

DAY TWO

María C. G. was the first witness on Tuesday, May 27. She was born in Choyomché, the eldest of six siblings, and married at 15 to Gaspar C., with whom she had 10 children. She spoke through an interpreter, describing the army sweeps through the Quiché and the arrival of the PACs.

First of all I would like to thank you for permitting us to come here and for listening to us. Today in Guatemala where I live there are still so many problems and it means a lot to be able to come give testimony in Spain. You have given us a kind welcome, which stands in contrast to the way we are treated in Guatemala.

During the armed conflict my community in Laguna Seca and all the communities nearby were constantly harassed and attacked by the military, beginning in 1981. We had to leave our house and all our belongings and hide in the mountains. We had nothing eat; one of my daughters died of hunger when she was two years old. For one year I was hiding in the mountain and sneaking back into the village to look for food, but it was hard because the soldiers kept coming after us, there was bombing from planes and helicopters.

After the soldiers massacred our villages in 1981 and 1982, the army sent the patrollers to control the communities. They stayed among us day after day, accusing us and harassing us. They wouldn't permit us to leave to buy our food. They constantly threatened to kill the male children in our village, saying they should die because they were bad people: "*semillas del mal*" [seeds of the guerrillas]. My family scattered. I had to send away all my sons, because if the military caught them they would be killed.

In order to find food, we had to go to the Chiché market. But once the patrollers were installed, we could no longer travel to Chiché to buy anything because along the way there were groups of patrollers watching the roads and if they caught you travelling they would cut your throat. Since we couldn't find food, we began to starve. The man who controlled and coordinated the Chiché PACs, Don Guicho, would not permit us to travel. We found some food in the mountain, such as wild berries, but we suffered a lot because we had nothing to eat. I was with my two of my children in the mountain and it was terrible. Thinking about it now makes me want to cry. They were both starving. They were nothing but bones.

[*Were you ever able to go back to your home?*] The first time I fled the violence, I ran to various communities in the Quiché but everywhere we went the soldiers would eventually come to kill the people and burn the village. And when the soldiers realized they were chasing the same group from village to village, on one occasion they encircled the communities and gathered the people together at the edge of a ravine, so that they had nowhere to run. The soldiers killed them all there and threw their bodies over the edge. Very few people survived; only those who were able to hide behind some trees. Everyone else died – children, old people, men and women. I witnessed this massacre. After that, we could not go back to our villages.

We realized we had to organize ourselves. So many people had died, there was no food left, no clothes. That was when we began to organize. We joined together from a lot of communities

from around my area and other parts of Quiché, thousands of people from all the communities that the soldiers burned.

Once we were organized, some of us decided to go to the market of Chiché to try and buy some necessities. But when we arrived, the people of the area closed their doors on us and called us bad people, asking, why had we come down from the mountains? They said we were devils, and they didn't receive us.

Two years later I was able to return to my own house. We had all fled, but little by little we were able to get back to our village. We would send one or two of the people who had fled to see how the situation was there and they would creep in and take some food and then run back to the mountains. I finally got back to my village in 1983.

But we were still hungry. I decided to try to pass through various ravines and reach the market in Chichicastenango so I could buy food for my children. We always had to find secret ways to get to the market, because if we travelled along the normal roads we would bump into groups of patrollers. And when they saw us they would speak into a machine, I don't know the name, they would call the soldiers and the soldiers would come right away and start shooting at us. I went six times to the market. Each time there were patrollers and soldiers there who would grab my arms, grab my *huipíl* and call me a donkey, maltreating me in this way. They would question me, what village are you from? What are you doing here? They asked me why I was buying so much food, is it for the *compañeros* [guerrillas]? And they would threaten to kill me, though I told them I was just buying food for my children.

The sixth time I went, some soldiers caught me in one of the ravines and raped me. I was coming back from the market, with my food bundled on my back and one child at my breast when a group of soldiers found me walking and said, oh you are always passing here, are you buying food for the guerrillas? I was frightened and didn't say anything and they got mad. They took my food from me and threw it on the ground. They grabbed my child and threatened to throw him in the river but I begged them not to hurt him and so they tossed him on the ground instead. And then they pushed me down and a soldier held my arms while another two raped me. The third didn't do anything to me because he saw I was practically dead, so they left. I grabbed my child and ran, leaving all the food behind.

I went home and told my husband what had happened, and he said I was to blame for having left the house instead of staying with the children. I said, how can I stay here when my children are dying from hunger? He said that it was only because we were living in such a difficult situation that he pardoned me; otherwise he would have slit my throat for putting myself in a situation where I could be raped. I answered, why don't you stop being a coward and go to find food for our children yourself? Afterwards I left again and found a way to get to Chichi by crossing several rivers.

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Dr. Charles R. Hale gave the second testimony of the day, appearing as an expert witness to address the relationship between ethnicity and state violence during the Guatemalan conflict.

Hale is a professor of anthropology at the University of Texas at Austin, where he has taught since 1996. He has conducted extensive field research in Latin America, first in Bolivia (1978-80), then Nicaragua (1981-90), then Guatemala (1996-2004). He is the author of numerous books and articles on identity politics, racism, neoliberalism and resistance among indigenous peoples of Latin America, including Racial Ambivalence and Neoliberal Multiculturalism in Guatemala (SAR, 2006).

The purpose of my declaration is to give my professional opinion on a series of issues concerning inter-ethnic relations in Guatemala. My field research in the department of Chimaltenango focused on the Ladino population and their perceptions of the Maya in the context of rising Maya demands for rights, empowerment, and an end to racism. I interviewed over 100 Ladinos, ranging from lower class to power holders, including political actors and in a few cases, high ranking officers in the Guatemalan Army. I also conducted extensive research on the history of Chimaltenango before and during the period of armed conflict.

The research finds a history of profound inequality between the Mayan community and Ladinos, or Euro-Guatemalans, who have monopolized political and economic power for such a long time. In the context of the armed conflict, this inequality is expressed through state violence that has certain generalized characteristics but has very specific characteristics when confronted with the indigenous.

We begin with an understanding of “ethnic group” as a group of individuals with social and cultural characteristics in common that enacts and recognizes boundaries defining the group. In the case of Guatemala, indigenous ethnic groups have common social characteristics that have to do with birthplace, mother tongue, cultural practices, cosmology or spiritual values – and also designated boundaries between themselves as indigenous and the rest of society as non-indigenous. These boundaries have been perceived and strengthened by dominant groups in Guatemala to relegate indigenous as culturally different and inferior and to reinforce inequality.

If we look at Guatemala’s history during the colonial period, regimes clearly differentiated the indigenous, imposing conditions of inferiority both informal and legal. The dominant Ladinos used the term “Republic of the Indians,” to differentiate the indigenous space. Once the country became a republic, all Guatemalans were considered citizens. But the economic, political and social conditions of the indigenous continued to be strongly limited. There were laws that compelled the indigenous to work in *fincas* [plantations] in order to avoid being considered criminals or vagrants. Their access to education was severely limited. Their political participation was inconceivable even at the local level. These conditions reflected the deep racism that ran through the Ladino sector. The indigenous group was considered inferior in a cultural sense, but biologically also. The only real way for a member of the indigenous community to advance would be to change his identity and leave his community and its customs behind altogether.

These conditions began to change during the decade of economic reform (1944-54), although certain limits still existed. But with the coup in 1954, there was a regression to the status quo so that when conflict started, the indigenous lived in conditions very similar to the past.

The Maya are pan-ethnic. They come from different regions in Guatemala and Mexico, are made up of diverse groups and speak numerous languages. But from the point of view of the Ladino, they represent a homogenous group, undifferentiated, with an “Indian” perspective. In essence, Ladinos consider the Mayan culture traditional and static, which does not change over time; it is an inferior culture, which doesn’t have the capacity to adapt to modernity; and it is an organic and unthinking culture, whose members blindly follow their traditional precepts.

So if we apply these generalities to the facts of the conflict, we can see that the first phase of the massacres and their characteristics rise out of this consideration that the indigenous are a mass of undifferentiated groups. If some individuals are guilty by association with the guerrillas, all must be guilty. It is also important to note the spatial configuration in the Guatemalan countryside. Counties are divided into a county seat, which is where the Ladinos live, and the outlying villages, which are overwhelmingly indigenous. Thus, when the military attacked these villages, they could be fairly sure that all the inhabitants were indigenous. And indeed, we see a pattern of selective repression in the county seats, but indiscriminate repression in the outlying village areas.

In the second phase, when the amnesty was passed and model villages built, state policy was no longer to destroy but instead to change the culture – to domesticate it, to subjugate it to national authority. The idea was to control the indigenous rather than eliminate him.

In Chimaltenango, there are notable patterns of state response to any sign of collective organization and the desire for social change.

In the mid-1970s, there were a number of new organizations starting to try and affect local conditions in Chimaltenango and improve indigenous rights. Little by little the 16 municipalities of Chimaltenango began electing indigenous mayors. The state’s response again was violence, as the mayors were killed off by death squads or other state-directed groups. In this context, a desire grew up for another path to change; there was sympathy with the guerrilla, but also a lot of social mobilization.

When the insurgency grew stronger in 1981, Chimaltenango didn’t have big guerrilla presence. Indeed, the pattern of massacres in the department – there were 63 documented massacres – showed that most were carried out *after* the guerrillas were gone. So there was a distinct logic of repression applied to the indigenous that didn’t necessarily coincide with the greater counterinsurgency logic.

One of the most striking findings in my research had to do with the way in which the Ladinos perceive the indigenous. In the Ladino mentality, the majority indigenous community is a threat. There is an ever-present fear of retribution by the indigenous against the Ladino: one day, they will collectively rise up and kill all our men and rape our women. They will do massive damage. It is the reverse of what has actually happened historically. We have a notorious case in Chimaltenango in 1944, when a group of indigenous took control of their municipal seat, and 14 Ladinos died. The army sent massive response to put down the rebellion and then, in order to teach a lesson not just to them but to indigenous communities in general, they slaughtered hundreds of Indians; the figures suggest that between 300 and 500 people died. The retaliation

was a demonstration of state power, and had similar traits to the later massacres in the refusal of Ladino elites to differentiate between individuals, treating all indigenous as a homogeneous group instead.

So when the military respond to the threat of insurgency, they are also responding according to this historical racism, with the idea that the indigenous traditionally act as a group and could at any time rise up against the Ladinos. The counterinsurgency was a marriage of the response against the guerrilla and the deep perception of the threat of the indigenous. Understanding that helps explain the logic of violence that was so much greater than what was necessary. It was a level of violence that had the clear intention to physically destroy or inflict crippling pain on members of specific indigenous communities, or groups of communities, without distinction. This partial destruction had a demonstration effect on the rest of the Mayan population.

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