2</sup> Bauman (2013) takes this point even further when he argues that modernity was a necessary “ingredient” in the making of a genocide.

At the essence, it is not surprising that it was the Nazis and their use of transportation technologies and multi-media propaganda that got people thinking about genocide and its prevention. Genocides of the last century are a reminder that we need to be more vigilant to how states can manipulate modern technologies in order to fulfill their violent political agendas. For that reason, the general premise of this research is in support of an idea that genocides of the modern era need to be examined by taking into account elements of modernity. (Cushman, 2003; Petersen, Mennecke & Markusen, 2003; Bauman, 2013). Better quality transportation and the

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<sup>1</sup>Beginning of “modernity” generally dates back to the Enlightenment era. Scholars commonly suggest that the European enlightenment had a sinister side from the onset. For example, in the book *“The Late Victorian Holocausts: El Nino Famines and the Making of the Third World”* Mike Davis shows that as early as 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, Colonial powers used various modern technologies and tools to repress the indigenous populations all around the world (Davis 2001).

<sup>2</sup>Along with Raphael Lemkin (1<sup>st</sup> to coin the term genocide in 1944) and others, Hannah Arendt is considered one of the founders of the genocide discipline. Arendt was one of the first to pioneer the idea that genocide was an outgrowth of modern era (Source: Stone 2011).

associated increased mobility is an important element of modernity. The speed and ease with which transportation infrastructures such as roads can be built in modern era is critical to understand modern age violence.

When people think of a road, they usually think of a hard flat surface as expressed in the definition at the beginning of this paper. However, the premise this research builds upon is closely related to the second definition. In an attempt to redefine roads and road making more precisely, we must shift the paradigm vastly beyond the common definition. In order to articulate the true depth and breadth of what road making truly is, we begin by redefining it as a process resulting in certain consequences. This requires thinking outside the box imagining roads beyond their modal use and conceptualizing their many manifestations and uses within a socio-political context.

As an integral part of a country's transportation system, roads constitute the primary building blocks of a nation. Roads not only signify economic development and commerce but also state control, political domination and conquest. Yet, the fundamental importance of roads is often left unrecognized. . This is ironic as road building is the starting point of every colonization and nation building effort. In the words of a four star general and a former head of the US Southern Command I interviewed for this research,

You know, if there is a road there penetrating land, people will use the road. You build a road and as they say: the people will use it, they will come. And your populace will spread; land will be developed, little cottage industries will develop, stores will be built etc., towns will be developed, schools will be built, yeah. The road, I would say, in developing and opening up your interior, a road is the most important infrastructural development ...look what the railroad did for the United States, once we got across particularly, the Mississippi...First it was the Conestoga wagon, the wagon trails, the Oregon Trail, the Santa Fe Trail etc... Then, after the wagon trails, came the roads, then came railroads, then came improved roads, then came the wire, the telegraph, then the

telephone, then the canals. Yeah, roads are absolutely fundamental; you will never develop without the road.

Logistically, many economic and cultural activities are often preceded by a road. Roads are also a socio-political tool that is much more than an infrastructure that gets people from point A to a point B. The vital result of building new roads is nurturing growth socially, economically and politically. However, as illustrated through the commonly used example about the connection between roads and the US economic prosperity expressed in the above quote, we are instantly reminded how easy it is to forget the ominous side of road making. Roads were means to access wealth on the U.S. frontiers, yet, roads also facilitated a very violent component of our history which led to mass genocide of the First Nations. Throughout the history of Western colonialism in the Americas, settling new lands in the “New World” and the mass killings of its native people went hand in hand.

Historically, “roads are inseparable from the larger political, cultural, and technological frameworks in which they are embedded” (Freed 2010, pg.206). In Eugene Weber’s historical analysis of 19<sup>th</sup> century France, he is one of the first to point out that roads are a fundamental vectors of state authority (Weber 1976). In his chapter titled “Roads, Roads, Roads,” Weber argues that roads helped unify France politically, economically and even culturally. Going back to antiquity, Greek historian Dionysius of Halicarnassus acknowledges the importance of roads when he writes, “the extraordinary greatness of the Roman Empire manifests itself in three things: the aqueducts, the paved roads, and the construction of the drains” (Quilici 2008, pg.552).

As the quote hints, roads in ancient Rome not only served as means of communication and trade but most importantly, they were Rome's strongest military asset.<sup>3</sup>

Under new postcolonial pretext of “development” and the alleged need for modernization, roadways became the primary means of raw resource exploitation, market expansion, acculturation (westernization) and movement of troops in today’s “global south.”<sup>4</sup> Ultimately, road development not only yields more profits for the West but allow for greater control and mobility. As Freed observed, “roads could bring not only trade and friends but enemies as well” (2010 pg. 207). In fact, due to technological flexibility and minimal costs of road building with the use of local cheap labor, motorways became the most widespread instrument of control over space in the “Third world” (Debrie, 2010; Freed 2010). Hence, it is easy to understand why road building needs to be viewed as a critical precursor to systematic state violence.

In 1960s Guatemala, the focus of this thesis, the US and the Guatemalan militaries began road building projects to open up Guatemala’s northern frontier region of Petén. This was part of a larger US economic development plans to “modernize” Latin America during the Cold War (Brands 2010). For Washington, road building in Petén was just another Cold War strategy designed to fight communism and to hasten economic development of Guatemala. However, from the perspective of the Guatemalan military leaders, conquering new frontiers was a long wanted nationalist vision hoped to not only boost the economy but also to racially “whiten” the nation by assimilating the indigenous Guatemalans into Ladinos (Casasola 1968). These are

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<sup>3</sup>At the peak of Rome's development, no fewer than 29 great military highways radiated from the capital, and the Late Empire's 113 provinces were interconnected by 372 great road links. The whole comprised more than 400,000 km of roads (Richard 2002).

<sup>4</sup>The idea that “development” is a fictitious construct invented by the West to help advance neocolonial strategies in the “underdeveloped” parts of the world (also commonly referred to as “third world”) is attributed to Arturo Escobar (1988)

similar racist ideologies that Guatemalan Clarification Commission (1999) found to be behind the genocide against the Maya that took place in some regions of Guatemala.<sup>5</sup>

I began this thesis introduction with a brief discussion of the Holocaust because one of the key differences about its organic development was the way railroads managed to bring victims to the killers rather than the killers going to the victims.<sup>6</sup> Yet, the connection between modern transportation technologies and the repressive nation-states' predispositions and capabilities to commit mass violence is repeatedly underestimated. In particular, road building has received inconsistent emphasis in genocide literature. Few exceptions include Jomini, 1862; Adalian, 1999; Hyndman & De Alwis, 2002 and Zhukov, 2012. As I began thinking about how to approach the topic of road building in 1960s Petén and its connection to violence in Guatemala, I looked into genocide literature and I found an interesting idea presented by Stanton (2008) in his work titled "*The 8 Stages of genocide*" where he categorizes transportation infrastructure such as road making as part of the 6<sup>th</sup> stage (Preparation) of the genocidal process. This is why I decided to test Stanton's theory and study how road building in Petén may have contributed towards the preconditions and intensity of violence in Guatemala.

This research argues that road making in Petén may have been part of the larger military planning prior to the 1980s counterinsurgency. The road construction in Petén contributed to the violence in Guatemala in two ways: logically and ideologically. The argument of this thesis is, first, new roads helped in carrying out the violence in Petén because transportation is a key logistical component of military success in combat. Second, the racist ideologies of the military road planners in the 1960s helped reinforce racism towards the Maya. These racist ideologies

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<sup>5</sup>The Nazis applied a similar strategy in Poland and Russia- they called it "Germanizing." See also Chapter 5 for a discussion of racist ideology of "whitening" in Guatemala

<sup>6</sup>Turks might have tried to implement this method during the Armenian genocide (1915) as well. Turks also pioneered the use of telegraph and trains to improve genocidal killing efficiency prior to the Nazis (Adalian 1999).

closely resembled the ideologies responsible for the period of violence in Guatemala considered genocidal.

This thesis is structured as follows, I begin by introducing the region that serves as the empirical focus of this study. Then I provide a short overview of the background information necessary to understand the historical complexities of this research. Next, I review the existing literature as I set up a space for my analysis of road building in Petén and its significance. In the following methodology sections I discuss various qualitative and quantitative research methodologies utilized to yield my final findings. I divided the empirical part of my thesis into two distinct chapters that are organized to complement each other and examine road building in Petén and its relation to the 1980s violence from two different angles. In the first chapter, I show what the military leaders in Petén were thinking and the ideologies that were accompanying their road making in the 1960s. In the second chapter, using mapping analysis, I show how the military utilized the new built roads in Petén during the 1980s. I chose this order of the two chapters to also show chronologically what happened. In other words, after I show the ideological setting of the military in the 1960s, I follow by mapping how violence in Petén correlated with the locations of the newly built roads. Finally, in my concluding remarks I discuss this episode of violence in Guatemala and how road building and subsequent near-to-road military violence in Petén relates to a larger patterns of genocidal violence that occurred in other parts of the country during the civil war.

## Chapter II. Context of Research

### *Petén*

Petén is the northernmost department of the third largest and the most populous country in Central America, Guatemala. In order to better understand the geographical setting of this study, some general facts about the region of Petén are to be discussed.

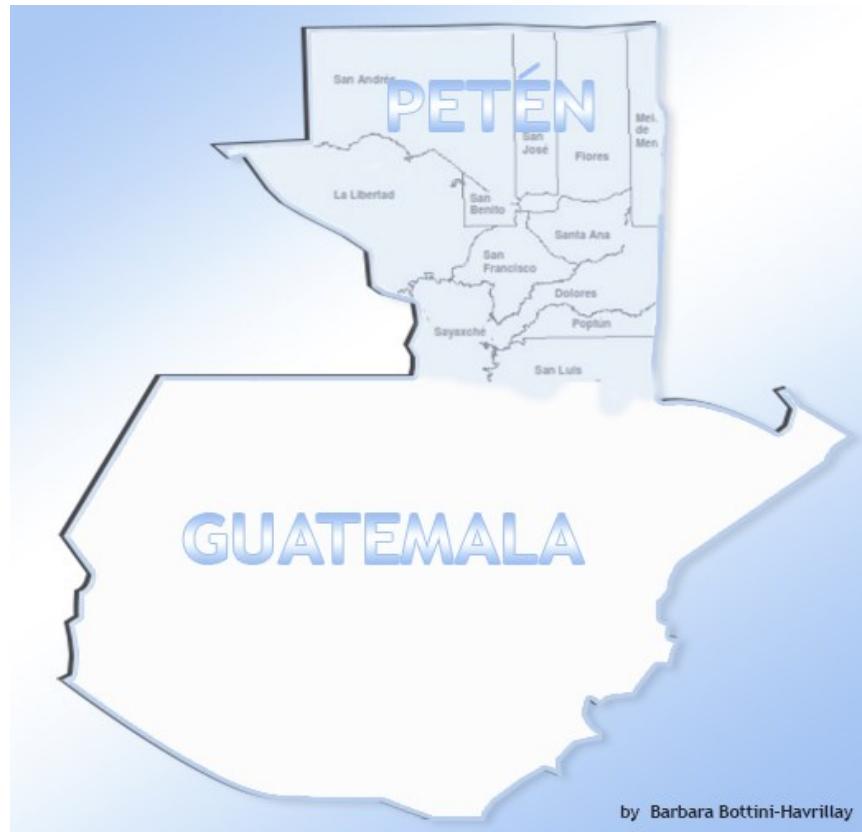


Fig.1: Petén and its Municipalities

Guatemala is divided into 22 departments of which Petén (also referred to as “Northern Lowlands”) is by far the largest. Geographically, Petén is situated between Mexico (Yucatan & Chiapas) from the Northwest and Belize from the East.

This department is divided into 12 municipalities with majority of people living in the Central area on the south side of the Lake Petén Itza (See Fig.1 for a map of Petén). The three towns - Flores (departmental capital), Santa Elena and San Benito form the largest urban concentration in Petén where most wealthy Creole families in Petén still reside (Schwartz 1990).

<sup>7</sup> North of Flores lies Guatemala’s greatest tourist attraction – the ancient Maya city of Tikal.

### ***Colonization of Petén***

Archeologists claim that from 2000 BC up until 900 AD., Petén was densely populated by the indigenous Maya and their predecessors (Schwartz 1990). However, since its first conquest by the Spanish, Petén remained isolated and scarcely populated until the 1960s. Even though this tropical region constitutes one third of Guatemala’s territory (36,000 square km), prior to the 1960s, it was only home to 5% of Guatemalans (Schwartz 1990). Prior to 1960s, most Guatemalans perceived immense jungles of Petén as a distant and dangerous (*El Imparcial*, 16 Mar., 1959). Historian Rodriquez Beteta explained in 1958, “Many Guatemalans still believe that going to Petén is like going to Siberia or Central Africa... that it is populated only by snakes, wild animals and *Lacandón* Indians in a savage state and the climate is deadly” (*La Hora*, 22 Oct., 1958). In 1967, Promotor of Petén, Coronel Oliverio Casasola describes Petén in *Prensa Libre* newspaper as “inhospitable and abandoned green hell” (5 June, 1967). Due to its

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<sup>7</sup> “Creole” are people of Spanish descent born in Guatemala

marginal economy, almost nonexistent transportation routes and its reputation for being dangerous, Petén was of little interest to the Guatemalan state until 60 years ago (Schwartz 1987).

In the 1940's Guatemalan President Arevalo's administration was first to pioneer developing Petén via project known as "Agricultural colony of Poptun." However, this attempt didn't result in success because by the end of Arevalo' presidency the project had been largely abandoned by the government (Possoco 2014). President Arbenz did attempt to continue in Arevalo's footsteps and he pursued construction of road between Flores and Poptun but his administration focused its energy in other places. Ultimately, Arbenz's work was cut short as he was overthrown by the US government and Guatemalan elites in a coup in 1954. However, Petén's military strategic significance became more prominent during Arbenz's term because of the territorial disputes with Belize and Mexico (Possoco 2014). This is an important legacy that continued in the 1960s when the military established an organization called FYDEP (National Enterprise for the Economic Development of Petén) as a primary institution to govern Petén. While Arevalo's and Arbenz's administration initiated the idea of colonizing Petén, it was the FYDEP that really took on the job during the 1960s and 1970s (Possoco 2014). Thus, it wasn't until the Cold War era that the Guatemalan government opened up Petén for colonization, and new migrants (mostly from the "highlands" and even neighboring countries) started moving into the department. Table 3 provides a historical overview of population in Petén.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Population</b>
1714	3,027
1778	2,555
1839	6,327
1845	5,203
1858	6,407
1869	8,817
1879	6,547
1880	8,374
1893	6,075
1904	10,000
1921	7,583
1936	9,728
1940	10,566
1950	15,897
1960	21,330
1964	25,207
1973	64,126
1978	120,774
1981	186,488
1982	162,874
1984	200,000 (est.)
1986	300,000 (est.)

Table 1: Population of Petén (1714-1986) (Schwartz 1990)

### ***Military Civic Action in Cold War Guatemala***

The military strategy of nation building is not a new concept. In antiquity, engagement in large scale military development projects was a common practice e.g. Alexander the Great modernizing Persian cities in 300 B.C. (*A Guide to Military Civic Action*, 1969). Even most recently, under the US President Barack Obama's administration, military development policy was used as an anti-terrorism strategy in Iraq. However, I am going to contextualize military led development that took place in Cold War Guatemala.

In the 1960s, as part of the US Cold War strategy, the Guatemalan and the US military were engaged in development-defense collaboration in Petén to promote economic development in Guatemala. During this time Guatemalan military was the best equipped, trained and organized in Central America (Handy 1984). This collaboration was officially the first

development-defense alliance of its kind between the US and any Latin American nation.<sup>8</sup> All the previous US military-development joint efforts with Latin American countries did not make part of US internal security strategy referred to as *Military Civic Action*. Military Civic Action (MCA) is defined as follows:

The use of preponderantly indigenous military forces on projects useful to the local population at all levels in such fields as education, training, public works, agriculture, transportation, communications, health, sanitation, and others contributing to economic and social development, which would also serve to improve the standing of the military forces with local population (*A Guide Military Civic Action*, 1969, De Pauw & Luz 1992)

Participation of local military forces and its institutions is a key part of MCA definition and this is what separates MCA from other forms of humanitarian relief efforts and civic action activities conducted by the US government. This differentiates MCA from humanitarian assistance and reconstruction development activities in response to natural disasters where preponderantly US forces are employed. Lack of indigenous troop involvement excludes it from the MCA definition (De Pauw & Luz, 1992)

In Guatemala, MCA projects supplemented with US development funding were managed and carried out by the national militaries under the guidance of the US military advisors. Normally, as part of what is referred to as a “country team” (US Ambassador being the team chief), under the Command of US Department of Defense (DOD), the US Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG or MILGRP) worked in cooperation with US Ambassador, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and US Information Agency to develop

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<sup>8</sup>Source: Airgram from Charge de Affaires ad interim Robert Foster Corrigan at the American Embassy to the Department of State Washington on 3 July 1961, reference, CA-2692

military assistance plans to provide advisory and technical support to the host country (Personal Interview).<sup>9</sup>

US Military Group Guatemala was a small organization made up of 20-30 military officers and enlisted men from the U.S. Army, Navy and Air Force (Personal Interview). The officers were living in Guatemala in a non-combat, advisory role. Although the US Military Group was a joint organization, the army remained the largest component. The MILGRP Guatemala operated under the Central Command of the United States Southern Command, joint organization located in the Panama Canal Zone (Personal Interview with former US MCA Advisor). Apart from MAAG and MILGRP Guatemala, another commonly utilized group in helping civic action programs in countries like Guatemala was Civic Action Mobile Training Team (MTT). Usually, a MTT consisted of 1-4 U.S. officers also taken from all of the military services. The MTT and MAAG specialists (often military engineers) were sent out on temporary duties to make initial contacts, surveys and help advise civic action programs under the direct supervision of the Civil Affairs-Civic Action officer on the MAAG Group Staff. Similarly to the MAAG, the principal role of the MTTs was to train local military forces in developing their own MCA programs (*A Guide to Military Civic Action*, 1969). The US sponsorship of the MCA in Guatemala had only one goal: to keep insurgency out of Central America. This goal was attained by working towards two objectives: to promote economic and social development and

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<sup>9</sup>MAAG can also be referred to as US Military Group (USMILGP or MILGRP) Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) is a designation for American military advisers sent to other countries to assist in the training of conventional armed forces and facilitate military aid. Typically, the personnel of MAAG's were considered to be technical staff attached to, and enjoying the privileges of the US diplomatic mission in a country. Though the term is not as widespread as it once was, the functions performed by MAAG's continue to be performed by successor organizations attached to embassies, often called United States Military Groups (USMILGP or MILGRP). The term MAAG may still occasionally be used for such organizations helping promote military partnerships with several Latin American countries. The two organizations basically performed the same tasks. The difference was primarily a name change rather than a change in mission (Source: Personal correspondence with ex US engineering advisor & *A Guide to Military Civic Action* 1969)

second, “to improve the standing of the military forces with the population” (Barber & Ronning 1966, pg.6).

It was a general belief of Kennedy’s administration that the main cause breeding insurgency in Latin America was its economic and social instability.<sup>10</sup> “Policymakers in the United States believed that committing enormous amounts of money, along with the technical expertise of leading intellectuals, would solve problems” (Taffet 2007, pg.6).

Most importantly, MCA in Guatemala was designed to complement the military’s counterinsurgency campaigns: the two pronged Cold War strategy developed by the US President Kennedy that combines violent counter-terror efforts in the countryside and nonviolent civic action development programs such as road building, literacy campaigns, or health programs (Grandin 2006). The salient point here is that in Guatemala, seemingly benign civic action development programs were part of the same mechanism as violent counterinsurgency campaigns. The text of various unclassified State Department cables, MCA & counterinsurgency manuals suggest that violent counterinsurgency campaigns and non-violent MCA were intended to be calibrated.<sup>11</sup> However, based on interviews conducted with US MCA veterans who worked in Cold War Guatemala, it is yet to be understood whether this calibration actually played out in practical terms. Perhaps, the calibration, if it did happen, occurred at higher levels than the MCA advisors I interviewed for this project or they were just unwilling to discuss it with me. *A Guide to Military Civic Action* (1969) reads, “It is therefore, necessary for the government to implement an effective program of psychological warfare and civic action” (pg. 36-37, Washington D.C. 1969).

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<sup>10</sup>Source: Defense Intelligence Agency report sent on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1958 to AIG

<sup>11</sup>Source: Unclassified US State Department files collected at NSA archives, George Washington University and JFK National Security Archives, *Counterinsurgency manual, Center for Military Studies, Guatemala & Guide to Military Civic Action*, 1969

In the aftermath of 1959 Cuban revolution and Washington's interventionist actions such as the 1954 CIA backed coup d'état of Jacobo Arbenz (1944-1954), popular opinion in Latin America turned against the US (Brands 2010).<sup>12</sup> As a result, there was great anxiety and fear on the part of the US government about the communist revolution in Cuba and growing threat of USSR's (Soviet Union) sphere of influence in Latin America. In 1961, in order to gain "hearts and minds" of people in South America, Kennedy began a series of development aid programs officially known as *Alliance for Progress* (1961-1969). Under the umbrella of modernization theory giving *Alliance for Progress* its ideological support, US sponsored military- led development projects boomed all over Latin America (Brands 2010).<sup>13</sup> These programs provided much needed infusion of funding for development projects in Guatemala such as road building and land titling programs designed to open up new forest frontiers for colonization by small farmers.

In 1961, average life expectancy in Guatemala was only 37 years and the average annual per capita income was \$163. Of the population of 3.7 million, 70% were illiterate and there were areas in Guatemala where there was only 1 doctor per 100,000 people.<sup>14</sup> This situation made Kennedy and his advisors confident that in order to stop the spread of insurgency in the countryside, the living conditions of the poor peasants in Guatemala needed to improve (Brands 2010). It is understood from the unclassified letters between Washington DC and the US

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<sup>12</sup> Cuban Revolution was a turning point during the Cold War in Latin America- an armed revolt conducted by Fidel Castro's *26th of July Movement* and its allies (such as Argentinean Marxist revolutionary, Ernesto "Che" Guevara) against the Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista. In 1959, the revolution succeeded and the old Batista regime was violently replaced with Castro's Communist Party of Cuba (Brands 2010). The 1954 coup d'état (18–27 June 1954) was the CIA covert operation (PBSUCCESS) that overthrew Guatemala's first democratically elected President Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán (1950–54). In the early 1950s, the politically liberal Árbenz Government passed agrarian land reforms that were designed to help the Guatemalan poor farmers which largely threatened the business interests of the United Fruit Company. (Grandin 2000)

<sup>13</sup> Modernization theory assumes that "underdeveloped" countries can be brought to development in the same manner more developed countries have. This is accomplished through process of "modernization" with the assistance of the developed (Western) countries.

<sup>14</sup> Source: Letter to Mr. Killinger, October 3, 1961, Central State Department Files, Economic matters (1960-1963)

Embassy in Guatemala City that Guatemala was also of critical strategic significance to the US during the Cold War. In the letter to the State Department on July 3, 1961, Robert Foster Corrigan reveals that Guatemala was the first country in Central America to accept US civic action offers.<sup>15</sup> Guatemala's loyalty during the infamous *Bay of Pigs Invasion of Cuba*<sup>16</sup> and its strategic geographical location as “Castro’s front yard”<sup>17</sup> made Guatemala an ideal place to showcase US Cold War accomplishments and serve as a MCA model for other Latin American nations.<sup>18</sup>

From 1959 onward, the mounting fear of communist influence in the region led many US backed Latin American military regimes brutally assassinate, kidnap and torture potential adherents to revolutionary ideologies (Brands 2010). In Guatemala, the repression was directed against even moderate social democrats as well as all kinds of alternative movements and groups. It was a commonplace tactic during the Cold War to label regime’s internal enemies as “communists” with intent to eliminate all potential challenges to power (Schirmer 1998). However, counterinsurgency in Guatemala was not all about fighting communist the guerillas. The violent counter terror efforts in Guatemala ended up targeting thousands of innocent civilians and ultimately led to 669 massacres in the 1970s and the 1980s (CEH 1999).<sup>19</sup> In the book titled, *Empire’s Workshop*, Grandin (2006) calls these events the bloodiest state violence that has taken place in the Western hemisphere in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nearly 250,000 Guatemalans were killed at the hand of the Guatemalan state during the 36 year long civil war (1960-1996). In

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<sup>15</sup> Source: Robert Foster Corrigan, Charge de Affaires ad interim. American Embassy to the Department of State, Washington. July 3, 1961. 714.5-MSP/7-361.

<sup>16</sup> Also known as “La Batalla de Giron”- CIA’s failed attempt to invade Cuba and overthrow Fidel Castro’s new regime by US trained Cuban exiles on April 17, 1961 (Jones 2008).

<sup>17</sup> Source: Letter to the US Senator George Smathers from the president of the General Design Corporation. August 2, 1961

<sup>18</sup> Source: Message from Guatemalan president, Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes to the Guatemalan National Congress, March 1, 1962

<sup>19</sup> 1970s and 1980s are considered the years when genocide took place, however internal armed conflict in Guatemala started during the early 1960s and officially ended in 1996 (CEH 1999).

1999, the widespread human rights violations committed against the Guatemalan civilian populace were categorized as genocide under international law, article II of the 1948 United Nations Convention on Prevention and Punishment of Genocide (CEH 1999).

Out of the 669 CEH reported massacres, defined as more than five people killed simultaneously, 626 were committed by the Guatemalan military and 32 by the guerillas. Thus, 93% of the violent acts recorded by the CEH (Guatemalan Commission for Historical Clarification) are attributed to state forces and only 3% to the insurgents, the responsibility for the remaining 4% cannot be determined (CEH 1999). It is commonly misinterpreted that the military and the guerillas were the only two actors involved in the 1980s violence (Stoll 1993).<sup>20</sup> However, CEH and REMHI reports also recognize the role of the Guatemala's economic elites, political parties, universities, churches and other sectors of Guatemalan state in the violence.<sup>21</sup> As a result of the violence in Guatemala, 250,000 civilians (83% Maya Indians and 17% Ladino) and 1.5 million innocent people were displaced (CEH 1999). Large numbers of the displaced were forced to cross the Guatemalan border. Roughly 150,000 -200,000 refugees traveled across the northern frontier, 50,000 ran away to Chiapas while the rest went to Mexico (CEH 1999). In smaller quantities, Guatemalan refugees also fled to other neighboring countries such as Honduras and Belize and some even managed to get as far as the United States and Canada (CEH 1999).

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<sup>20</sup>Umbrella insurgent “guerilla” organization is known as URNG (National Guatemalan revolutionary unity).URNG was composed of four groups (FAR, EGP, ORPA and PGT—write out the names if this is the first time you use them.)

<sup>21</sup> REMHI 1998 – ODHAG (Human Rights Office of the Archdiocese of Guatemala). *Guatemala: Never Again! REMHI Recovery of Historical Memory Project*

### ***The Genocide***

*“Human rights violations are not just an act of God, nor are they accidents of history, but they are acts attributable to human beings, who are- and should be made- accountable for their deeds”*

*-Former coordinator of the CEH, Christian Tomuschat*

As declared by Guatemalan Commission for Historical Clarification in 1999, Genocide against the indigenous Mayas took place in some parts of Guatemala. The violence of Guatemalan genocide was marked with extreme cruelty. As brought to light by the CEH 1999 & REMHI 1998 reports, members of the army's special counterinsurgency commando unit known as the *Kaibiles* committed acts of particular barbarity.<sup>22</sup> Cold War scholar Greg Grandin (2006) describes gruesome killing practices of the *Kaibiles* as “going primitive.” These special forces were a principal weapon used by the Guatemalan military during Scorched Earth campaigns against the leftist guerrillas in the 1980s (Issacson, 2013) Scorched Earth campaigns were carried out under the General Efrain Rios Mont's administration and initiated in 1982. Scorched earth is a military strategy that targets anything that might be useful to the enemy. Specifically, all the assets that are used or can be used by the enemy are targeted such as food sources, transportation, communication and even people in the area. In Guatemala, military destroyed crops, slaughtered livestock, fouled water supplies and even violated sacred places. Under these campaigns, the Guatemalan army killed anyone suspected of being associated with the communist “subversives” (Sanford 2004). This resulted in large numbers of Maya deaths. See photo of Guatemalan Kaibiles below.

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<sup>22</sup>The word “Kaibil” comes from K’abowil”- pre Columbian Maya deity associated with souls and lightening (Friedel et al. 1993, pg.46 cited in Posocco 2014)

*Kaibil* training included killing animals and then eating them raw and drinking their blood in order to demonstrate courage. The extreme cruelty of these training methods... was then put into practice in a range of operations carried out by these troops...: ‘*The Kaibil* is a killing machine’ (CEH 1999, pg.25-26).



Fig.2: Guatemalan Kaibiles

For example, on December 6<sup>th</sup> 1982, *Kaibiles* entered the village of *Dos Erres* in Petén, and within a few days, brutally murdered the entire village with no exception of women or children. Out of 250 victims, 113 were under the age of 14 (CEH 1999). In almost all cases during violent counterinsurgency campaigns, victims of massacres like the ones in *Dos Erres* were “just unlucky” to live in the areas believed to be guerilla territory. Grandin (2006) describes these atrocities,

Between 1981 and 1983 in Guatemala, the army executed roughly 100,000 Mayan peasants unlucky enough to live in a region identified as the seedbed of a leftist insurgency. In some towns, troops murdered children by beating them on rocks or throwing them into rivers as their parents watched...they gutted living victims, amputated genitalia, arms and legs, committed mass rapes, and burned victims alive (pg.90).

Drouin (2011) argues that such ferocious eugenic practices were designed to ensure that nobody in the targeted Maya community survived.

Other characteristics of “la violencia” in Guatemala included forced military recruitment of civilians. Commonly, innocent people were forced to inflict violence on their relatives, neighbors and friends (REMHI 1998). Maya Indians were not only being aggressively recruited to join the Guatemalan military but their complicity was also accomplished through the establishment of Civil Patrols (PAC) -the paramilitary forces organized by the Army in 1981.<sup>23</sup> According to CEH 1999 data, PAC participated in 1 in every 5 massacres committed by the Guatemalan state (Vol. II, III, part.2 pg.264). Evidence also points to hundreds of cases in which civilians were forced to torture, mutilate and kill their immediate family members (REMHI 1998). Understandably, the full psychological impact of such targeted social disintegration is difficult to document.

Racist spatial patterns or “geographies of violence” during the genocide should not be missed. In one example, Guatemalan military officers were trained to identify weaving patterns of traditional Maya dress linked to certain regions known as “subversive” (Manz 1988). During the armed conflict, even a simple act of wearing traditional Maya clothing could get a person killed. Oglesby & Ross (2009) write,

The widespread village-level massacres occurred in regions that are overwhelmingly Mayan... Through the careful study of four regions the CEH was able to demonstrate that the Guatemalan army’s definition of ‘internal enemy’ (intrinsic to the counter-insurgency response) came to be applied to the entire areas of the countryside. In effect, large swaths of territory where the Mayan population reached 90 percent or greater came to be viewed as ‘subversive’ (pg.22-23).

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<sup>23</sup> Guatemalan army foot soldiers was overwhelmingly made up of indigenous Mayas (CEH 1999).

At the bloodiest time of the conflict (1981-1983), it was a common practice to label the indigenous Maya as a whole ethnic group as “communists” by the Guatemalan military intelligence (CEH 1999, Vol II&III part 2, pg.318). As a result, entire Maya villages were brutally massacred and the material possessions of the victims destroyed (CEH 1999). Interestingly, violence in the urban areas and other spaces predominantly occupied by the Ladinos and “Creoles” was selective while outlying villages known as strictly Maya were massacred in their entirety (Oglesby & Ross 2009).<sup>24</sup> In reality, there were only few thousand guerilla combatants on the grounds (CEH 1999). Research found that the Guatemalan military was well aware that the insurgents did not pose a real threat to the political order. The Commission for Historical Clarification states that Guatemalan military intelligence knew the status of the weaponry, number of guerilla combatants and their strategy. Therefore, the Guatemalan State intentionally exaggerated the military threat of the guerilla to justify mass violence against the Mayas. The CEH (1999) states,

The State deliberately magnified the military threat of the insurgency, a practice justified by the concept of the internal enemy. The inclusion of all opponents under one banner, democratic or otherwise, pacifist or guerilla, legal or illegal, communist or non-communist, served to justify numerous and serious crimes. Faced with widespread political, socioeconomic and cultural opposition, the State resorted to military operations directed towards the physical annihilation or absolute intimidation of its opposition, through a plan of repression carried out mainly by the Army and national security forces (pg.22)

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<sup>24</sup>Term “Creoles” refers to white “elite” minority of Guatemalans, direct descendants of Spanish. Term “Ladino” refers to people who have mixed (indigenous or European heritage) but identify with the Western culture (Handy 1984). Term “Ladino” in Guatemala is comparable to the term “Mestizo” (mixed race background, usually of indigenous and Spanish heritage) used in Mexico and other Latin American countries (Grandia 2006; on “Mestizaje” in Mexico and formation of ladino identity in Guatemala see Loewe (2010), Taracena (1999,2002), Grandin (2000), Casaus Arzu (1995), Eraque, Gould& Hale. Ed. (2005), Hale (2006).

### ***Insurgency and violence in Petén***

The history of violence in Petén is unique, in that its marginal position in Guatemalan political context has often worked in favor of its population. While the military applied considerably more corporal violence in other parts of the country, Petén was part of government's MCA counterinsurgency project from the early 1960s. Thus, counterinsurgency in Petén was fought mainly in the form of MCA until the scorched earth campaign of the early 1980s when the Guatemalan military began targeting small villages and agricultural cooperatives in Petén. (CEH 1999). In fact, the first known massacre in Petén did not occur until 1980.

Starting in 1970, guerilla organization known as the FAR (Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes) began finding refuge in the jungles of Petén and mobilizing rural communities. While the FAR maintained political cells in the capital, its armed insurgency was fought on the grounds of Petén. In 1979, FAR decided to join forces with URNG (National Guatemalan Revolutionary Unity). From the establishment of the URNG, the FAR coordinated the revolutionary people's war strategy with other guerrilla organizations in Petén.

In April of 1982, Guerilla forces entered a small town near Las Cruces to hold a meeting and purchase supplies. The army responded by setting up a military post in Las Cruces and massacring the entire village of Los Josefinos (CEH 1999). In the months to follow, the entire area became heavily militarized. In December of 1982, Guatemalan military carried out another massacre in the village of Dos Erres (REMHI 1998). The massacre of Dos Erres is considered among the worst of the 36 years long armed conflict in Guatemala.

## ***Race and Nation in Guatemalan history***

Investigations conducted by the Guatemalan Commission for Historical Clarification reveal that military aggression was directed against elements of profound symbolic significance for the Mayan culture, such as the destruction of sacred places, the killings of the elderly or acts of extreme savagery targeting Maya children and pregnant women. Evidence explained in CEH 1999 proves without a doubt that the Maya were targeted for genocide based on the traditional racial prejudice against them.

The deep rooting of racism toward the indigenous Guatemalans and the antagonistic class divisions between Mayas, Ladinos and the “White” landowning elites are particularly problematic in Guatemala (Smith 1994). Because of their education and economic power, Ladinos have been taking advantage of the Mayas for centuries. Unlike in other Latin American countries, going back to colonial era, scheming politics of the ruling class never allowed Mayas and Ladinos to merge into one social class and identity; instead the two remained polarized and opposed throughout the history (Smith 1994).

Guatemalan historian Martinez Palaez describes the colonial era in Guatemala as a “regiment of terror for the Indians” (cited in Handy 1984, pg.14).

What we must recognize [is that ] the cruel treatment of the Indian was not sporadic phenomenon, but...inherent in the social structures of the colony, absolutely necessary to maintain subjected to incredible forms of exploitation a mass of serfs with enormous numerical superiority (Palaez 1979, pg. 535).

Following the disease and the wars of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Spanish colonialists laid the foundation for the violent principles of “white” racial superiority. In this way, historically, Guatemalan society was being indoctrinated into attaining “whiteness.” This racist strategy to position Mayas as “non-white” produced principles designed to make their exploitation ideologically

possible. “This heritage of cruelty, exploitation and oppression is apparent in all aspects of Guatemala today.... colonial period laid the basis of a society moulded principally by the need for extensive terror and force as means of social control” (Handy 1984, pg.15).

The repression of the Indigenous Guatemalans initiated by the Spanish colonial conquests continued throughout the Guatemalan history. It persisted through 1821 independence and the 1870s liberal reforms of Justo Ruffino Barrios as the demand for the native labor reached its peak with the boom of the coffee economy (Handy 1984). The repressive colonial power structures survived even the Guatemala’s “ten years of spring” (1944-1954) when the first two democratically elected presidents Juan Jose Arevalo and Jacobo Arbenz tried to improve the conditions of peasants in Guatemala by adopting a new constitution in 1945 (Handy 1984). Under this new constitution the Guatemalan government would pay more attention to the voices of the middle and lower classes and would restrict power and privilege of the elite class. This new constitution granted women the right to vote, instituted Guatemala’s only land reform, provided for freedom of speech and gave the right for previously banned peasant labor unions and political parties to organize (Handy 1984). In the 1950, agricultural report showed that 2% of wealthy Guatemalans owned 72% of arable land and the indigenous landholders controlled 8 times less arable land than the Ladinos (Handy 1988). In response to these inequalities, Jacobo Arbenz began significant land reforms.<sup>25</sup> Arbenz’s radical land reforms did not sit well with the US economic interests in Guatemala. US Secretary of State J.F. Dulles and his brother Allen Dulles (CIA director at the time) had personal business interests within United Fruit Company and when Arbenz tried to redistribute idle lands from large plantations belonging to United Fruit Company, US and Guatemalan elites simply decided to get rid of Arbenz by staging a coup on

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<sup>25</sup> Arbenz’s Agrarian Reform Law (Decree 900, approved by Congress on June 17, 1952) (Grandia 2006)

July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1954. The new CIA installed military led government did very little to stop the wealthy elite's violent control over indigenous land and labor (Grandin 2000).

Instead, the newly installed military junta was preoccupied with eugenically driven race politics, this preoccupation later enacted in discriminatory policies against the indigenous Guatemalans. Smith (1994) describes the military's desire to "whiten the population and encourage European migration to improve Guatemalan racial stock" (pg.76). These worldviews became institutionalized through exploitative land and labor policies inherited from the colonial and postcolonial era. The coupling of economic dependence on exporting raw materials, import of finished goods and constant need for labor on coffee plantations completely marginalized indigenous Guatemalans. Thus, throughout the centuries, Mayas became slowly alienated and remained economically and culturally isolated from the rest of the Guatemalan society.

The population of Petén at the time was mixed and its inhabitants were both Mayas and Ladinos. While there was a Maya community in Petén just like in the rest of country, Petén was being settled by both Ladinos and Maya. There were actually very few Maya in Petén until the new development projects of the 1960s made a way for them to populate and settle in this region. Also, compared to the rest of the country, differences between Maya and Ladinos in Petén were less pronounced and class tensions were less intense (Schwartz 1990). This is because in Petén, both Maya and Ladinos were very poor and there were less opportunities for Ladinos to get ahead economically (Schwartz 1990). In relation to other departments, violence in Petén happened a bit later. In fact, Petén was the last region affected by military's violence and both Maya and Ladinos were affected by the violence (REMHI 1998).

## **Chapter III. Literature review**

### ***Causes of the Guatemalan genocide***

Previous studies suggest that more research is still needed to better identify all causes of the Guatemalan genocide (Sanford, 2003, 2004; Latham, 2011; Grandin, 2006). Plethora of literature has already looked at the Guatemalan history explaining the internal preconditions such as institutionalized racism and the exploitative land and labor politics of the Guatemalan ruling class (Smith, 1994; McCreery, 1983, 1994; Handy, 1984). For example, racist colonial legacies have been already well documented by others (Sundberg, 1998; Nelson, 1999; Wanatabe, 2000; Grandin, 2000; Hale, 2006; Drouin, 2010). Most of these studies suggest that the 1980s bloodshed was caused by a combination of internal and external events (Sanford, 2004; Nelson, 2009; Grandin, 2000, 2006; Schirmer, 1999; Carmack, 1988; Stoll, 1993; Davis, 1988). Some of the key external events were closely related to geopolitical factors of the Cold War.

The extent to which US Cold War involvement in Guatemala have helped create conditions for the genocide have been previously considered. For example, authors argue that violence in Guatemala was preceded by geopolitical military arrangements. Schirmer (1999), Grandin (2006) and Latham (2011) show that the already precarious situation rooted in deep racism of the military towards the Maya was further aggravated by the US Cold War politics. In fact, evidence shows that US Cold War military and financial support “had significant bearing on human rights violations in Guatemala” (CEH 1999). Driven by the fear that Guatemala would become the next Cuba, the US government ended up blindly supporting the Guatemalan military’s violent counterinsurgency campaigns. While many scholars have already criticized US military and financial support (McClintock, 1992; Schirmer, 1998, 1999; Doyle, 2002; Grandin,

2004; Latham, 2011), little research has evaluated the impacts of what might in comparison seem to be innocent US-Guatemalan cold war development initiatives.

### ***Debates of US Cold War Involvement in Latin America***

As part of the immense body of Cold War literature, scholars have written comprehensively about the 1960s *Alliance for Progress* development plans and its effects in Latin America (Muller, 1985; Latham & Gaddis, 2000; Grandin, 2006, Taffet, 2007; Field, 2010; Brands, 2010 and Latham, 2011). Understandably, in such a large body of literature some general trends of divergence can be ascertained. Relevant to the subject of this study is a particular debate about the responsibility of the US during the Cold War. At the root of this debate are differing views on the extent of US culpability for the counterinsurgent violence in Cold War Latin America.

Some authors hold Washington almost fully responsible for the intense violence in the region and describe Latin American leaders as lackeys in the much larger game of US hegemony. Grandin (2006) even brands US and Latin American Cold War relationship, an “*Empire’s Workshop*” (the title of his book). The strongest evidence presented by these scholars is the US military and financial support funneled in the form of Cold War development aid programs (Schirmer, 1999; Grandin, 2006; Latham, 2011). For example, Doyle (2002) writes that by the end of the 1950s, U.S government had sent \$58 million to Castillo Armas military regime in Guatemala (cited in Grandia 2006). In Guatemala, like in many other LA countries, this money was designed to fund counterinsurgency training and civic action development programs (Doyle 2002 cited in Grandia 2006). Since US oversight of its aid money was lacking as argued by Brands (2010), scholars are right on target to assert that United States Agency for

International Development (USAID) dollars in the hands of the Guatemalan military leaders helped unleash violence on a much larger scale.

While Grandin (2006), Latham (2011) and Schirmer (1999) rightfully condemn US Cold War politics, Brands (2010) argues that these authors underplay power and stimulus exerted by Latin American military dictatorships, Cuban revolutionaries and the various other guerilla movements throughout the continent. Brands (2010) and others paint a more complex picture as they describe more balanced power dynamics (Taffett, 2007; Brands, 2010; Field, 2012). According to Brands (2010), Latin American military leaders were not as easily manipulated as previously suggested by Grandin (2006) and Latham (2011). Instead, he describes cold war events as a storm shaped by many forces and US being only one of the key players. Taffet (2007) explains, “Latin Americans wanted the money, but they did not want to be told what to do” (pg.7). Brands (2010) also shows that Latin America’s conservative military regimes felt threatened by brutal assassinations of the Batista military leaders in Cuba and ended up reaching out to US out of fear.<sup>26</sup>

In a recently published article on *Alliance for Progress* development programs, Field (2012) writes that as much as the US pressured Bolivia to violently suppress communist resistance, it was ultimately the decision of Bolivia’s leaders to cooperate with the US. Brand and Field show that Latin American military leaders had a lot more control over events in their own countries than it is commonly believed. Guatemalan leaders were no exception. In 1960, Guatemalan President Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes and Minister of Defense Enrique Peralta

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<sup>26</sup>Fulgencio Batista y Zalvidar, (1901 – 1973) was the elected President of Cuba from 1940 to 1944 and dictator from 1952 to 1959, he was overthrown as a result of the 1959 Cuban Revolution

Azurdia were the first to request US assistance in setting up of Guatemala's military civic action development programs (*A Guide to Military Civic Action*, Washington D.C. Jul, 1969).

### ***1960s Frontier Colonization in Guatemala***

One way to better understand the role of Latin America's militaries is to evaluate the impacts of military led development programs. In Guatemala, one of the most important development programs led by the military funded through Kennedy's Alliance for Progress was frontier colonization (McPherson 1996). The majority of Latin American scholars center their attention on the environmental and socio-economic impacts of new land settlement in the tropical rainforests (Smith, 1981; Rudel, 1983; Hecht, 1985). Some wrote about the disappointments of colonization projects owed to the environmental damage of deforestation and detrimental economic and public health impacts on indigenous communities (Smith, 1981; Hecht, 1985; Rudel, 1983). Other scholars bring up discourses of Western capitalist accumulation while others criticize the validity of dependency and modernization theories as an explanation to faltered development of frontier regions. While it is true that due to inadequate ecological, regional and cultural knowledge, Latin American governments often failed to execute effective development efforts (Smith 1981; Rudel 1983; Hecht 1985; Schwartz 1987), this approach fails to consider how these efforts fit into larger political and ideological agendas of the local military leaders. For example, while Smith (1981) and Hecht (1985) effectively highlight local government failures to execute effective colonization programs, they do not elaborate on the cultural implications of often very racist and violently "assimilationist" development initiatives.

In the past decade, scholars have begun to fill this gap in literature. Mollett's (2006) research on race and natural resource conflicts of Miskito and Garifuna Indians in Honduras

examines how dominant racial ideologies of “whiteness” continue to be used as an indicator of civilization and development in frontier regions (Mollet 2006). Although she does not focus on the involvement of the military, Mollet finds that racist representations of Indian identities as “savage” are blamed for “undermining economic development” of the frontiers (2006, pg. 79-80). In the Guatemalan context, recent research by Ybarra (2012) and Gould (2009) suggests that colonization projects helped reinforce ideas about the superiority of non-indigenous people. Gould (2009) argues that colonization practices in Petén had deep racist connotations linking back to military’s larger eugenic project to “whiten” the nation. Schwartz (1987), Grandia (2012) and Ybarra (2012) show how transnational conservation efforts and unjust property rights management in Petén worked to disenfranchise the Mayas as well as non-indigenous peasants and help erase indigenous claims to territory while advancing racist ideologies of the military leaders. Ybarra’s recent work describes “the military’s territorial counterinsurgency strategies to tame the jungle as a dangerous space in the wake of a colonization project” (2012, pg.483). She discusses the precarious conditions put forth by the development planners that saw colonization of Petén as a patriotic duty to “save” the forest from its “savage” inhabitants (Ybarra 2012). In describing the latest development programs in Guatemala, another scholar describes colonization process in Petén as “inherently violent” (Possoco 2014, pg.70). Grandia (2006) too finds that, “At best, colonization programs ignored indigenous people- at worst, they were responsible for a new wave of genocide unparalleled since the first Spanish invasion” (pg.103).

Thus, as it has been previously shown by others, racist views towards indigenous people in Guatemala is closely tied to the elitist policies advanced through construction of infrastructure projects (Schwartz 1990, Grandia 2012). In Petén, racism accompanied infrastructure building and resulted in direct and indirect violence inflicted upon indigenous Guatemalans. Road

building in Petén was by far the largest infrastructure project implemented in this region during the Cold War (Grandia 2006).

### ***Road building in Petén***

Road building in Petén was the biggest accomplishment for the local military leadership (Casasola 1968). Schwartz (1990), Shriar (2006) and Grandia (2012) provide valuable critique on economic impacts of roads in Petén. For example, Shriar (2006) and Grandia (2012) examined how road projects intended to promote economic growth led to economic disintegration of the region instead. Previously, others have studied whether US sponsored road projects in Petén were effective, corrupt or led to environmental degradation (Schwartz, 1990; Carr 2002, 2006; Sader et al. 1994) but little research has explored how the material processes of road building connect to the cultural effects such as nation building and understanding of race.

Accordingly, these earlier studies tend to neglect how road building in Petén fits into larger ideological project of the Guatemalan military. The most recent research suggests that even seemingly innocent activities such as road building helped reinforce cultural ideas about class, race and nation (Ybarra, 2012; Grandia, 2012; Mollet, 2006). According to an ex U.S. MCA road building advisor in Guatemala, new roads in Petén were the most important element of Guatemalan military's nation building efforts (Personal Interview). In a recent article, Grandia writes, "roads clearly hold cultural meanings beyond national economic development" (2012, pg. 180). In her brief look at the road project between Flores and Guatemala City, Grandia (2012) is one of the first to observe that while roads improved people's access to markets, they also bring unwanted intruders like military and police. Grandia (2012) also found that new roads in Petén brought increased state surveillance and control into the region.

Despite recent research (Grandia, 2013; Ybarra, 2010, 2012; Manz, 2004) suggesting that new roads in Petén served as vectors of military violence during the genocide (Grandia 2013) no one has yet looked at this extensively. This study aims to do just that. This research seeks to fill this gap in literature and add to existing literature by bringing to light how road building in Petén connected with the violence, both logistically and ideologically.

## **Chapter IV. Methodology**

My research methods for this paper consisted of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Primarily, my findings were a result of archival materials analysis that I collected during my field research in Guatemala and Washington DC. I also conducted oral history interviews with two US MCA advisors stationed in Guatemala during the 1960s. Both of the military officers I interviewed were well positioned to directly inform my research. Although I describe the quantitative component at the beginning of Chapter 6 in great detail, I provide a short overview toward the end of this section. I briefly discuss how I utilized various genocide reports to map logistical connections between new roads in Petén and 1980s violence. However, in the following methods section, I focus more on describing the qualitative part of my work.

### ***Field Research and Archival Materials Analysis***

During the summer of 2013, I conducted field research in two phases. This field research was made possible through support of Concordia University international travel field research fellowship and additional financial assistance from my thesis supervisor, Dr. Kevin Gould. In the first phase (July 2013), I traveled to College Park, Washington DC where I spent one week reviewing and photographing 1960s & 1970s declassified State Department & Joint Chief of Staff files at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). These files contained information pertaining to US infrastructure building, economic activities and MCA in Cold War Guatemala. Furthermore, I briefly reviewed declassified CIA & State Department files collected at the JFK Presidential Archives in Boston, Massachusetts and the National Security Agency (NSA) Archives in Washington DC supplied by my thesis supervisor. Analysis of the above mentioned archival materials served as a window into the discourses and practices accompanying

US Cold War development in Guatemala. Most importantly, the archival materials were full of information pertaining to Kennedy era *Alliance for Progress* programs in Petén.

Voices of the Guatemalan military leaders in Petén were unrepresented in the US government documents. To look at the work of Guatemalan military behind its road making in Petén, I also conducted archival research in Guatemala. During the second phase of my fieldwork (August 2013), I traveled to Antigua, Guatemala and visited the archives of the Center for Mesoamerican research (CIRMA). During my two week stay at CIRMA, I collected and reviewed *El Imparcial*, *Prensa Libre* and *La Hora* national newspapers from the 1960s and the 1970s. For the most part, the articles I was reviewing discussed FYDEP's road building, Indigenismo movement and Military Civic Action campaigns. At the archives of CIRMA, I also found and analyzed Guatemalan counterinsurgency & civic action manuals from the 1980s.

Although civil war in Guatemala officially ended in 1996, many Guatemalans still live in fear. In many parts of the country, state violence and repression continues. Disappearances, kidnappings and murder are not uncommon. This adds to the heightened vigilance and suspicion toward outsiders, including researchers like myself. While in Guatemala, I had to be very careful to follow all the regulations and instructions of the CIRMA staff and stay as discrete as possible about the military materials I was reviewing. Bringing the 1980s Guatemalan counterinsurgency manual into Canada was particularly challenging. In fact, I was unable to copy the entire manual as I had to get special permission to copy only some parts. Upon my departure from Antigua, I created electronic version that I uploaded online and destroyed the original paper version I photocopied. Being a US citizen, I did not feel comfortable bringing these documents through the airport customs in Guatemala City. My main concern was raising unnecessary suspicions and potentially creating an unpleasant situation before exiting the country. Originally, my travel to

Guatemala was designed to also include a trip to Guatemala City. However, due to safety concerns and time constraints, I hired a local journalist, who spent one week of August 2013 photographing *Prensa Libre* newspaper articles at the Guatemalan National library in Guatemala City. Afterwards, I reviewed these materials. For the respect of her privacy, I do not disclose her name.

In addition to archival materials I found during my field research in Antigua, I had the opportunity to review the memoirs and photo albums belonging to Oliverio Casasola, the director of the state agency responsible for road building in Petén. These memoirs and photo albums which had been stored in the municipal library in Flores, Petén were photographed by my thesis supervisor. The three albums hold many photos depicting development work during the 1960s. These albums served as an excellent visual companion to the information found in the newspaper articles. The second album in particular was dedicated entirely to road making in Petén, and gave me an excellent chronological overview of the road projects.

This archival analysis not only allowed for identification of key military figures but Casasola's captions and personal notes attached to the images gave insights into his racist visions and other similarly powerful cultural meanings. Most importantly, the photo albums help imagine visually militarization of Petén and became a helpful tool in preparation for the oral history interviews. Nonetheless, these photo albums were created as a celebration of Casasola's accomplishments in Petén. While the albums contain great deal of important factual information, they are a form of Guatemalan military propaganda during the 1960s.

As argued by Foucault (1977), archives are a form of power/knowledge institutions designed to produce certain regiment of truth (cited in Rose 2001). Therefore, during my field research in Washington DC and Guatemala, archives could not be understood as neutral and

objective sources of information. This is especially true with the albums which are a kind of military public relations archive. Yet, archives are an important point of reference and a compass for understanding what the Guatemalan military leaders tried to show during the 1960s. My objective was not to establish the truth but to expose how the various philosophies accompanying the 1960s MCA in Petén worked to help construct racist visions of Guatemalan nation.

### ***Oral History Interviews***

In November and December of 2013, I conducted phone interviews with the former head of the MCA in Guatemala (April 1966- January 1969) and former US road building advisor stationed in Petén (October 1966- December 1969). I also had an opportunity to review oral history interviews that my thesis supervisor conducted with two former FYDEP employees in Petén. To protect the privacy of the interview subjects, I do not disclose their names. The phone interviews lasted roughly hour and a half and were divided into two different sessions. Both interview subjects were fully informed about the nature and purpose of this research. The interviews were voluntary and I did not financially compensate the interviewees for their participation. Oral testimonies of the MCA advisors provided much needed insights and details into the relationship and the level of collaboration between the US and the Guatemalan military in the 1960s Guatemala. The information given to me was especially helpful as one of the military advisors worked directly with the Battalion of Engineers on the road projects in the town of Poptun. The other interviewee collaborated directly with top military officials in Guatemala which provided many insights into the way Guatemalan military interacted with the US advisors during that era. Not only did I learned about the operational details of how different military groups operated and funded road projects in Petén but I learned about the power dynamics between the US and the Guatemalan military on the ground.

### ***Violence in Petén Database & Mapping***

The quantitative component discussed in Chapter 6 involved a thorough review of the Guatemalan Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH 1999) report, The Official Report of the Human Rights Office Archdiocese of Guatemala (REMHI 1998), and the Special Report of the Guatemalan Forensic Archeology Foundation (FAFG 2001). I analyzed all the survivor testimonies to prepare comprehensive database of violence in Petén in the form of an excel file. Later, I used this database to graph the intensity and geographic distribution of violence in Petén. This data was collected to systematically evaluate the relationship between the geographies of violence in Petén and the new roads that were built during the 1960s. I displayed my results in the form of graphs and info graphic maps prepared using Microsoft Excel and Adobe Illustrator. Please see beginning of chapter 6 for more detailed description of my methods.

### ***Positionality***

In the past, assumed objectivity associated with white western masculinist methodologies have dominated much of the research in Latin America (Sundberg 2003). First, it is important to acknowledge that no researcher can be entirely “objective.” This is due to everyone’s personal subjectivities. Knowledge is only valid when it is put in context with researcher’s race, class, gender, identity or even geographic origins. Therefore, instead of trying to remove bias which is impossible, I need to account for my positionality.

As a white western female conducting field research in Guatemala, I was aware of the limitations and advantages of my position. Being born and raised in the Global North, conducting field work in the Global South, I acknowledge that the information I produced in this thesis was influenced by my own life experiences and cultural assumptions as a “westerner.” While being an American researcher in Guatemala helped facilitate quick access to archives, my

interpretation of the newspaper articles and other documents was challenging. Not growing up in Guatemala and not being a native Spanish speaker limited my ability to interpret all of the information available. While many Guatemalans were kind and eager to assist my research, due to recent violence in this part of the world, being an American also put me in a delicate position.

Although I had previous experiences visiting countries in the Global South, the case of Guatemala was very particular. The controversial US political interventions, military involvement, and economic agenda negatively impacted lives of many Guatemalans. During my writing of this thesis, Chapter 5 in particular, I took much care not to favor the United States government or try to justify its actions in any way. My personal experiences dealing with the US Department of Defense not only impacted what type of knowledge I produced as a researcher but it is also one of the reasons why I became interested in this project. Furthermore, having been raised in a family impacted by the violence of Cold War, I also have personal motivation to better understand the complex dynamics of events taking place during this era. One of my family members was wrongfully accused and imprisoned as a result of 1960s Cold War espionage politics between the US and the former USSR. In particular, I was interested in studying the role of the US government in the Cold War violence.

My past professional experiences also equipped me with a solid understanding of prevalent ideologies and mentalities accompanying US development work overseas. This was especially helpful while conducting interviews with the US military officers. My background not only made it easier to set up the interviews but also facilitated more open and effective conversations. My familiarity with the work of various US government agencies and the US military was also of much relevance while making sense of declassified US government files and archival materials. It was also easier for me to personally relate to the military officers I

interviewed for this project. Secondly, as a woman conducting phone interviews with male interview subjects, I was very attentive to the fact that men tend to share different types of information with a woman than they would with a man. My interaction with my interview subjects was not only affected by my gender but also my age. It was my impression that the dynamics of an interaction between a young woman and an older men put my interviewees in a position to teach me. During my analysis of the archival materials and oral history interviews, I spent time reflecting on my positionality as a young female researcher.

### ***Theoretical approaches***

Greg Stanton's work on the eight stages of genocidal process served as one of the theoretical bases for my work. As previously mentioned in the introduction, his work is the first to identify infrastructure building as a precondition to mass violence (Stanton 2008). Stanton is the first to coin the idea that infrastructure such as roadways is part of the genocidal process. Roads not only serve as means to transport victims but road making often becomes part of the planning in preparation for the mass killings. In fact, Stanton (2008) classifies transportation infrastructure building as a constituent of the 6<sup>th</sup> stage of the genocidal process- called "Preparation". This is fundamental as my research finds its focal point in this argument and it is my ambition to illustrate the validity of Stanton's theory using the case study of 1960s Petén.

This study also draws on the work of critical development scholars (Escobar 1988, 1995; Peet 2009). Use of military led development in Guatemala as the US internal defense tactic is an exemplary illustration of Escobar's "third world" development critique (1988). According to Escobar (1995), the new way of thinking of the world in terms of "underdeveloped" and "developed" set in motion new global discourses of power and economic practices. Escobar

(1988) argues that “underdevelopment” of the “third world” is a fictitious construct behind a new strategy invented by the West designed to facilitate “first world” interventionism and control.

This was especially true during the cold war. Escobar argues:

The Cold war was undoubtedly one of the single most important factors at play in conformation of the strategy of development. In the late 1940s, the real struggle between East and West had already moved to the Third world, and development became the grand strategy for advancing such rivalry and, at the same time, the designs of industrial civilization. The confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union thus lent legitimacy to the enterprise of modernization and development; to extend the sphere of political and cultural influence became an end in itself (1995, pg.34).

Escobar’s critical approach helped inform a great deal of my own analysis. For example, my research is an illustration of how poorly executed development programs in Petén not only disrupted the lives of the indigenous Guatemalans but helped equip local military oppressors with more tools to exploit the Mayas. Furthermore, as argued by another scholar who inspired my research, Greg Grandin, US development aid programs in Guatemala ended up funding violent counterinsurgency campaigns responsible for deaths of many innocent civilians (mostly Mayas) during the 1980s genocide (2006).

The collected archival materials and photo albums were analyzed via the method of discourse analysis. This method allows for interpretation of important cultural meanings by looking at how dominant discourses are articulated and “subjects” are produced through images, texts and practices (Rose 2001). Foucault argues that all institutions are centered on dominant discursive formations that claim the absolute truth which closely connects to the exercise of power through production of knowledge (Foucault 1977). Foucault’s power/ knowledge approach “offers a methodology that allows detailed consideration of how the effects of dominant power relations work through the details of an institution’s practice” (Rose 2011, pg.185). My study draws from this idea as I look at how dominant discourses and practices of the

Guatemalan military institution in Petén worked to reinforce racist visions of the Guatemalan nation. While making sense of numerous characters and events represented in the photos, I kept in mind the concept of “intertextuality” mentioned by Rose (2001). “Intertextuality” is crucial to understanding a particular discourse, as the meaning of each text or image depends on every other collected image and text (Rose, 2001).

Lastly, the quantitative chapter of this paper where I link new transportation infrastructures with 1980s violence in Petén builds upon the academic work of Jomini (1862) and Zhukov (2012). These scholars are among the very few who examine how roads and logistics of violence interconnect. In the words of Jomini, “Strategy decides where to act; logistics brings the troops to the point” (1862, pg.69). Similarly to the argument I bring up in Chapter 6, both of these scholars acknowledge the logistical importance of transportation infrastructure in facilitating and determining violence outbreaks. Not only do roads help bring perpetrators to the victims but as Zhukov (2012) argues, “by physically connecting locations to one another, roads offer low-cost routes for the local movement of personnel, ammunition, spare parts, food, fuel and other essentials needed to initiate fighting and keep it going” (pg.145). In Chapter 6, I elaborate further on Zhukov’s theory in the case of Petén.

## **Chapter V. Militarization & Ideology: From Heroes to Killers?**

### ***Introduction***

In this chapter, I will explain how the military- led road building in Petén became part of a larger counterinsurgency planning in preparation for the violence that followed in the 1980s. Secondly, I will show how the newly established road development agency became a tool to militarize Petén and a built up of an enterprise designed to empower the Guatemalan military during the Cold War. The analysis in the coming paragraphs comes primarily from the oral history interviews with the US MCA advisors, 1960s Guatemalan newspapers (e.g. *Prensa Libre* & *El Imparcial*) and 1960s FYDEP Photo albums documenting development work in Petén. The photo albums were compiled by FYDEP's most influential promotor Oliverio Casasola and archived at the Municipal Library in Flores, Petén as I discussed in the previous chapter.

During the Cold War, transportation infrastructure was an essential part of military strategy to establish state presence in “at risk” areas (Grandia 2013). Strategically, guerillas tended to control more remote areas where army access was almost impossible due to lacking transportation networks. The Ex-head of the MCA in Guatemala (1966-1969) explains,

In an unpopulated area, the guerillas are in control; they move freely from isolated village to isolated village. They live off the villages; they’re not farmers, they’re fighters. But when the villages start to link together into towns, and there are networks and development, the guerilla loses his freedom of movement and loses the convenience of his base. And also, it’s harder to recruit future guerillas from a town than it is from an isolated village because in towns you have the police, you have the military etc... The isolated village is the backbone of a guerilla force. That’s why, one of the things a military tries to do in a counterinsurgency is to eliminate the guerillas from the village and then establish a permanent presence. And roads help you do that (Personal Interview).

In Petén, the sole most important development strategy implemented by the Guatemalan military was road building. In *El Imparcial* article from July 9<sup>th</sup>, 1964, journalist Ramon Blanco explains, “The principal problem in the Petén was always the lack of terrestrial communication due to nonexistent road networks.” In fact, prior to the 1960s, the only way to access the Petén was by an airplane (Boburg 2013). Although roads were being built for multiple reasons in Petén, lacking roads posed a serious obstacle to combat approaching insurgency in the region. Although in the early 1960s, insurgency was happening in other parts of the country, Guatemalan military leaders must have been aware that new roads would help secure Petén against future guerilla invasions.

In the past, the Guatemalan government focused almost exclusively on road construction projects in the rest of the country while forgetting the economic and strategic importance of building roads in the Petén.<sup>27</sup> This dramatically changed during the 1960s, up to 82% of development budget in Petén became dedicated to road making projects (Schwartz 1990). Memorandum prepared for the CIA on August 12, 1968 reads, “The building of roads and bridges is probably the most significant single category of civic action.”<sup>28</sup> The unclassified US government budget proposals from the 1960s show transportation infrastructure as top development priority in Guatemala.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Source: *El Imparcial*, 9<sup>th</sup> July, 1964

<sup>28</sup>Source: CIA Intelligence Memorandum on Military Civic Action in Latin America, August 12<sup>th</sup>, 1968

<sup>29</sup>Source: Report on Economic planning sent from American Embassy in Guatemala to the State Department on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1961 (National Security Agency Archives at George Washington University).

### ***The Triumvirate -US MILGP, “Battalion of Engineers” & FYDEP: Role of the Guatemalan military***

In its road building endeavors in the Petén, the US Military Group Guatemala assisted the local military run development and colonization state agency known as National Enterprise for Economic Development of Petén (FYDEP). FYDEP worked in collaboration with a Guatemalan military unit called “Battalion of Engineers”<sup>30</sup> (Figure 3).



Fig. 3: Battalion of Engineers & FYDEP leaders inaugurating section of the road from San Benito to Poptun completed in 1965. The man cutting the ribbon is the head of FYDEP Oliverio Casasola

The Battalion of Engineers was headquartered in Poptun, Petén under the command of General Luis Garcia Leon.<sup>31</sup> At its peak strength (including its headquarters and 2 construction

<sup>30</sup>Source: 1969 FYDEP Photo albums, Album no.2, part 1: IMGP9974

<sup>31</sup>Source: *El Imparcial* n.d, Personal Interview with Ex US engineering advisor

companies), this unit of the Guatemalan army was made up of bit less than 400 men designated as a construction only battalion.<sup>32</sup>

From personal interviews with 1960s US MCA advisors and FYDEP photo albums, it is evident that while FYDEP benefited from the US tractors and other road building equipment, US military personnel had little contact with its leadership.<sup>33</sup> US engineering advisor remembers,

I knew what FYDEP meant, I had heard the term, and we knew that it was there to develop and open up the area of the Petén. But it was peripheral organization as far as I was concerned. I had no dealings at all with the civilians or the politicians who made up FYDEP. I just knew that Battalion was working for the opening up and the development of the Petén, but I didn't know too many details on what FYDEP was doing in general. So, I can't even say that I met anybody from FYDEP.<sup>34</sup>

My research shows that it was the Guatemalan Commander of Battalion of Engineers who would typically coordinate activities with FYDEP and serve as a liaison between US advisors and FYDEP executives.<sup>35</sup> This is demonstrated, for example, there are archival photos of General Luis Garcia Leon having a business lunch with FYDEP's Oliverio Casasola at the Military Zone of Poptun (see photo below).<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Source: Personal Interview with ex US engineering advisor

<sup>33</sup> Source: Personal Interview with ex US engineering advisor

<sup>34</sup> Source: Personal Interview with ex US engineering advisor

<sup>35</sup> Source: Personal Interview with ex US engineering advisor

<sup>36</sup> Source: 1969 FYDEP, Album no.3: 2005-08-10 065.jpg



Fig.4: Commander of Battalion of Engineers, General Luis Garcia Leon, having lunch with Oliverio Casasola in Poptun

The role of the US road building advisors in Petén was to advise, train and provide technical support to their Guatemalan counterparts. Thus, it was the responsibility of the Guatemalans to develop detailed civic action plans and carry out their own road building programs.<sup>37</sup> The MCA guide prepared by the US military instructs,

The MAAG Civil Affairs Officer can request help in advising and supporting the host country forces in planning, executing, and supervising their own civic action program. Help is available in the form of staff augmentation, civic action mobile training teams, and organized detachments of units, namely civil affairs units and Special Forces (Emphasis mine).<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup>Source: *A Guide to Military Civic Action*

<sup>38</sup>Source: *A Guide to Military Civic Action*

As explained above, the actual project management and the decision making over the road development operations on the grounds of Petén was the responsibility of the local military planners.<sup>39</sup>

While the interests of the United States and the Guatemalan militaries were aligned and mutually beneficial during the Cold War, the authority of the US officers while in Guatemala was very limited. In his reply to my question about his interactions with the Guatemalan military, the ex US MCA advisor in Guatemala stated,

If one of the members of the Military Group screwed up or did something wrong and they were telling us “remember, you’re guests in our country and we are in charge. You’re here as long as we benefit from your presence.” That’s how they were telling us. They wouldn’t say it in those words; they’d just put us in the “freezer” for a week or two (personal interview).

Being put in the “freezer” mentioned above refers to the Guatemalan military refusing to meet or communicate with the US advisors. Not only did US advisors have restricted powers while on assignment, they were by no means in charge of the road projects that they were helping to fund. This is not to underplay the role of the US but to help define more precisely the roles of all the participants and clearly state who was in command giving orders on the ground. The ex US engineering advisor in Petén (1966-1969) goes on to describe,

I never gave any order or instructions directly to the Guatemalans, I would advise them. For example, I would be aware of something that they were doing and I would call an officer over and would say, “You know, you probably would be better off doing it this way, rather than the way you’re doing it.” I never told him that he had to do it that way...The only place that I had any kind of control or enforcement was in the maintenance aspect of the equipment, because the equipment we were giving them, we were giving it to them free...that was the only place where we had any kind of US authority to say anything: to make sure the equipment we gave them was being maintained properly (personal interview).

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<sup>39</sup>Source: Personal correspondence with Ex US Engineering advisor in Petén

It is unquestionable from the oral history interviews, my archival research and FYDEP photo albums that the primary mover behind the road building initiative in Petén was the Guatemalan military.

### ***Petén- the Guatemalan military's dream***

The colonization of Petén was not a new idea to the Guatemalan military leaders; developing this unexplored region was a long wanted dream finally made possible with US financial assistance during the Cold War. Historically, Guatemalan military's biggest national security concern was not communism but fear of losing Petén to one of its neighbors, Mexico and Belize. Leaving Petén undeveloped and unpopulated made it vulnerable to territorial disputes. *La Hora* newspaper reports in the 1960, “The only way to incorporate Petén is to populate it.”<sup>40</sup> *Prensa Libre* article discusses the military’s plan to colonize Petén along the *Usumacinta* river on the border with Mexico in order to create an “army of agriculture” to protect against Mexican invasions.<sup>41</sup> The Guatemalan military believed that populating Petén would be a good way to defend the area from Mexico.<sup>42</sup>

Long before the arrival of US advisors and engineers in the 1960s, Guatemalan leaders began their road building plans in Petén. The first “agriculture colony” was established on October 25<sup>th</sup>, 1945 in the Southeast of Petén.<sup>43</sup> Already in 1945, Guatemalan President Juan Jose Arevalo (1944-1951) began the construction of first paved road from *Flores* to *Poptun*. This project was also known as “Future Empire of Poptun.”<sup>44</sup> Posocco describes,

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<sup>40</sup>Source: *La Hora*, 30 Aug., 1960

<sup>41</sup>Source: *Prensa Libre*, 24 May, 1967

<sup>42</sup>Source: *Prensa Libre*, 24 May, 1967

<sup>43</sup> Source: *El Imparcial*, 18 Nov., 1967

<sup>44</sup> Source: *El Imparcial* 18 Aug., 1960

The Arevalo administration and its program of colonization of Petén is significant in two respects. First, the colonization effort represents the antecedent to successive programs of the 1960s. More generally, the Arevalo administration marked the inception of development in Petén (2014, pg.57).

This initiative was later briefly continued with Arevalo's successor, Guatemalan president Jacobo Arbenz (1951-1954). However, after his overthrow, these projects were put on hold due to the unstable political climate in the country.<sup>45</sup> As early as the 1950s, FYDEP photo albums collected at the municipal library in Flores show images of Guatemalan military beginning road works in Petén.<sup>46</sup> In the photo captions from 1949 and 1951, Casasola discusses his future road plans during his visit for the inauguration of the Tikal airport.<sup>47</sup>



Fig.5: Oliverio Casasola showing his future road building plans in Petén

<sup>45</sup>Source: *El Imparcial* 18 Aug. 1960

<sup>46</sup>Source: 1969 FYDEP Photo Albums, Album no.2 part1: IMGP9959

<sup>47</sup>Source: 1969 FYDEP Photo Albums, Album no.2 part 1: IMGP9963& IMGP9957



Fig.6: Oliverio Casasola, as a Minister of Communications & Public Works at the time studying the national territory and making future road plans in Petén.<sup>48</sup>

I show these photos as evidence to validate that road building plans in Petén were drafted long before the arrival of US military advisors. Thus, it needs to be asserted that while Guatemalan military collaborated with the US military to advance common Cold War objectives, Guatemalans possessed an independent agenda behind the road making initiatives in Petén, separate from the ones of the US.

<sup>48</sup>Source:1969 FYDEP Photo Albums, Album no.2 part2: IMGP9957 & IMGP9960

My oral history research also shows the Guatemalan military's strong interest to prepare for the war against the insurgents. Some of the preparation strategies included opening up access routes in remote regions like Petén and building up the combat side of the army. Ex US engineering advisor laments,

The only obstacles I ran into was not with the Engineer Battalion, but with the hierarchy in the Guatemalan military who were more interested in bringing in the guns and airplanes, tanks and Armored personnel carriers under the Grant-Aid program...They were more interested in building up the combat side of their military.

In his book, Schwartz (1990) too argues that since the Guatemalan highlands were already under the economic control of the Guatemalan elites, the only place where the army could still enrich themselves was in Petén. In 1964, the Guatemalan journalist Manuel Ponciano - Lechuga calls Petén "the fabulous empire of unexploited riches."<sup>49</sup> Another journalist Ramon Blanco wrote, "Petén is a dream for quick riches."<sup>50</sup>

Guatemalan military leaders were aware that in preparation for the fight against the guerillas, exploiting the rich resources and economic potential of Petén would be strategic. I also argue that creating access routes in Petén must have been part of the Guatemalan military plan to strengthen its economic position within the society and logistically prepare for the war on the insurgents. In response to my question whether he thought if there was a link between new roads in Petén and Guatemalan military's counterinsurgency preparation, the ex US military official stationed in Petén from 1966 to 1969 states,

Certainly I do, I mean if they didn't they were stupid. Obviously, if they needed to get to an area with a type of force that needed to counter the insurgent movement... The Guatemalan military had to have in the back of its mind the idea that they needed to move large force into that area... knowing enough about military tactics, because I had

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<sup>49</sup>Source: *El Imparcial*, 23 July, 1964

<sup>50</sup>Source: *El Imparcial*, 18 Aug., 1960

been with the US army for ten years, I would have assumed that the headquarters of the Guatemalan army would have anticipated the need for a road for that purpose (Personal interview).

Historically, Petén served as a training grounds in preparation to defend against ongoing territorial disputes with Mexico and Belize as well as other national security concerns. Ex US engineering advisor recalls an interesting experience right before his departure in 1969,

I wanted to go on a hunting trip in El Petén, and I was hunting along the river that was located to the west of Poptun. And while I was in the area, they had these planes fly over, and a whole bunch of Guatemalan parachutists jumped out. They were just going through an exercise of how they would be able to mobilize soldiers in that area, because there were no roads; and they couldn't really get to this area by road, so they had them jump in by parachute (Personal interview).

In fact, CIA funded paramilitary forces in preparation for the US invasion of Cuba in 1961 (known as *Bay of Pigs*) also trained in Petén. The military base where some of this training has taken place was established near *San Juan Acul* in the municipality of Petén (FEDECOAG 1993, pg.11 cited in Posocco 2014). Guatemalan military's infamous killing squad *Kaibiles*, responsible for massacres of thousands of innocent civilians during the Guatemalan Civil War, trained on two compounds located in Petén, *El Infierno* ("Hell") and *La Polvora* ("Gunpowder") near *Melchor de Menchos*.<sup>51</sup> In 1989, these two Kaibil training centers were moved to the Military Zone 23 in *Poptun* also located in the department of Petén (CEH 1999).

Thus, I agree with Possoco when she claims that Petén was "site of early militarization and counterinsurgency" (2014, pg.51). During the most violent years of the internal armed conflict, apart from being a site of constant military exercises, Petén also became "a kind of

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<sup>51</sup>Source: CEH 1999, Vol. II, Chapter 2, pg.56; & Unclassified DIA report, Feb. 1987. NSA Archives, George Washington University

haven for the Guatemalan military” because there were few confrontations with the insurgents compared to other parts of the country (Gould 2009, pg.78). Thus, I argue that development activities in Petén need to be viewed as being commanded by the Guatemalan military through the bureaucracy of FYDEP. This military run agency was the primary institution behind the road projects taking place in 1960s and 1970s Petén. This is why thinking of FYDEP as a military institution and an economic enterprise is key to tracing roots of violence in Petén. For this reason, the following sections of this chapter are dedicated to understanding FYDEP and its military leadership.

### ***FYDEP - The Guatemalan military enterprise***

The FYDEP was created on May 27<sup>th</sup>, 1959 (Legislative Decree number 1286) under the administration of President Ydígoras Fuentes.<sup>52</sup> General Fuentes came into power after the assassination of Coronel Carlos Castillo Armas who was the head of the US installed military run government after the 1954 CIA overthrow of the democratically elected civilian president, Jacobo Arbenz (Schirmer 1998). In the aftermath, Guatemalan government came under direct military rule (Posocco 2014).

One of the key things that distinguished the establishment of FYDEP from other state development agencies such as its national predecessor (and later competitor) – the *National Institute for Agrarian transformation* (INTA) was that FYDEP was formed at the hands of the Guatemalan military.<sup>53</sup> According to organogram published in 1959, the FYDEP was established under direct control of the Guatemalan Ministry of National Defense (Please see Figure 8).<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Source: *La Hora* 28 May, 1959; *Prensa Libre* 24 may, 1967

<sup>53</sup> Source: *La Hora*, 19 August, 1960

<sup>54</sup> Source: FYDEP Summary 1946-1966

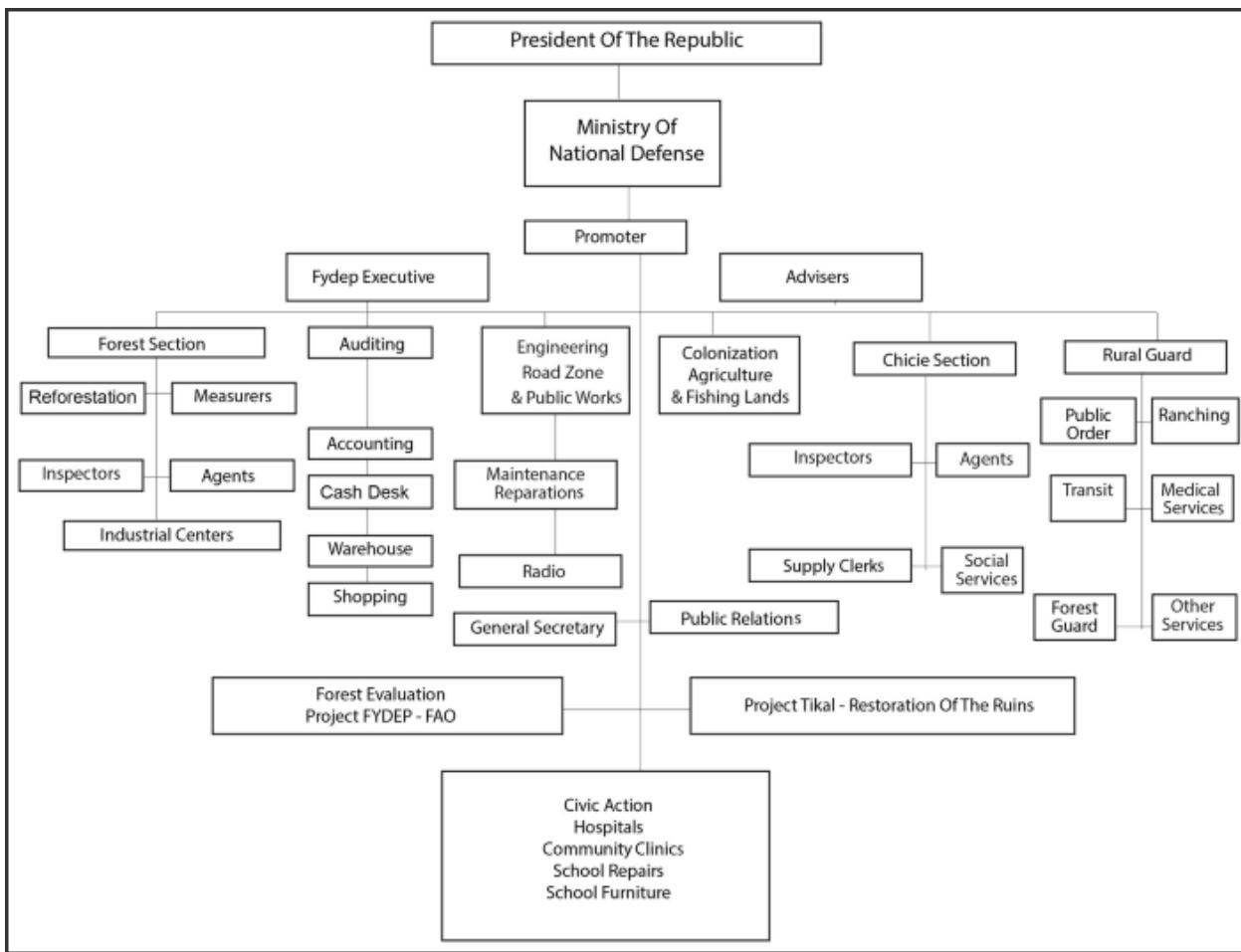


Fig. 7: 1959 Organogram showing foundation of FYDEP under the direct rule of the Guatemalan Ministry of National Defense (translated from Spanish by the author)

Another particularity about FYDEP was its level of autonomy. In an oral history interview, former employee describes FYDEP as a “government inside another government.” Possoco finds, “FYDEP amounted to an organism of oligarchic self-governance, which was under direct control of the Guatemalan Army” (2014, pg.51). This autonomy and administrative control exercised by FYDEP caused much discontent among the Guatemalan elites. Numerous articles published in the Guatemalan newspapers shortly after FYDEP’s establishment discuss the conflict between FYDEP, INTA, and different congressmen. According to my analysis of the

articles, at the root of the discontent were FYDEP's economic policies, military self-rule and civilian government's lack of oversight.<sup>55</sup> In one example, members of *Block of Democratic Unity* (BUD) protested against FYDEP law designed to keep economic profits away from the wealthy elites and the politicians in the capital. In 1960, members of BUD and enemies of FYDEP's first Promotor Robert Barrios Pena attempted to dissolve FYDEP because they were angered with FYDEP's enforcement of article 142 of the Guatemalan constitution that prohibited congressmen to take on Chicle<sup>56</sup> contracts in Petén.<sup>57</sup> In various newspaper articles published in *El Imparcial* and *Prensa Libre*, Oliverio Casasola accuses INTA of trying to "paralyze" Petén as he urges its members to "leave FYDEP alone".<sup>58</sup> The determination of FYDEP leaders to keep INTA and other state agencies out of its affairs only attests to its military led agenda in Petén.

Ironically, despite the huge economic potential with Petén's reserves of natural resources such as Caoba trees, Chicle or petroleum, FYDEP seemed to run into frequent financial problems. In my analysis of *El Imparcial* and *Prensa Libre* articles, I found that in the years of 1960, 1965 and 1968 FYDEP almost went bankrupt.<sup>59</sup> High level of corruption within FYDEP was to blame for these frequent financial crises. I came across newspaper articles discussing Chicle workers' strike against FYDEP's corrupt practices on January 7<sup>th</sup>, 1970 and criminal investigations of FYDEP fiscal frauds from September 1970 and July 1971.<sup>60</sup> *El Imparcial* even

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<sup>55</sup>Source: *La Hora*, 19 August, 1960; *El Imparcial* 18 Aug. 1960; *La Hora*, 20 Aug. 1960

<sup>56</sup>Chicle is a natural resin base used to make chewing gum, *La Chiclería* is the commercial production of chicle for export (Source: Schwartz 1990)

<sup>57</sup>Source: *El Imparcial*, 18 August 1960

<sup>58</sup>Source: *Prensa Libre*, 23 May, 1967; *El Imparcial* 31 May, 1967; *El Imparcial* 24 May, 1967

<sup>59</sup>Source: *El Imparcial*, 13 Aug. 1960; *El Imparcial* 26 July, 1965; *El Imparcial* 5 Aug. 1968

<sup>60</sup>Source: *El Imparcial*, Jan 7, 1970; *El Imparcial* 12 July, 1971; *Prensa Libre* 12 Sept. 1970

attacks FYDEP's "biggest hero" Oliverio Casasola because of the corrupt practices of his employees.<sup>61</sup>

It was not uncommon that military officers took advantage of FYDEP to improve their economic status. All along the new built roads in Petén, Guatemalan military acquired such an immense amount of territory that Petén's most fertile lands became known as "Valley of the Stars" (referring to Stars of the Generals). The colonization area in the south of Petén also became known as "The General's strip" (Grandia 2013). Grandia too finds,

President Romeo Lucas García (1978-82), under whom village massacres and other extrajudicial killings increased dramatically during the civil war, himself owned an estimated 80,000 ha, equivalent to 18 percent of privately held land in the colonization regions on the border with Petén (Solano 2005). He also blazed roads into the northern lowlands, conveniently passing his father's cattle ranch, Tula, on the eastern Petén border with Verapaz. Land assignments to military officers around oil wells and in the zones of combat with guerillas also served to disguise the paramilitarization of the region (Falla 1980) (Grandia 2013, pg.231-232).

Despite constant pressures from the civilian legislators in the capital, the FYDEP managed to remain in the hands of the Guatemalan military with only few brief exceptions. In September of 1960, one year after its establishment, the FYDEP passed under the control of the Ministry of Agriculture (at the time under the leadership of Minister of Agriculture - Coronel Enrique Peralta Azurdia).<sup>62</sup> The following year, FYDEP made another brief shift and went under the rule of the Guatemalan Ministry of Economy.<sup>63</sup> However, and after the terms of two FYDEP Promotors, Coronel Robert Barrios Pena (1959-1961) and Eduardo Rodríguez Genis (1961-1962), FYDEP was back under the governance of the Ministry of Defense. See table 3 below for a full chronological list of FYDEP Promotors. The leadership of the FYDEP was made up

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<sup>61</sup>Source: *El Imparcial*, n.d.

<sup>62</sup>Source: *Prensa Libre*, 7 sept. 1960

<sup>63</sup>Source: *Prensa Libre*, 2 Oct. 1961

exclusively of the members of the Guatemalan army. In fact, large majority of the subjects photographed in the FYDEP photo albums are military personnel: cadets, coronels and generals.

<sup>64</sup> Possoco too observes,

FYDEP's operations were, from their very inception, undertaken under the aegis of the Army. The relationship between FYDEP and the Army is most transparent when one considers the figure of the "Promotor," that is, the head of FYDEP, a subject position that came into being with the establishment of the organization and that from its creation was the prerogative of military personnel who took up the role for the duration of the national legislature (2014, pg.61)

Promotor Oliverio Casasola refers to FYDEP as "military government" in his photo albums.<sup>65</sup> In illustration, there are Casasola's captions to the photos of the administrative headquarters of the "military government" in *Poptun* and in *Santa Elena* (municipality of *Flores*).<sup>66</sup> Not surprisingly, a former FYDEP employee interviewed for this project calls it "the command center" of the Guatemalan military in Petén. In all aspects, the military-run FYDEP was the only law and the governing body of this department. Thus, I argue that the primary objective of the Guatemalan military was to militarize Petén through development projects and FYDEP's bureaucracy.

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<sup>64</sup>Source: 1969 FYDEP Photo Album

<sup>65</sup>Source: 1969 FYDEP Photo Album, no.1: IMGP9898

<sup>66</sup>Source: 1969 FYDEP Photo Album

<i>Coronel Robert Barrios Pena</i> (1958-1962)
<i>Eduardo Rodríguez Genis</i> (1962)
<i>Coronel Oliverio Casasola y Casasola</i> (1962-1966)
<i>Hiran Ordóñez Fetzar</i> (1966)
<i>Luis Arenas Barrera</i> (1967)
<i>Coronel Oliverio Casasola y Casasola</i> (1968- 1972)
<i>Mateo Cordon Meraz</i> (1972-1974)
<i>Guillermo Pellecer Robles</i> (1974-1978)
<i>Coronel Jorge Mario Reyes Porras</i> (1978-1982)
<i>Coronel Efraín Villagrán Rivas</i> (1982-1986)
<i>Coronel Roberto Estrada Estevez</i> (1986)
<i>Coronel Francisco Ángel Castellanos Gongora</i> (1986)

Table 2: Chronology of FYDEP Promoters

The chronological trajectory of different road building projects documented in the photos show that FYDEP prioritized regions of Petén that were strategically important for national

defense purposes. The albums show that *Poptun*, *Melchor de Menchos*, *Sayaxche*, *Santa Elena*, *Flores* or *San Benito* were among the first places in Petén to see new development projects.<sup>67</sup> In fact, colonization of Petén began with 64 families coming to *ColPeten*, on the road to *Poptun* (Possoco 2014). The Military zone of *Poptun* was where most of the military meetings and events took place in Petén.<sup>68</sup> The *Melchor de Menchos* military zone, infamous for being a *Kaibiles* training ground, was strategically situated on the border with Belize.<sup>69</sup> Historically, the road *Flores- Poptun- Guatemala City* became known as the “Military road of Petén” due to Petén’s strategic importance in relation to Belize and Mexico.<sup>70</sup> A Former US engineering advisor explains,

At that time there was a big controversy between the Guatemalans and the British Honduras, which is now known as Belize. The Guatemalans had a motto that said “Belice es nuestro,” which means ‘Belize is ours’ not the British...the reason I bring this up is because there was a roadway that went from El Petén, across the border into Belize, and there were checkpoints there (personal interview).

Shortly after the first migrations coming into the region, in 1964, FYDEP photo albums display images of military barracks, police station, tax and border customs office being built in *Melchor de Menchos* just 50 meters from the Belize border.<sup>71</sup> As previously mentioned, military zone in *Sayaxche* served as training grounds for Cuban paramilitary forces prior to the Bay of Pigs Invasion of Cuba (See Fig. 16 for exact locations of the cities discussed in this paragraph).

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<sup>67</sup>Source: 1969 FYDEP, Album no.1: IMGP9924;IMGP9927;IMGP9898;IMG9899;IMGP9929;IMGP9891;IMGP9892;IMGP9886;IMGP9894;IMGP9920;IMGP9928;IMGP9939

<sup>68</sup>Source: 1969 FYDEP Photo Album

<sup>69</sup>Source: 1969 FYDEP, Album no.1:IMGP9883

<sup>70</sup>Source: *El Imparcial*, n.d.

<sup>71</sup>Source: 1969 FYDEP, Album no.1: IMGP9885

FYDEP's first Promotor Barrios Pena received particularly strong criticism due to his perceived disloyalty to national military objectives.<sup>72</sup> *La Hora* newspaper writes on August 18<sup>th</sup> 1960, "Pena is not the man that Petén needs, If Pena stays, Petén will become Mexican." One of the other reasons why Pena became so strongly criticized was because he was not physically present in Petén during his term as Promotor.<sup>73</sup> In 1962, after three years of FYDEP struggling and almost ending up dissolved, Coronel Oliverio Casasola seemed to be the right man for the job.<sup>74</sup> Unlike Pena, Casasola was ambitious, always on the grounds of Petén ready to build new roads. On August 1<sup>st</sup> 1962, FYDEP was back under the rule of the Ministry of National Defense headed by the FYDEP's yet to be its most legendary Promotor Coronel Casasola.<sup>75</sup>

Not only was FYDEP highly militarized in its every aspect and designed to benefit the military while disadvantaging the working classes. Both Maya and Ladino peasants were marginalized during the FYDEP era and the following sections of this chapter examine FYDEP's leadership and the ideologies accompanying their work. To do this I continue my analysis by looking at FYDEP's most prominent figure, Coronel Oliverio Casasola y Casasola.

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<sup>72</sup>Source: *Prensa Libre*, 17 Aug, 1960

<sup>73</sup>Source: *Prensa Libre*, 18 August, 1960

<sup>74</sup>Source: *El Imparcial*, 13 August, 1960

<sup>75</sup>Source: *El Imparcial*, n.d. 1962

### ***Oliverio Casasola y Casasola***

Survival and popularity of eugenics as a core foundation ideology of the ruling military junta in Guatemala has manifested itself as one of the pre-conditions for the 1980s genocide. Visions of “racial purity” and ambitions to manipulate “racial health” of the nation had remained on the minds of the Guatemalan military leaders. FYDEP’s most legendary Promotor was no exception. Comparing himself to Hernan Cortez, Leonidas de Thermopylae or even Charles de Gaulle, Oliverio Casasola was unquestionably the most passionate road builder in Petén, a real “caminero” (road builder) as his employees used to call him (Casasola 1968).<sup>76</sup>

Casasola firmly believed that the number one priority for Petén was to make it accessible. He was convinced that without roads, economic growth of this region was impossible as he refers to transportation infrastructure as the “nervous system” of Petén (1968, pg.38). He writes, “colonize without roads is a blind process” (Casasola 1968, pg.35). In fact, as illustrated in the photo albums, under Casasola’s leadership of FYDEP, road development in Petén reached its apex. In the words of former FYDEP employee interviewed for this project, “he was a Progressista!” See photo below for an example of FYDEP style road.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>Source: *El Imparcial*, 14 jun.1979; *El Imparcial* 8 nov.1966

<sup>77</sup>Source: 1969 FYDEP, Photo Album no.2; IMGP9975



Fig.8: FYDEP style road - section from San Benito to Melchor de Menchos

Oliverio Casasola was born in the city of Zacapa on July 23rd, 1912 to Felipe Casasola and Felipa C. de Casasola.<sup>78</sup> In 1930, young Oliverio began his military career by attending the Guatemalan Military Polytechnic School.<sup>79</sup> After successful completion as an infantry officer, in February of 1934, Casasola returned back to military school to pursue a second degree as a road builder.<sup>80</sup> In June 1945, now a trained road builder, Casasola becomes a director of the road project to the Atlantic.<sup>81</sup> Finally in 1948, Casasola was assigned to his first road project in Petén as the supervisor of the section Poptun - San Benito, part of a larger road project also known as

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<sup>78</sup>Source: *El Imparcial*, n.d.

<sup>79</sup>Source: Ibid.

<sup>80</sup>Source: Ibid.

<sup>81</sup>Source: Ibid.

the “military road of Petén.”<sup>82</sup> In 1952, he achieved military rank as a Coronel and four years later, in 1956, he was finally given the opportunity to be the director of the road zone no.9 in Petén.<sup>83</sup> Eventually, Casasola became the second sub secretary of the Guatemalan Ministry of National Defense in charge of reincorporating Petén.<sup>84</sup> Prior to becoming Promotor of FYDEP in 1962, Casasola also served as Petén’s governor, spending his time on another road project - Flores-Poptun-Guatemala as chief of public works.<sup>85</sup>

In 1970s, Casasola finishes the greatest accomplishment of his career- completion of a road project that connects Petén to the rest of the country. Shortly after, in his then newly published book *Grandezas y Miserias Del Petén*, he makes it clear that unlike Ladinos, Maya settlers are not welcome to travel this road. In his writing, Casasola openly expresses his visions of the indigenous people in Guatemala as “backward” and “barbarian”(Casasola 1968). He explains that since “to populate is to govern,” populating Petén with pre-selected racially “healthy” people is his biggest demographic challenge (Casasola 1968, pg.42). In the same paragraph, he tries to justify his racist beliefs by claiming that the indigenous people inhibit the economic growth of Petén and the rest of Guatemala. In his support he claims that immigration of Q’eqchi’ Maya people to the municipality of *San Luis* in southern Petén destroyed not only the land but also the economic potential of this region and even the neighboring region of Alta Verapaz (Casasola 1968). In particular, Casasola criticizes their nomadic lifestyle and indigenous subsistence strategies, different from ladino agriculture practices (Casasola 1968). More precisely, he describes his fears of “human storm,” as he warns that Maya settlement of Petén would “contaminate an organism that must remain healthy” (Casasola 1968, pg.44). He

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<sup>82</sup>Source: Ibid.

<sup>83</sup>Source: Ibid.

<sup>84</sup>Source: Ibid.

<sup>85</sup>Source: Ibid.

continues as he reveals his hope that Petén's good racial health could “infect the health of the rest of the country” (Casasola 1968, pg.44).

Casasola's commentary of an image where his son is photographed with a Lacandon “Indian” is alarming. The language used by Casasola to discuss the indigenous man in the photo reminds us of someone describing a piece of livestock. The tone of the Casasola's words in the caption is not only dehumanizing but smug with an air of superiority reminiscent of the colonial Spanish settlers. The caption reads, “There are still remnants of the Lacandon race that populated this region, so here we see this inhabitant of the Lacandon area in the margins of the Usumacinta, forced by the necessity to wear ladino clothing as he visited the city of Flores in search of medicine for his nearly extinct family members.”<sup>86</sup> At the time, Casasola was admired by many Peteneros which made his openly racist remarks and ideologies even more influential and dangerous. Please see the discussed photo below.

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<sup>86</sup>Source: 1969 FYDEP Photo album no.3: 2005-08-10 024.jpg



Fig.9: Oliverio Casasola's son photographed with Lacandon "Indian"

Eugenic ideologies of "whitening" Petén by favoring ladino migration into the region is one of the biggest priorities described in Casasola's book. The Guatemalan newspaper, *El Imparcial*, also describes FYDEP's preference for "human element that dedicates its efforts to exploitation of agriculture and ranching in Petén."<sup>87</sup> This indicates that it was the Ladino farmers who were to be the new settlers of Petén as opposed to the Nomadic Mayas. The new roads in Petén were not intended to benefit the Mayas but to attract racially "healthier" Ladino population.

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<sup>87</sup>Source: *El Imparcial*, n.d.

### ***Indigenismo Movement & Ladinoization***

Through the discourses deployed by Casasola, it was a common belief among the Guatemalan military development planners that the Maya were in the way of Petén's economic development and Guatemala's national progress. In particular, FYDEP military leadership was strongly influenced by so called "Indigenismo" movement. In Guatemala, this nationalist movement promoted racist ideas to solve the "Indian" problem and "whiten" the Guatemalan society by assimilation of Mayas (Taracena 2004). This movement was closely connected with a process also known as "ladinoization" or making Maya into Ladinos. This was accomplished by encouraging Mayas to take on ladino culture, language, dress etc... Former US advisor in charge of MCA in Guatemala remembers,

It was a village that we didn't classify as Indian nor as Ladino, or at least I didn't, but rather as a village in transition because it had collected Indians of different linguistic groups, but they still wore their Indian garb, or dress, and they still spoke their Indian language. But the men were generally bilingual. Some of the women, not many, were bilingual. And the men, however, had abandoned Indian dress and were wearing western clothes, and by custom they were in transition from being an Indian village to a Ladino village (emphasis mine) (Personal Interview).

This was not new to Petenero society. The operational hierarchy of "La Chicleria" that dominated Petén's economy for decade, also reinforced "Ladinoization" programs. For example, if chicleros wanted to advance into higher ranks in business, they needed to write and read Spanish, which was considered exclusively a "ladino" trait (Schwartz 1990).

At first glance, assimilation of the Mayas might not seem as a "bad" idea in the society where being ladino is advantageous. However, nothing could be farther from the truth. It has been previously shown that "ladinoization" was a violent process rooted in Eugenics that

positioned “whiteness” as a racialized identity connected to power and privilege, superior to the “non-white” Mayas (Nelson 1998).

Wolfe (2006) makes an important point when he claims, “assimilation can be a more effective mode of elimination than conventional forms of killing, since it does not involve such a disruptive affront to the rule of law that is ideologically central to the cohesion of settler society”(, pg.402). In the modern era, the elimination of the native is more subtle, yet no less problematic. While the opening of America’s hinterlands is no longer genocidal by massacring people, inherently violent process of colonization and its new strategy of “development” now found more clever way to eliminate - by assimilation.

Although ladino racial identity is not inherently connected to “whiteness” as most Ladinos in Guatemala have indigenous heritage, cultural characteristics of ladino racial identity such as language and dress are considered to be closer to a “white” racial identity than the one of the Mayas. Possoco (2014) explains, “Ladino identity seems therefore never to have been directly predicated on Criollo whiteness, but rather, on a sense of hispanicized character, civilized conduct, and, most importantly, an inherent opposition to indigenous primitivism”(pg.35).

Already in the 1950s, Guatemalan military was obsessed with “racial purity” and ambitions to manipulate “racial health” of the nation. In 1951, during the conference for the Society of History and Geography, ”indigenista” development planners even suggested that Petén should be populated by Spanish and Italians in order to whiten the population and encourage European migration to improve Guatemalan racial stock (Beteta 1951, cited in Gould 2009). The Guatemalan military’s obsession with Eugenics manifested itself in various forms.

On August 24<sup>th</sup> 1961, Guatemalan President and General Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes, passed a new law for Defense of Purity of Spanish language (Congressional Decree 1483).<sup>88</sup> Although enforcement of the law proved ineffective, in a country where dozens of indigenous languages and dialects are spoken, such law is deeply racist and discriminatory.<sup>89</sup> At the time, the Guatemalan census estimated that 53.6% of the population was indigenous.

As suggested, the ultimate goal behind the Guatemalan military's obsession with racial purity was "ladinoization". Since it is imagined that race in Guatemala is alterable and can be changed in one's lifetime, "ladinoization" of the Maya was part of a larger national project to "whiten" and modernize the Guatemalan nation (Gould, 2009). In his book, Taracena describes this as a new national paradigm in the 1950s and 1960s designed to rebuild Guatemala (2005, pg.79). Gould observes,

According to Schirmer's (1998) brilliant account of the Guatemalan military project (the title of her book), the army sought to resolve the national crisis by re-making the country... According to this new approach, the army was to annihilate the 30% of the population that was imagined to be "lost." The army aimed to bring the other 70% back into the nation through model villages, the organization of "volunteer" civil defence forces, and other militarized development projects" (2009,pg.97).

Guatemalan military's imaginaries to "re-make" the Guatemalan nation by "whitening" the Mayas is closely connected to the 1980s racial violence against them.

The racist ideologies of the military in the 1960s led to implementation of "assimilationist" strategies such as "ladinoization" of the indigenous Guatemalans. As argued by Wolfe (2006), assimilation can manifest genocidal as it is in its essence the most effective form

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<sup>88</sup>Foreign Service Dispatch between US Embassy in Guatemala City and US State Dept., September 7,1961, Central State Dept. files-economic matters (1960-1963) (Source: NARA- National Archives College Park, Washington DC)

<sup>89</sup>Source: *El Imparcial*, 19 April 1963

of a group's elimination. To this day, Mayas in Guatemala have proven resistant to assimilation. Genocide scholars Chirot & McCauley (2006) argue that when the victim group fails to assimilate, mass killing often becomes the "final solution" to get rid of a group. In the 1960s, Mayas did not fit the racial and cultural profile of the military development planners such as Oliverio Casasola. These planners saw Mayas as a real hindrance to their vision of the new modern Guatemalan nation they were working to re-built through projects such as road building in Petén. Mayas became a real threat to the military's idea of racial purity and thus became superfluous and eventually destined for elimination. Thus, it is not a coincidence that the same military institution undertaking road projects in 1960s Petén was part of the military responsible for the 1980s mass killing of the Maya.

## **Chapter VI. Military Logistics in Petén: Roads to Progress?**

*“Strategy decides where to act, logistics brings troops to the point”*

- *Jomini (1862)*

### ***Introduction***

Transport and easy movement of troops on the ground are vital to successful military combat strategy. Thus, existence of transportation infrastructure such as roads in combat zones is fundamental. Practical preparations for violent counterinsurgency was one of the top priorities for the Guatemalan military planners prior to the genocide. In the previous chapter, I described the heavy militarization of Petén and the racist ideologies of the military road planners in 1960s Petén. In this chapter, I show what happened two decades later and how in practical terms roads served as channels of military violence in 1980s Petén. I use mapping analysis to show the correlation between military logistics on the grounds of Petén and the newly built roads. The term military logistics is defined as a discipline of carrying out the movement and maintenance of military forces (Personal Interview). In other words, I am interested in understanding how military used roads to attack and monitor the insurgents and the rest of the population.

In order to evaluate how new roads helped facilitate bloodshed during the 1980s, I needed to first examine the scale of violence in Petén. I begin this section by discussing the findings of my data analysis. In particular, I was interested in geographic distribution of military inflicted violence in Petén. The ultimate goal of such analysis was to compare these geographies of violence and the locations of new built FYDEP roads. This was done by identifying the patterns of violence and comparing it to the maps of FYDEP roads. My main objective was to

visually display the intensity of violence occurring along the new roads. This was designed to show how the 1960s road building and 1980s violence interconnected in Petén. By looking at these connections, I investigate how new roads facilitated Guatemalan military movements, strategy and spread of violence. My findings are also displayed graphically.

### ***Methodology***

I continue by describing my methods. Before I proceed to overlaying my violence data with road maps, I need to first account for my violence data collection, organization and analysis. At the same time, I work to identify systematically and account for the various difficulties, errors and uncertainties associated with my methodology approach. I organized the following coming paragraphs based on various challenges and limitations I encountered during this process.

### ***Violence in Petén database and CEH 1999 report***

When I first decided on the type of data needed to perform my analysis, I quickly came to realize that there was no single comprehensive report summarizing violence data for the region of Petén. Of course, information on violence in Petén is scattered throughout different reports, books and academic articles but none of these previous studies have focused in detail on geographic distribution of violence within this department. Thus, before I could proceed, I needed to create my own database allowing me to display the spatial distribution of violence in Petén. In order to compile such data, I decided to review the Guatemalan Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH 1999) full report. Not only is the CEH the most comprehensive study of civil war violence to date but the full version of this report includes annexes with detailed survivor testimonies. These testimonies are the original interviews with the survivors and they are organized by departments. Most importantly, exact locations where violence has

taken place are provided in these interviews. . I spent two weeks conducting content analysis of these testimonies which allowed me to quantify the information I found in the text and create my own detailed database documenting different locations where violence occurred in Petén.

Basically, I have counted all the mentions of violence for Petén discussed in the CEH records. I chose this approach under the assumption that the patterns of civil war violence in Guatemala documented in CEH represent closely the patterns of violence in Petén. I organized my data in a database applying various rules to keep my counting of violence consistent. All the rules are discussed further in this section.

The CEH report registered a total of 42,275 victims (including men, women and children) who were victim to 61,648 human rights violations and acts of violence (CEH 1999 pg.319). It is estimated that the total number of victims of the Guatemalan Civil war was more than 200,000 (CEH 1999). Accordingly, the CEH registered roughly 20% of all the deaths that occurred during the civil war and by extension the ratio for Petén may be similar. However, this cannot be known with certainty as it is not clear whether the CEH interviews led to consistent estimates across the country. It is unclear whether CEH registered a larger ratio of victims in some departments and less in others (e.g. less in more distant regions from the capital). Also, it is possible that survivors were more forthcoming to tell their stories in certain regions and less in others.

I also reviewed the Official Report of the Human Rights Archdiocese Office of Guatemala (REMHI 1998) and the Special Report of the Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation (FAFG 2001) as well as other literature discussing violence in this region (Possoco 2014, Grandia 2006, Lowel 2005). These sources provided a means for cross-checking and enriching the information found in the CEH report. However, to graph and map my findings I use only data on violence collected from the CEH report.

The Commission for Historical Clarification report published in 1999 is the result of an international effort sponsored by the United Nations, and was central to the peace agreement that the Government of Guatemala and URNG signed on December 29<sup>th</sup>, 1996 (Tomuschat 2001). CEH's investigative field work took place from September 1<sup>st</sup> 1997 until the end of April 1998 (Tomuschat 2001). CEH activities focused on rural, urban, ladino and indigenous communities in all departments. Along with the REMHI 1998, the CEH 1999 was the largest project attempting to examine and estimate the scale of violence during the Guatemalan civil war. It was the result of this UN managed project that helped prove that genocide against Guatemala's indigenous people have taken place at certain times and in certain places during the armed conflict. CEH data is a result of almost a one year investigation and it looks at all types of violence, including arbitrary executions, rape, torture, disappearances (CEH 1999).

#### ***Few words on REMHI 1998 & FAFG 2001 reports***

The REMHI project is an internal Guatemalan investigation conducted by the Catholic Church (Archdiocesan Human Rights Office) for the recuperation of country's historical memory. Created in 1994, the REMHI project trained over 800 Guatemalans to travel throughout the countryside, encouraging survivors to tell their stories (Ross 2004). REMHI efforts began prior to establishment of the Historical Clarification Commission and were designed as an initial support for the Commission. While CEH activities focused on all rural, urban, ladino and indigenous communities, REMHI's objective was to focus their attention primarily on rural indigenous communities in all departments where physical access and linguistic barriers would be difficult for the CEH investigators (REMHI 1998). Unlike the CEH, I do not possess full version of the REMHI report. And I was not able to access their data collected for other forms of violence besides massacres. However, I do possess REMHI's comprehensive list of massacres

indicating dates, locations and responsibility (REMHI 1998, pg.151). Since the list included information for 10 massacres in Petén indicating specific location, dates and responsibility, I was able to compare these 10 massacres to the massacres mentioned in the CEH. This helped to add credibility to the CEH data I was reviewing and provide me with a better understanding of violence in Petén.

The most recent and the last report I reviewed for this project was published by the Guatemalan forensic Anthropology foundation (FAFG 2001). FAFG began their work in the early 1990's exhuming mass graves of various arbitrary executions and massacres to identify victims. The version of FAFG 2001 report I managed to obtain through Concordia's library described only 10 events of violence being studied in the region of Petén. Thus, I took the data from this report and I compared it with CEH 1999 and REMHI 1998 data in order to see if there were any massacres or acts of violence that were missed by CEH 1999 and REMHI 1998. In fact, in one case of a massacre in *Los Josefinos* (municipality of *La Libertad*) on April 29<sup>th</sup> 1982, I was able to compare the number of victims registered in CEH and the number of bodies exhumed in a mass grave by the FAFG for the same massacre. The number of exhumed bodies by the FAFG (19) for that massacre was lower than the number reported by CEH (27). Although the number of victims differed, the FAFG still helped confirm information I found in the CEH. The difference in victim counts between the two reports could have been a simple error or it is also possible that some of the victims reported by survivors were burned instead of being buried or were buried elsewhere. This would also explain why they were not found decades later during FAFG exhumations. Comparing data from different reports helped to validate and learn more about the violence I was trying to quantify. However, I only use CEH data for the quantitative analysis used to map violence in Petén.

### ***Limitations of the data found in the CEH 1999 report***

Testimonies compiled by the CEH project represent only a small representation of the massive human rights violations that took place. As previously mentioned, CEH registers only about 20% of all the deaths. Furthermore, victim testimonies and other data found in this report was collected under time pressure, cost restrictions and often very dangerous conditions (CEH 1999). This eventually resulted in a certain level of error, it is no secret that large part of the violence that occurred was never reported (CEH 1999). As suggested, compiling a complete list of all the violent acts that occurred in Petén is not possible. In most cases where violence is inflicted by the state, many deaths, disappearances and other forms of violence go unreported. This is either because there are no family members left behind or victim relatives are too afraid of possible retaliation. This is especially true in Guatemala where criminal justice system is almost non-existent and where state forces were responsible for 93% of the violence (CEH 1999). Thus one is left to speculate a bit about the relationship between the CEH data and what actually happened in Petén. However, as I map violence in Petén I work under the assumption that patterns of deaths documented in CEH are something like the patterns of deaths during the civil war.

### ***Defining the terms and organization of violence data into a database***

For the purpose of this study, I defined the term “act of violence” (one row of data in my excel database) that I use to organize my data into an excel file. An “act of violence” in my database can be all of the following: massacre, murder, disappearance, torture, rape, kidnapping, injury, deprivation of liberty and displacement. For better organization of my excel database I use the abbreviations explained in the table below.

<b>Act of violence</b>	<b>Abbreviation</b>
Massacre	MS
Murder (arbitrary executions, death by human target, death by bomb)	M
Disappearance (includes Forced disappearances)	D
Torture	T
Rape	R
Kidnapping	K
Injury	I
Deprivation of Liberty or Forced recruitment into PAC	DL
Displacement	DS
Children among victims	CH

Table 3: Types of violence in Petén and their abbreviations

Attributes recorded about each “act of violence” in my database are the following:

locality, municipality, date, responsibility, type of violence, source of information, number of victims and notes section.

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Description</b>
Locality	Name of the town, village or hamlet
Municipality	Appropriate municipality for the locality
Date	Exact date or a year if known
Responsibility	State forces vs. Guerilla forces
Source of information	Page numbers in CEH report

Number of victims	Please see next section on victim count methodology
Notes	Any relevant information regarding particular act of violence

Table 4: Attributes recorded with each “act of violence” and their descriptions

In the responsibility section, I assign responsibility to each incident of violence. I divide the responsibility whether it was inflicted by the state forces or the guerillas. State forces (abbreviation M) includes all of the following: military personnel, military commissioners, “Kaibiles”, PAC, G-2, departmental rural guards and national police. Guerilla forces (abbreviation G) refers to all of the different guerilla groups such as URNG, FAR and others. There were instances where the responsibility was not clear from the written testimony (e.g. “armed group of men came to our house”). The head of the CEH Christian Tomuschat explains, “In many instances of armed fighting in the countryside, it was extremely difficult to find out whether the acts complained of had been perpetrated by governmental forces or by military units of the guerillas” (2001, pg.244). In these cases I indicate responsibility as “unidentified” (abbreviation U).

For the most part, each testimony indicated the exact location of a violent incident but there were handful of cases where only the department was indicated. One inconsistency I encountered while reviewing CEH testimonies, was the varying municipality assignments for the same locality. The two particular ones were towns of *El Chal* and *Santo Toribio*. It appears that CEH files place these towns in 2 different municipalities (Dolores and Santa Anna). It is unclear whether this is an error of the person who recorded these testimonies or the municipal boundaries

changed or if maybe the names of the towns changed. Since the source of this discrepancy cannot be established with 100% certainty, I decided to keep the municipality assignments indicated in the original testimony.

### ***Incomplete massacre data and underestimation***

It is important to discuss the limitations of my data source and the implications this had on my estimates. Incompleteness of the CEH massacre data posed limits to what I could see. CEH 1999 report defines massacre as an “arbitrary execution of more than 5 people, taking place in the same place and as part of the same operation, when the victims were in the absolute or relative state of inability to defend themselves” (CEH 1999, Vol. II-III pg. 251, my translation from Spanish). It was not uncommon that massacre data in CEH report did not include the estimated number of dead, disappeared, tortured etc. Thus, I continue by explaining how this led to a minimum estimate in my database and how I dealt with this to keep my data organization standardized.

When the number of victims for a particular massacre was missing, I recorded 6 deaths. Based on the massacre definition above, 6 deaths was the minimum number for a mass murder to be defined as a massacre under the CEH definition. In reality, the number of victims during massacres in Petén was much higher than my estimates show. For example, CEH testimony would mention that the whole village was massacred without providing the exact number of village inhabitants. The massacre of an entire village might involve 20-300 people. However, if the exact number was unknown I was only able to enter the absolute minimum. For example, in the case of Dos Erres massacre some sources estimate the number of victims as high as 300 people (REMHI 1998, Lowel 2005). I emphasize this point because incompleteness of massacre

data in the CEH leads to underestimation in my study and so the numbers in this study need to be viewed as the lowest estimates.

### ***Defining a “victim”***

For the purpose of this study victim is defined as anyone who was harmed by the particular “act of violence.” Thus, in my victim count, I recorded number of affected people and not the number of dead, which allowed me to include disappearances in my victim count as well. This is consistent with the CEH methodology and it is crucial because many of the “acts of violence” described by the survivors were disappearances. Although the disappeared mentioned are almost certainly dead, if the body was never found declaring one as dead in my report becomes problematic from a legal standpoint. The Guatemalan military was notorious for mutilating, burning and burying bodies in mass graves and many of these mass graves were never found or exhumed (Sanford 2004). Sometimes, the number of victims was entered incorrectly or miscounted in the testimonies I was reviewing. Occasionally, I was able to correct these rare mistakes just by reading the testimony carefully which is why I include page numbers next to each row of data in my database.

There were other rules I followed while composing the database. If it was clearly mentioned in the testimony that the particular victim died as a result of a certain “act of violence” but their actual death did not happen until “days following” the incident I included them in the victim count for that event. However, this scenario was not very common. Fortunately, testimonies were very detailed and it was easy to determine these situations. In other words, “acts of violence” were fluid and dynamic events and each case had specific circumstances. These particular circumstances are explained in the notes section and this is why I make my excel database available for a review, accompanying final draft of this thesis.

### ***Base maps of roads and their limitations***

In order to graphically show the spatial distribution of violence in Petén and overlay my violence data with road maps, I needed reliable maps of Petén from the 1980s. I visited the GIS lab & library while I was at the Canadian Association of Geographers (CAG) conference at the Brock University in Saint Catherine, Ontario last year. After some research, I found old CIA maps of Petén from 1983. Since the data I collected includes many small towns, villages and hamlets not displayed on the older CIA maps, I chose to use the current 2015 map of Petén for my spatial analysis. The error using this approach is minimal as the roads in Petén have not changed much since Casasola times (Grandia 2012). Most roads were paved later on but the original dirt roads were planned and paved by FYDEP (Grandia 2009). I include the older CIA maps for comparison in the last section where I display geographic distribution of violence in Petén. Using the CIA 1983 road map I describe the differences between the current roads and the roads in 1980s later on in the chapter. In order to map violence locations in Petén from my database I have used google maps software. In this process, I found that many localities that existed at the time of the violence are no longer to be found on the 2015 map of Petén accessed from Google maps. This is because many of the localities where violence in Petén occurred were either small hamlets, farms, villages or cooperatives that no longer exist today or are just too small to be included on current maps. Thus, the data displayed in my final violence maps do not show each act of violence recorded in my database but only the locations that still exist today. It is important for the reader to keep this in my mind while viewing my final violence and roads map.

### ***Violence in Petén reconsidered***

REMHI 1998 and CEH 1999 rank Petén 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> with the highest number of massacres during the 36 year long Civil war (Please see figure 11 below). Interestingly, graph no. 17 in the CEH report shows that between years 1986 and 1996, Petén was among the top five departments with the highest arbitrary execution rates (CEH 1999, pg.335). CEH also found that Petén ranked 6<sup>th</sup> for total number of human rights violations and acts of violence during the Guatemalan civil war (CEH 1999).

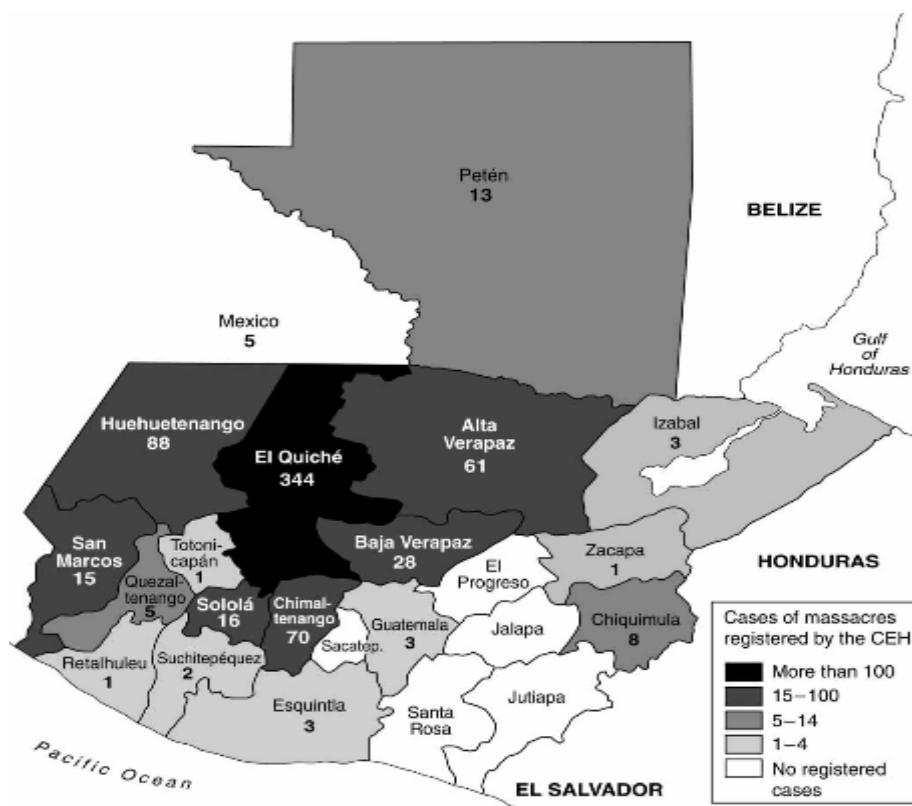


Fig. 10: Massacres in Guatemala by Department (Source: CEH 1999 Database, Conclusions and Recommendations, Annex 5)

It is key to remember that there were 22 departments in Guatemala and Petén was the least populated one, looking at its low population, I argue that Petén should be viewed as one of the hardest hit by military violence. In fact, estimated population of Petén in 1981 was only 131,927 while estimated number of victims there according to REMHI 1998 was 2,099. By comparison, the department of Chimaltenango (ranked 3rd in the number of massacres) with population of 230,059 had 332 total victims (REMHI pg.311, [www.citypopulation.de](http://www.citypopulation.de)). Combining REMHI victim data and Guatemalan population census data from 1981, I have calculated ratios between the total number of victims and population for each department and my results show that Petén was the 4<sup>th</sup> worst affected. From this perspective, there were three regions that were hit harder than Petén - Alta Verapaz, Baja Verapaz and El Quiche. See Table 5 below for the results of these calculations.

Department	Population 1981	Total Victims (REMHI 1998)	Population/ Victim Ratio in %
Alta Verapaz	322,008	6,485	2.0 %
Baja Verapaz	115,602	2,799	2.4%
Chimaltenango	230,059	332	0.14%
Chiquimula	168,863	43	0.03%
El Progreso	81,188	38	0.05%
Esquintla	334,666	108	0.03%
Guatemala	1,311,192	421	0.03%
Huehuetenango	431,343	4,776	1.1%
Izabal	194,618	943	0.05%
Jalapa	136,091	0	N/A

Jutiapa	251,068	17	0.007%
Petén	131,927	2099	1.6%
Quetzaltenango	366,949	595	0.2%
Quiche	328,175	28,806	8.8%
Retalhuleu	150,923	29	0.02%
Sacatepéquez	121,127	3	0.002%
San Marcos	472,326	2718	0.6%
Santa Rosa	194,168	6	0.003%
Sololá	154,249	46	0.03%
Suchitepéquez	237,554	27	0.01%
Totonicapán	204,419	136	0.07%
Zacapa	115,712	177	0.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,054,227</b>	<b>50,604</b>	<b>0.8%</b>

Table 5: Percentages of Total Population vs. Total victims<sup>90</sup> in Guatemala by departments

As discussed previously in this thesis, Petén was by far the most inaccessible department in the country. It is likely that CEH and REMHI investigators had hard time traveling through Petén's rough terrain and didn't manage to access Petén's most remote communities. On the other hand, access to highlands and other regions located close to the capital might have been easier to reach and thus, easier to collect data from. Although FYDEP developed new roads in this department connecting Petén to the rest of country, due to Petén's

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<sup>90</sup>Please note that these numbers are only a fraction of total number of victims in Guatemala.

weather, often times many of the new built roads were not accessible due to frequent flooding which might have had impact on CEH and REMHI data collecting in Petén. Thus, one can speculate that this may be the reason why there is more focus on violence being reported in Guatemalan highlands and less in more remote regions like Petén.

According to REMHI 1998, some of the largest massacres of the civil war occurred in Petén. One example is a massacre of Dos Erres where among the victims were 113 children under the age of 14 (CEH 1999). Most of the Guatemalan violence literature (Carmack 1998, Falla 1993, Grandin 2000, Sanford 2004, Drouin 2011) focus on violence in other departments such as El Quiche, Huehuetenango, Chimaltenango, Baja Verapaz or Alta Verapaz while violent events in Petén receive considerably less exposure. Other have written extensively on violence that has taken place in other regions and this is why I continue by describing the violence in Petén.

The first known massacre in Petén occurred in the village of El Limon (municipality of Santa Ana) in 1980 (REMHI 1998). My database shows that there were several acts of violence reported going back to 1971, however, violence in Petén really intensified ten years later, in 1981. During 1981 and 1982, the Guatemalan state forces began aggressive repressions of cooperatives, villages and small hamlets in Petén. The Guatemalan Army carried out numerous masacres in villages where guerilla presence was suspected such as; *Tres Aguadas, La Bonanza, Nueva Libertad, El Mango, Dolores, El Chal, Palestina, Los Josefinos, La Tecnica* (Cooperative), *Las Flores* (Cooperative), *Col Peten, Buena Fe, La Amistad* (Cooperative) and others. My violence data analysis also confirms what Petén scholars Schwartz (1990) and Possoco (2014) previously observed: the same cooperatives established by FYDEP in the 1960s were among the worst targeted during the counterinsurgency. Possoco writes, “Cooperatives,

however were soon the target of Army intimidation to the extent that many who lived in them resolved to flee over the border and into Mexico” (2014, pg.71). Some of the Cooperatives heavily targeted were *Arbolito*, *La Tecnica*, *La Amistad* or *Las Flores*. Beginning with close army surveillance, next came the massacres as happened in 1981 in Cooperative *Arbolito* on the *Usumacinta* River (Possoco 2014, pg.72). This was because the Guatemalan military suspected that the farmers from *Arbolito* were collaborating with the Guerrillas. A Milpa farmer near Usumacinta River in June 1981 recalls, “They would not call us ‘cooperativistas’ they would call us ‘comuneros,’ ‘comuneros’ they would say, they would not say the word ‘comunista’ directly” (Possoco 2014, pg. 72).

My findings also show that no municipality in Petén was spared from military violence (Please see table and graph below). In early 1982, army organized Civil Patrol units (PAC) in almost every county seat of this region (REMHI 1998). In particular, Rios Montt’s “scorched earth” campaigns devastated Petén, including massacres in *Palestina*, *Los Josefinos* and *Macanche* (REMHI 1998). In fact, most of the documented massacres in Petén were carried out under the regime of Rios Montt. As illustrated in the graph below, according to the data I collected from CEH, the areas most affected by violence in Petén were the municipalities of La Libertad, Dolores, Santa Anna and Sayaxche. The total number of victims based on census of data I recorded from CEH report is 1,340.

MUNICIPALITY	VICTIMS
San Luis	19
Poptun	12
Dolores	316
Sayaxche	144
Santa Anna	187

La Libertad	569
San Francisco	10
Flores	42
San Andres	11
San Benito	7
Melchor de Menchos	14
Unknown	9

Table 6: Victims in Petén by Municipalities (1971-1996)

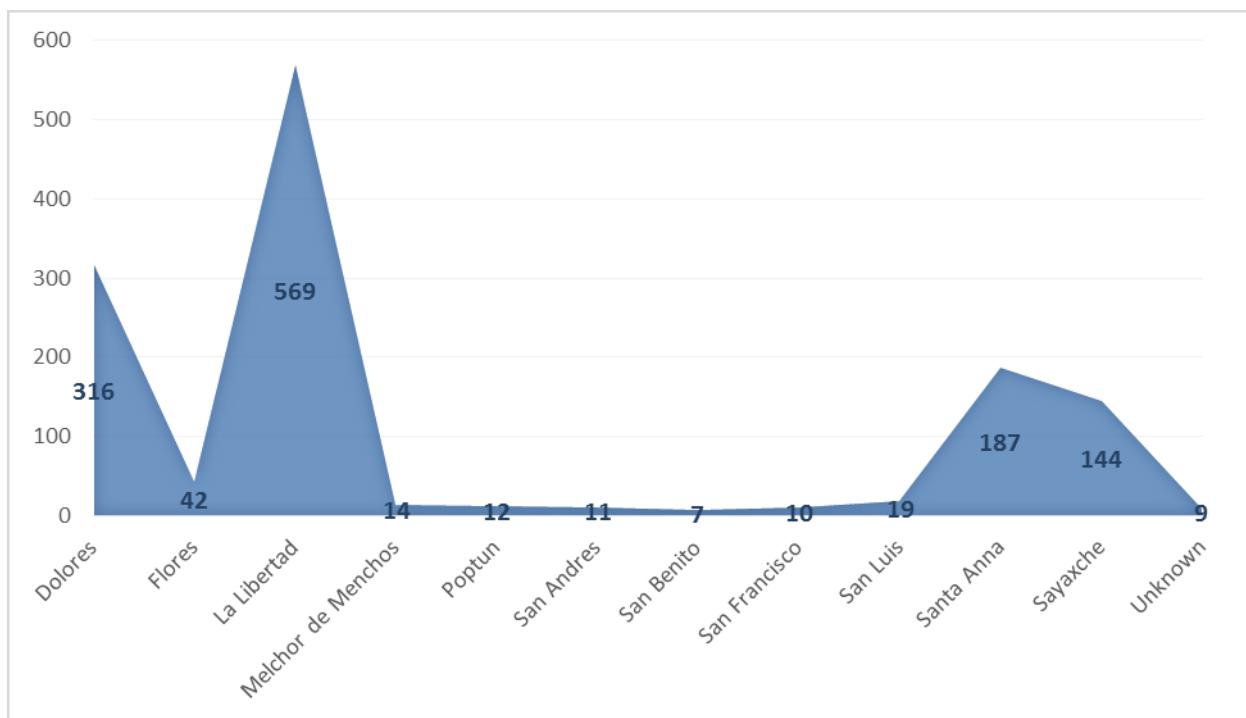


Figure 11: Victims in Petén by Municipalities (1971-1996)

As previously argued by the Guatemalan Commission for Historical Clarification, Guatemalan state forces were responsible for most of the violence committed during the civil

war. I find that this was also true in Petén. My data shows that 91% of violence was committed by the state forces, 4% by the various Guerilla organizations and for the remaining 5% responsibility could not be determined. Interestingly, these results for Petén are consistent with the CEH results on the national level. Nationwide, state forces were responsible for 93% of the violence, guerillas 3% and 4% was not determined (CEH 1999, pg.86). State forces figure displayed in the graph below include the violence committed by the Guatemalan military, military commissioners, civil patrols (PAC), G2 units (death squads), Kaibiles, National Police Forces, State Security Forces and Departmental rural Guards (See Figure 12 below).

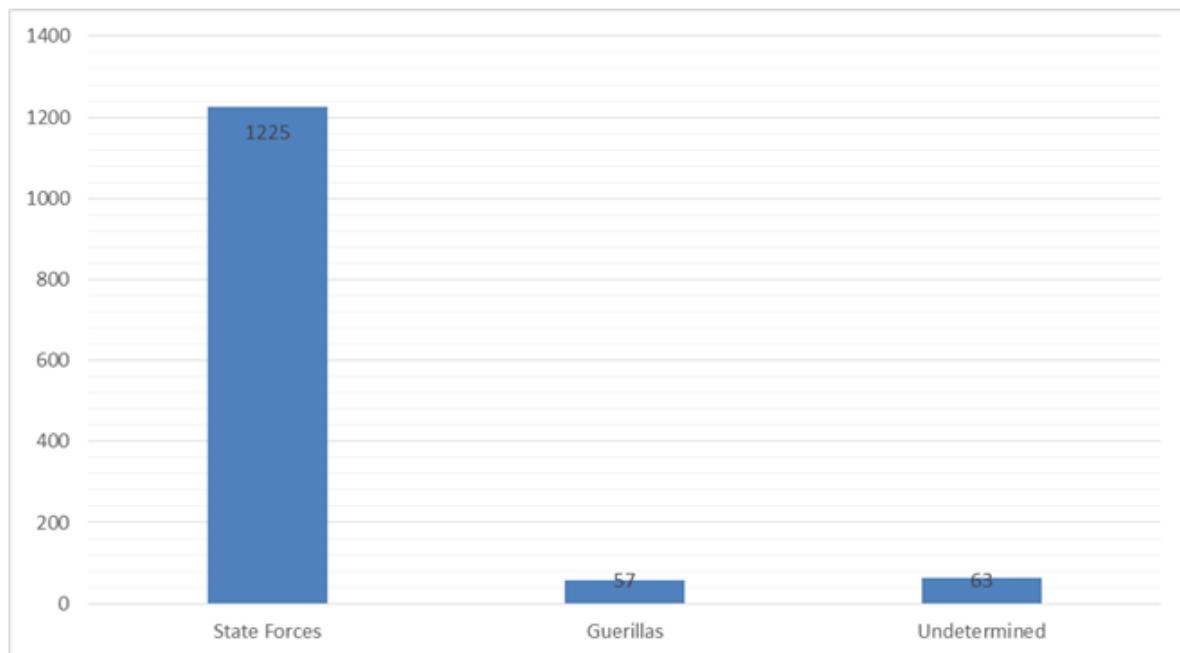


Figure 12: Violence in Petén by Responsibility (1971-1996)

RESPONSIBILITY	PERCENTAGES
State Forces	91%
Guerillas	4%
Undetermined	5%

Table 7: Violence in Petén by responsibility in percentages (1971-1996)

Unlike the CEH 1999 report where data was collected from both ladino and indigenous communities, REMHI report focused solely on indigenous Maya rural communities and interestingly, Guatemalan military was responsible for all the massacres in Petén that were documented by REMHI investigations (1998 pg.151). In general terms, the military was always most involved in the killings, especially in Petén, guerilla forces did not do much killing of civilians or the army.

The next graph shows different forms of violence in Petén. As displayed below murder, torture, disappearance and massacres were the most common types of aggression. Although not displayed in the graph below, violence inflicted on children was very common as well in Petén. In fact, my database data shows that 10% of all forms of violence involved children. Other forms of violent behaviors that occurred in Petén included rape, kidnapping, deprivation of liberty, displacement and injury.

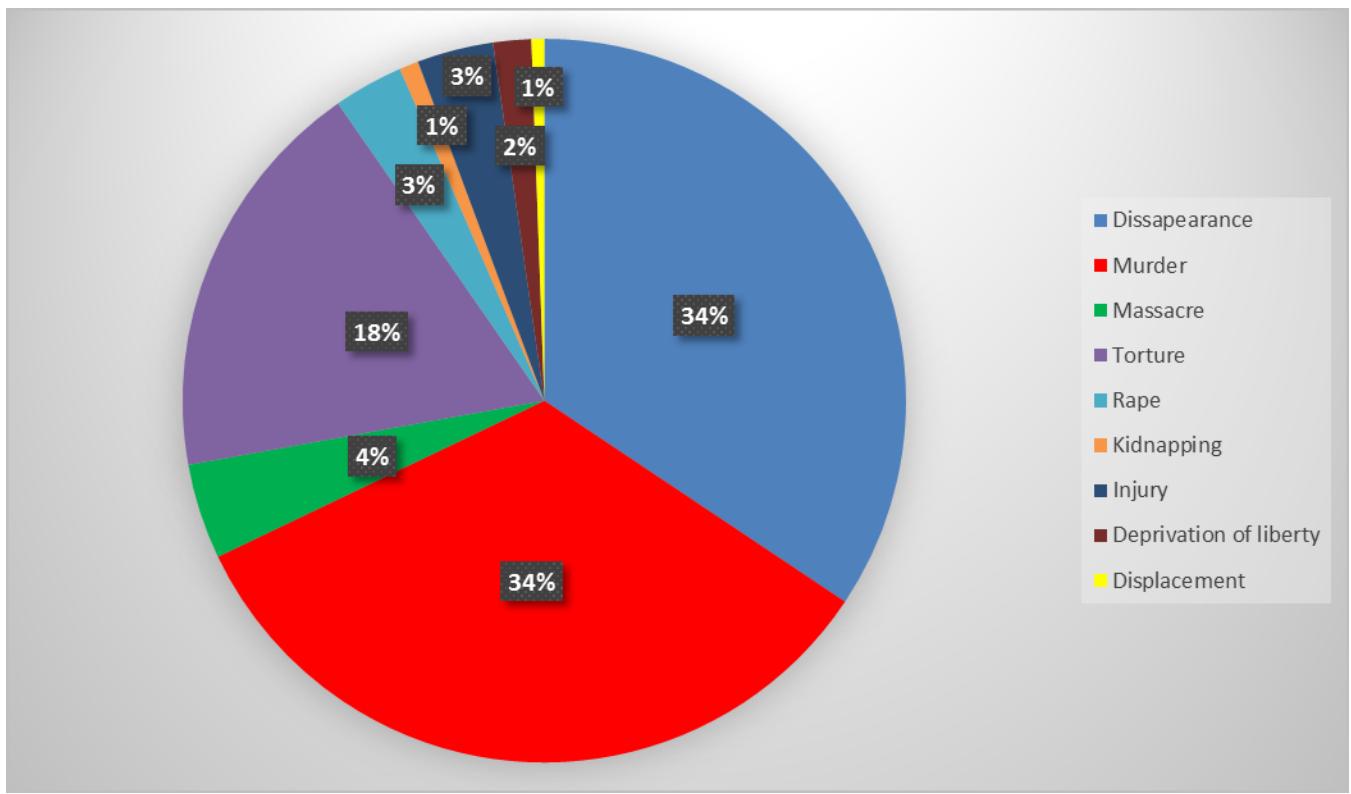


Fig. 13: Forms of violence in Petén (1971-1996)

### ***New Roads in Petén and Military Logistics***

It is unquestionable that roads played an important role in the military's preparations for the counterinsurgency. Learning from the previous experiences fighting insurgents in other areas (e.g. department of Zacapa), the Guatemalan military knew that access roads would become essential when the counterinsurgency campaigns began in Petén (Personal Interview, US MCA advisor). In his answer to question whether he thinks road building in Petén was part of the Guatemalan military's counterinsurgency planning, the ex US MCA advisor responds,

Yes. And there are indirect spin offs. It helps the military if you move landless people into a Milpa, a land-owning capacity. Why? Because they then have a stake in the government, rather than being a victim of the government. So there is greater satisfaction, greater support. With the road, you can then move in police to provide security...And all this contributes to the government being in control rather than guerillas (Personal interview).

As suggested by the US MCA advisor in the above quote, without new roads, it would have been impossible for the Guatemalan military to gain control of Petén. In his research on spread of violence Zhukov (2010) finds, “the roads may reduce the risk and severity of civil conflict-by multiplying the reach and mobility of government forces” (pg.145). However, in the case of Guatemala, government forces were the primary aggressor of violence (91%) as shown in the previous section. Thus, improving access of state forces to Petén meant that the main perpetrators of violence were able to control larger territory and gain access to more distant communities in Guatemala. Manz (2004) writes, “Always when there is an access road, this facilitates the army to corner people (pg. 88, cited in Grandia 2013 pg. 251). Ybarra (2010) too recounts how army ordered the Q’echi’ residents of Yaab’alhix to clear trails to their homes immediately before troops arrived to massacre the villagers in the counterinsurgency campaign of the early 1980s. Survivors were then relocated to rural settlements known as ‘development poles,’ for easier surveillance (cited in Grandia 2013 pg.251). Not only did new roads allowed military access to new villages but also served as a powerful tool of military surveillance.

Roads in Petén served many purposes for the Guatemalan military but the main one was transportation via trucks. Roads were used to attack and monitor the population. Roads were used to transport victims to various military compounds for torture and questioning. Such operations would have been more difficult without the presence of roads. In many of the CEH testimonies I reviewed, survivors describe their relatives being transported to the nearest military

compound and afterwards being found either heavily injured or dead with signs of torture. In 1985, this was the fate of four men Jose, Catalino, Raul and Adelio when members of G2 captured them in a small village called San Joaquin as they were transferred to the military compound San Diego (municipality of La Libertad) where they were tortured for days and afterwards brutally executed (CEH 1999, pg.698).

For the first time, roads in Petén gave the Guatemalan military the ability to move around its rough terrain. Prior to that, Petén was only accessible by airplane. After putting in road networks, the military was able to bring in supplies, ammunition, weaponry and vehicles. Movement between various military bases in Petén became significantly easier. New roads allowed the army to corner people and make it more difficult for adversaries to hide or escape. In other words, setting up military presence in different parts of the department allowed for better surveillance of the insurgents and the rest of the population. Thus, I argue that presence of roads dramatically improved the military's potential to commit violence on the ground. Survivor testimonies from CEH (1999) report describes one such event of violence,

Approximately in 1980 in the village of La Palestina, municipality of La Libertad, department of Petén, Guatemalan Army members tortured and executed an unknown number of people. The girl Clemencia Gonzalez Vasquez was executed with a firearm. Among the victims were some pregnant women whose bellies were opened with knives. First, the military they killed the children as they considered them to be the seed of the guerrillas. Later, other women that were not pregnant were raped and then executed. The soldiers burned houses and left only corpses and ashes everywhere. Following this incident, there was another child that survived but became disabled and some survivor families of this village took refuge in Mexico (pg.703).

Apart from demonstrating the brutality and the hatred of the Guatemalan military for the population, the above quote is significant in two regards. First, practices such as cutting pregnant

women's bellies to kill the "seeds" (a phrase used by the military) resembles genocidal violence against the Maya that took place in other departments. . Second, military's ability to commit large scale violence like burn houses and massacre entire villages shows large military presence in the department. While violence in Petén was never officially declared as genocidal, practices such as these show strong connections to the genocide that happened in other parts of Guatemala. Having set up military posts all across the department military was able to quickly access almost any town in Petén. This is also the reason why guerillas tended to stay in more distant parts of the department. Insurgents knew that roads played an important role in military's combat strategy, by allowing the military vehicles to access villages to the transformation of roads into sites of violence. For example, as illustrated in the above testimony, victims were tracked down and attacked while traveling on the road.

On September 3, 1989, near the municipal capital of La Libertad, department of Petén, Guatemala Army members fired indiscriminately with machine guns and grenades at a truck where were traveling Nehemiah Zepeda Gonzalez and Elias Morales Melgar. As a result of the attack, Nehemiah died and Elijah was seriously wounded and nearly blind (CEH 1999, pg. 700).

From the perspective of the Guatemalan military, anyone who used roads and was not associated with the army could have been collaborating with the FAR. Roads provided a way for the military to monitor movement in the department. This was especially important as insurgents needed to bring food, ammunition and other necessary supplies and without the use of roads, this was very difficult. Road were also used as a site to dump corpses as the following quote shows.

On April 25, 1994, in Jobonche, municipality of San Luis, department of Petén, a group of twelve suspected male members of the G-2 (Guatemalan secret police in 1980s), captured at night Israel Hernandez Hernandez and his twelve years old son, Jose Israel Hernandez Barrondo, and they moved towards Poptún. Two days later, appeared the corpse of the

child on the bank of river Machaquilá, with signs of torture. Later, the corpse of Don Israel appeared on the road to San Luis- Poptún brutally tortured. The victim was a deputy mayor, chairman of the Pro-Improvement Committee, the Malana project collaborator and commander of the PAC” (1999, pg.702).

Based on the testimonies of the CEH, it is clear that dumping bodies along roads, often showing signs of torture, was a common practice the army used to terrorize the population.

From the ground level perspective, roads also shaped the costs and efficiency of sustaining and expanding military operations (Zhukov 2012). In fact, roads allowed for more rapid troop movements on the ground. To my question how new roads in Petén benefited the Guatemalan military, the US MCA advisor answers,

Yes. The road project helped in three dimensions that I can think right off: It opened the Petén to national development... But also, besides the national development and the incorporation of the Petén into the national structure, it gave the military more rapid movement of troops around. That's a definite military benefit, when you don't have to walk through the jungle, but you can go partway by road and then dismount...If its used properly you can increase your logistical movement, your rapidity of movements and etc... (Personal Interview).

Not only new roads in Petén provided needed transportation infrastructure for the perpetrators of violence but new roadways also increased the efficiency/speed of killing by accelerating troop movements. Thus, it is fair to speculate that without roads, violence in Petén might have been less intense. Especially, during the era of Rios Montt when all the large scale massacres took place in this region. Logically, military's ability to bring more forces into the area when large massacres were taking place led to increase in number of victims. It is important to remember that roads can also serve as airplane landing zones in emergency situations. Thus, if the military

needed to fly in emergency military support to intensify their efforts, roads provided quick space where military aircrafts could land.

From geographical perspective, roads allowed for open communication between places and decreased social distance. According to Zhukov, “most conflict research has placed geographic proximity at the center of the diffusion story: violence is more likely to “spill over” to nearby locations than to distant ones” (2012, pg.145). Zhukov (2012) continues as he argues, “the diffusion of insurgent violence requires three conditions: (1) a location currently experiencing violence, (2) a location susceptible to insurgent violence, and (3) a channel of communication between these two localities” (pg. 146). Although Zhukov discusses insurgent violence in this particular example, his logic applies to spread of violence of all types- both insurgent and counterinsurgent. Thus, I argue that basic principle describing how violence spreads discussed by Zhukov can be applied universally. According to this theory, new roads in in this case allowed for violence to diffuse more easily throughout the department.

Guerilla warfare largely relied on the ability to survive and move around Petén’s rough terrains. Both the military and the guerilla needed to bring in new supplies of ammunition, weaponry, personnel and other necessary equipment. Roads allowed for these logistical necessities to take place and thus allowed for violence to continue and sustain itself. Zhukov (2012) continues,

Organized violence generally-whether government or insurgent, in flat terrain or mountain valleys- is constrained by road networks, even for lightly-equipped insurgents, locally-supplied goods will likely be limited to food, water and fuel. The flow of fighters, ammunition, and spare parts still requires open supply routes and logistical connections to the outside world (pg. 145).

Often times, large groups of victims were loaded into trucks by the Guatemalan military and either killed on the way (often discarded on the road) or taken to the nearest military base for torture. Military zones of *El Subin*, *Poptun* and *El Chal* being among the most mentioned destinations in the testimonies. In one example from the CEH report, in March, 1988, 21 victims were taken from the village of *El Juleque* (municipality of Santa Ana) to military base of *El Chal*. Afterwards, victims were again transferred to the military zone of Poptun where they were questioned, tortured and eventually murdered. Without roads, such operations and transport of victims would have been very difficult if not impossible. In this way, new roads contributed to the military's efficiency and capabilities.

On other occasions, survivors describe roads in Petén as actual sites of violence. In several cases, survivors describe their loved ones being either kidnapped or murdered on the road. As I was reviewing testimonies, I came across different examples of this. In one example, the bodies of two victims were mutilated by G2 squads and dumped on the road section between Poptun and San Luis on April 25<sup>th</sup>, 1994. Grandia too describes,

During Guatemala's three decade civil war (1960s-1996, at its apex in the early 1980s), roads were also vectors of military violence. As late as the mid-1990s, travelling by bus was a risky undertaking; buses were stopped and searched at military checkpoints and any civilians suspected of being leftist insurgents and caught travelling without national identification papers could be arrested and thereafter 'disappear' (Grandia 2013, pg.239).

Grandia (2013) calls roads in Guatemala "vectors of military violence", this is consistent with the findings of my mapping analysis. As illustrated in the figures 16-17 below, most of the violence in Petén occurred in the localities along the new roads and most of these roads were planned and built by FYDEP. In fact, prior to beginning of FYDEP's development projects of the 1960s Petén had almost no ground transportation infrastructure. Also, it is interesting to

notice in the figures 16- 17 below that FYDEP's road making was designed around locations of strategic military importance. In fact, my analysis of 1969 FYDEP's photo albums, roads around military bases at *Sayaxche*, *Flores*, *Poptun*, or *Melchor de Menchos* were among first being built.

In the maps below, I combined the violence data I gathered from CEH survivor testimonies and the current road maps of Petén I found using google maps. I decided to use the current 2015 map of Petén for my analysis as the older maps I collected at Brock University do not display towns in Petén in as much detail as the current maps do. Furthermore, during my phone interview with the US road building advisor working on road projects in Poptun in the 1960s, I learned that roads built by FYDEP during the 1960s have not changed much since the times of FYDEP. While many roads have been paved and improved since the 1980s, the road trajectories built by FYDEP have remained. Please see below 1983 CIA map of Petén for comparison.

As it can be seen by looking at roads in 1983 and 2015 maps, road networks connecting different towns in Petén are very similar. Only few differences can be observed, for example, there seems to be a new road between town of *El Campo* and *San Ignacio*. A road heading west from *Las Cruces* and *El Subin* appears to be new as well. On the other hand, road heading west of *La Libertad* is displayed in both maps. Also, as one would expect, roads that were unsurfaced in 1983 map appear to be paved on the current map. Although there are few differences, main road network in Petén connecting towns of *Sayaxche*, *El Subin*, *La Libertad*, *Flores*, *Santa Ana*, *El Chal*, *Dolores*, *Poptun* and *San Luis* are the same in both maps. Road network connecting *Flores* to *Melchor de Menchos* has also remained the same.

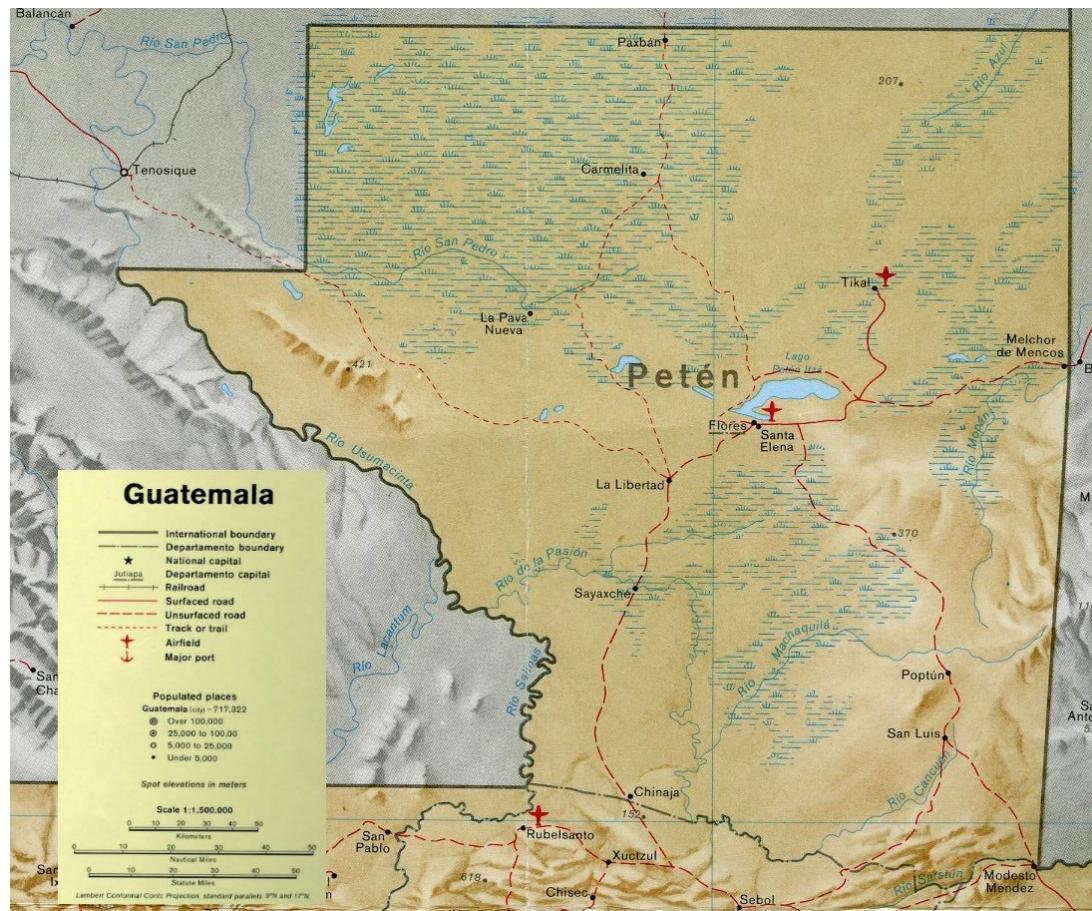
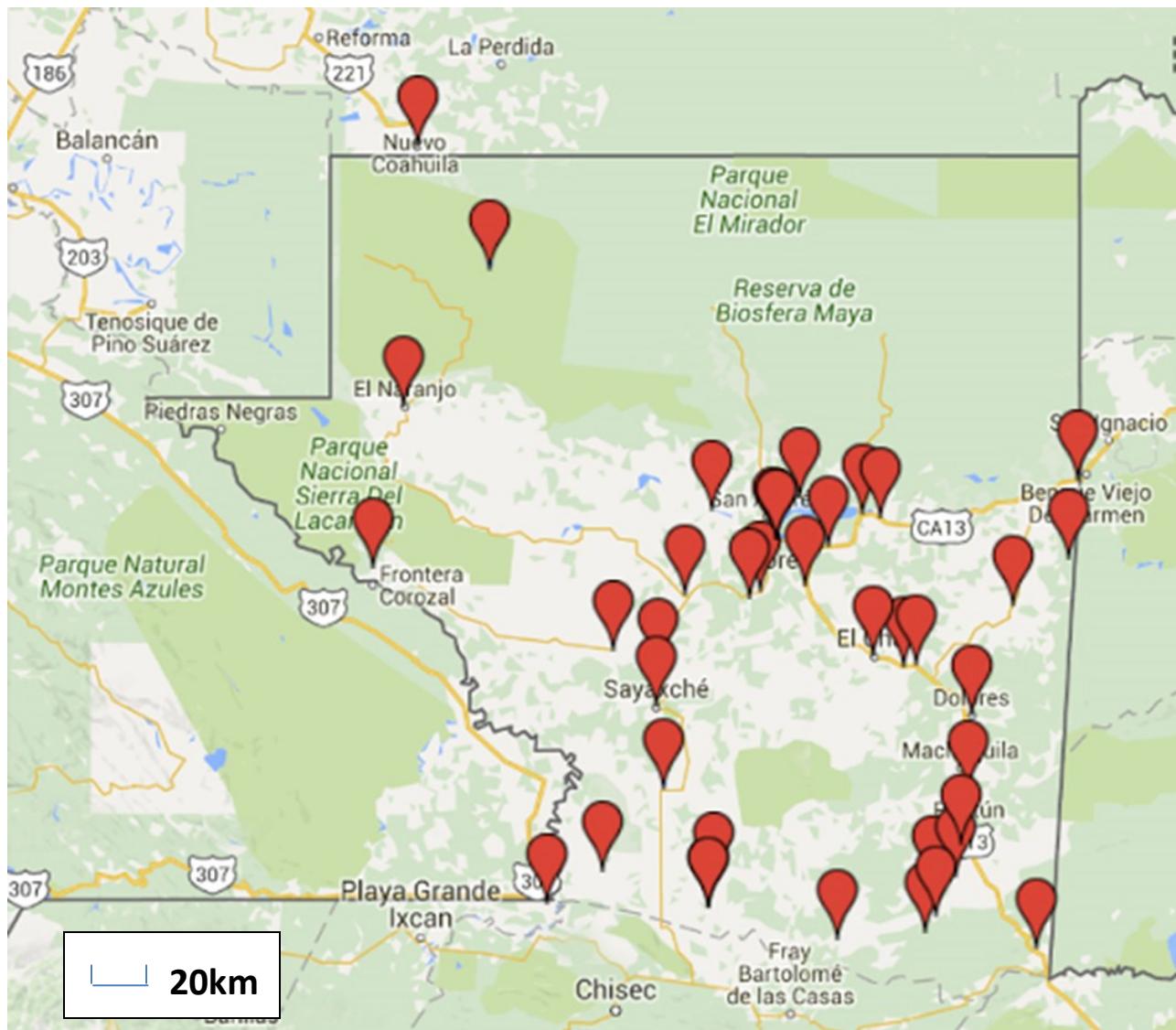
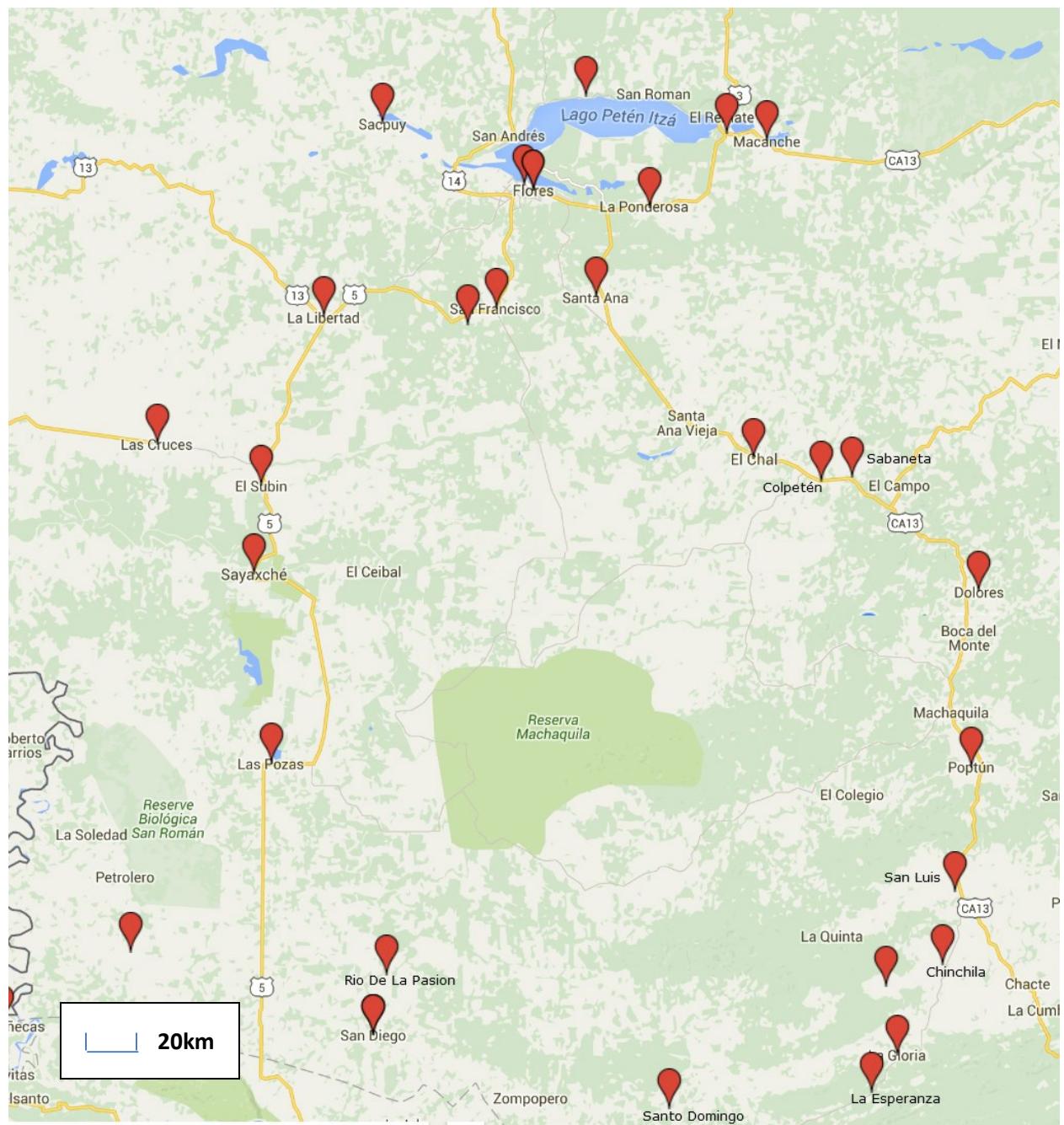


Figure 14: CIA map of roads in Petén from the 1983



- Affected by violence

Figure 15: Locations of Violence in Petén



📍 - Affected by violence

Figure 16: Locations of Violence in Petén (detail)

As displayed in the maps above, most of the violence in Petén is centered on the areas accessible by roads. There is no significant violence concentrations in other parts of the department where there is no road access. In fact, as my mapping analysis shows violence in Petén predominantly happened along the roads. As suggested previously by Zhukov, violence cannot easily spread without a reliable channel of communication and transport. My maps show that most of the violence occurred along the roads connecting towns of Sayaxche, Santa Ana, La Libertad, Dolores, San Luis, Poptun and Flores. As shown in the map, there is a strong correlation between the new built roads and the localities of violence in this region. Although roads in Petén were being built to aid in economic development of the region, I argue that roads also played a logistical role for the military during its counterinsurgency campaigns in Petén.

Deployment and maneuverability of the armed forces depends on the existence and quality of transportation infrastructure. Normally, violence is not associated with roads but as shown through my quantitative analysis, there is a correlation between roads and violence. Therefore, I suggest that road building in Petén during the 1960s might have been part of the larger Guatemalan military planning and national security strategy against the insurgents. To what extent this was planned or resulted helpful after the fact is hard to determine but as shown in this study state forces tended to commit violence in areas accessible by roads. In fact, many of the roads in Petén were built before many of the communities were settled in this region. Thus, I argue that roads in Petén were used to encourage settlement but also to kill when became necessary. This is not to suggest that FYDEP built new roads exclusively to kill people in Petén but as I illustrated in this chapter, roads did have logistical significance for the Guatemalan military during their counterinsurgency campaigns in Petén. This is consistent with the findings in the previous chapter where I show how FYDEP worked to militarize Petén and help built up

the combat side of the military prior to the 1980s. FYDEP leaders prioritized road development in areas of higher strategic importance for the military. This suggests that making new roads in Petén may have been part of a larger military agenda to prepare for future repression.

## **Chapter VII. Conclusion**

I began this paper with two definitions of a road because my premise was to highlight that a road is not only a flat surface to travel on but also a process that leads to a certain result. I chose to introduce my writing with this definition because one of the objectives of this research was to show that even seemingly innocuous activities can have unexpected implications. This requires thinking outside the box and looking at infrastructures such as roads from a new perspective. Roads bring trade, migration, economic growth and simplify movement of people. However, as I have tried to show in this thesis, roads also have meanings and functions that are not normally recognized. With the arrival of Kennedy's development programs, Petén became heavily militarized and roads became the connective fiber for the new military posts established. Transportation logistics and military strategy worked closely together. Cowen (2014) hits the nail on the head when she observes,

It was historically the military and warfare that gave the gift of logistics...logistics was dedicated to the art of war for millennia only to be adopted into the corporate world of management in the wake of World War II. For most of its martial life, logistics played a subservient role, enabling rather than defining military strategy. But things began to change with the rise of modern states and then petroleum warfare. The logistical complexity of mobilization in this context meant that the success or failure of campaigns came to rely on logistics (pg.3).

As the above quote suggests, the role of logistics in combat strategy has evolved over time. With the emergence of "late modernity", logistics went from being an enabler of military strategy to being a determining factor of its success. This is aligned with Cushman's idea discussed in the introduction of this thesis where he argues that modernity and genocide are not mutually exclusive. Cushman (2003) writes, "The aim of the Nazis was to kill as many Jews as possible

and they used the instruments of modernity- bureaucracy and technology – to do so” (pg. 537).

By pointing out the role of modern technologies during the Holocaust, Cushman suggests that we need to be careful how seemingly harmless elements of modernity can be used to perpetuate and intensify violence instead of helping to eliminate it.

By studying connections between road making in Cold War Petén and political violence that followed, I showed that seemingly innocent road development projects were critical for the military’s success to commit large scale violence. This is not to argue that roads in Petén were made exclusively for the killing of Ladinos and Mayas, but I do suggest that strategic significance of new roads in Petén might have been on the minds of the Guatemalan military planners prior to the violence. Evidence from the oral history interviews discussed in Chapter 5 and strategic road placements discussed in the FYDEP photo albums help demonstrate this point. Analysis of the violence data I collected from CEH 1999 allowed me to map exact locations where violence in Petén took place and illustrate that most violence in Petén did take place along the newly built roads.

Roads were the most fundamental infrastructure that needed to be put in place for large scale atrocities to be organized in Petén. To what extent this was planned or whether new roads just came in handy when counterinsurgency campaigns moved to Petén is hard to determine. Clearly, in the 1960s no one could have predicted that genocide would take place in Guatemala but behaviors and racist ideas of the road planners created some of the conditions. Spreading racist thinking via books and other means by people like Casasola helped reinforce racism against the Maya. Furthermore, FYDEP’s new roads created the possibility for military to mobilize when violent counterinsurgency came to Petén.

By conducting archival research in Guatemala, I also discovered that the racist beliefs promoted by military road builders created racist ideological conditions that could have justified racist actions towards the Maya in Guatemala. Reviewing and analyzing photo albums and manuscripts belonging to the chief road builder, Oliverio Casasola, I bring attention to the racist way of thinking among the Guatemalan military. Casasola preferred “selected” Ladino migrants in Petén and considered Maya not racially “healthy.” He even expressed deeply racist concerns that Maya can pollute the racial health of the Guatemalan nation. While, genocide against Maya did not take place in Petén and Ladinos as well as Maya ended up being victims of military violence there, it is still significant to note that similar racist ideas resulted in genocide in other parts of Guatemala (CEH 1999).

Thomas Cushman questions whether genocides are preventable and what lessons can we learn by studying modern era genocides? He argues that “knowledge about genocide needs to be expanded to include more consideration of human agency and the social structure of modernity” (2003, pg.25). My findings in Petén have broader implications for genocide prevention research as transportation infrastructure is a fundamental part of logistics of violence and it needs to be viewed from this perspective by genocide prevention scholars. Without transportation, mass violence being committed on the ground cannot sustain itself or intensify. This is an important lesson for future genocide prevention and research. In order to be vigilant, we must have the analytical framework in place that would lead us to better understanding of logistical and ideological preconditions of mass violence as a key to more successful genocide prevention going forward.

Apart from helping provide the framework for more successful genocide prevention going forward, my study had another indirect contribution. In fact, my research is adding to a debate among Cold War scholars about the agency of the US in Cold War violence. Evidence found in the oral history interviews, I suggest that Guatemalan military had more control over the events in their own country than previously argued in Cold War literature. While it is true that US played a crucial role by supplying Guatemalan regime with weaponry and financial resources, local military coordinated the operations on the ground. This is an important observation as many Cold War scholars overgeneralize and label Latin American leaders as puppets of the US government during the Cold War. This research illustrates that Guatemalan military leaders had much agency during the early years of the Cold War. They clearly had their own agenda and were not just puppets of the US government. Of course, this is not to say that the power of the Guatemalan leaders was unlimited. When the Guatemalans went too far, US did intervene as was illustrated in 1954 when the CIA orchestrated a coup d'état against Guatemalan socialist president Arbenz. In other words, US government let Guatemalans do as they pleased as long as their actions were aligned with the US Cold War objectives.

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