

**“MORE THAN THE SILENCE OF RIFLES:” GUATEMALAN REBEL
COMBATANTS’ PERSPECTIVES ON THE EVE OF PEACE**

by

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PERSPECTIVES ON THE EVE OF PEACE**

submitted by Stephen Robin Peter Stewart in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

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Abstract

This thesis analyses interviews with 13 guerrilla combatants originally conducted in early 1997, while I was a journalist with the CERIGUA news agency covering the Guatemalan armed conflict, the Peace Accords and the demobilization and reintegration into civil society of Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) fighters.

The work gathers the testimonies of the guerrillas, including their motivations for joining the insurgency, experiences in the guerrilla, and feelings regarding the end of the armed conflict and their pending reintegration into Guatemalan society. I compare what the URNG combatants expressed in these interviews with other research regarding the 36-year conflict and especially studies documenting the experience of demobilized URNG members a decade after their reintegration into Guatemalan civil society.

Based on this research, the thesis argues that, contrary to what is promoted in some Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) literature, in the Guatemalan experience collective reintegration proved more successful than individualized reintegration, and should have been provided to a much large number of former combatants. In this research, successful reintegration is interpreted as economic and social well-being, as well as the political and social engagement of the former combatants in broader Guatemalan society, particularly engagement aimed at addressing the factors that originally gave rise to the armed conflict. Special attention is paid to these criteria in the reintegration of female former combatants.

Lay Summary

In this thesis I argue that in the Guatemalan experience, collective reinsertion of guerrilla fighters was more effective than breaking up rebel units and demobilizing them on an individual basis.

I analyze interviews I conducted with guerrilla fighters from the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) as they prepared for demobilization at the end of Guatemala's 36-year long armed conflict in early 1997. I find that a majority of the combatants wished to participate in some form of collective reinsertion into civilian society, something that was actively discouraged by many of the international organizations providing support for the demobilization process.

In revisiting the experiences of the former combatants 10-15 years after the end of the conflict, I find that the small number of URNG fighters who did demobilize collectively tended to fare better and be more engaged socially and politically than those who reinserted individually into civilian society.

The thesis also includes extensive testimony from URNG fighters about their motives for joining and their experiences during their long years in the guerrilla movement.

Preface

This thesis uses archival material from the Guatemalan news agency CERIGUA. It is based on thirteen interviews I conducted between 1994 and 1997 with guerrilla combatants of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) while working as a journalist for the Guatemalan news agency CERIGUA. Excerpts from five of the interviews – with the combatants *Yali, Timoteo Navarajo, Silvio, Pancho* and *Walter* – appeared in CERIGUA’s 1998 special report *Transición en Guatemala: De Las Armas a la Lucha Política*. The thesis also includes thirteen photos taken while visiting rebel camps in Guatemala to carry out the interviews. There is one additional photo taken in July 2019 while visiting Nuevo Horizonte, a cooperative community of demobilized URNG combatants in northern Guatemala. All photos but one, were taken by the author.

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full Name, Spanish	Full Name, English
CCDA	Comité Campesino del Altiplano	Campesino Committee of the Highlands
CERIGUA	Centro de Reportes Informativos de Guatemala	Centre for Informative Reporting on Guatemala
CIA		Central Intelligence Agency
CPR	Comunidades Populares de Resistencia	Popular Communities in Resistance
EGP	Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres	Guerrilla Army of the Poor
FAR	Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes	Rebel Armed Forces
FGT	Fundación Guillermo Toreillo	Guillermo Toreillo Foundation
FMLN	Frente Farabundo Marti para la Liberación Nacional	Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front
FSLN	Frente Sandinista para la Liberación Nacional	Sandinista National Liberation Front
MINUGUA	Misión de Verificación de las Naciones Unidas de Guatemala	United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala
MR-13	Movimiento Revolucionario 13 de Noviembre	November 13 Revolutionary Movement
ORPA	Organización Revolucionaria del Pueblo en Armas	Revolutionary Organization of the People in Arms
PACs	Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil	Civil Defense Patrols
PGT	Partido Guatemalteco de los Trabajadores	Guatemalan Workers' Party
URNG	Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca	Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity
USAC	Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala	University of San Carlos (Guatemala's national public university)
US AID		US Agency for International Development

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I want to recognize the contribution of my wife, Carmen Miranda Barrios who, long before I had decided to write this thesis, transcribed several of the interviews I had collected with URNG combatants. Long before I did, she recognized that these memories of rebel combatants must be preserved and shared for the historical record.

Special gratitude is due to Luis Ovalle, without whose support it would have been impossible for me to begin and complete this thesis. Some 22 years ago, Luis assisted me in establishing the contacts I needed to travel to Guatemalan guerrilla camps and carry out the interviews that this work examines. Many years later, when I chose to take up the interviews for academic research, Luis provided valuable guidance in interpreting them and clarifying details regarding the history of the guerrilla fronts. *Camino Blanco*, Luis' own living collection of the stories and memories of combatants from the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR), is a vital contribution to the historical memory of the armed struggle in Guatemala and helped inspire me to dust off my old interviews and begin this work.

Dedication

To the *compañeros* and *compañeras* of Nuevo Horizonte, Las Teclas and Santa Anita, who every day, demonstrate that Another Guatemala is Possible.

To be clear, we took up arms because we had no more alternatives left, not because we liked to take up a gun and kill someone. Before, there was no space in Guatemala to fight for your rights. It was pure repression.

-Compañera Gregoria, March 1997



Image 1. A unit from the Rebel Armed Forces' (FAR) Santos Salazar Front in Santa Rosa province, February 1997. - Photo: Steve Stewart, CERIGUA

Chapter 1: Introduction

Guatemala's civil war, stretching from a rebellion by nationalist military officers in November 1960 to the signing of a "final and lasting peace" at the end of 1996 was at the time, the longest armed conflict in the Americas¹. The unequal battle pitted small and poorly armed rebel forces against a powerful military trained and armed – during different phases of the long war – by the United States of America, Israel, South Africa and Argentina. It was also a conflict in which the overwhelming majority of casualties were civilian.² Perhaps for this reason, studies of the conflict tend to focus on its impact on civilian populations, and to a lesser extent, the structure and role of the Guatemalan army. Largely missing from the story is the guerrilla movement itself. Resources that do exist focus on publications and communiqués of the insurgent organizations, interviews with guerrilla leaders and a number of memoirs published after the conflict by former rebel commanders.³

What of the experiences, motivation and aspirations of the men and women who joined the rebel movement as regular combatants? What led them to adopt the precarious existence of a guerrilla fighter? How were their experiences within the guerrilla organizations? What hopes and doubts

¹ Colombia's armed conflict, which has lasted almost 6 decades, is now the longest armed conflict in the region.

² The United Nations Commission of Historical Clarification on Human Rights violations in the Guatemalan civil war estimates that approximately 200,000 civilians killed or disappeared, including 626 massacres, between 1962 and 1997. Shortly after the end of the war, the army reported that approximately 5,000 soldiers had been killed in combat since 1980, (Lahr Caballero, 2). A study carried out by the URNG's Guillermo Toreillo Foundation immediately after the war documents 2,108 insurgents killed in combat between 1971 and 1997 (*Memoria de los Caídos en la Lucha Revolucionaria de Guatemala*, Guatemala City, Fundación Guillermo Toriello, 2006, 445). Although important data for army deaths is missing for the 1960s and 1970s, and for guerrilla organizations during the 1960s, the conflict was significantly smaller and more localized during that period, so it is likely that overall, armed combatants made up not more than 5% of all violent deaths related to the war.

³ Eg. *Somos los jóvenes rebeldes. Guatemala insurgente*, by Jorge Soto [Comandante Pablo Monsanto] 2013, Sierra Madre. *Pasajes y perfiles de la guerra revolucionaria*, by Pedro Palma Lau [Comandante Pancho], 2010 and *Insurgentes. Guatemala, la paz arrancada*, by Santiago Santa Cruz Mendoza [Comandante Santiago], 2004.

did they have at the end of the war as they prepared to transition back to civilian life, some after decades in the mountains?

At the close of the war, while working for the CERIGUA⁴ news agency, I interviewed rebel combatants as they gathered in camps throughout the country to prepare for demobilization and reintegration into civilian life. Some of the testimonies I gathered are included in CERIGUA's special report *Transition in Guatemala: the URNG Prepares for Peace* (1997), but most remained unpublished.

At a time when the role of the guerrilla in Guatemala is once again controversial due to the genocide and war crimes trials of high-level military and police officials in that country, this paper seeks to revisit the voices of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity's (URNG) combatants as they prepared for peace. When comparing these interviews with those other researchers (Jantzen 2014, Hauge 2007, and Hauge and Thoresen 2008) conducted with former combatants regarding their experiences with reintegration a decade or more after the war, a common theme of collectivity becomes apparent. Many of the combatants I interviewed spoke of a collective impulse that led to them joining the guerrilla, their experiences with living, working and fighting together in the mountains, and their hopes to reintegrate into civilian society collectively with their former comrades in arms. Jantzen, Hauge and Thoresen's research, carried out in 2007-2008, note important differences in how the reintegration process was experienced as successful by

⁴ CERIGUA, the "External Centre for Informative Reporting on Guatemala" was an opposition news agency founded in Managua in 1983, that focused on labour issues, human rights, land struggles and the armed conflict in Guatemala.

combatants who reinserted collectively compared to those who did so as individuals.

This thesis is divided into eight chapters. The first provides the context for what led me to the rebel camps as the war moved to a close in early 1997. The second is a literature review of the different sources drawn on to develop the thesis. The third provides a brief guide and historical summary of the complex web of guerrilla movements that emerged during the 36 years of combat. The fourth is a summary of the operative sections of the 1996 peace accords that cover the demobilization, disarming and reintegration of the guerrilla combatants. The fifth section explores the motivations, hopes and concerns of the rebel fighters I interviewed and compares them with more recent studies of former URNG combatants' experiences with reintegration in the post-war era. The sixth examines the perspective of women combatants in the URNG and explores reasons why rates of women's participation in the Guatemalan insurgency was lower than in revolutionary organizations in neighbouring countries. The seventh section seeks to identify common experiences of the Guatemalan guerrillas and their aspirations for the post-conflict period and compares them to the post-demobilization experiences described by former URNG combatants interviewed by other researchers a decade after reintegration in Guatemalan society. The final section concludes the paper, exploring factors that explain the limited success of the URNG as a political party in the post-conflict period.

When I visited the URNG camps to conduct the interviews, I also took photos of daily life in the camps and among the guerrilla units. I have included some of these photos at specific points throughout this study, as I believe they provide the reader with a visual image of the experiences described in the interviews. The faces captured in these photos convey expressions of hope and trepidation that reflect the emotions expressed by the combatants when asked about their feelings

on the eve of peace. I took all photos included in this document, except one, during visits to URNG demobilization camps between February and May of 1997. The one exception is a photo taken of me interviewing combatants at the Sacol demobilization camp in the Petén in March, 1997 (P 43). That photo was taken by *InfoPrensa* Reporter Ruth Gidley, who also participated in most of the interviews with the FAR guerrillas at Sacol.

1.1 Covering the Conflict

La Libertad, El Petén, Guatemala - May, 1988

We were about three kilometres out of La Libertad – a dusty garrison town full of weary looking soldiers – when our bus was flagged down by a uniformed man with a machine gun.... “Army?” I wondered aloud. “Guerrilleros!” responded the elderly peasant man beside me.

We climbed out of the bus and lined up while the guerrillas checked our identification. Then we were led through the jungle to a clearing where about 50 civilians were already gathered. There were seven guerrillas in all, six men and one woman; all dressed in faded green fatigues and clutching captured M-16 or Galil rifles....”⁵

This first direct contact with URNG insurgents in the spring of 1988 had a profound influence on me. At the time I was an undergraduate student in history and an amateur journalist, visiting Central America after a semester of university field study in Cuba. My interest in Latin America had developed several years earlier and I had published a number of interviews with visiting Latin American activists in campus and alternative media. The 10 weeks I had just spent in Cuba heightened my interest in the alternative that country represented to the raw capitalist systems I

⁵ Stewart, 1988

had seen in Central America, but the interaction with Guatemalan guerrillas in the Petén rainforest focused my interest on the armed struggle in this beautiful, but beleaguered Central American country.

It eventually led to work with Guatemala's CERIGUA News Agency and visits to rebel camps in the mountains and jungles of Guatemala to interview URNG combatants as they prepared to rejoin civilian life in the final stage of the country's 36 year-long civil war.

CERIGUA, the *Centro Exterior de Reportes Investigativos sobre Guatemala*, was founded August 8, 1983 by exiled Guatemalan journalists as a project to inform the world about the deepening social struggles and massive human rights violations taking place in the country.⁶ The agency specialized in covering human rights, labour and land struggles, and the armed conflict. Originally, CERIGUA's head office was located in Managua, Nicaragua, but like many other Guatemalan exile organizations, it was moved to Mexico City following the electoral defeat of the Sandinista National Liberation Front in the 1990 Nicaraguan elections.

CERIGUA sought to bring the situation in Guatemala to the attention of the international community. The agency published newswires and longer reports in Spanish, English and

⁶ A former combatant told me that CERIGUA had originally been conceived as the external support team for the Rebel Armed Forces' (FAR) *Radio Insurgente* and that it had first been called the "Comando Exterior del la Radio Insurgente de Guatemala." However, the donated transmitter the FAR used to broadcast *Radio Insurgente* from the jungles of the Petén was old, large and unwieldy. Fleeing an army offensive, the unit charged with transporting the transmitter chose to facilitate their escape by carefully wrapping and burying it. Later, the guerrillas were unable to find the place where they had hidden the transmitter, and Radio Insurgente ceased to broadcast. This misadventure is recalled by singer-songwriter and former FAR combatant Luis González in his song "El Gran Acumulador." (*Guitarra Armada*, Luis Gonzales)

German. It also directed its coverage into Guatemala, reporting news that was considered unsafe for journalists within the country to cover. International CERIGUA reporters, working under cover, would travel to Guatemala to investigate stories but did not publish them until we were back in Mexico. The Guatemalan dailies then picked up the CERIGUA articles on the understanding that the agency, rather than the media which had published them, would be blamed for any information that aroused the ire of the military.

Late in 1994, with a human rights agreement in place and peace talks between the government, army and the rebels progressing, the agency tested the waters by opening an office for its English section in Guatemala City. When nothing serious happened, the agency gradually transferred almost all its staff to the Guatemala City office during 1995.⁷

After the Zapatista National Liberation Army's (EZLN) January 1, 1994 uprising in Chiapas, the Mexican government became more reluctant to play host to leaders of an armed resistance in neighbouring Guatemala. At the same time, the United States and its allies' priorities for Central America were shifting from Cold War geopolitics to a neoliberal interest in creating a stable political and investment climate on newly-minted NAFTA's southern frontier⁸. With the Mexican government pressuring the rebels, and the US and other Western countries pushing the

⁷ In August 1995, a few months after CERIGUA set up a full Guatemala City bureau, the office was broken into and computer hard drives containing the agency's databases were taken. One of the first officials to show up at the office afterwards to offer us condolences was a Guatemalan Colonel responsible for the army's public relations.

⁸ The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) united the Canadian, United States' and Mexican economies into a single market that included special provisions protecting transnational corporations housed in each of the three countries. It came into effect, Jan 1, 1994, the same day the Zapatista uprising began.

army, peace talks that had been sputtering along for several years, began to advance more quickly.

After presidential elections in November 1995 brought to power pro-peace oligarch Alvaro Arzú Irigoyen, it became clear that a final peace accord in Guatemala was only a matter of time.

Although no formal truce had yet been signed, the URNG declared a unilateral ceasefire just prior to those elections and combat eased off, as both the army and the guerrilla avoided confrontations that might affect the peace process.

Soon after the elections, new workers appeared in CERIGUA's archives section - lean, serious men who until recently had been on the rebel fronts. It seemed that the URNG was confident enough in the progress of peace talks to begin to informally demobilize its fighters ahead of a final agreement. At first, their military demeanor set the newcomers apart from CERIGUA's reporting staff, but as time passed and we worked together, those divisions blurred. I spent memorable evenings at the CERIGUA offices in that period listening to their tales of privation and comradeship on the rebel fronts. It was partly the friendship I developed with these former fighters that opened the rebel camps for me toward the end of the war.

As the armed conflict edged to a close, CERIGUA Director Ileana Alamilla⁹ decided it was a strategic moment to produce a special report on the history and aspirations of the URNG as it prepared for transition into civil society. The report was to focus on the rebel commanders, but I

⁹ Ileana Alamilla served as the director of CERIGUA from its creation in 1983 until her death in January 2018. Seven months later, on August 8, 2018, CERIGUA's 35th anniversary, the agency shut down.

felt it was also important to publish the experiences and aspirations of rank and file combatants. I had just read José Ignacio López Vigil's *1001 Cuentos de Radio Venceremos*, a deeply engaging tapestry of the testimonies of men and women who operated one of the FMLN's clandestine radio stations during the recently concluded Salvadoran civil war. I understood the evocative power of such testimony and felt it would have a greater impact than simply focusing on the discourse of the *comandantes*.

The director gave me permission to travel to the rebel camps to interview combatants as they prepared for the war's end and demobilization. With the assistance of new CERIGUA employees *Sergio, Benjamín* and *Alfredo*'s¹⁰ contacts in the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR), and of friends in the popular movement with contacts in other rebel organizations¹¹, I travelled to several camps, interviewing field officers and rank and file combatants. Of particular interest to me were combatants' stories of joining the insurgency, anecdotes of their life in the guerrilla, and their hopes and concerns regarding demobilization and reintegration into civilian life - for some after decades in the mountains.

Transition in Guatemala: the URNG Prepares for Peace, the feature report CERIGUA published in early 1998, did include several of my interviews with rank and file combatants, but the focus

¹⁰ *Nombres de guerras* (pseudonyms adopted for security during the armed conflict)

¹¹ The URNG was an alliance of four insurgent groups – the FAR, the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP), the Revolutionary Organization of the People in Arms (ORPA) and the Guatemalan Workers' Party (PGT). Although the four organizations formally united as the URNG in 1982, the unity was only at the level of the commanders. They did not fuse into a single political organization until after the war ended.

remained on the voices of the *comandantes* and other historical leaders from the revolutionary movement. Many of the rebel testimonies I had gathered were never published.

Some of the guerrillas I interviewed had spent most of their lives in the guerrilla (one man, *Compañero Pancho*, had been with the rebels since 1963). Most of the respondents anticipated the coming peace with a mixture of hope and trepidation. Almost all shared that what they would miss most about life in the mountains was the companionship of their comrades at arms, something they feared would be difficult to reproduce in civilian life. But the majority expressed hope that they would be able to continue to work and live together collectively after demobilization.



Image 2. Young Members of the Rebel Armed Forces' (FAR) Frente Santos Salazar in Taxisco, Santa Rosa in February 1997, a week before beginning demobilization. – Photo: Steve Stewart, CERIGUA.

1.2 Literature Review

This thesis examines interviews with 13 combatants that I originally conducted in 1997 as a journalist covering the Guatemalan Peace Accords and the demobilization of URNG fighters. The work analyses the testimonies of the guerrilla fighters, including their motivations for joining the insurgency, their experiences during the guerrilla, and their opinions and feelings on the end of the armed conflict and their pending reintegration into Guatemalan society. I compare what the URNG combatants told me with other research regarding the 36-year conflict, and with studies of demobilized URNG members 10 years after their reintegration civil society. As befits a thesis written for an Interdisciplinary Studies Graduate Program, I draw from a number of different disciplines for my sources.

In the first chapter of the thesis I employ a journalistic story-telling style, drawing on primary sources and my own experiences.

The second chapter, on the history of the guerrilla, the armed conflict and the peace process, spans four decades from the CIA-backed invasion of 1954 to the signing of the peace accords at the end of 1996. For this I take a historical approach, drawing on contemporary reports from that period (including from CERIGUA, the agency I worked for in the mid-1990s), as well as academic works and the memoirs of *comandantes* of the guerrilla organizations that formed the URNG.

I found Uruguayan master journalist and writer Eduardo Galeano's account of the war in Guatemala in the 1960s, *Guatemala: Occupied Country* (1969), to be an invaluable source of

information about the formation of the guerrilla and the counterinsurgency terror that was developed to fight it. Much of what Galeano wrote about speculatively at the time regarding the United States' role in building the clandestine security apparatus in Guatemala in the second half of the 1960s, has in recent years been shown to be correct by official US government documents obtained by the National Security Archives.

For the origins of the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP), writer and former guerrilla Mario Payeras' *Days in the Jungle* (1983) provided a useful first-person account of the organization's initial incursion into the Ixcán jungle lowlands and the initial years of the movement, while Jesuit priest and anthropologist Ricardo Falla's *Massacres en la Selva* (1992) offers extensive documentation on the impact of the Guatemalan army's "scorched earth" counteroffensive in the early 1980s on the civilian population of the region.

Santiago Santa Cruz Mendoza's (*Comandante Santiago*) memoir "Insurgentes. Guatemala, la paz arrancada" (2004) served as an important source on the origins and development of the Revolutionary Organization of the People in Arms (ORPA).

For the section on the Peace process, I needed to better understand Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) processes, so I drew on several works from peace studies, including de Vries and Wiegink's 2011 article "Breaking up and Going Home? Contesting Two Assumptions in the Demobilization and Reintegration of Former Combatants" in *International Peace Studies*¹²

¹² De Vries and Wiegink, *International Peace Studies*, Volume 18, Issue 1, 2011, 38-51

that questions the conventional DDR wisdom of encouraging former combatants to demobilize individually back into their communities of origin.

Of particular relevance to this section was Hauge and Thoreson's chapter, "The Fate of former Combatants in Guatemala: Spoilers or Agents for Change?" in *The Paradoxes of Peace Building Post 9/11* (2008). Hauge & Thoreson contend that the success of DDR processes should not be measured only by "the achievement of security and the return to normalcy," after the conclusion of an armed conflict. They argue that unless the conditions that gave rise to the conflict are addressed, there is a risk that those could generate new violence in the long term. Another way of measuring the success of a DDR process, the authors say, is the degree to which former insurgents become involved in non-violent, transformative social and political action to address issues that gave rise to the conflict.

Hauge and Thoreson apply this approach to their study of former URNG guerrillas a decade after their demobilization and reintegration, seeking to identify: "1) the prerequisites for the successful reintegration of former combatants into civilian life and; 2) the possibilities of former combatants becoming agents of change in a post-conflict peacebuilding process."¹³

The authors found that while the DDR process was successful insofar as URNG members integrated fairly quickly and smoothly into civil society and there were no documented cases of

¹³ Hauge and Thoreson, "Spoilers or Agents for Change?" 211

combatants re-arming, the participation of former guerrillas as agents of change was very limited.

Hauge and Thoreson attribute the low participation levels to a lack of support for reinserted ex-combatants following demobilization, and the favouring of individualized demobilization over a collective process.

When the Accords for a Final and Lasting Peace were signed between the URNG and Guatemalan government on December 29 1996, the international community had pledged USD 85,272,000 to support the demobilization and reintegration process.¹⁴ But once the disarmament and demobilizing phase was completed and reintegration was underway, the URNG was informed that only USD 27 million of the promised funds would materialize, and that the special URNG foundation¹⁵ created by the peace accords to facilitate the reintegration of the former guerrillas would administer just US\$ 3,150,000 of these funds.¹⁶

The bulk of remaining funds were administered by international development organizations, such as the US Agency for International Development (US AID) and various European agencies.

Hauge and Thoreson point out that in a comprehensive survey the URNG conducted of its demobilizing combatants in early 1997, 41.3 % said that they wanted to engage collective economic activity with other former guerrillas or their communities. A further 18.5% said that

¹⁴ Ibid, 218

¹⁵ The Guillermo Toreillo Foundation, or FGT

¹⁶ Hauge and Thoreson, "Spoilers or Agents for Change?" 219

they wanted work both collectively and individually. Despite this proclivity of 60% of demobilizing combatants for collective reintegration, there was a strong emphasis on individual economic development by the international agencies managing the reintegration projects. This was particularly the case with the US AID.¹⁷

At the end of the demobilization process in mid-1997, there were still 355 combatants who had nowhere to go, and who wanted to reintegrate collectively. Many of these were from the core of the guerrilla organizations - fighters who had joined the rebels with their families, who had spent a decade or more in the mountains, and/or whose home communities had been wiped out by the military. These guerrillas were eventually provided with credits to purchase land in three different regions of the country on which to construct new communities. However, the funding provided was a loan for which the ex-combatants were expected to make fairly large payments.

Hauge and Thoreson's conclusion is that the limited participation of former guerrillas as agents of change in the decade following reintegration is largely due to the following factors: 1) Most guerrillas were reintegrated individually, making it difficult for them to organize with their former comrades in arms and for the URNG to maintain contact with them; 2) Since funding for reintegration was less than a third of what was promised, and only a tiny proportion of that was administered by the URNG, most former combatants were so busy finding ways to survive that they could not participate frequently in social and political action, and; 3) While those combatants who reintegrated collectively were better organized and more engaged with the party

¹⁷ Ibid, 221

than those who reintegrated individually, the large debt-load that they carried forced them to focus on productive capacity, rather than social organizing. The authors add a fourth factor not related to the neoliberal bent of the international support for reintegration. This is the internal divisions within the URNG itself, which resulted in the departure from the party in 2003 of the former leadership of the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR).

Chapter Three analyses the testimonies of the URNG combatants I interviewed just prior to and during the demobilization process and compares them with other research carried out with former URNG combatants. I turn again here to Hauge & Thoreson (2008), as well as Janzen (2014), Miranda Madrid (2012), and to a lesser extent, Lahr Caballero (1999).

Janzen, a professor of peace studies, analyses eight in-depth interviews he conducted with former combatants living in the demobilized guerrilla community of Nuevo Horizonte in Guatemala's northern Petén province, a decade after reintegration. In his study, *Guatemalan Ex-Combatant Perspectives on Reintegration: A Grounded Theory*, Janzen seeks to understand how the Nuevo Horizonte member's experience of collective reintegration might differ from those who reintegrated individually.

Historian Miranda Madrid's dissertation, *De la Insurgencia a la Legalidad: La Experiencia de la Guerrilla Guatemalteca*, is the most comprehensive study I have come across of the URNG's transition from a coalition of guerrilla armies to a legal political party. Miranda Madrid argues that the URNG paid less attention to the operative agreements of the peace accords - the contents of which were negotiated only a couple of weeks before the signing of the Accord for a Final and

Lasting Peace - than they did on the substantive accords, which took many years to negotiate. The substantive accords governed fundamental changes to the Guatemalan state and human rights, while the operative accords dealt with the demobilization, disarming and reintegration of rebel combatants, as well as a reduction in the size of the Guatemalan army and a disbanding of the army-controlled paramilitary Civil Defence Patrols (PACs).

Miranda Madrid contends that the speedy negotiation of the operative accords led the URNG to miss key potential pitfalls in the process. One of these, she argues, was the rapid dissolution of the individual guerrilla organizations that made up the URNG, when it was converted to a political party in early 1997. This led to the elimination of the structures of communication and command in each organization, leaving the URNG as a party without operative structures, and a membership too busy struggling to survive in daily life to dedicate themselves to the construction of new ones. Further, she argues, the challenges that demobilized URNG combatants faced largely alone, and the lack of communication and direction, led once-faithful militants to feel betrayed, and to turn away from the party.

Chapter 5 focuses on women combatants in the URNG. I rely on feminist scholars who researched women in revolutionary movements in Mesoamerica between the 1960s and 1990s (Kampwirth 2002, Viturna 2006, Luciak 2001, and Lobao, 1990). I also draw on research conducted by Hauge (2007) and Sharp (2017), based on interviews with female former combatants of the URNG that describe an upsurge in female participation in these movements from the mid-1970s to the early 1990s.

Kampwirth developed a tool, “Factors that Lead to Mobilization of Women as Guerrillas,” that helps to explain the significant increase in women’s participation in Mesoamerican insurgencies during this period. I applied this tool to the situation in Guatemala during the same period and found it useful in helping explain why women’s participation in the URNG was lower than in its contemporaries in neighbouring countries.

Chapter five returns to the interviews with URNG combatants, focusing on their concerns, aspirations and dreams related to demobilization, reintegration and re-engagement with Guatemalan civil society. The chapter explores the combatants’ expectations of the newly established URNG political party and their role within it, and seeks explanations for why the party was largely unable to meet those expectations. Drawing also on the research of Janzen (2014), Hauage (2007), Hauge and Thoresen (2008), and Miranda-Madrid (2012), it explores the question of why the vast majority of URNG combatants were reintegrated individually, rather than in the collective form that most had expressed as their preference.

Chapter 2: The Insurgency

2.1 – A brief history of the guerrilla movements in Guatemala

The history of the guerrilla in Guatemala is a convoluted one, with insurgent organizations arising, amalgamating and then splintering again into different groups. At several points during the 36-year war (1960-1996) the army appeared to have succeeded in crushing the rebel movements, only to see them rise and spread once again. When a “final and lasting peace” was signed on December 29, 1996, the rebel movement was significantly smaller than it had been at its height in the early 1980s, yet it was larger and better equipped than it had been at the close of the army’s scorched earth campaigns a decade earlier.

The Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) that signed the final peace agreement was an umbrella organization of three political-military organizations with a national scope and the smaller, more urban based Guatemalan Workers Party (PGT). Other armed insurgent groups, such as the *MR-13*, the *MRP IXIM* and the *Movimiento 20 de Octubre*, emerged during the 36 years of the armed conflict, but they were short-lived. The brief history below focuses only those groups that eventually formed the URNG.

The insurgency first emerged as a response to the US-orchestrated invasion that ousted in 1954 the liberal-democratic government of President Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán.¹⁸ The 1954 coup

¹⁸ Of course, the roots of the armed conflict can be traced much further back to the Spanish invasion of the region in the 1500s and the subsequent construction of a society based on deep social inequality, institutionalised racism and colonial dependency.

abruptly ended the decade-long “Guatemalan Spring” that had begun with a popular uprising that toppled in 1944 the 14-year long dictatorship of Jorge Ubico, and ushered in significant advances in the construction of a modern social democratic state in the country. The US intervention led to a series of unstable military regimes and waves of repression against rural, labour and student activists.

On November 13, 1960, junior military officers¹⁹ attempted a *putsch* against the *de facto* regime of General Ydígoras Fuentes, launching uprisings on military bases in Guatemala City, Zacapa and Puerto Barrios. The spark that ignited the soldiers’ rebellion was Ydígoras’ agreement to allow the US to provide military training in Guatemala to right-wing Cuban exiles whom the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had recruited for the planned Bay of Pigs invasion to oust nationalist Cuban President Fidel Castro²⁰. The young Guatemalan officers had received their military and political formation during the 1944-54 democratic revolution and were motivated by a desire to restore the social rights and national independence that the country experienced during that period.²¹

The risings at the Guatemala City (Mariscal Zavala) and Puerto Barrios bases were quickly suppressed, and a planned rebellion by Air Force officers was aborted when the US ambassador

¹⁹ At least two active Colonels (de León Aragon and Paz Tejada) and several civilians also participated in the plan to overthrow Ydígoras. But when the conspiracy at the Mariscal Zavala base in Guatemala City was leaked prematurely and the rebellion there aborted, Col. De León withdrew from the uprising. (Coronel Carlos Paz Tejada, cited in “Testimonio de un Militar Revolucionario,” in *Transición en Guatemala: De las Armas a la Lucha Política*, Guatemala City, CERIGUA, 1998, 7)

²⁰ Paz Tejada, “Testimonio de un Militar Revolucionario,” 8

²¹ Comandante Rolando Morán (Ricardo Ramírez) in “el Origen de la Guerrilla,” in *Transición en Guatemala: De las Armas a la Lucha Política*, Guatemala City, CERIGUA, 1998, 23

threatened to bomb rebellious air bases with the modern planes being used to train the Cuban invasion force.

This left the rebels at the Zacapa base to stand alone against the loyalist army and air force. The rebels, under the command of Lieutenants Luis Trejo Esquivel, Luis Agosto Turcios Lima and Marco Antonio Yon Sosa, endured the bombings for three days before abandoning the base and fleeing into the nearby hills - and from there, into exile across the Honduran border.

The putschists spent several months reorganizing in El Salvador and Honduras, and in March 1961, Yon Sosa, Trejo Esquivel and Turcios Lima slipped back into Guatemala with a tiny force of two dozen soldiers calling themselves the 13 of November Revolutionary Movement (MR-13)²². The war of the guerrilla began. The emergence of the MR-13 emboldened other sectors opposed to the Ydígoras regime. A general strike and student-led civilian uprising in the capital and other cities in March and April of 1962, (known as the *Jornadas Patrióticas de Marzo y Abril*) was only crushed after several weeks of bloody street fighting.

Over the next several years MR-13 was to fuse with other groups to create the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR), re-appear as a separate organization, reunite with the FAR and then splinter again to create the different insurgent groups that would eventually make up the URNG.

²² Ironically, these three junior officers were experts in guerrilla warfare, because they had received special courses in counterinsurgency from the US Army at Fort Benning, Georgia, USA. – “MR-13, la guerrilla de noviembre de 1960,” *Prensa Libre*, November 10, 2016

2.1.1 The Rebel Armed Forces (FAR)

In December 1962, survivors of the *Jornadas Patrióticas*²³ uprising in the capital, the MR-13 and the Guatemalan Workers Party (PGT) united to create the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR), the first of the guerrilla organizations that would later create the URNG. Under the December 1962 unity agreement, the PGT would assume the political leadership of the new organization, while the MR-13 would direct the military campaign.

The FAR established three small guerrilla fronts in eastern Guatemala along the Sierra de las Minas mountain range that straddles the Motagua and Polochic valleys. The alliance with the youth wing of the PGT (*Juventud Patriótica*) also enabled the FAR to open an urban front in Guatemala City. The urban front primarily undertook propaganda activities, but also engaged in some bank robberies to capture funds for the movement, and a couple of high-profile kidnappings aimed at exchanging hostages for captured rebels.²⁴

Initially the FAR made slow, but steady progress, engaging the army in several parts of eastern Guatemala and gaining support in campesino communities of the region. However, the movement lacked a clear long-term strategy and was plagued by internal conflicts. In the March 1966 presidential elections, the FAR publicly endorsed the Revolutionary Party (PR) candidate

²³ A largely student-led civilian uprising against the presidency of General Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes that took place in Guatemala City in March and April of 1962. The *Jornadas Patrióticas* were violently suppressed by Ydígoras' security forces, leaving several dead and wounded. Student organizers of the *Jornadas* created the *Movimiento 12 de Abril* (April 12 Movement), which joined with the MR-13 and the PGT to form the Rebel Armed Forces.

²⁴ The most notorious of these were the botched kidnapping of US Ambassador John Gordon Mein in 1968 (he was killed during the abduction attempt), and of West German ambassador Karl von Spreti in 1970. With these and other kidnappings the rebels sought the release of activists abducted by state security forces.

Julio Cesar Méndez Montenegro, Dean of the Faculty of Law at the national university. The rebels hoped Méndez Montenegro, who promised a return to the policies of the Guatemalan Spring, would bring about reforms that could facilitate a negotiated end to the insurgency. This strategy was not shared by all members of the FAR leadership and in protest, Yon Sosa, who along with Turcios Lima was now the top military *comandante* of the rebels, split with the FAR to re-establish the MR-13 as a separate guerrilla group.

Méndez won the election, but in order to take office he was forced to negotiate a deal with the military that left the new president with little more than token powers. Soon after the civilian president assumed office, the United States government re-equipped the Guatemalan army with new weapons and equipment, built a military base in eastern Guatemala, and sent hundreds of *Green Berets* (US Army Special Forces) to train Guatemalan soldiers in counterinsurgency and interrogation techniques.²⁵ A reinvigorated army launched a new offensive against the guerrillas in the countryside and a wave of terror against their supporters in the cities far worse than under the previous military regimes. At times, the violence was even directed against progressive members of Méndez's own party, whom the president appeared powerless to protect.²⁶

Even before Méndez took office, the US began to dispatch special advisors to train Guatemalan security forces in *black ops*, such as committing atrocities within the rebel zones of influence and setting them up to make the guerrilla appear responsible. It was at this time that the US Green

²⁵González, Martin Abel. Guatemala, in Encyclopedia of the Cold War, edited by Ruud van Dijk 2008, London, Routledge Press, 391.

²⁶ Galeano, 59

Berets began organizing what would become Latin America's first death squads - special police and military units that abducted, tortured and murdered civilians under the guise of freelance paramilitary organizations.²⁷ By late 1966, the US Air Force was also flying bombing runs from bases at the US Southern Command in the Panama Canal Zone to rebel areas in eastern Guatemala, using napalm to incinerate large swaths of forest and anything living within it.

The FAR suffered a serious blow in October 1966 when its top commander, Turcios Lima, was killed in a suspicious car accident in the capital. That same month, the FAR's chief Mayan organizer, *Pazcual Iztapá* (Emilio Román López, former Mayor of the Achí Maya town of Rabinal) was killed by the army. The following year, the PGT split from the FAR following a dispute over whether the urban civilian leadership or the rural-based field commanders should direct the organization. Then in August 1968, *Comandante Camilo Sánchez*, Turcios Lima's successor, was captured by the military and subsequently executed.

Damaged by the loss of much of its leadership, weakened by terror campaigns against potential supporters, pursued from the land and air by the Guatemalan military and its US ally, and wracked by internal divisions - by the beginning of the 1970s, the FAR had been virtually annihilated. The remnants of its guerrilla forces beat a retreat northward into the sparsely populated Petén province.

²⁷ Galeano (1969, 71-81) made this assertion based on circumstantial evidence and interviews he conducted with former security personnel in 1967. The US admitted sending military aid to Guatemala in 1960s but denied involvement in the black ops. Galeano's assertions are confirmed, however, in US State Department, AID and CIA documents obtained by the National Security Archives in the late 1990s - see: [www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB11/docs/.](http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB11/docs/)



Image 3. Members of the Rebel Armed Forces' Frente Santos Salazar in Taxisco, Santa Rosa in February 1997, a week before beginning demobilization. – *Photo: Steve Stewart, CERIGUA.*

For the next decade, the rebels generally refrained from armed actions and focused instead on community organizing. Throughout most of the 1970s, the FAR, PGT and two new guerrilla movements that emerged from splinters in the FAR, suspended the armed struggle and focused on developing social foundations in rural communities and new areas of operation.²⁸

The FAR did not actively engage the Guatemalan military again until 1980, when it opened new combat fronts, first in the Petén in the North and later in Chimaltenango and Sololá in the Central

²⁸ From 1970-72, FAR's urban commandos did carry out a handful of bank robberies and kidnappings aimed at obtaining the release of prisoners of the state and funding the organization's development in the Petén.

Highlands, Alta Verapaz in the northeast, and Santa Rosa, Escuintla, and Jutiapa provinces in southwestern Guatemala.

At the end of the war, the FAR appeared as the second largest of the insurgent organizations, with its combatants comprising approximately a third of all fighters who participated in the March-May 1997, United Nations-supervised demobilization process (see Table 2 on page 34).

2.1.2 The Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP)

The EGP became active in January of 1972 when a column of 16 combatants of the new organization crossed from Mexico's Chiapas state into the dense jungle lowlands of Guatemala's Ixcán region. The group had developed from a split in the FAR in the late 1960s. Members of the FAR's central command, such as *Cesar Montes* (Julio César Macías) and *Rolando Morán* (Ricardo Ramírez), disagreed with their organization's *foquista*²⁹ strategy, and broke with the organization to lay the foundations for a prolonged insurgency centred in the largely indigenous western part of the country. Before its retreat to the Petén, the FAR had focused its organizing in the primarily *ladino*³⁰ areas of eastern Guatemala, and to a lesser extent among Achi and Kekchí Mayan communities in Alta and Baja Verapaz.

²⁹ Thesis furthered by legendary Argentine guerrilla Ernesto "Che" Guevara, that, if the objective conditions (poverty, oppression, discrimination, etc.) exist, a small, determined group of guerrillas can generate the subjective conditions for revolutionary insurrection. This concept departs from the more orthodox Marxist belief that such subjective conditions can only be created through long-term conscious-raising work among "the masses."

³⁰ *Ladino* is a term used in Guatemala to describe people who speak Spanish as their first language and identify with a hybrid Mayan-influenced "western" culture. It is similar, but not the same as, the term "mestizo" (mixed) in other Mesoamerican countries. In Guatemala, *ladino* was originally used to refer to the indigenous assistant to the parish priest in rural communities who learned Latin in order to interpret the words of the priest into the local indigenous languages. Over centuries of colonization, the word came to describe the large caste of Guatemalans who did not identify as indigenous but were also not *criollo* (direct descendants of European settlers). Unlike the term *mestizo*, *ladino* is more of a cultural than a "racial" term. There are Guatemalans who identify as *ladino*, who are biologically indigenous, and others who have little or no indigenous ancestry. (See Salazar, 2007)

The EGP spent its initial years building its guerrilla force and developing a strong social base in the Ixcán before gradually expanding to highland areas of Quiché and neighbouring provinces. The organization did not reveal itself publicly as an armed insurgent movement until June of 1975, when one of its units tried and executed a notorious coffee plantation owner in Quiché province. (Jose Luis Arenas Barrera, known as “*El tigre del Ixcán*” for his harsh treatment of peons on his ever-expanding “La Perla” plantation.)

The insurgents had sown seeds in fertile ground. By 1980, the EGP had grown to be the largest guerrilla movement in the country with thousands of guerrilla fighters and tens of thousands of irregular local militias (*Fuerzas Irregulares Locales* – FILs)³¹.

Ideologically, the EGP differed from the FAR in that it placed more emphasis on the participation of indigenous peoples in the revolution. In Guatemala at the time, indigenous Mayans made up at least half the population, but the first wave of revolutionary organizing by the MR-13 and the FAR focused on organizing with the largely *ladino* small farmers of eastern Guatemala. The Guerrilla Army of the Poor also drew greater inspiration from liberation theology and counted a number of former Catholic priests and catequists among its leadership and mid-level command.³²

³¹ Miranda Madrid, “De la Insurgencia a la Legalidad,” 44

³² For details on the roots of the EGP among catholic adherents to liberation theology and the “Option for the Poor,” see *Whose Heaven? Whose Earth?* by Tom and Marjorie Melville, a former Maryknoll Catholic priest and nun who worked with Mayan communities in Northern Guatemala in the 1960s and eventually developed ties with the guerrilla movement before they were expelled from the country. The two were later imprisoned in the United States after being convicted of destroying files used for the US Army’s military draft.

As it expanded out of the Ixcán, the EGP centred its operations in the more heavily populated, majority Mayan provinces of Quiché, Huehuetenango, Alta and Baja Verapaz and Chimaltenango. Much of the EGP's fighting forces were recruited from the Committee of Campesino Unity (CUC), a Mayan small farmer and rural labourer's movement, as well as from indigenous members of *Acción Católica*³³. Most of the EGP's combatants and field officers were Maya, although its high command remained largely *ladino*.

At the end of the war, the EGP emerged as the largest of the URNG organizations. About half the URNG combatants who participated in the March-May 1997 UN-supervised demobilization process, belonged to the EGP.

2.1.3 The Revolutionary Army of the People in Arms (ORPA)

Like the EGP, ORPA emerged from a splinter of the remnants of the FAR in the late 1960s. ORPA leaders shared the EGP's rejection of the *foquista* strategies implemented by the FAR, inclining instead for a "prolonged war of the people."³⁴ ORPA also believed that challenging racism in majority indigenous and ethnically divided Guatemala was as important as the class

³³ US Historian Greg Grandin, who has written extensively on social movements in Guatemala, describes *Acción Católica* as: "A catequist movement originally designed to instill orthodox Catholicism (*among the Maya who tended to practice a syncretic blend of traditional beliefs and Catholicism*) and serve as a bulwark against rural communism. *Acción Católica* evolved in the 1960s and 70s to be the locus of much of the work associated with liberation theology." (*Who is Rigoberta Menchú?* New York, Verso Books, 2011, 122)

³⁴ Also known as Prolonged Popular War, this was a strategy inspired by the long victory of Mao Zedong in China. Proponents argued that guerrilla forces needed to engage in a long period of consciousness raising with peasants and a gradual encircling of the enemy's urban administrative areas through the creation of rural liberated zones. After the failure of the *foquista* strategy in much of the Americas, the prolonged popular war approach was adopted by many of the revolutionary movements in Central America.

struggle favoured by the FAR. Like the EGP it focused its political work among Mayan communities in the Western Highlands.

From its beginning in 1971 (and even before, as a faction of the FAR) ORPA was led by Rodrigo Asturias, the son of Guatemalan Nobel Laureate Miguel Angel Asturias. Asturias took his *nom de guerre* “*Gaspar Ilom*” from an indigenous character in one of his father’s novels (*Hombres de Maíz*).

Although ORPA guerrillas established their first armed camp on the slopes of Guatemala’s highest volcano, Tajumulco, in 1972, the organization did not become public until September 1979, when its troops occupied a coffee plantation in Quetzaltenango. ORPA militants were given the nickname “*los Volcanes*” by members of other URNG groups, due to the organization’s strategy to move peak by peak, down the geologically active western spine of the country, aiming to eventually surround the capital.

ORPA’s sphere of operations encompassed the western provinces of San Marcos, Quetzaltenango, Sololá, Suchitepéquez, Sacatepéquez and parts of Escuintla. ORPA also played a key role in the creation of the *Frente Unitario*, which operated in Sololá, Chimaltenango and Escuintla provinces, and was the only insurgent front that integrated combatants from all of the organizations that formed the URNG.

While ORPA's fighting force was clearly smaller than that of the EGP and the FAR, United Nations statistics showing that only 8.5% of URNG combatants³⁵ who demobilized belonged to ORPA can be misleading since ORPA fighters made up the vast majority of combatants who demobilized through the *Frente Unitario*. With 224 fighters demobilizing, the *Frente Unitario* represented another 7.7% of URNG combatants.

2.1.4 Guatemalan Labour Party – PGT

Founded in 1949, the PGT was the Guatemalan expression of the wave of pro-Moscow communist parties that emerged in Central America in the 1940s. The PGT was largely an urban-based organization that found most of its support among skilled workers and intellectuals from the public university (University of San Carlos), although at times the party also had influence among rural workers in Guatemala's important sugar cane industry. The PGT collaborated with the liberal democratic governments of Juan José Arevalo and Jacobo Arbenz during the decade of the "Guatemalan Spring," and it served as an important (underground) pole of resistance to the military regimes following the CIA-organized invasion that overthrew President Arbenz in 1954.

Throughout the 36 years of the armed conflict, the PGT was distinctly ambivalent about armed resistance. At times it formed part of the armed rebel movement, while at others it was outside of, or in conflict with, the guerrilla. The party was also prone to frequent splits over ideological and strategic issues. One faction, the PGT-NDN (*Núcleo de Dirección Nacional*), was a founding organization of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity, but they were replaced in 1987 by

³⁵ Miranda Madrid, "De la Insurgencia a la Legalidad," 161

another faction, the PGT-CC (Central Committee) led by Ricardo Rosales, who at the end of 1996, as *Comandante Carlos González*, would be one of the four URNG commanders to sign the agreement for a final and lasting peace.

All of the guerrilla organizations that founded the URNG had their roots in the PGT -particularly its youth wing, the Patriotic Labour Youth (JPT) - but had broken with the party orthodoxy at different times on issues such as the role of the vanguard party and the ethnic dimensions of the revolution.

Through much of the armed conflict, different factions of the PGT operated small urban guerrilla units in the capital and other cities. These urban commandos focused mainly on armed propaganda actions to raise awareness of the social struggle in Guatemala. The party did not maintain independent guerrilla forces in the countryside, but some of its members did incorporate with fronts of the FAR, EGP and ORPA. Only a couple dozen PGT fighters joined fellow guerrillas in the UN supervised camps during the 1997 demobilization process, although there may have been more who demobilized as part of the the *Frente Unitario*.

The PGT focused almost exclusively on organizing in urban areas, but all the guerrilla organizations maintained “urban fronts.” These were irregular forces whose primary tasks were political and logistical, but who also carried out propaganda activities, such as sabotage, resistance graffiti, armed information meetings and setting off pamphlet bombs. Even after the creation of the URNG in 1982, it was common for the different urban fronts to compete with one another for influence in student, labour and community organizations.

2.1.5 Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity – URNG

When the different guerrilla organizations publicly (re)emerged in the late 1970s, they found significant popular support in the countryside.³⁶ Testimony from guerrilla fighters about that period indicates that the numbers of people who wished to join the insurgents far exceeded the organizations' capacities to train, arm and feed them.³⁷

Drawing from a variety of sources, Miranda Madrid³⁸ estimates that by 1982, the guerrilla movement in Guatemala involved between six and ten thousand full-time combatants and an active base of between 250 and 500 thousand people, including irregular militias.

However, the insurgents lacked the unity that would enable them to coordinate strikes against the army in different parts of the country, and the need to maintain four parallel logistics and support systems proved a drain on the different guerrilla organizations. In urban areas, the rival groups also expended energy and political capital in power struggles for influence in social movements that were regaining strength in the second half of the 1970s. A similar rivalry took place at the

³⁶ Although never again did the guerrilla develop a strong support base in the Oriente, the region of FAR's guerrilla *focos* of the 1960s, a legacy of the US and Guatemalan army's counterinsurgency campaign in the area that left thousands of civilians dead.

³⁷ Teniente Guiler, "...We didn't have enough weapons. Men we had, but what we didn't have were weapons...there was a lot of men ready, but what we didn't have was food, we didn't have clothes..." (Interview Toluché I demobilization camp, Quiche, March 1997), and Teniente Walter, "At that time my uncle was the squad leader. He said 'We're going to carry out an ambush!' But I said 'how can I go? I don't have a weapon' He answered, 'and don't you have a machete?'" According to Walter, when he joined the FAR in 1981, his squad of 13 had "5 M16 assault rifles, 3 hunting rifles and a couple of grenades" between them. (Interview Camp Compañera Elvira, Santa Rosa, February, 1997)

Miranda Madrid, "De la Insurgencia a la Legalidad," 44.³⁸

international level, as Guatemalan organizations identified with the different guerrilla forces jockeyed for support from governments and solidarity groups in other countries.

As early as 1979, the EGP, FAR, ORPA and PGT made tentative efforts to cooperate, but this initially did not extend much beyond issuing a few joint communiqués. The Guatemalan army's successful destruction of the urban support networks of the different guerrilla organizations in 1981, followed by a series of brutal "scorched earth" counteroffensives in the countryside, stretched the guerrilla movements' resources beyond their limits. The guerrilla had hoped that with the triumph of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua,³⁹ solidarity would now be directed to their revolution, but the international support the rebels hoped for did not materialize.

With little aid coming from abroad, and their supply lines from the capital broken, the guerrillas faced the massive army offensive with the few weapons and supplies they could capture from the enemy or scavenge locally. Several of the guerrilla fighters I interviewed about this period speak of a severe scarcity of arms and ammunition in their units during this period. One EGP officer, in charge of a guerrilla column in northern Quiché, told me bullets were so scarce that they were under strict orders not to fire more than 10 each when engaging the army.⁴⁰

As they struggled to survive the onslaught of an army made even more lethal by new modern aircraft provided by the USA, and arms and military advisors from Argentina, South Africa and

³⁹ In July 1979, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) toppled the decades-long dictatorship of the Somoza family in Nicaragua, marking the first successful left-wing insurgency in Latin America since the triumph of the Cuban revolution at the end of 1959.

⁴⁰ Interview with Lieutenant Guiler, Toluché I demobilization camp, March 1997.

Israel, the leaders of the guerrilla groups accelerated unity talks. In January 1982, the EGP, FAR, ORPA and the Nucleus of the National Direction (NDN) faction of the PGT announced that they had united into a single organization- the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG).

For a long time however, unity remained more a goal than a reality. In a 1997 interview, ORPA *Comandante Gaspar Ilom* told CERIGUA that the plan to merge all the insurgent structures met resistance from significant sectors within each of the organizations. “The unity was declared in 1982, but it didn’t begin to work right away,” Ilom said, “Sectors within the organizations opposed the unification. This put a brake on things until ’84 and 85,”⁴¹ when a unified command was finally established. Although the URNG created a joint leadership council of the commanders of the four guerrilla organizations, each maintained its own separate structure, and the different groups continued to compete for influence in grassroots organizations and with international solidarity groups. It was not until after the final peace agreement between the URNG and the Guatemalan government was signed that, in January 1997, the rebels dissolved their individual organizations and formed a single political party under the URNG banner.⁴² The only significant advance towards deeper unity during the war was the creation in 1991 of the *Frente Unitario*, a new guerrilla column made up of fighters from several of the guerrilla organizations belonging to the URNG. The *Frente Unitario* operated mainly in the western

⁴¹ CERIGUA, *Transición en Guatemala*, 38

⁴² Even this unity of the revolutionary left was short lived. Following the November 2000 elections, one faction, consisting mainly of former FAR members, broke off to create a separate political party – the Alliance for a New Nation (ANN), which later formed the nucleus of the current Convergence for a Democratic Revolution party (CRD).

highland and *piedmont* provinces of Chimaltenango, Suchitepéquez and Sololá. Its most significant action was the brief occupation of Escuintla, Guatemala's third most important city, in late August 1991. At demobilization in early 1997, the *Frente Unitario* comprised approximately 7.6% of the URNG's fighting forces (see Table 3 on page 35).

2.2 The Peace Process

The URNG and its member organizations survived the army offensives of 1981-84, but it emerged significantly weakened both militarily and politically. Short of supplies, communication infrastructure and ammunition, the URNG commanders ordered their forces to beat a "strategic" retreat into sparsely populated regions. This enabled the rebel forces to avoid annihilation, but it came at a very high political and human cost.

During its military offensives the Guatemalan army sought to eliminate the guerrilla's civilian base of support. Without guerrilla units taking action to at least slow the military onslaught, the mostly indigenous rural farming communities perceived by the army to be supportive of the guerrillas were easy prey. Hundreds of communities suspected of supporting the rebels were destroyed by the Guatemalan army and tens of thousands of people slaughtered.⁴³ The communities that survived became heavily militarized, with all males between the ages of 16 and 60 required to participate in army-organized paramilitary Civil Defence Patrols (PACs). The

⁴³ The United Nations Commission of Historic Clarification, created by the Peace Accords to investigate rights violations committed during the war, found that the army and its allies committed a total of 626 massacres, most of which occurred between 1981 and 1984. 83% of civilian victims were indigenous Maya—Tamuschat C., Lux de Cotí A., & Balsells, Tojo, *Guatemala: Memory of Silence*, 34

guerrilla had shown itself unable to protect its civilian base. Never again was it able to inspire the active support of significant sectors of the rural population.

Conditions in Guatemala and the changing international situation convinced the URNG leadership that a military victory over the army was no longer possible.

When the Guatemalan military permitted a civilian government to assume nominal power in early 1986, the URNG contacted the new president to propose

peace talks. The Christian Democratic government of President Vinicio Cerezo agreed to an exploratory meeting with the rebels, which took place in Madrid, Spain October 7, 1987.

The Madrid meeting opened the way to over nine years of negotiations, which concluded with the signing of a final peace accord on December 29, 1996.

The peace negotiations can be divided into three phases:



Image 4. Members of the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR) turn in their weapons to UN peace-keepers. Camp Claudia, Santa Rosa, March 3, 1993 – Photo: Steve Stewart, CERIGUA

- a) A preliminary stage of finding a way for the government and the URNG to initiate talks. This stretched between October 1987 and March 1990, when the two sides signed in Oslo, Norway a calendar for peace negotiations
- b) The 1990-1993 “Oslo Process,” moderated by Catholic Bishop Monsignor Rodolfo Quezada Toruño as head of the National Reconciliation Commission. The Oslo Process involved meetings in international settings between URNG representatives and different sectors of Guatemalan society, before direct conversations opened between the government, the army and the guerrillas. Once direct talks began, the Oslo process soon showed progress. Agreements were reached in 1991 on a process and agenda for the talks, and a “Framework Agreement on Democratization” was signed. But negotiations ended abruptly in May 1993, with the attempted “self-coup⁴⁴” of then President Jorge Serrano Elias, his subsequent ousting, and the installation of an interim government led by former Human Rights Ombudsman Ramiro Carpio de León.
- c) The third and final phase began in January 1994, under the mediation of the United Nations. This final stage of negotiations included the unique feature of establishing an “Assembly of Civil Sectors,” enabling an array of organized Guatemalan sectors ranging from political parties and business associations to women’s and indigenous organizations, to deliberate on

⁴⁴ In May 1993, President Serrano attempted to seize absolute power by dissolving the legislature. His “self-coup” was opposed by civil society organizations and the “institutional” faction of the army (led by General Otto Perez Molina, who himself was elected president in 2012 to be ousted in September 2015 following massive anti-corruption demonstrations). After several days of street confrontations and stand-offs between different units of the army, Serrano resigned and fled to Panama.

and submit proposals to the negotiating table on the different themes under discussion. These talks concluded with the signing of the “Final and Lasting Peace” in Guatemala City December 29, 1996. This agreement included 6 substantive accords aimed at addressing the roots of the war, and four operational ones dealing with the cessation of hostilities, and demobilization and reintegration of combatants (See appendix II).

Although the Guatemalan government and the URNG signed the “Agreement on a Firm and Lasting Peace” at the end of 1996, the permanent ceasefire that ended the war was not to take effect until more than two months later. To allow time to build the demobilization camps where URNG combatants would concentrate, and for the United Nations to approve, organize and deploy a multinational contingent of “Blue Berets”⁴⁵ to monitor compliance with the demobilization process, the official end to hostilities was not to take place until “D” (for demobilization) day - March 3 1997. On that day, the peace observers of the United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA) were to verify that all state military units had been re-deployed beyond the agreed-on 12-kilometre security zone surrounding the demobilization camps, and URNG fighters would cease armed propaganda activities and concentrate in the camps. There they would be registered, issued civilian identification cards, and receive rudimentary vocational training to help prepare to re-enter the civilian workforce. As a trust-building measure, guerrillas entered the camps armed, and were to retain their weapons throughout most of their time at the camps. They turned them over to the UN observer mission in three successive rounds one week apart, with one third of the guerrillas turning in

⁴⁵ United Nations’ military peace observers.

their arms in each round. After disarming, the ex-combatants began the process of reintegration into civil society on May 3, 1997.

During the period between the signing of the Peace and “D” day, guerrilla units began to gather informally within the security zones. It was at this time that it became easier for journalists to meet with and interview rebel combatants.

Two weeks before the signing of the Final and Lasting Peace, the two sides approved the last operational agreement, the “Accord on the Basis for the Incorporation of the URNG into Legality.” The agreement laid out the groundwork for the reincorporation of URNG combatants into civilian society. It established a joint Special Incorporation Commission made up of equal numbers of representatives from the government and the URNG, and a foundation, to be administered by the URNG. The commission was responsible for ensuring compliance with the agreed-on demobilization, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) procedures, and for assigning resources received from the international community for projects that were to facilitate the reintegration process.⁴⁶

The foundation, named after Guillermo Toriello, foreign minister under progressive President Jacobo Arbenz, who was ousted in the 1954 CIA coup, would be responsible for coordinating orientation, basic literacy and vocational training for URNG members during the demobilization

⁴⁶ At the time the final peace was signed, the International Community pledged more than US 85 million to assist with the demobilization and reintegration of the URNG combatants (Hauge & Thoresen, “Spoilers or Agents for Change?” 218). What was actually delivered once the rebels turned in their arms, however, was less than a third of what was originally promised.

period. The foundation was also responsible for coordinating housing, training and assistance for the ex-combatants for up to one year during the reintegration process. The Toreillo Foundation (FGT) carried out extensive surveys of URNG members and combatants, generating statistical data that has been very useful to the research for this thesis.

2.3 Demobilization

The United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA) had been established in the country in 1994 to monitor compliance with the accord on human rights. With the signing of the Final and Lasting Peace, the UN Mission also assumed responsibility for the

demobilization process. MINUGUA built eight camps in six different areas of the country for the demobilizing rebels. Four housed demobilizing members of the EGP, two were for the FAR, and there was one each for ORPA and the *Frente Unitario*. (See Map 1 and Table 1).



Image 5. URNG combatants line up to turn over their weapons to UN peacekeepers, *Lo de Blanco* demobilization camp, Santa Rosa, Guatemala May 3, 1997.

– Photo: Steve Stewart, CERIGUA

During the 2-month period between the signing of the Peace and “D” day, the Toriello Foundation carried out a comprehensive survey of URNG combatants that provides important insights into the demographics, and the aspirations of guerrilla fighters on the eve of peace.

The FGT’s survey involved 2,778 of the combatants who were to gather in the demobilization camps. Of these, 71% of combatants identified as Maya, and 15% were women. The majority of demobilizing combatants interviewed (58%) were from Guatemala’s western highlands, and about half had worked as small farmers (*campesinos*) and agricultural labourers prior to joining the guerrilla.

The exact number of URNG members who demobilized is controversial and difficult to confirm. Some scholars have used the numbers of those who officially demobilized through MINUGUA to judge the URNG’s strength at the close of the war, but the lack of firm figures makes this an unreliable measure. The URNG initially indicated to the Incorporation Commission that 2,950 guerrillas would gather in the demobilization camps, and an additional 1410 members of the URNG’s political and logistical structures would demobilize via the MINUGUA offices in Guatemala City. Lahr Caballero observes that in the first year of the demobilization, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) process, figures given for numbers of demobilized rebels rose steadily from 2,950 at the beginning of the year to 6,400 when the camps closed in May 2007.⁴⁷ Hauge, writing a decade later, states that the final number of demobilized URNG

⁴⁷ Lahr Caballero, “Condiciones y Expectativas de los Ex Combatientes de la URNG para la Reinsercion,” Guatemala, University of San Carlos, 1999, 12

members was 3,614, ⁴⁸ although she does not specify whether this includes only those who demobilized through the camps, or also members of the political and logistical structures of the URNG.

The Guillermo Toriellos Foundation divides the demobilizing URNG members in 3 groups, and provides the following table:

Table 1: Categories of URNG Members who demobilized in 1997⁴⁹

List A	Ex-Combatants	2940
List B	Internal political structures (within Guatemala)	1896
List C	External structure (responsible for coordinating international support for the URNG).	364
	Total URNG members who demobilized	5,200

Hauge and Thoreson believe that the different insurgent groups played a kind of demobilization numbers game to boost their relative organizational strength as the organizations of the URNG prepared to dissolve their separate forces and integrate into a single political party. They suspect that the organizations inflated their ranks in the camps with civilian collaborators in order to increase their profile *vis a vis* other rebel organizations, with the aim of claiming more space in the newly unified party. Hauge and Thoreson argue that the numbers of actual combatants in the URNG at the end of the war were likely less than the numbers registered at the camps.

⁴⁸ Hauge & Thoreson, “Spoilers or Agents for Change?” 214

⁴⁹ Corral Alonso, Enrique and Rivas Castillo, Mariana. *Excombatientes ¿Dónde están?*, FGT, 2016, 47

Figure 1: Locations of U.N. supervised URNG demobilization camps, March 1997

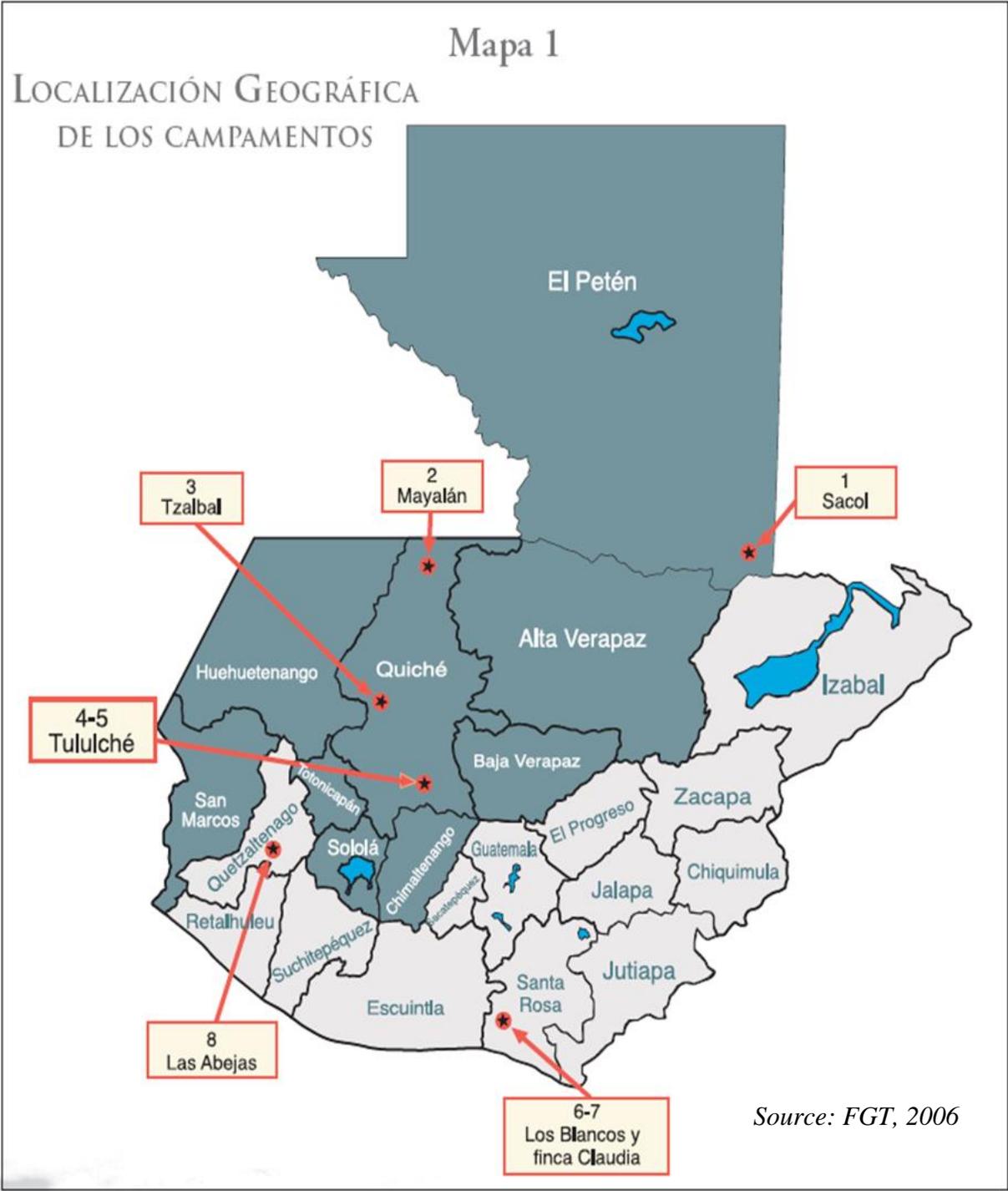


Table 2**Distribution of URNG's demobilizing combatants by camp and Organization⁵⁰**

Region	Camp Name (MINUGUA)*	Number of combatants	Organization
El Petén	Sacol	642	Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes – FAR
Santa Rosa	Lo de Blanco**	342	FAR
Ixcán, Quiché	Mayalán	428	Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres – EGP
Nebaj, El Quiché	Tzalbal	499	EGP
Chiché, El Quiché	Tuluche I	285	EGP/PGT
Chiché, El Quiché	Tuluche I	258	EGP
Quetzaltenango	Las Abejas	250	Organización Revolucionaria del Pueblo en Armas – ORPA
Santa Rosa	Claudia	224	Frente Unitario (Mainly ORPA but Includes fighters from other organizations as well.)
Total		2,928	

* A number of the camps were given different names by the guerrillas. For example, the FAR called Camp Lo de Blanco “Campamento Compañera Elvira,” after a fallen guerrilla fighter from the FAR’s Santos Salazar Front, which operated in the region.

**Camp lo de Blanco is also called in some sources “Los Blancos,” or Claudia II

But there were other guerrillas who, due to distrust, or disagreement with the peace process, did not register for demobilization but simply melted back into the civilian population. Miranda Madrid⁵¹ observes that during the final year of negotiations, as it became clear the war was

⁵⁰ Based on numbers provided in Corral Alonso, Enrique and Rivas Castillo, Mariana. *Excombatientes ¿Dónde están?* FGT, 2016, 42

⁵¹ Miranda Madrid, *De la Insurgencia a la Legalidad*, 70

coming to an end, many combatants quietly returned to their homes rather than registering for the lengthy demobilization process. In his memoir of the war, former ORPA field commander Santiago recalls, “Many *compañeros* did not believe in the process and were not willing to publicly expose themselves, nor share personal information that later could be used to harm them.”⁵²

Nor would the above figures include internationalist combatants, who were not covered by the DDR process beyond a safe conduct pass out of the country⁵³. While the number of internationalists was probably not high, they were a definite presence both on the battle fronts and in the logistics structure of the guerrilla organizations. One of the 13 combatants I interviewed was an internationalist, and I met several more in logistics in the early 1990s. The FGT’s *Memoria de los Caidos en la Lucha Revolucionaria de Guatemala*, a registry of URNG members killed during the war,

includes 37 internationalists (Canadian Raoul Leger is among them) out of a total of 2118

Table 3:
Total combatants by organization, who demobilized in the U.N. camps

Organization	Totals
EGP	1,459
FAR	984
ORPA	250
PGT*	22
Frente Unitario	<u>213</u>
URNG combined	2,928

• These figures are totals drawn from Table 1, but also take into account Santa Cruz Mendoza’s (Comandante Santiago) observations that 22 PGT fighters demobilized in camps administered by other rebel organizations. I have separated them out from the Frente Unitario and Toluché I numbers.

⁵² Santa Cruz Mendoza, *Insurgentes: Guatemala, la Paz Arrancada*, 339

⁵³ Miranda Madrid, *De la Insurgencia a la Legalidad*, 183

killed.⁵⁴ According to a study published by the FGT in 2016, at the time of demobilization there were at least 100 men and women from 21 different countries in the ranks of the URNG. The study reveals that the participation of these *internationalistas* was a closely guarded secret until many years after the conclusion of the armed conflict.⁵⁵

“Neither everyone who is there is (a URNG combatant), nor is everyone who is (a URNG combatant), there,” admitted FGT director Enrique Corral Alonso.⁵⁶ While some of those who registered in the demobilization camps were people who played only minor roles in the rebel movement, there were other long-time combatants and activists who did not register at all.

My own experience supports Corral’s observation. In March of 1997, my colleagues and I gained entry to a demobilization camp for FAR combatants in Sacol, Petén province, in part because one of my housemates in Guatemala City had demobilized there and put in a good word for us with a camp command reluctant to receive foreign journalists. His role in the guerrilla had been limited to unarmed logistical support in the city, but when in early 1997, the FAR put out the call for its members to demobilize, he left the city and spent two months at the camp. On the other hand, three former guerrillas who came to work with CERIGUA only a year before the war ended had spent years in the mountains, yet none of them registered to demobilize.

⁵⁴ FGT, *Memoria de los Caídos en la Lucha Revolucionaria de Guatemala*, 2006, 146

⁵⁵ FGT, *Excombatientes ¿Dónde están?*, 67. The report indicates that the *internationalistas* came from the following countries: El Salvador, México, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Spain, France, USA, Canada, Northern Ireland, Belize, Chile, Cuba, Venezuela, Colombia, Uruguay, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Italy, Brazil and the Philippines.

⁵⁶ Hauge & Thoreson “Spoilers or Agents of Change?” 218. Originally a Jesuit priest from Spain, Enrique Corral joined the EGP in the 1970s and became a member of the organization’s national directorate. He was a URNG representative in the peace negotiations and was appointed director of the Guillermo Toreillo Foundation that established by the accords. Enrique Corral died in Spain on March 3, 2018.



Image 6. Members of the Guatemalan Army, the UN Peace Observers and URNG fighters in formation at Camp Claudia, Santa Rosa when the final contingent of guerrilla combatants turned their arms over to the UN, May 3, 1997. – *Photo: Steve Stewart, CERIGUA*

In general, combatants demobilized in the camps closest to the fronts where they had operated during the war. There were some exceptions. For example, some of FAR combatants I interviewed at the Lo de Blanco camp in the southern province of Santa Rosa had spent most of the war on the FAR's fronts in northern Petén province. But since they were originally from the southwest, they chose to demobilize there in the hopes of reconnecting sooner with their families.

Chapter 3: Rebels on the Eve of Peace: The Interviews



Image 7. *Captain Walter, Lieutenant Silvio* and other members of the FAR's Santos Salazar Front prepare to surrender their arms at Camp Claudia, May 1997 – *Photo: Steve Stewart, CERIGUA*

In the period between the signing of the Final and Lasting Peace on December 29 1996, and the reintegration of the majority of the guerrillas into civil society in May 1997, I made five trips to demobilization camps. I visited one before it became a formal demobilization camp, when the rebel fighters were just beginning to gather and had set up their own field tents and simple shelters. The others I visited when the camps were operational, but the guerrillas still had their weapons. My final visit took place on one emotional day in early May 1997, at camps Claudia and Lo de Blanco when combatants lined up to turn over to their weapons United Nations peacekeeping officials.

The demobilization centres I visited were the FAR camps of Sacol in El Petén and Lo de Blanco in Santa Rosa, the EGP camps of Toluche I and II in Quiché, and Camp Claudia, the Unitary Front's camp in the southwestern province of Santa Rosa. Camp Claudia and Lo de Blanco were geographically united, separated only by a ravine, but under different administration. The same was true of Toluche I and II, which were only separated by an open field.

Camps Claudia and Lo de Blanco were relatively close to Guatemala City (a 2-hour bus ride, then a 45-minute hike up into the hills) and I was able to visit them on three occasions: Once before the demobilization camps were established, when there was simply a rough camp of several platoons of the FAR's *Frente Santos Salazar*, again shortly after the formal demobilization camps had been established, and finally to witness the rebels turning over their weapons shortly before they left the camps to return to civilian life. This enabled me to establish a closer relationship with some of the combatants at these camps, some of whom I met again in the capital soon after they had reinserted into civil society.

At the time I conducted the interviews, my primary interests were to gain an understanding of URNG combatants' perspectives on the coming transition from life in the guerrilla to reintegration into Guatemalan civil society, and some insight into their motives for joining the armed struggle and their experiences within it. Given that this paper is being written more than 20 years after the original interviews, much more could have been learned if it were possible to locate the former guerrillas I spoke with, share the interviews with them and discover how much their hopes (and fears) for a post-conflict Guatemala reflect their current realities. Unfortunately,

resources are lacking for conducting a second, post-conflict set of interviews with the same participants. However, several studies published a decade or more after the demobilization process was completed (Hauge, 2007, Hauge & Thoresen, 2008 and Janzen 2014) shed some light on former guerrillas' experiences with reintegration, and serve to compare combatants' expectations of reintegration with their lived realities a decade later.

Combining quantitative data from the Toreillo Foundation with qualitative material gleaned from interviews with former combatants ten years after demobilization, Hauge and Thoresen evaluate the role ex-combatants have played in Guatemalan society during the post-war period. They ask whether the former guerrillas have been “spoilers” of the peace process or have been able to contribute to democratic change in the country. Hauge also approaches reintegration through a gender lens in her 2007 study, interviewing 44 women who had participated in the URNG, asking them to compare their experiences as women in the guerrilla during the war to those of the post-war period, and gauging their levels of social and political participation in post-war Guatemalan society. In the above studies, Hauge and Thoresen argue that the post-war levels of engagement by former combatants in non-violent activism aimed at changing the social conditions that engendered the war is an important measure of the success of a DDR process. If these conditions are not changed, they argue, there is the possibility of armed conflict breaking out again.

Janzen's research took place in 2008 and involved in-depth interviews with eight former rebels in the community of Nuevo Horizonte in El Petén province. Nuevo Horizonte is a unique community of former FAR combatants and their families, numbering about 500 people in all.

Given the emphasis in many DDR processes on breaking up rebel units and encouraging combatants' individual reintegration into broader society, due to fears that united ex-combatants could re-arm and fight again,⁵⁷ Janzen looked to use grounded theory to understand the experiences of those who chose to demobilize and reinsert collectively with their former comrades in arms. Nuevo Horizonte represents the largest and most successful of the four experiments in

Table 4: Testimony Participant Demographics

Variable	Number	%
Total combatants interviewed	13	100%
Male combatants	9	69%
Female Combatants	4	31%
Ladino	12	92%
Indigenous	1	8%
Rural background	9	69%
Urban background	4	31%
FAR members	8	62%
ORPA	1	8%
EGP	1	8%
Mixed (<i>participated in more than one guerrilla group</i>)	3	23%
URNG officers	4	31%
Specialists	6	46%
Rank and file combatants	4	31%
Average age when interviewed	39	
Average age at joining	23	
Average years in the guerrilla	15.8	
Median years in the guerrilla	15.0	

collective reintegration by former URNG combatants. The others are: Las Teclas, a small community established by former FAR guerrillas from the Santos Salazar Front on the South Coast in Suchitepéquez province; Santa Anita, a coffee cooperative settled by former ORPA fighters in San Marcos; and *29 de Diciembre* in Chimaltenango. Of these only Nuevo Horizonte is of significant size. (*29 de Diciembre* is similar in population to Nuevo Horizonte, but it is a housing complex made up of former members of several URNG organizations, rather than a production cooperative.)

⁵⁷ Hauge & Thoreson write that the international community, influenced by traditional DDR thinkers such as Joanna Spear, sought to individualize the reintegration process as “the most effective way to break former combatants’ ties to their former fighting units...” “*Spoilers or Agents of Change?*” 231

While the informants in the studies above may not be the same people I interviewed, they make up a very similar demographic.⁵⁸ It is useful to compare the aspirations expressed by the participants in the 1997 interviews with the lived experience of the ex-combatants interviewed a decade later.

From the five trips I made to the camps I have preserved interviews with 11 guerrillas. I also included in this research an interview with *Sergio*, a former combatant who came to work at CERIGUA not long before the end of the war; and another that took place in San Salvador in 1994 with URNG combatant, *Benjamín*, who had been sent out of the country to recover from an injury. While that interview has less emphasis on post-war expectations, I have included *Benjamín* in this study because he provides very rich detail of guerrilla life in the mountains and, as the only foreign national I met among guerrilla combatants, his experience adds another dimension to the research.

Prior to the visits to the camps and the interviews, the image I had of the typical URNG combatant was what might be called the “Che Guevara” archetype – earnest, single young men who had left society behind to fight for a new one. For me, it was a surprise to discover the diversity in age and gender, and the strong family ties of the combatants I met. The average age of the guerrillas I interviewed was 38.5 (of the 9 that gave their age), almost one third were women, and more than half (7) had either joined the guerrilla with their families, or they had

⁵⁸ In fact, it is possible that some may well have been the same people. I am aware that some of the combatants I interviewed did settle in the demobilized rebel community of Nuevo Horizonte, and all three of the studies referred to here include interviews with ex-combatants living there.

joined with a large group of relatives and friends from their communities. The average age at which participants said they had joined the guerrilla was 23, but there was a broad distribution, with the youngest being 14 and the oldest 60, at the time of joining⁵⁹. The average length of time spent in the guerrilla was 15.8 years, with the most recent recruit (also the oldest, *Adán*, who joined at age 60) having joined 7 years before the end of the conflict, and the longest-serving having spent 33 years with the rebels. (*Cro. Pancho*, who with his father, joined the first FAR column in the Sierra de las Minas in 1963.)

In many of the variables, the demographics of the combatants I interviewed are similar to those outlined in the Toriellos Foundation's comprehensive survey of 2778 URNG members at the end of the war. However, the sample differs significantly from the Foundation's variables in three areas:

1. The Foundation's survey found that approximately 71% of URNG members were indigenous,⁶⁰ while only one guerrilla in the interviews I conducted was indigenous (Lieutenant Guiler), representing just over 7% of the sample.
2. 62% of the interviews I conducted were with members of the FAR, while the FGT indicates that FAR members made up only about 33.6 % of total URNG combatants who demobilized through the peace accords (see table 3). In addition, two of the

⁵⁹ Age at joining was a challenge to establish firmly, as several interviewees began as collaborators several years before fully incorporating. In these cases, I chose the age when they moved from collaborators to full-time combatants.

⁶⁰ This figure includes both combatants and members of the URNG's political and logistics structures. The same survey indicated that 81.5 percent of the combatants were indigenous, but only about half the members of the political and logistics structures. Corral Alonso, Enrique and Rivas Castillo, Mariana. *Excombatientes ¿Dónde están?*, FGT, 2016, 48.

three participants whose organizational affiliation is indicated as "mixed" in Table 2 were FAR members at the time of the interview.

3. The majority of combatants surveyed by the Foundation (63%) were between 16 and 30 years of age, while the average age of the people I interviewed was 39.

There are two reasons for the preponderance of FAR members in the interviews I conducted:

1. Due to the particular role of the CERIGUA News Agency, and work I had been involved in prior to conducting the interviews, I had better contacts in the FAR, so it was easier to obtain permission to visit their camps, and;
2. During my visits to the camps I conducted a total of 18 interviews with combatants from various URNG organizations. Unfortunately, two cassettes containing several recordings of interviews was lost. Two of the lost interviews were with EGP combatants, carried out when I had visited the Toluche I and II camps in Quiché province. The other three lost interviews were with FAR combatants Camp Sacol in the southern Petén, including two indigenous Kekchi Maya.

The fact that the majority of the interviews are with FAR combatants may partially explain the discrepancy between the high percentage of indigenous URNG members indicated by the FGT, and the tiny number in my interview samples. As Lahr Caballeros observes, unlike ORPA and the EGP that centred their operations in the largely Mayan Western and Central Highlands, "...the FAR was mainly based among poor Ladino *campesinos*, workers and the urban middle class

(students and intellectuals), with mobile guerrilla forces in the Petén, Chimaltenango and Escuintla-Santa Rosa..."⁶¹. By the time the peace accords were signed, the FAR also had a growing base of support among Mayan small farmers and labourers in Alta Verapaz, Chimaltenango and Sololá provinces,⁶² where it had revived the *Panzos Heroíco* and *Tecún Uman* guerrilla fronts made up primarily of Mayan fighters,⁶³ but most long-time combatants were *ladino*.

Given that I only recorded the ages of 9 interviewees, the age discrepancy between my interviews sample and the statistics from the FGT survey may simply be due to the small sample used. If you remove *Adán*, who was 67 at the time of demobilization, for example, the average age of the combatants interviewed drops to 31.

3.1.1 Profiles of URNG Combatants Interviewed

Much of the following chapter consists of excerpts from my conversations with the 13 URNG combatants interviewed. To assist the reader in putting these excerpts into context, I am including below profiles of each of those interviewed, and the circumstances under which the interviews were conducted. Interview participants are identified solely by their *nom de guerre*. URNG members were given a pseudonym once they were recruited into the guerrilla. For those who became full-time combatants in rural areas, this would become the only name they would

⁶¹Lahr-Caballeros, "Condiciones y Expectativas de los Ex Combatientes," 21

⁶² Approximately 15% of the FAR combatants who demobilized in 1997 (150 of 984), were Mayan members of the Campesino Committee of the Highlands (CCDA) from these provinces – Author's interview with CCDA General Coordinator Leocadio Juracán Salomé, May, 2014

⁶³ Saenz de Tejada, *Elecciones, participación política y pueblo maya en Guatemala*, 2005, 52. The *Panzos Heroíco* Front, made up largely of Kekchí fighters, was established by the FAR in Alta Verapaz in 1989. The largely Kakchiquel Maya *Tecún Uman* Front was originally established in Chimaltenango in the early 1980s but was wiped out during the 1981-84 army offensives. In 1993-94, the FAR re-established the *Tecún Uman* Front, but it became more centered around the Madre Vieja Valley and the Atitlán volcano in Sololá.

use throughout the years of the conflict. A number of those interviewed remarked on how strange it felt to begin using their civilian name again.

Some of the interviews were conducted one on one – just myself and the interview participant. Others were conducted as a conversation with two or three combatants together. The interviews that took place at the UN demobilization camp for FAR Combatants at Sacol in the Petén were conducted jointly with an English journalist, working for another Guatemalan news agency.

3.1.1.1 Sacol

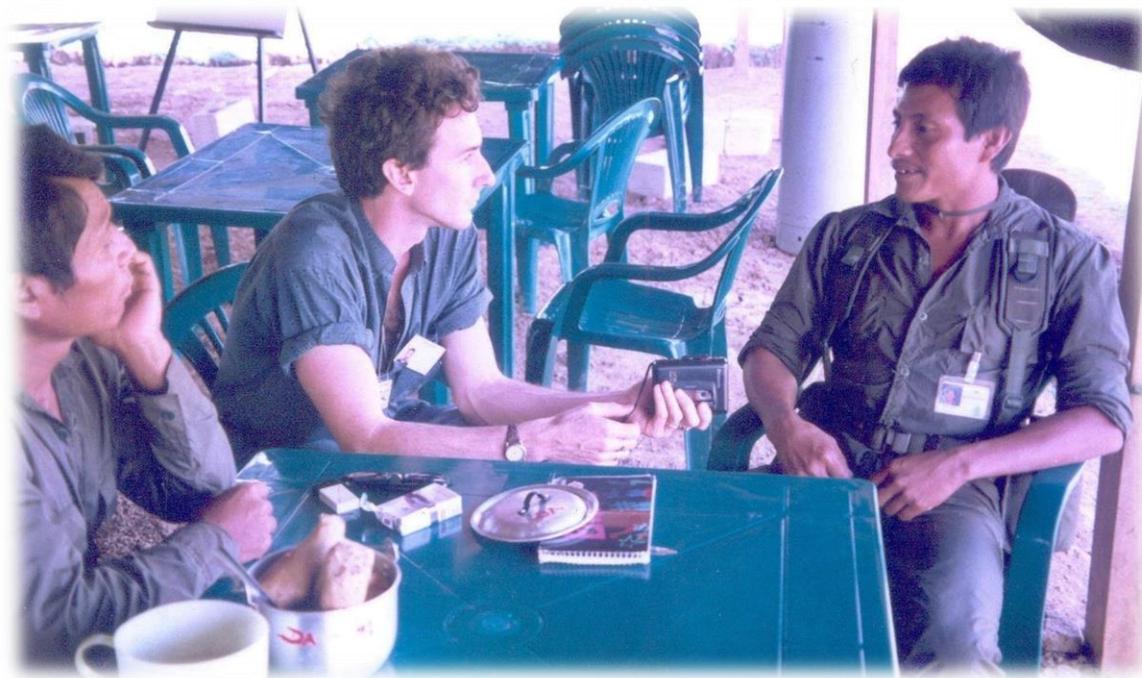


Image 8. Steve Stewart interviews FAR Combatants at Sacol Camp, El Petén, March, 1997

Photo: Ruth Gidley

In late March 1997, I traveled from Guatemala City to Sacol, a demobilization camp for members of the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR) that straddled the boundary between the Petén and

Alta Verapaz provinces. Sacol was built on cattle ranching land carved from the surrounding jungle not too many years before. We reached the camp by taking the main road from the capital towards the Petén capital of Flores for some six hours before veering left off the main highway onto a dirt track. I was joined on this journey by *Infoprensa* reporter Ruth Gidley, and Renate Sova, a coordinator of the alliance of international human rights accompanier organizations in Guatemala (what later became called ACOGUATE).

After winding through savanna-like land for some 30 minutes, we came to a United Nations “Blue Beret” checkpoint. The Spanish officer in charge told us that we were not permitted to proceed to the camp without authorization of the camp commander. After making radio communication with the camp, the officer informed us that the camp commander was away, and the second-in-command (*Comandante Ovidio*) would not authorize our entry. Using the checkpoint’s satellite phone, I contacted CERIGUA director Ileana Alamilla, who promised to intercede with the FAR high command on our behalf. A couple of hours later, the Blue Berets received a radio communication from Sacol and authorized us to proceed to the camp.

Sacol was a sprawling camp wedged between the savanna and the jungle. It consisted of numerous large white canvas tents and a few smaller shelters, apparently built by the guerrillas themselves. Some tents were walled and contained numerous bunks and cots, while others were open, serving as cooking facilities. The camp housed some 650 combatants from the Rebel Armed Forces’ (FAR) guerrilla fronts in the Petén, and from the more recently established “Panzos Heróico” front in Alta Verapaz province. When we arrived, we were met by the three

officers of the camp command, who checked our credentials, asked us a series of questions and then agreed to be interviewed.

The officers I interviewed were: **Comandante Ovidio, Captain Ronald, and Lieutenant Byron.** Unfortunately, the file of the transcript of this interview was damaged, and only the first few paragraphs were recovered. The only demographic information preserved was that Ovidio and Byron were originally from the cooperatives of the western Petén, while Captain Ronald was originally from the South Coast. (I met Capitan Ronald again later at Lo de Blanco camp in Santa Rosa province, where he had transferred in order to demobilize close to his family). Due to the lack of more information, I did not incorporate these three combatants into the demographics table (Table 3 and Appendix 1).

We spent 2 days at the camp, sleeping in the large dormitory tents provided by MINUGUA. During this time, we carried out several short interviews and conversations with FAR combatants who had gathered at the camp. Longer interviews with three of them have been used in this study.

Compañero Pancho

As we walked through the camp, we came upon an older man building a chair from wood gathered from the nearby jungle. He smiled, waved us over and, after chatting a bit about the work involved in constructing furniture from sticks and logs, agreed to be interviewed. Pancho, 52, was from Guatemala's *Oriente* region, where the FAR's original rising had begun in 1960. He told us that he and his father, a *campesino* (peasant farmer), had begun to collaborate with the

guerrilla in the Sierra de las Minas 34 years earlier - in 1963. He was 19 at the time. Pancho recalls that later his father ran into some trouble with the army. The family had to flee and lost contact with the guerrilla force. In late 1966, they emigrated to the Petén, and there Pancho recalls, the family re-established contact with the rebels when the remnants of the FAR arrived in the region in 1967. There, Pancho says, they spent 14 years of political organizing among the settler communities and cooperatives in the Petén before the FAR opened new guerrilla fronts in the province. “Because the slaughter was too much – the theft, the assaults, abductions, rape of women,” Pancho said. As a re-armed guerrilla, his task became to assist people fleeing the massacres to safely transit the jungle and the Usumacinta river to find refuge in Mexico. He said he could never forget the stories they told him of the extreme violence inflicted in the communities by the Guatemalan military.

Pancho was sceptical that the newly signed peace could last. He feared that unless there was some reckoning for those who had committed and ordered these massacres, once the guerrilla turned in their arms, the military would find a new way to attack them. Nevertheless, Pancho said he would follow the orders of his officers to disarm and rejoin civil society. He hoped to work as a carpenter but expected to spend several days a month carrying out political organizing work for the new URNG party.

Compañera Gregoria and Compañera Blanca

On our second day at the camp, we met two women sitting outside their tent. Both were *ladinas* from small rural communities close to the town of los Cruces in the western Petén, not far from Guatemala’s border with the Mexican state of Chiapas. Gregoria, 35, grew up with the

revolutionary struggle. She said that her entire family - mother, father and siblings - supported the movement. When she was 12 or 13, she began to collaborate as a messenger. In 1980, at age 19, she received military training and joined a FAR unit as a full-time combatant.

Blanca was seven years younger than Gregoria. She came from a community in the same area as Gregoria's and became involved with the rebels the same year, but her path was quite different. Blanca said the army arrived in the communities in 1980. There was repression, and her family and many others fled to the jungle. It was there, Blanca said, that they met the guerrillas, who helped them. She remembered that although she became involved with the insurgents after that, she did not become a combatant until she was 19. She said that her mother did not want her to join a rebel unit, but her father understood "that there were problems and the need to fight." There is an odd gap here: If Blanca was 27 in March of 1997, she would not have been more than 11 when she and her family fled to the jungle. At least eight years would pass between when Blanca first meets the guerrilla and when she becomes a FAR combatant. Where were Blanca and her family during that time? She does not tell us. It is possible that they formed part of the Communities of Popular Resistance of the Petén (CPR-P). The CPRs were largely made of survivors of army massacres who were unable or unwilling to flee to Mexico. They established nomadic hidden communities in the Petén and Ixcán jungles and in the mountains of Quiché province, building shelter and cultivating crops, but frequently relocating to escape army attempts to capture them. The CPRs served as a civilian base for the URNG guerrillas – a place to rest after long periods of combat and a limited source of food.

Both Gregoria and Blanca were mothers, having carried and given birth to their children in the jungle while still active with their units.

3.1.1.2 Lo de Blanco/Claudia II (or Camp Compañera Elvira)

Camp Lo de Blanco/Elvira was located on a dry hillside in Santa Rosa province, wedged between the smoking highland volcanoes of Pacaya, Fuego and Acatenango and the hot, humid and fertile plains of Guatemala's south coast. From the capital you travel some two hours southwest, along the road to Taxisco, turning left some 15 kilometres outside of Escuintla onto a dirt road into the hills. The UN's MINUGUA built two demobilization camps there, separated by a forested ravine that divided the hill in two. One, Lo de Blanco, accommodated combatants from the FAR's Santos Salazar Front, based among the poor ladino campesinos in the hard-scrabble, dry hills of Jutiapa and Santa Rosa and down into the wealthy sugar plantations and cattle ranches of the fertile South Coast. The camp also housed a smaller number from the FAR's Tecún Uman Front, made up largely of Kakchiquel Maya combatants who operated around the Tolimán and Atitlán volcanoes in Sololá. The other camp, Claudia, accommodated demobilizing combatants from the Unitary Front, a URNG guerrilla column mixing combatants from all the URNG organizations, and operating in a region that encompassed parts of Escuintla, Suchitepéquez, Sololá and Chimaltenango.

In February of 1997, CERIGUA was contacted by a Canadian photojournalist who was interested in photographing and interviewing members of the URNG. I was assigned to accompany him to the nearest rebel camps as an interpreter, and to gather interviews for the agency's upcoming report on the URNG's transition from guerrilla organization to political

party. Sergio and Alfredo, former members of the Santos Salazar Front who now worked at CERIGUA, helped us to make contact with guerrillas who had gathered near Lo de Blanco to await completion of the camp, which opened March 3, 2017.

I visited the Lo de Blanco camp three times in 1997: Once with the Canadian photo-journalist in February before MINUGUA had built the official camp; later in April, hopping off a chicken bus and hiking 40 minutes up a dusty dirt road from the junction with the Escuintla – Taxisco highway; and a third and final time in early May by jeep with a group of foreign journalists covering the moment URNG combatants' turned over their weapons to the UN's military observers in preparation for reintegration into Guatemalan civil society. During these visits, I interviewed several combatants, some more than once.

Lieutenant Silvio

I interviewed **Silvio** - a friendly man in his late 40s, with an easy grin - on two occasions. Once, as part of a group interview with other officers from the *Santos Salazar* Front (Captain Pancho, Lieutenant Walter and Timoteo Navarijo), and later in a one on one interview. Silvio was born on the South Coast in the province of Escuintla in a campesino family that eked out a living on a small plot of poor land not far from the Lo de Blanco camp.

Silvio said he became involved with the revolutionary movement in 1978, when he was 28. He had noticed that his father received visits from time to time from a group of strangers. When

Silvio asked who they were, his father told him “these gentlemen are fighting for better living conditions in Guatemala, to end poverty, exploitation and the repression, and I am organized with them.” He asked Silvio if he wanted to join him, and he agreed. His father’s *responsables* (people who served as his link to the wider revolutionary organization) were with the PGT, and initially Silvio’s participation involved studying revolutionary theory and small acts of resistance, such as painting revolutionary graffiti and hanging banners. Then in 1981, their *responsable* told them that he had left the PGT and joined the FAR. He told them that the FAR was developing a guerrilla front on the South Coast and asked Silvio if he would become part of it.

Silvio agreed and was sent to the Petén for training.

He would remain there for the next 9 years, returning to the South Coast only in 1990 with a small unit of seven

combatants to re-establish the FAR’s southern “*Santos Salazar Front*.” The Salazar Front had first been established in 1981, as Silvio’s *responsable* had said, but it had suffered such severe blows from the military in the mid-1980s that it became inactive until Silvio’s unit was sent from the Petén to rebuild the front in 1990.



Image 9. Lieutenant Silvio, Santa Rosa, Guatemala, March 2017

– Photo: Steve Stewart, CERIGUA

The military *disappeared* Silvio's father in 1981, but due to his isolation in the Petén jungle Silvio did not learn of this until years later.

Silvio said he was at first skeptical of the peace accords. He had trouble believing that the army and government would comply with their part of the agreement. But he said that he had faith in the leadership and negotiating team of the FAR, and he recognised that, with the current correlation of forces at both the national and international level, it was the best deal the URNG was going to get. He believed the accords laid the groundwork that would allow the rebels to carry forward their struggle by political means. He saw the accords as a triumph – proof that their years in the mountains were not for nothing.

Silvio's unit had been together since 1983, and he said he would miss the deep solidarity that existed in such a group – something he doubted he could find again in civilian life. But he looked forward to working with the new URNG political party to achieve the changes that before they had fought for with arms.

Captain Pancho

Pancho participated in an interview I conducted at Camp Elvira in late February 1997, with other officers of the *Santos Salazar Front*. Pancho commanded one of the Salazar Front's two guerrilla columns, but with the front's *Comandante Abel* away at meetings at the time of the interview, he was responsible for the entire camp.

He told me that he, along with 14 others from the Bella Guatemala Cooperative, near Sayaxché Petén, joined the FAR as *milicianos* (irregular forces) in May 1983. Shortly afterwards, the army attacked Bella Guatemala and several neighbouring cooperatives (Pancho mentions Bonanza, el Arbolito and Flor de Esperanza), massacring the inhabitants. The survivors attempted to flee to Mexico across the Usumacinta River. As a *miliciano*, Pancho's job was to find safe passage for the cooperative members, helping them find refuge at a Mexican military base on the other side.

Later, he learned of a group of cooperativists who had established a semi-permanent refugee camp on the Guatemalan side of the Usumacinta, and he travelled there and joined the guerrilla unit assigned to protect the community (this was likely the beginnings of one of CPR-Ps, referred to in the interview above with Blanca at the Sacol camp).



Image 10. Captain Pancho near Camp Elvira, February 1997. – Photo: Steve Stewart, CERIGUA

In 1990, Pancho and Silvio's unit journeyed from the Petén to help re-build the *Santos Salazar Front* on the South Coast.

Teniente Walter

As with Silvio, I interviewed Walter, 31, as part of a group of Salazar Front guerrilla officers during my first visit to Lo de Blanco in late February, and again in an individual interview on my second visit to the camp in April.

Walter said he had joined the FAR along with several other young cousins from the La Técnica Cooperative in the Petén in July 1981. He was 16 at the time, but for two or three years prior, he had collaborated with the guerrilla as a messenger. Army attacks against the cooperatives of the western Petén had already begun by then. Walter said that the military's attacks precipitated his incorporation into the guerrilla, but it was not his primary motive for joining. He said his consciousness had already been raised by his family, and he understood the need for the guerrilla struggle.

His family was from the province of Jutiapa, between the fertile South Coast and the arid dry belt that hugs the Salvadoran & Honduran borders. They had emigrated to the Petén when Walter was very young, following government promises of land on the Guatemalan side of the Usumacinta. Like many southerners who migrated North in the late 1960s and early 1970s to establish the cooperatives of the western Petén, Walter's family had a history of resistance. Supporters of the 1944 Revolution and the social and democratic reforms ushered in by the

“Guatemala Spring,” two of his uncles had been killed fighting the CIA-organized invasion that overthrew the presidency of Jacobo Arbenz in 1954.

Walter’s family brought their revolutionary values with them when they emigrated to the Petén. This made them receptive to the FAR’s message of liberation through social struggle when its organizers began to appear in the coops in the mid-1970s. Walter said his family would regularly leave food out in the fields for the guerrillas to collect, and he and his brothers would pass messages from them to other collaborators in the community. When the military repression came to La Técnica, his family fled to Mexico, but Walter stayed, joining a poorly armed guerrilla unit commanded by one of his uncles. Three of Walter’s brothers also joined the FAR. Two were killed in combat, one in 1988 and another in 1993, at the age of 16.

Like Pancho and Silvio, Walter was part of the FAR unit sent from the Petén to Santa Rosa in 1990 to revive the Santos Salazar Front.

Timoteo Navarijo (also called Adán)

Timoteo participated in the group interview of FAR officers at Camp Elvira in late February 1997. Although he didn’t appear to have a specific military rank, the other officers showed him deference. His intervention was somewhat brief, but several other FAR combatants interviewed both at Camp Elivira and at Camp Sacol make reference to him. Timoteo it appears, played an important role in the recruitment into the guerrilla movement of people from various cooperatives of the western Petén. Both Walter and Pancho mention his role in recruiting them.

Timoteo became a catequist, a lay missionary of the catholic church, in the mid-1970s. Another migrant from the South Coast, he lived at *Los Josefinos* cooperative in Western Petén, but his missionary work took him to other cooperatives in the region. This was a time when the Catholic doctrine of the “preferential option for the poor”⁶⁴ had gained significant influence among the clergy of the Guatemalan church, moving its teachings closer to those of the re-emerging guerrilla movements in the country, and distancing it from the increasingly militaristic and authoritarian secular governments. Timoteo said that it was once he became active as a catequist that the military began to accuse him of being part of the guerrilla movement.

He said he was inspired by the triumph of the Nicaraguan revolution in July, 1979, and its hybrid of Marxism and liberation theology. His interest in Guatemala’s own revolutionary movement grew. Timoteo made contact with the FAR column operating in the area and began to attend meetings the guerrillas convened for cooperativists. Timoteo began to coordinate groups of supporters in three different communities, but that brought him even greater attention from the military, and the “*compañeros*” (it’s not clear whether Timoteo refers here to his fellow cooperativists or his contacts in the guerrilla) advised him to leave *Los Josefinos*. He transferred

1. ⁶⁴ This doctrine, first expressed in the Vatican II Council in Rome in 1962-65, and more explicitly enunciated in 1968 at the Second Episcopal Conference of Latin America in Medellin Colombia, espouses that “the needs of the poor take priority over the desires of the rich; the rights of workers over the maximization of profits; the preservation of the environment over uncontrolled industrial expansion; production to meet social needs over production for military purposes.” Development and Peace website: [About Us/Catholic Social Teaching/Preferential option for the Poor](https://www.devp.org/en/cst/preferential-option), accessed July 21, 2019., <https://www.devp.org/en/cst/preferential-option>

responsibility for the groups to someone else and moved from *Los Josefinos* to the “villages in the mountains where the families of many of the *compañeros* lived.”⁶⁵

Compañero Adán

During my first visit to Camp Elvira in February 2019, I stayed for 2 days, sleeping on a piece of cardboard in a simple wood shelter the guerrillas of the Salazar Front had set up for visitors. On the second day, on the slope of the treed ravine, I came upon the curious site of a toddler playing with an empty cornsack inside a crudely constructed playpen of bound branches. An older man cooking mountain tamales⁶⁶ on a campfire informed me that they called the child “*Chorreado*,” (“Gusher”) due to his ongoing diarrhea. This was Campanero Adán, the most elderly of the URNG guerrillas I interviewed.

Adán said he was from the municipality of Taxisco in Santa Rosa province, not far from the camp. At 67, he had worked all his life on the land. He said he began to collaborate with the guerrillas of the Santos Salazar Front in 1989, but for the first few years his support involved providing information and food to the insurgents, rather than serving with a rebel unit.

Adán told me that land issues were what had first drawn him to the guerrilla. Many years before, he had purchased land to farm as part of a US Agency for International Development (US AID) market-based land distribution program. Although the land sale was part of a development

⁶⁵ While Timoteo does not specify, it is most likely that these “villages in the mountains” were the CPRs of the Petén.

⁶⁶ *Tamales de montaña*, large firm tamales made only of corn that can be sliced like bread and shared by several people, were the staple meal of the Guatemalan guerrilla,

program, the required payments were higher than a campesino could pay. Adán's small plot of arid land was so poor that he was unable to produce enough surplus to sell for the payments. When creditors threatened to take his land, Adán and his immediate family began to collaborate with the FAR, attracted to its platform of land reform and redistribution.

Later, he joined one of the guerrilla columns of the Salazar Front to serve as a cook (and childcare provider) for one its units, made up primarily of his own children. Adán said that of his six children, five – two women and three men – had joined the guerrilla. At the time of the interview, there were also three young grandchildren with the unit, whom Adan cared for while their parents were on patrol or training.

Adán said it was not uncommon in rural areas for entire families to join the guerrilla, due to the poverty and the concentration of arable lands in few hands. He said it was not an easy decision to make, as those who collaborated with the guerrilla faced a lot of risk. "If they know someone is collaborating," he said, "Poum! They kill them."

3.1.1.3 Camp Claudia

To visit the Lo de Blanco Camp you had to go through Camp Claudia, on the same hill overlooking the South Coast in Taxisco, Santa Rosa province. The two camps were so close that when I visited, I first assumed that it was all one camp. The primary difference was that Camp

Claudia was administered by, and housed, combatants from the Unitary Front,⁶⁷ while Lo de Blanco was for combatants of the FAR's Santos Salazar and Tecún Uman Fronts. The first time I visited the FAR combatants in Taxisco, the MINUGUA camps had not yet been completed, so Camp Claudia was not there yet. When I returned in mid-March, there was both the camp and a UN "Blue Berets" check point where visitors to both camps had to register.

Ana

As I walked through the camp, I saw a woman in an olive-green uniform sitting on a patch of dry grass reviewing work in a small stack of notebooks. This was *Compañera* Ana, the camp's literacy instructor, responsible for improving the reading and writing skills of the demobilizing guerrillas at Camp Claudia. It was a vocation that she also engaged in during her years with an ORPA guerrilla column.

Ana, 30, said that she was originally from the capital city and that she and her brother had joined the revolutionary movement 15 years earlier, when she was a high school student. She and her brother were recruited by a teacher at their high school, who was active with the EGP. They formed a small revolutionary group with other youth they knew from their local church. Ana said that her group were not fighters, but rather engaged in what she called "propaganda activities," political graffiti, hanging banners, and distributing leaflets supporting the guerrilla struggle.

⁶⁷ The Unitary Front was established in 1993 and operated in the provinces of Sololá and Chimaltenango, and parts of Escuintla, Suchitepéquez and Sacatepéquez. It was made up of combatants from all four guerrilla organizations federated in the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG), although the great majority of this front's combatants were from ORPA's Javier Tambríz Front, which merged with the Unitary Front.

Later, she left her neighbourhood to complete high school studies and lost her contact with the EGP. Instead, she became involved with ORPA, where she completed her political training before joining the organization's Luis Ixmatá front in northwestern Guatemala.

Ana said that her primary motivation for joining the guerrilla was a strong desire she had since she was quite young, to end racial and class-based discrimination in Guatemala.

Among the combatants I interviewed, Ana was one of the most skeptical of the peace accords and demobilization. She said that from what she understood from the *comandantes* during meetings in the guerrilla zones, the agreements on socio-economic issues and agrarian reform, as well as the support promised by the international community, would lay the foundations for the changes needed to achieve economic and social justice in Guatemala. But she was skeptical that the army and the oligarchy would comply with the agreements, once the URNG fighters turned over their weapons.

Ana was also of two minds about her own reintegration into civilian society. She talked about getting married now that there would be stability and perhaps resources. But she was worried about how she would be received back in civil society after so many years in the guerrilla, including by her own family. She said that she wasn't ready for reconciliation and reintegration. She wished that there was somewhere she could hide for a while, rather than going into civil society right away.

Yali

Yali said she first became interested in the political movement when she was a high school student in the late 1960s, in the context of a wave of repression taking place at the time against the organized labour movement.

She became more involved after she began to study law at the Autonomous University of San Carlos (USAC). She participated in field practicums the public university required students to do in marginalized urban neighbourhoods and in small rural communities (Supervised Professional Exercise, or EPS). “The communities showed us the reality,” she said, “This made us think more about the great difficulties, suffering, and the whole history of injustice.”

Yali would have been among the early members of ORPA, after the organization split from the FAR in 1971. She said she was part of the second urban group to “go into the mountains” in January 1972. She spent a year there training before returning to her home city of Quetzaltenango. Yali said that they were trained by indigenous officers of the guerrilla organization, who not only taught them military tactics, but also about organizing and the political aims and principles of the group.

ORPA spent 8 years organizing and carefully preparing the terrain before emerging publicly as a political-military organization in September 1979. For much of that time, Yali’s task was to organize bases of support for the movement in Quetzaltenango, where she studied at USAC’s western campus. Returning from training in December 1972, she spent four years working, studying, and organizing for ORPA, before she was assigned new tasks that required her to

work for the organization full-time. She had to go underground, cutting off all contact with her family and assuming a *nom de guerre*. She remained in the city, but she and other members of ORPA's "urban fronts" would return to the mountain for short periods for military and political training that they would later apply with their units in the cities.

In 1988, Yali incorporated with the rural guerrilla forces on a permanent basis. She remained with them until demobilization. Yali told me that she felt that they had a greater advantage in the mountain, compared to her experiences in the urban guerrilla. She said that between 1981 and 84, the urban guerrilla forces had been able to hit the "enemy" hard, but they had also suffered some heavy blows. Many safe houses fell, and a lot of militants were captured or killed. In the city they were always at a disadvantage, she said. But in the countryside the guerrilla could choose the terrain and the timing of combat, and this gave them an advantage. She said she felt safer in the mountain than in the city.

Yali said she had a four-year old daughter, whom she raised with her partner. She said she was still not sure where she would go after demobilization but was eager to begin the work of building the URNG party and said she would go wherever her organization sent her.

3.1.1.4 Tuluché I and II

In mid-March of 1997, I was invited by the Committee of Campesino Unity (CUC) to join a caravan they were organizing from the capital to greet EGP combatants who were concentrating at the Toluché I and II camps near Chiché in Quiché province.

The CUC was a Mayan farmer and rural labourers' organization that gained prominence in the Western Highlands and among the migrant workers of the South Coast plantations in the late 1970s. As a consequence the organization suffered heavy repression at the hands of the Guatemalan military. The EGP and the CUC shared similar bases, both recruiting heavily from the Mayan communities of the Western Highlands,⁶⁸ and many CUC activists were eager to visit relatives at the Toluché camps whom they had not seen in years.



Image 11. CUC member shows her new baby to her sister, a demobilizing combatant of the EGP. Toluché I, Chiché, Quiché, March 1997.

- Photo: Steve Stewart, CERIGUA

We made the four-hour journey from the capital to Chiché in large buses that CUC had rented for the trip, arriving at Toluché I around mid-day. I snapped a few photos of EGP combatants warmly greeting friends and relatives from the CUC, and then spent time wandering around the camp. The two camps were located in a dry highland forest of small, widely spaced pines

⁶⁸ Sáenz de Tejada, *Elecciones, participación política y pueblo maya en Guatemala*, 2005, 72-3

interspersed by meadows of dry grass. The camps consisted of several long, low buildings constructed of roughly cut pine that served as dormitories and eating spaces. The combatants had not yet disarmed, and most of them still carried automatic assault rifles. In contrast to the FAR camps at Lo de Blanco and Sacol, where the guerrillas favoured the Russian-designed Kalashnikovs (AK-47), most of the EGP fighters at Toluché carried US-made M-16s. A fighter I interviewed there told me that this was because most of those demobilizing at the Toluché camps were from guerrilla zones – contested areas where small full-time guerrilla units were backed by irregular forces. In contrast, in the EGP guerrilla fronts where larger rebel columns largely controlled the territory, he said, the combatants carried AK-47s.

In Toluché I, I interviewed two Mayan combatants who appeared to be in their mid-30s.

Unfortunately, the recording of this interview was lost and no transcripts were made.

I then walked across a dusty field to the Toluché II camp where I saw a young man in a tan and brown uniform cleaning a pistol outside one of the wooden dormitories.

Lieutenant Guiler

He told me his name was Guiler and that he was a lieutenant in the EGP's Fernando Hoyos Guerrilla Zone. He shared a powerful story. Guiler joined the EGP on January 16, 1981, when he was just 14-years old. He had grown up in one of the settlements in the Ixcán, a region of lowland jungle in northern Quiché province, that formed the Ixcán Grande Cooperative⁶⁹ colonization

⁶⁹ Ixcán Grande was a program begun in the mid-1960s by the Guatemalan government, and supported by the Catholic Church, to resettle land-poor campesinos from the highlands in cooperatives on state land in the sparsely populated jungle lowlands of the Ixcán region. The program was launched about the same time and for the same

project. Although this region was subject to some of the worst army violence in the early eighties, direct repression was not Guiler's primary motivation for joining the guerrilla. After completing primary school in the Ixcán, his family had sent him to Guatemala City so he could attend high school, but Guiler had already experienced military repression in his community. He said that when he was still in primary school, the army killed some of his school friends.

In the capital, Guiler followed closely the triumph of the Sandinista revolution in July 1979 and became involved in youth activism in the city. As news reached him of increased military violence, and armed resistance back in the Ixcán, he decided to abandon his studies in the capital and join the guerrilla. Guiler said that his mother had already made it very clear to him that she was against him joining the insurgents, so he when he went with the EGP, he told no-one.

The EGP sent him to a special training school called "APDI" for six months, where he received both military and political training. "Its not just a case of joining and start shooting." He said, "The revolution is a combination and our struggle, apart from being military, is also political." When Guiler completed his training, he was assigned as a military instructor to a new unit of the EGP's Comandante Ernesto Guevara Front in the Ixcán. It was a time when the conflict between the military and the guerrillas in the Ixcán was heating up and combat was frequent. Although he was still very young, Guiler rose quickly through the ranks. He remembered that he was already in command of a column of some 70 guerrillas in late 1982 or early 1983, when he was ordered

reasons as the Petén colonization project, with the chief difference being that most of the settlers to the Ixcán were highland Maya rather than *Ladino* campesinos from the southwest, and there was greater logistical support, primarily from the Catholic Maryknoll Order.

to protect a civilian population near the Chixoy river. The civilians, mostly Kekchi Maya, had fled to the jungle to escape the army massacres that ravaged the Ixcán Grande cooperatives during the first half of 1982.⁷⁰ Guiler said that this was the most painful experience of the 15 years he spent in the guerrilla.

It was a time of extreme scarcity for the EGP. The army's "scorched earth" strategies between 1981 and 1983 cut off the guerrillas from their civilian support base, either by wiping them out entirely,⁷¹ forcing them to flee, rounding them up in highly controlled "model villages," or militarizing them by requiring all men between the ages 16 and 65 to participate in military-controlled civil defence patrols. The guerrilla's supply lines from the capital, built up so carefully in the 1970s, were also broken, following an army intelligence offensive in 1981 against safe houses in Guatemala City. The offensive destroyed much of the urban support network. Nor did hoped-for support from abroad materialize. "We thought that after the triumph of the revolution in Nicaragua, the international support would come to us," Guiler said, "But it didn't. It by-passed us and went to El Salvador."

Under these difficult circumstances Guiler's column had to confront the army and civil defence patrols hunting civilians who had escaped their scorched earth campaign. Guiler's orders were to hold the area and protect the civilians so that they could establish settlements there. "This

⁷⁰ For detailed documentation of the massacres in Ixcán Grande, see *Massacres de la Selva: Ixcán, Guatemala (1975-82)* by Jesuit anthropologist Ricardo Falla.

⁷¹ According to *Memory of Silence*, the report of the United Nation's Commission for Historic Clarification, the Guatemalan army committed 626 massacres during the armed conflict, with 95% of them taking place between 1978 and 1984, 257

was new for us. We didn't have the slightest idea of how to maintain a population in resistance," Guiler said. They were on the move constantly, fleeing government forces. The hunger worsened. Children died. Guiler's forces began to desert, including the other commanding officers of the column. "What was I to do?" Guiler asked, "since it (membership in the guerrilla) was voluntary, how could I force our people to stay?"

Guiler remembered that among the 70 fighters under his command, they had an eclectic collection of only 40 guns, including shotguns, M16 automatic rifles, pistols and old carbines. Their ammunition was varied and scarce. "It was a difficult time," he recalled, "We didn't have food, we didn't have ammunition. We had to count every shot we took. I was down to just 30 bullets."

Between combat casualties and desertions, Guiler's column was eventually reduced to just 30 fighters. At that point, he made the decision to disobey orders. Instead of holding the territory, they fought their way North, opening a route so the civilian population could cross the border to seek refuge in Mexico. "I didn't want them to be killed," Guiler said, "And I felt incapable of defending so many people."

Guiler remained in the Ixcán for many years, first as the commander of what remained of the guerrilla column he was assigned to, and later as the "*responsable*" (coordinator) of the EGP's Political Training Team in the region. Towards the end of the war, the EGP sent him to provide political training for their irregular forces in the Fernando Hoyos Guerrilla Front in the highlands of Huehuetenango and Quiché departments. Guiler said that it was really hard for him

to leave the jungle after so many years. He felt less secure in the highlands and was having trouble withstanding the cold. But he believed that being ‘torn’ from the jungle made it easier for him to take the next steps of demobilization and reintegration into civil society.

Guiler recalled that when they first received news that the URNG was to sign a final peace with the Guatemalan government, it was he and the other long-time veterans in the EGP who were most opposed. They wanted to continue fighting in the hopes of still winning a clear victory, and they were unhappy with the plan to dissolve the EGP and merge it with the other organizations in the URNG. He said it took a lot of education from the leadership to bring them to understand that “we are not giving up on the victory – just fighting for it in another way.”

Guiler said he still did not know where he would go after demobilization. He believed that his family sympathized with the struggle, but they were in a difficult economic position. He also felt that his family still resented him for leaving them. He preferred not to settle in with them to avoid conflict.

What Guiler was clear on was that with the end of the armed conflict, he would commit to carry on the struggle through political means. “I want to continue in this,” He said. “The revolution. We’re going to do everything possible, give all that we’ve got, to open spaces, to put in power other politicians and involve all of our people. They are the ones who can make the change in society. We trust the People, and we believe that the URNG provides them with an alternative.”

3.1.1.5 Outside the Camps

Two of the interviews with URNG combatants took place outside the camps: One, with Benjamin, took place in San Salvador and another, with Sergio, in Guatemala City.

Benjamín

In March 1994, I travelled from Guatemala to El Salvador to cover the first elections to take place since the 1992 Chapultepec Peace Accords ended the armed conflict in that country. The former Salvadoran guerrilla movement, the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN), was a prominent contender in this vote. I spent two weeks covering the campaign in various parts of the country. During this time, I worked out of an apartment in San Salvador that served as a dispatch office for the CERIGUA Agency to gather and report on information regarding the peace process in El Salvador. The office was run by *Benjamín*, a lean, mustachioed man in his late thirties. *Benjamín* had been a combatant with the FAR from 1984 until early 1994, when he was taken out of active duty after suffering a hernia in his abdomen that made it impossible for him to carry the heavy loads required of guerrilla combatants.

After several days of sharing the apartment, *Benjamín* began to speak to me about his experiences as a combatant and I asked to interview him. Since this interview⁷² took place almost three years before the conclusion of the peace process in Guatemala and *Benjamín* was

⁷² The interview with Benjamín was published in Volume 8, issue 5 (September-October, 1994) of *Latin American Connexions*, a Vancouver-based publication (1986-2007) focusing on human rights and social movements in Latin America. Since *Benjamín* had maintained his *nom de guerre*, after reinserting into civil society, I used the pseudonym *Gonzalo Guerrero* for him in the published interview. In 1997, *Benjamín* published his own memoir, *La hora cero en tiempos de guerra: testimonio de un combatiente de la guerrilla guatemalteca*, of life in the Petén as a FAR combatant under the pen name Angel Cantú Aragón.

in effect (although not officially) demobilized, the focus of this interview is different than those I carried out with combatants in the space between the signing of the peace and full demobilization. However, I chose to include it in this study because *Benjamín* is the only *internacionalista*, I interviewed. I feel that his testimony provides a unique perspective to the study.

Benjamín said that, in addition to his role as a combatant, he served in the FAR as an educator. Each morning he moved from unit to unit in his guerrilla column, teaching others to read and write. He felt literacy work was very important for the FAR in order to provide a political education for its combatants. "...really, many people joined us in the mountains because of the the repression from the enemy," he said. "Many didn't understand the reasons why we are there. They simply want to return to their parcel of land, and they know they have to fight the army to do it." Benjamín taught the fighters to read so that "little by little they understood more clearly what they are fighting for."

He told me he became interested in revolutionary politics at an early age, when some classmates shared literature they had about the Soviet Union. His parents ran a laundry in a small town in his home country, washing and ironing clothes. Later his father moved the family to the capital where, by working afternoons to pay tuition fees, *Benjamín* was able to attend a school that catered to more middle-class students. The students who gave him the Soviet literature invited him to meetings of a communist organization, and by age 12 he had become involved in a left-wing student movement. When he finished high school, he wanted to continue

to university, but lacked the funds. Instead, he enrolled in a technical school and became a member of the Communist party, which led to his arrest and imprisonment.

Benjamín left prison more convinced than before of the need for armed struggle to bring about the social changes he saw as necessary for his country. Since the small armed movements that existed in his country in the 1970s had been crushed by the military, he decided to look for experience abroad. “I told myself,” he recalled “...the struggle isn’t restricted to my own country, its going on in others as well. Because it’s the world that we want to change.”⁷³

Using his contacts in the Party, Benjamin approached Nicaragua’s Sandinista National Liberation Front in the late 1970s, but they said he was too young. Later, as the Salvadoran conflict heated up in the early 1980s, he met with contacts in the FMLN. The Salvadoran rebels told him they were only looking for *internacionalistas* with specific skills – in communications, chemistry, or medicine – none of which *Benjamín* had. But, as the military offensive against the Guatemalan guerrillas and civilian population reached its height in 1982-83, the organizations of the URNG were open to any support they could get. “They told me to think very carefully before deciding,” he recalled, “Because the life of a revolutionary is not easy.”

At first, *Benjamín* said, life in the guerrilla was very difficult for him – not so much because he was a foreigner as for his urban background. Unlike his campesino brothers and sisters at arms, he was unable to identify edible plants in the jungle to supplement the meagre guerrilla rations

⁷³Stewart, Steve. "Armed Struggle is the last resort of the oppressed: Interview with Gonzalo Guerrero, Guatemalan Guerrilla," *Latin America Connexions*, Volume 8, Number 5, 1994: 14

of three corn tamales a day, and he was less used to doing without. Benjamín recalled that the adaptation process was not a matter of months. Rather, “the first two or three years are very difficult.” He spent 10 years in the Petén jungle before being sent to bolster a new front the FAR had opened in another part of the country (*Benjamín* does not specify in the interview where he was sent, but during the first half of the 1990s, the FAR either revived or opened new fronts in the provinces of Alta Verapaz, Sololá and on the South Coast).

Apart from the lack of food and other urban comforts, *Benjamín* said that the most challenging things in the jungle were the illnesses (he caught dengue fever within a week of joining his unit), the biting insects, and a sense of longing for the family and friends he had left behind. Still, *Benjamín* missed his life in the guerrilla and was hoping to have his hernia operated on so that he could return soon to his comrades in the mountain.

Sergio

Sergio was a former combatant who, in the final year of the conflict, was assigned to work with CERIGUA. He began to work out of the agency’s Guatemala City office sometime in mid-1995. *Sergio* had been a communications specialist in the FAR and had spent time in several of the organization’s guerrilla fronts, training units in radio communications.

His last posting was with the FAR’s Santos Salazar Front in the southwest and *Sergio* was particularly helpful in assisting me with contacts there. *Sergio* was a natural story-teller. After listening to a number of stories about his experiences in the guerrilla, I asked him for a more formal interview. This took place at the CERIGUA offices in April, 1997.

Sergio's family was from Guatemala City. His father was a shoemaker. He said he joined the FAR while he was a student, motivated by a desire to fight for social transformation in his country. He was first sent to join a guerrilla front in the Petén. Sergio said that being from the city made it particularly challenging to adapt to guerrilla life in the jungle. Biting insects, illnesses, humid heat and spiny underbrush conspired to make it very difficult for him to complete his basic training. Later, as he specialized in radio-communications, *Sergio* was sent to Mexico, operating out of safe-houses to assist the organization in communications. From his base in Mexico, *Sergio* would return regularly to the different FAR fronts in Guatemala to train radio operators. This gave him the opportunity to meet and learn the stories of FAR militants engaged in a wide variety of activities. A few years after the war ended, *Sergio* began a blog of short stories and anecdotes about the FAR combatants he worked with during his years with the guerrilla. It is one of the few sources that document the experiences of rank and file combatants in the Guatemalan guerrilla.

With the demobilization process unfolding, *Sergio* was concerned about what would happen to his fellow combatants after reintegration. He himself had effectively reinserted before the war's end. He had a home in Guatemala City and ongoing employment as a reporter for CERIGUA, but he felt it was important to create a network after demobilization to enable ex-combatants to remain connected to each other and to their organization.

3.2 A grounded theory analysis on the interviews

In the following sections, I identify and summarize common themes that appeared in the interviews. These include experiences of incorporation into the guerrilla, motives for joining, life in the mountains, experiences of female combatants, and thoughts about reintegration into civil society.

3.2.1 Incorporation into the Guerrilla

A surprising number of combatants interviewed joined the rebels with their extended families and other members of their communities. *Compañero Pancho*, for example, was 19 when his father invited him to join the 13 of November Movement with him in 1963.⁷⁴ *Compañera Gregoria* says she grew up in the resistance. “My parents for many years have been working in what is the revolutionary struggle, so since we were very small, all of my siblings and I were immersed in this idea. Through this I came to work in the organization....”⁷⁵

This was especially true of rural combatants. Only two of the nine rebels interviewed from rural backgrounds had joined alone as individuals (compared to 3 of the 4 combatants interviewed of urban origin). Of these, one, Timoteo Navarijo (*Adán*), is credited by several other interview participants with having recruited them to the guerrilla. As *Captain Pancho* recalls, “...*Adán* was our political instructor. We were 15 *compañeros* from the area where there used to be a cooperative called La Bella Guatemala.”⁷⁶ *Pancho*’s recollections are supported by Lieutenant

⁷⁴ Interview with Cro. Pancho, Sacol demobilization camp. El Petén, March, 2007

⁷⁵ Interview with Cra. Gregoria, Sacol Camp, El Petén, March, 1997

⁷⁶ Interview with Capitán Pancho, Lo Blanco Camp, March 1997

Walter, 31, “We formed a cell of pure kids (*patojos*). The *compañero* who prepared us in this political cell was the same guy who *Captain Pancho* said, *compañero Adán...*”⁷⁷

When his parents fled to Mexico to escape the army massacres taking place in the Northern Petén at the beginning of the 1980s, Walter and 3 of his brothers became combatants with the FAR. Two of them were killed in combat.

Timoteo himself recalls that he first became involved in the social movement as a catequist for the Catholic Church, working with the new cooperatives of the Petén. His work brought him to the attention the army, and by 1978, they began to threaten him. That, combined with the victory of the Nicaraguan revolution in 1979, Timoteo recalled, convinced him of the necessity of armed struggle, and later that year he joined the FAR.

For *Compañero Adán*⁷⁸, 67, half of his military unit were family members. “The whole family,” *Adán* said. *Adán* had a small plot of land not far from the demobilization camp. He and his family began to provide logistical support to the rebels seven years earlier when FAR scouts from the Petén first arrived in southern Guatemala to revive the Santos Salazar guerrilla front. Eventually five of his six children - 3 boys and 2 girls - became combatants with the *Frente Salazar*, and *Adán* had moved into the mountains with them to cook for their unit and tend his three young grandchildren, who were born in the mountain. At the time of the interview in

⁷⁷ Interview with Lieutenant Walter, Lo Blanco Camp, March, 1997

⁷⁸ Not Timoteo Navarijo, but a different combatant with the same *nomme de guerre*. *Compañero* (companion) is a term commonly used in Latin America for comrades involved in the same struggle. But among the Guatemalan guerrilla organizations, the term also refers to combatants without an officers’ rank – similar to “private” in a formal army.



Image 12. Compañero Adán with his son and grandchild at FAR camp Compañera Elvira (later UN Camp Lo de Blanco) in Santa Rosa, Guatemala. - Photo: Steve Stewart, CERIGUA.

February 1997, Adán and his unit had joined others from the Frente Salazar at what would soon become demobilization camp Lo de Blanco in Santa Rosa province.

The combatants who came from an urban background were more likely to have joined the rebel organizations individually, getting involved after becoming active in student or church groups.

“We were students and youth from a group in the church.” recalls *Compañera Ana*, aged 30, an ORPA combatant who demobilized with the Unitary Front at Camp Claudia. Ana explains how she became involved in the movement 15 years earlier;

We were a youth group, and from time to time we also did other activities. But everything was in secret of course. My first political formation was with the EGP, through an instructor at the institute (an experimental public school where she studied). Later my studies took me to another place, and when I came back, I made contact with people from ORPA. So, it was with ORPA that I finished my political training.⁷⁹

Yali, another ORPA combatant interviewed at Camp Claudia, recounted how at the national university in the early 1970s, she became involved with a student group that carried out social work in marginalized neighbourhoods. Through this group she met representatives of ORPA and eventually left the university to receive military training in the mountains. “We were the second urban group that went up to the mountains. We had the idea that we were going to the countryside to provide clarity, but it was the organized campesino communities that had the real political vision.” At the time, *Yali* recalls, the shift to the mountains meant a full rupture with her urban life. “We had to leave our families and live a clandestine life with fronts (false identities).”⁸⁰

In the case of *Benjamín*, the only foreign fighter I interviewed, joining the Guatemalan rebels was the result of repeated attempts to join an armed revolutionary movement in Mesoamerica after suffering violence and imprisonment as a working class activist in his own country. “I tried to become involved in the Nicaraguan Revolution in the late 1970s, but they said I was too young,” *Benjamín* said. “Then, when the war in El Salvador began, I thought that my chance had come....They asked me if I was trained in various areas – communications, chemistry, medicine etc., But I didn’t have experience in any of those areas, so they rejected me.....Then the

⁷⁹ Interview with Cra. Ana, Camp Claudia, Escuintla, February 2007

⁸⁰ Interview with Cra. *Yali*, Camp Claudia, March, 2007

opportunity presented itself for me to participate with the *compañeros* from Guatemala....I joined and was sent to the jungle....”⁸¹

3.2.2 Motives for Joining the Armed Struggle

All the people interviewed cited at least one of two recurring motives that spurred them to join the armed struggle: direct repression and *consciencia* - a desire to transform the unequal social conditions in their country. Five interviewees cited repression as their main motive for joining the insurgents. Of these, four were from the cooperatives in the western Petén that were destroyed in a series of army massacres in the early 1980s. “The army came to our villages and we had to flee into the mountains. It was there that I came upon the guerrillas....,” *Blanca* recalled.⁸²

Captain Pancho also remembered those massacres. “.... On the 17th of June (1983), there was a massacre in what were (the cooperatives called) Bella Guatemala, El Arbolito, and the Flor de Esperanza.... We fled and later we learned that there was a camp of refugees in the hills. Soon after, we joined a guerrilla military unit that was looking after this population....”⁸³

For Lieutenant Guiler of the EGP, the final motivation to join the armed struggle came when the army killed some of his school friends in 1981. At age 14, he was already an activist in the social

⁸¹ Stewart "Armed Struggle is the last resort of the oppressed: Interview with Gonzalo Guerrero, Guatemalan Guerrilla", P. 14

⁸² Interview with Cra. Blanca, Sacol Camp, March 27, 1997

⁸³ Interview with Capitan Pancho, Lo Blanco Camp, March 1997

movement but when two of his friends were killed by the military, “I made the decision to leave school and to fully incorporate into the armed struggle.”⁸⁴

Distinguishing those motivated by *consciencia* from those who joined the armed struggle due to state repression is difficult, since most became political activists or supporters of the rebels due to a desire to bring about change in Guatemala, but their transition from civilian sympathizer to combatant could be accelerated by repression. *Compañero Pancho* recalled:

We began to work for the PGT in propaganda, intelligence, providing information and such, in 1963-64. But in 1965, if I’m not mistaken, we had some problems with the army - some attacks they made on my father....so we had some serious problems, and towards the end of 1966 we came to Petén and began to work to organize the people of the Petén.... But we eventually had to engage in military operations because the slaughter was too much, the robberies, the abductions, the rape of the women....⁸⁵

“My incorporation was not due to repression from the army. This did speed it up a bit,” said *Lieutenant Walter*, “But I already had the idea of the struggle, my consciousness had already been raised, because since before, my parents had always inculcated in me the history of the revolution of 1944.... I used to go out to bring food to the *compañeros*...”⁸⁶

Lieutenant Silvio recalled that he joined the revolutionary movement after his father introduced him to some PGT organizers and told him that he too was member of the party. *Silvio’s* father asked him to join, saying that he was free to decide yes or no, but whatever his decision he must

⁸⁴ Interview with Lieutenant Guiler, Toluca I Camp, Quiché, March 1997.

⁸⁵ Interview with Cro. Pancho, Sacol Camp, March 1997

⁸⁶ Interview with Lieutenant Walter, Lo Blanco Camp, March 1997

tell no one of his father's involvement. "Seeing the situation our country was going through," *Silvio* remembers, "I told him I was ready to join the guerrilla."

Compañera Ana joined ORPA in the hopes of building a more just Guatemala. "When I was a young teenager, I gave myself a task. An idea that while there was even one of us in Guatemala whose spiritual, physical and political needs were not being met, I would not rest. And that was the idea that many of us held.... While racism, classism, and gender discrimination too, persist, we would not, and we will not, rest..."⁸⁷

When Hauge and Thoresen interviewed former combatants a decade later, they found their respondents cited similar motives for joining the guerrillas, with most citing either family ties, repression, *conciencia*, or some combination of these as the spark that led to their incorporation.⁸⁸

3.2.3 Life as an insurgent

When asked to describe their experiences in the mountain, the combatants interviewed tended to first bring forth stories of privation and suffering: Sleeping rough in the jungle without blankets or a tarpaulin to keep the rains off, long periods of little or no food, the constant battles with insects, mud and spiny foliage. Stories of emotional strain – the pain of seeing close comrades

⁸⁷ Interview with Cra. Ana, Camp Claudia, March 1997

⁸⁸ Hauge & Thoreson, "Spoilers or Agents of Change?" 208

killed in battle or badly wounded, the anger and feelings of impotence on coming upon the results of army massacres – the *saudade* of years without seeing family, friends and home.

It was necessary for us to join the guerrilla force, even though we didn't have weapons.”. “At first it was hard, knowing that my parents had fled into the hills to escape the repression – thinking of my brothers and sisters and the other kids walking through the mud and the spines, sleeping without shelter, without a bed, enduring the cold, suffering from the rain....⁸⁹

Lieutenant Walter

Lieutenant Silvio recalls that when he was sent to the Peten for training, he expected to find an established guerrilla camp. Instead, he and the others found themselves in the middle of the jungle with almost nothing:

We slept on the ground where we laid down palm leaves. In the swamps the mosquitos wouldn't let us sleep. And when it rained, we got wet, so we'd wake sitting up.... Before the *comandante* came, all we had to eat was two cans a day – one of tuna and one of vegetables – to share between 18 people.

After about 15 days, we were all making plans to head back South. Then the head *Comandante Pablo Monsanto* arrived. He called a meeting and began to both explain and scold us. ‘*Compañeros*, do you think things have to come in a tin for you to be able to eat them? Look!’ He waved his arm to the bush surrounding the camp. ‘Look how much *capuca*⁹⁰ there is. There's your food *compañeros*!’

But the problem was that the camp commander had forbidden us to cut the plants, including the *capuca*. Anyone who did faced sanctions because he feared that it would leave traces the army could detect.⁹¹

Walter said that the trying times in the jungle also brought the combatants together:

⁸⁹ Interview with Lieutenant Walter, Elvira Guerrilla Camp, Taxisco, Santa Rosa, February 1997

⁹⁰ Capuca is a local name for a species of small palm similar to the Pacaya (*Chamaedorea tepejilote*). Capuca is fairly common in the undergrowth of the Petén rainforest and centre shoots are edible (palm hearts).

⁹¹ Interview with Lieutenant Silvio, Lo Blanco Camp, March 1997

Enduring hunger, thirst, cold – that’s hard. But we learned to endure the hunger. We had to survive for a time in the Petén eating only wild fruits. We also had to eat some monkeys. But the most difficult moment is seeing a *compañero* fall (in combat). After going through so many things together, you feel a really strong brotherhood with your *compañeros*.⁹²

“Of course, when you’re in the mountains, there are many memories of family, of loved ones,” *Benjamín* said. He had left a wife and young daughter behind in his own country when he joined the FAR. “If you love your wife, your daughter, your parents, I think you begin to appreciate them more and you miss them a lot. ... It takes a long time to put this love, this longing, to one side, and replace it with affection for your comrades.”⁹³

Sergio said that his first months in the jungle came close to breaking him:

There is a hill named after me in the Petén. It’s called the “Hill Where Sergio Cried.” I was from the city, and it was hard for me in the jungle at first. We had been hiking for a long time. It was really hot and I cut my hand on my machete. A little later, I slipped and grabbed a small tree. Its spines went deep into my hand. Some time later, we took a break at the top of a hill and the commander of our unit approached me – she’s my wife now, but back then she was my commanding officer – and asked me where my rifle was. I realized that I had lost it back where I’d slipped!

She reprimanded me harshly, and it was just too much – I sat down on the ground and began to cry. After a bit, she called over a *compañero* who handed me my rifle. After that everyone referred to that place as ‘the Hill Where Sergio Cried.’⁹⁴

⁹² Lieutenant Walter

⁹³ Interview with Gonzalo Guerrero, San Salvador, March 1994

⁹⁴ Interview with Sergio, Guatemala City, April 2007

Lieutenant Guiler spoke of the incredible emotional burden of trying to protect people without adequate supplies, food or firepower.

...At that time, we were protecting the retreat of a (civilian) population. There was fighting...there were many Kekchi⁹⁵ people, suffering from pretty high malnutrition. I saw a lot of people buried then, and many comrades fell in combat at my side. Not just the military unit, civilians too who supported the resistance. They died. It was a difficult moment. We had no food. We had no ammunition. I only had 30 bullets left... I didn't want them to die and I felt incapable of defending so many people....⁹⁶

But the combatants didn't just speak of hardship, they also recalled fondly the deep bonds of *compañerismo* that developed, the respect they felt from their fellow fighters, the warmth of the people in the communities they visited, and the satisfaction of learning new skills, of feeling useful and valued. "In the jungle when we were fighting we felt a strong sense of fraternity because in the most difficult moments we gave each other the support we needed...And you knew that if you were wounded in combat they would do anything to get you out," *Lieutenant Silvio* told me.⁹⁷

While *Benjamín* also spoke of the *compañerismo* in his unit, for him some of the most fulfilling times were when the guerrillas would visit a rural community. "I always found it beautiful when we were in contact with the *campesinos*. After spending a long

⁹⁵ The Kekchi are one of the 22 ethno-linguistic groups in Guatemala who anthropologists group under the category of "Mayan."

⁹⁶ Interview with Lieutenant Guiler, Camp Toluché I, March 1997

⁹⁷ Lieutenant Silvio, February 1997

time in the mountains only with your *compañeros*, you miss the warmth of the people. And I always felt this when we were with the *campesinos*....”⁹⁸

Gregoria recalled how the guerrilla was also a school for her. “The majority of us here, we’ve learned (to read and write) here in the jungle... most of us didn’t know how when we left our homes, but now we can write pretty well...”⁹⁹

“We have lived a life of camaraderie, like brothers and sisters,” said Lieutenant Walter, “Because here everything is shared equally.”¹⁰⁰

Despite the emotional and physical hardships of life in the guerrilla, the majority of those interviewed who reflected on their post-war future expressed a regret to have to leave that collective life behind.

⁹⁸ Gonzalo Guerrero, March 1994

⁹⁹ Interview with *Compañera Gregoria*, Sacol Camp, El Petén, March 1997

¹⁰⁰ Lieutenant Walter, February 1997

Chapter 4: Female combatants in the URNG



Image 13: Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) combatants, Camp Toluché I, Chiche, Quiche, March 1997. - Photo: Steve Stewart, CERIGUA

The participation of women in the URNG, both as combatants and political and logistics cadre, was significantly lower than in contemporary revolutionary movements in neighbouring countries.

An important difference between the armed resistance movements that gained prominence in Mesoamerica during the final three decades of the 20th century and their predecessors throughout Latin America was the increase of women in rebel ranks. Firm figures are available only for those insurgent forces who formally demobilized under United Nations supervision – the

Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front in El Salvador (FMLN) and Guatemala's National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) – but estimates of female membership in the primary insurgent groups in the region from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s run at about thirty percent.¹⁰¹

Kampwirth writes that “a quantum leap occurred in women's participation in Latin American revolutionary movements between 1965 and 1975.”¹⁰²

The surge in female participation in insurgent groups during this period gave rise to debate about why women took up arms at that time. There are a number of studies (for example Mason, Reif, Wickham-Crow) that find an explanation for this in the economic changes that took place in Central America during the second half of the 20th century.

However, the pattern of women's participation in guerrilla organizations in Guatemala in the 1970s to 1990s does not match that described of insurgencies in neighbouring countries during the same period. According to the Guillermo Torreillo Foundation's survey of URNG members just prior to demobilization, women made up 15% of the combatants surveyed and 25% of the 1410¹⁰³ members of the URNG's political and logistics structures in Guatemala. Taken together, these figures indicate that just over 18% of URNG members were women.¹⁰⁴ A later FGT study

¹⁰¹ Since guerrilla movements are clandestine, it is not possible to gain access to membership lists, if any exist, of active ones. ONUSAL figures for the FMLN say “of the 8,552 combatants that were processed, 2,485, or 29.1 % were female.” Luciak, 5&6, “Within the FSLN of Nicaragua, many have estimated 30 percent of the combatants, and many top guerrilla leaders, were women.” Kampwirth, 2, citing other sources. Kampwirth, citing *Subcomandante Marcos*, Mercedes Olivera, and Lynn Stephen, estimates women to be “about one third of the combatants” of EZLN forces in Chiapas.”

¹⁰² Kampwirth, Karen. *Women and Guerrilla Movements. Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chiapas and Cuba*. 2002, 3.

¹⁰³ Lahr Caballero, “Condiciones y Expectativas de los Ex Combatientes,” 14, citing the Fundacion Guillermo Torreillo, although Luciak, gives the total number of URNG cadre as 2,813, rather than 1,410, 51.

¹⁰⁴ FGT, *Memoria de los Caidos en la Lucha Revolucionaria*, 2006, 446

also shows that about 11.5% of URNG members killed in combat were women.¹⁰⁵ These statistics indicate that Guatemala breaks with the general trend for women's participation in guerrilla forces in Mesoamerica.¹⁰⁶ Why?

In comparison to armed revolutionary organizations in neighbouring El Salvador and Nicaragua, there is not much research on female combatants in the Guatemalan armed conflict and their motives for joining the armed resistance movements. In the past 2-3 years some useful new studies have come out, such as Sharp's 2017 thesis "From Guatemaltecas to Guerrilleras: Women's Participation in the Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres." But they do not address the question of women's lower participation in the Guatemalan insurgency *vis a vis* contemporary, similar movements in neighbouring countries.

By applying to the Guatemalan context the socio-economic theories that have been advanced to explain increased participation of Mesoamerican women in armed revolutionary movements, we can gain some insight into why women's participation was lower in the URNG.

There appears to be consensus among researchers exploring the question of why women entered guerrilla armies in the 1970s and 1980s and not in earlier movements, that changes in

Mesoamerican social and economic structures in the decades following the Second World War

¹⁰⁵ Lahr Caballero P.23 and FGT P.446

¹⁰⁶ ONUSAL provides a relatively firm figure of 29.9% for the percentage of demobilized FMLN fighters who were women (Luciak, 5), but, as Kampwirth (2) points out, figures for female participation in the FSLN in Nicaragua and the EZLN in Chiapas are largely conjecture, as these forces never demobilized, and membership lists of the revolutionary organizations either did not exist, or were never made public.

increased the availability of women to become involved in revolutionary organizations (for example Mason, Reif, Wickham-Crow and Kampwirth).

The expansion of agro-industry in the region, beginning in the 1950s, set into motion changes that altered the traditional role of women. As industrialized plantations for export crops – coffee, cotton, sugar cane, and later African palm – displaced rural families who practiced subsistence farming or production for local markets, land ownership became even more concentrated, and the number of campesino families with insufficient, or no land (*minifundia*) increased.¹⁰⁷

This development generated both displacement and opportunity. Many campesino families lost their self-sufficiency, as the land they had access to reduced significantly. But the expansion of capitalism in the countryside also generated new employment opportunities for some, as waged labour to harvest the export crops. Since harvests are seasonal, rural labourers were forced to temporarily migrate, following the harvests of different crops to different regions.

This structural shift in rural economies affected genders differently. Kampwirth observes that in Nicaragua “temporary migration in search of rural work was a predominantly male phenomenon, since men had greater opportunities to earn money in agriculture than women did. Moreover, men had fewer child-care duties than women did, making migration easier for them.”¹⁰⁸ Men’s out-migration from rural communities in search of waged employment led to long-term separation from and for many, eventual abandonment of their families.

¹⁰⁷ Kampwirth 2002, 7 and Viturna 2006, 7, citing Kampwirth, Mason and Reif-Lobao.

¹⁰⁸ Kampwirth, *Women and Guerrilla Movements*, 2002, 25

This left increased numbers of impoverished women-headed rural families. Women responded by seeking waged or informal sector employment outside the home, as well as by organizing with others around issues related to their roles as mothers and caregivers. Many also migrated from rural communities to urban areas where women could find either waged employment in services, particularly as domestic workers, or informal work as street vendors. This shift from the private to the public sphere increased women's interactions with other people facing similar challenges and with organizations working to resolve them.

While her focus is El Salvador, Viturna generalizes this experience to the region.

Male migration resulted in a corresponding increase in the number of impoverished female heads of household (Kampwirth 2002; Mason 1992; Reif-Lobao 1986, 1998). Women responded by moving into the paid labour force and mobilizing their communities around specifically women's interests (e.g., child-care or familial nutritional needs). These new experiences in the labour force and in community politics increased women's contact with individuals and issues outside of the family and thus increased their potential for revolutionary mobilization.¹⁰⁹

In addition to pushing more women into the public sphere as heads-of-household, these socio-economic changes also meant there was less paternal control of daughters, creating more freedom for adolescent girls and young women to also become involved in community organizations and social movements.

¹⁰⁹ Viturna, 7

The structural changes of the 1950s and 60s that displaced *campesino* families and pushed them into the waged economy occurred throughout the Mesoamerican region, but the response of rural peoples was not necessarily uniform throughout. In Guatemala the majority of the rural population was at the time, and remains, indigenous Maya.¹¹⁰ The adaptation of Mayan *campesinos* to displacement by agro-industry was different than that of the largely *mestizo* peasant farmers in other countries of the region. The different strategies Mayan farmers adopted may help explain why fewer women joined the Guatemalan insurgency than in guerrilla movements in neighbouring countries.

4.1.1 Factors that Lead to Mobilization of Women Guerrillas

Kampwirth believes that a number of different factors need to come together in order to create the objective and subjective conditions that may mobilize women as insurgents. She identifies the following categories as key to the recruitment of women into revolutionary coalitions: Structural changes, Ideological and Organizational Changes, Political Factors, and Personal Factors. Kampwirth developed the chart shown on the following page, which summarizes the key factors that her research indicates mobilized Mesoamerican women into revolutionary coalitions during the final three decades of the 20th Century:

¹¹⁰ In 1950 approximately 54% of Guatemalans were indigenous. Of these 87% lived in rural areas. (Castellanos, 88).

Table 5: Kampwirth's Factors that Lead to Mobilization of Women as Guerrillas¹¹¹

Structural Changes

Land concentration, increasing insecurity for rural poor (due to economic globalization and population growth).

- Male migration and often abandonment of families
- Rise in number of single-female-headed households
- female migration (to cities or Lacandón jungle), which broke traditional ties, made organizing more possible

Necessary but not sufficient

Ideological and Organizational Changes

Rise of Liberation theology

- growth of religious and secular self-help groups

Change in guerrilla methods

- from *foco* organizing to mass mobilization
- from military strategy to political-military strategy
- from disinterest in, to interest in, mobilizing women in response to international feminism.

Political Factors

State response to those self-help groups was often repression

- repression pushed many women into more radical activities in self-defense

Ineffectual state efforts to co-opt (especially in Chiapas) gave women new skills and new resentment

Personal Factors

Family traditions of resistance

Membership in pre-existing social networks (student groups, church groups, labour unions).

Year of birth¹¹²

Combination of all factors = a mobilization of women in guerrilla movements and other revolutionary organizations

¹¹¹ Kempwirth (2002), 135

¹¹² Kampwirth includes year of birth in her determining factors because she believes that biographical availability plays an important role in women's incorporation into guerrilla organizations. Based on her interviews with women who were active with the FSLN during its struggle to overthrow the dictatorship of the Somoza family in Nicaragua, Kampwirth determined that women who had few or no children, and/or were students, were much more likely to join the armed struggle. Since these were generally young women, Kampwirth finds that women who were in their teens or early 20s in the two years prior to the July 1979 general insurrection that toppled the Somoza regime were much more likely to have become guerrillas than those born earlier or later. During the final two years of the Nicaraguan armed struggle the FSLN ranks swelled considerably. Although Kampwirth includes a "rise in number of single-female-headed households" as a key structural factor in the shift to increased female participation in revolutionary movements, she does not include growing up in a female-headed family as a personal factor influencing the incorporation of women into revolutionary movement, although others, such as Lobao (1990) do.

Kampwirth's analysis of women's guerrilla participation suggests that the route that women follow to guerrilla movements is initially very similar to the mobilization path that most participants follow in any type of social movement. Involvement in community activism intersects with high levels of biographical availability and results in women's participation in peaceful political organizations. However, when government repression targets such organizations, these activists are then forced into clandestine armed resistance.

Missing from Kempwirth's table of factors, says Viturna, are those that explain why individual women involved in activist social networks take the further step of joining armed movements. She believes that social psychology can contribute to this understanding through theories of identity-based mobilization processes. Viturna found that direct repression was not an important factor in pushing women active in non-violent activism into armed resistance groups, but that participation in those non-violent movements helped forge an identity of participation. Viturna argues that when individuals develop a "participation identity" they are more willing to face the risks associated with deeper involvement in a revolutionary movement. When "being a participant must become so important to a person's sense of self that to not participate would cause psychological and emotional harm," external obstacles to participation become less important.¹¹³

¹¹³ Viturna, "Pulled, Pushed, and Persuaded," (2006) 5

“Politically active women appear to have been pulled into clandestine activism by their already strong participation identities.”¹¹⁴ She argues that rather than targeted repression, a more common catalyst pushing women into Mesoamerican guerrilla movements was the indiscriminate violence carried out against entire populations in “scorched earth” campaigns, a strategy that was more common with the Guatemalan and Salvadoran militaries than under the National Guard of former dictator Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua.

4.1.2 The Guatemala Context

From the mid-1960s to the 1980s, Guatemala experienced most of Kampwirth’s “Factors that Lead to the Mobilization of Women as Guerrillas.” Despite the presence of these factors, women’s participation in the guerrilla movement in Guatemala was only 60% of the percentages estimated in neighbouring countries. One explanation for this may be the different strategies adopted by rural Guatemalan families to the displacement, loss of land and semi-proletariatization sparked by the expansion of agro-industrial frontier in the decades following the Second World War.

Kempwirth, Reif-Lobao and others have argued that, since rural families’ adaptation to these factors resulted in a significant increase in female-headed families, agro-industrial expansion were an important structural factor in increased participation of Mesoamerican women in armed resistance movements from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s. In Guatemala, however, where the

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 38

rural population is majority indigenous Mayan,¹¹⁵ campesino families adopted a different survival strategy than in the neighbouring republics.

In contrast to rural families in other Mesoamerican countries, Mayan campesinos tended to respond to landlessness and *minfundia* through seasonal migration as a family unit to work in the harvests of the expanding agro-export crops. Thus, instead of male migration, whole families of mothers, fathers, children and grandparents would travel to the coast or *piedmont* to engage collectively in the gruelling labour of harvesting sugar cane, coffee and cotton, returning in the off-season to their communities in the highlands to engage in subsistence farming. This practice would have served to keep indigenous families, and culture, more intact than in other contexts where men and women entered the capitalist economy separately.

Thus the percentage of female-headed households did not grow significantly in rural Guatemala during the 1960s and 1970s in the way that Kampwirth, Mason, Reif and others have demonstrated it did in El Salvador and Nicaragua. Since the same researchers point to the increase in female headed rural families as an important background factor leading to women's greater participation in the public sphere, in community organizing, and from there to armed revolutionary organizations. The fact that this did not happen in Guatemala may explain the

¹¹⁵The Guatemalan General Directorate for Statistics' VII Censo Nacional de Población y II Censo de Habitación 1964, indicates that 54% of the rural population in 1964 were indigenous Maya, but in the provinces that would become the centres of the armed conflict in the 1980s, the proportion was much higher; Quiche (88%), Alta Verapaz (96%), Huehuetenango (72%), San Marcos (66%), and Solola (97%). (Cuadro 2). And indeed, the FGT's 1997 survey of URNG combatants indicated that a full 81.5% were indigenous (FGT, *La Incorporación de la Guerrilla Guatemalteca a la Legalidad*, 2006, 48).

lower level of women's participation in the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) than in related insurgencies in neighbouring countries.

Although the participation of women in the URNG was lower than for revolutionary organizations in neighbouring countries, almost one in five insurgents were women at the time of demobilization in early 1997, still a significant ratio.

If the structural factors that Kampwirth describes as “necessary but not sufficient” for the mobilization of women as guerrillas was not as present in rural Guatemala during the 1960s and 1970s as in other Mesoamerican countries, did the other factors in Kampwirth's table still have an influence on women's participation? Did the Guatemalan society experience the ideological and organizational changes, and political factors that sparked increased women's participation in armed struggle in neighbouring countries?

4.1.3 Interviews with Women URNG Combatants

Among the URNG members I interviewed were four female combatants (30.7% of the sample of 13 combatants interviewed). These women belonged to two different organizations of the URNG alliance - FAR and ORPA. The two from the FAR were of a rural background, and the women from ORPA, urban. All four were *Ladina* (mestiza), rather than Maya.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Statistics vary, but approximately 40-50% of the Guatemala's population is Maya, and a similar percentage is *Ladino* – a term used in Guatemala to describe both mestizos and assimilated indigenous people.

I conducted the interviews to learn the perspectives of rank and file combatants on the Peace Accords and the coming reintegration into civilian life. However, the women also shared information such as why they joined the guerrillas and about relationships between men and women in the armed movement, enabling us to compare with the theories developed by Kampwirth, Viturna and others in their studies of female insurgents in neighbouring countries. With just four female URNG members interviewed, the sample is small, so I also draw on knowledge generated by Wenche through interviews with 44 female former-URNG members a decade after demobilization.

Gregoria (FAR)

Gregoria was 36 at the time of our interview in March 1997 in the Sacol demobilization camp in Guatemala's Petén province. She was a *specialist*¹¹⁷ in the FAR.

Gregoria said that her whole family were collaborators with the FAR, and she began to work with the guerrilla as a messenger when she was 12 or 13. "My parents had been working in the revolutionary struggle for many years, so from a very young age all my other brothers and sisters were instilled with this idea, and it was through that that I came to work in organizing." She became a guerrilla in 1980 at age 19. Gregoria affirms that the decision to become FAR combatant was one she made on her own. "I told my parents what my decision was, and that my wish was to incorporate with the guerrilla to keep fighting. My parents told me to think it over

¹¹⁷ A rank corresponding to a non-commissioned officer (corporal, sergeant) in a North American army.

carefully, that this was not a game or something easy. But I was firm in my decision to do it, and since then I've been here.”

Gregoria is the mother of two children, both of whom she gave birth to in the mountains while with her guerrilla unit. The children, the eldest of whom would have been eight at the time of the demobilization, lived with her and her unit in the jungle.

While she did not indicate if there was a rebel platform on women's rights that attracted her to the FAR, Gregoria described the relationship between men and women in the mountains as more equal than in civilian life. In the guerrilla, “They taught us that a woman has the same rights as a man. The fact that you are a woman doesn't mean you are worth any less than any other *compañero*,” she said. In reflecting on what she will do after demobilizing, Gregoria said she would like to work with women in Guatemala to share what she learned in the mountain about equality. “In my country, they don't respect our rights. As women we have our rights and our worth. In our years here and at least we have learned a little about this, and we'd like to share that with the other women.”

Gregoria believed that gender discrimination in civilian life was a reason why more women hadn't joined the insurgency. “It is very rare that a girl can decide for herself, without being limited by her parents, even when they're adults,” she said. “... so there are few women who can make the decision to leave their children to join the struggle, or even young women... When we who are in the mountain have come out to visit communities, the women are excited to see that we are women too. But they themselves are held back by their children or spouses.”

Blanca (FAR)

Blanca was younger and more reserved than *Gregoria*. She tended to give shorter responses to the questions asked, sometime simply affirming what *Gregoria* had said. She told us she had one daughter, to whom she gave birth in the mountain in 1991 while serving in a guerrilla unit in the Petén jungle. *Blanca* said her daughter was currently living in a nearby community with her father.

Blanca's contact with the FAR, which led to her incorporation into the insurgency, was the result of army attacks on her community. When *Blanca* decided to join the FAR, her mother was opposed to it, but her father supported her decision.

Blanca agreed with *Gregoria* that her experience as a female combatant was positive. "At first, it was difficult, but you get used to it, and it is nice. For me, it was good there." She said.

Yali (ORPA)

Yali had been active in the Revolutionary Army of the People in Arms (ORPA) for almost 25 years at the time of her interview in March 1997. Like *Blanca* and *Gregoria*, she was a *ladina*, but not of campesino origin. *Yali* grew up in the Western Highlands, in Quezaltenango, Guatemala's second urban centre. *Yali* does not discuss her social background in the interview, but she mentions early involvement in the labour movement, which could indicate an organized working-class background. *Yali* was the mother of a four-year old girl. She did not indicate whether her daughter lived in the mountains with her, or elsewhere.

Yali's route to the guerrilla was not initiated by direct state repression, but she says repression of the labour and student movements in 1969-70 served as the spark that awoke her consciousness. Around that time, *Yali* became active in the student movement, building alliances with students in other faculties concerned about social justice in Guatemala. Through this work, *Yali* met students involved in the revolutionary movement, and she became an early recruit of the fledgling ORPA.

Like *Gregoria* and *Blanca*, *Yali* said that she planned on remaining active in the URNG following demobilization and was committed to taking on whichever tasks the organization assigned to her and going wherever it sent her.

Ana (ORPA – originally EGP)

Ana was a *ladina* from Guatemala City who became involved with the rebels as a high-school student. Ana was the only one of the 4 female URNG combatants whom I interviewed who did not have children. She said that one of the few things she looked forward to following reintegration was starting a family:

Apart from the political life, the party, the training, creating a constitution, and everything political, I would like... perhaps to get married. To have a family, because there will be resources now.... If we have somewhere to live, if we can have a dignified life for ourselves and our children, why not consider it, no? But before, no. You had to survive or die. So why think of a stable relationship? All the relationships were unstable – knowing that tomorrow we could die or be transferred somewhere else.

In Ana's case, it was a desire to end the racism, inequality and discrimination she saw all around her that motivated her to join the guerrilla movement. She was also the only woman interviewed

who mentioned gender-based discrimination as a motive for becoming active in the revolutionary movement. Ana described her early motivation in the following way:

When I was still a very young adolescent. I gave myself an objective. An idea that while there was even one of us in Guatemala whose physical, spiritual or political needs were not being met, I will not rest. And, that was the idea for many of us. So, from a very young age that's what I've been working towards. That's why I have not gotten involved in anything very personal, because that stops us from achieving the social victory. If I focus too much on me, my individualism closes the doors to a life of social equity. One day we need to end the differences between classes..... So, while racism and classism exist - and gender discrimination too - we will not rest....

Initially, *Ana's* description of gender equity and women's rights in the ORPA fronts appeared similar to how *Blanca* and *Gregoria* perceived them in the FAR's guerrilla fronts in the Petén:

As a woman here in the camps, how do I see the relation between men and women combatants? Well, we try to live what we believe. Like the communist ideal to share with each other fraternally. Between men and women, we try to live like brothers and sisters, and to help one another mutually in whatever we need.... This is our reality living as men and women here.

However, as the interview proceeded, it became clear that *Ana's* understanding of how women's rights are conceived in the guerrilla was quite different from the perception the two FAR combatants had. While *Blanca* and *Gregoria* said they saw relations between men and women as more equitable among the guerrillas than in civilian society, *Ana* believed that regarding feminism and women's rights, civilian Guatemalan society had advanced beyond what was practiced by her comrades in the mountains. When asked if she included women's rights and gender consciousness in the education work she did with the combatants, *Ana* replied:

No, because it is still very difficult to speak of this with the *compañeras*. Personally, I support it. But I have had the opportunity to see more. The gender work, equal rights, equal conditions for women is a challenge, because there is still a lot of the patriarchy within us. Perhaps in civilian life, women have achieved a little more, they've managed to overcome this, but they still don't understand much of what feminism is.

On the other hand, I can't speak about gender issues because it could push women into the extreme feminist camp. So, I prefer to not touch on the theme until we are able to return to civilian life and can approach it from a broader perspective....

I was always afraid that it would push the *compañeras* to an extreme position – that they would say, 'No we are independent, we don't need the men...' (In civilian life) ...I have seen some women arrive at extreme feminist positions saying 'we don't need men. We are independent. We are liberal. We are free....' This can generate a sectarianism of just women, which is also an error. We are not looking for that, but rather democracy - the fraternal and shared life among the troops.

Ana added that she does not completely avoid the issue of gender equality in her work with the combatants but includes the issue of discrimination against women as part of the human rights package.

4.1.4 Additional data on female Guerrillas in the URNG

Wenche Hauge's 2007 study for the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *The Demobilization and Political Participation of Female Fighters In Guatemala*, shed light on the situation of female ex-URNG members in the decade following their demobilization and reintegration into civilian life, but it also includes data that helps us to measure the testimonies of the women combatants cited above against a larger sample.

Hauge interviewed 44 female former-URNG militants from different parts of Guatemala and from all four of the guerrilla organizations that made up the URNG coalition. The majority of

study participants were rural women from a low-income background and with little or no formal education. But approximately one quarter were middle or lower middle-class women who had grown up in an urban setting¹¹⁸.

Hauge's interviews included some questions regarding motives for joining and experiences as women during their time in the guerrilla. Most of the women Hauge interviewed (58%), and particularly the rural women, spoke of the assassination of a parent, or massacres in their community as a catalyst for them joining the guerrilla. While reasons for having joined the URNG were varied, Hauge identified 3 common factors among the rural women: "1) They had reached a high level of social conscience and awareness about injustice in their society and wanted to work for changes. 2) They had witnessed and escaped torture and massacres. 3) They had ties to the guerrilla through other family members. The reason given for their membership was often a mixture of these factors."¹¹⁹

Participants who came from urban, more educated backgrounds differed from the rural women in their motives. Most indicated that they became politically and socially aware through participation in the student movement, and that it was through that network that they came into contact with the guerrilla organizations. Hauge reports that none of the urban women mentioned family ties as something that drew them into the guerrilla. She also observes that, in contrast to the rural participants, none of the former guerrillas from an urban background mention that they

¹¹⁸ Hauge, P7

¹¹⁹ Hauge, 9-10

joined the revolutionary movement as a result of direct state repression, although several said they were persecuted once they became active members.¹²⁰

Hauge reports that the majority of women she interviewed “expressed that being respected and valued and realizing that they were capable of carrying out a range of different, important tasks, were their best experiences. Some of them emphasized this by adding that becoming a guerrilla soldier was the chance of their life, and that they never would have had the self-esteem, knowledge and the possibilities they had today, without these experiences.”¹²¹

The data generated through Hauge’s interviews corresponds closely with my own much smaller sample of interviews. Like *Gregoria* and *Blanca*, the women from a rural background interviewed by Hauge cited generalized army repression and family ties as important factors in motivating them to join the guerrilla movement. And, like *Ana* and *Yali*, the urban women interviewed by Hauge, cited activism in the student movement as the principal factor that raised their awareness and encouraged them to join the insurgency.

Blanca and Gregoria’s statements that they were taught in the guerrilla that women had the same equal value and rights as their male counterparts, is also reflected by the assertions of participants in Hauge’s study that their most positive memories of life in the guerrilla were being

¹²⁰ Hauge’s observation here must be placed in context. Only 16 of the URNG women that she interviewed were full combatants, and while some others would have played a support role in the military structure, and occasionally engage in combat, most were civilian activists in popular organizations with links to the URNG – part of what Kampwirth calls the “revolutionary coalition.”

¹²¹ Hauge, 12

valued, respected and encouraged to take on non-traditional activities. How do the reasons cited by women who joined the URNG compare to Kempwirth's "Factors that Lead to Mobilization of Women as Guerrillas?"

As we discussed above, the structural changes Kampwirth includes in her list of Factors also took place in Guatemala, but the survival strategy adopted by many Guatemalan rural families was different than in neighbouring countries, and so this did not play as important a role in increased recruitment of women into the guerrilla movement.

The ideological factors she lists were definitely present in Guatemala. From the end of the 1960s on, liberation theology had a powerful influence in the Guatemalan revolutionary movement, particularly within the EGP. The duration of the armed conflict in Guatemala, spanning almost four decades, allows us to see the impact of the shift in guerrilla strategy from *foquismo* to that of Prolonged Popular War. In the 1960s, the period when the *foquismo* strategy was employed, there were very few women in the rebel ranks,¹²² but with the shift to prolonged popular war strategies in the mid-1970s came a corresponding increase in women's participation, albeit at lower levels than in the FMLN and FSLN.

In Guatemala, with more than 200,000 killed or forcibly disappeared and 623 villages exterminated by the Guatemala military and its paramilitary surrogates,¹²³ state violence was

¹²² Luciak, *After the Revolution*, 2001, 184. Although their overall numbers in the armed movement of the 1960s were not high, a number of women played distinguished roles. Some, such as Rogelia Cruz Martinez – a prominent member of the FAR who was captured, tortured and murdered by the army in 1968, became revolutionary icons, inspiring new generations of women to join the revolutionary movement.

¹²³C., Lux de Cotí A., & Balsells, Tojo, *Guatemala: Memory of Silence* Memory of Silence, 1999, 257

even more vicious than in the armed conflicts in neighbouring countries. So Kampwirth's political factor of a violent state response to non-violent social and political organizing was clearly present in Guatemala. *Gregoria, Blanca*, as well as the majority of rural participants in Hauge's study, cite state repression as an important motivator in their decision to join the armed struggle.

Hauge's and my own interviews with female URNG members also reveal that some, but not all, of Kampwirth's "Personal Factors" played an important role in drawing Guatemalan women to the guerrilla movement. Her "Family Traditions of Resistance," are shown to be a common factor for rural women in joining the URNG (The interviews I conducted indicate this to be an important factor for both men and women).

"Membership in Pre-existing Social Networks" is also shown to be a factor in the Guatemalan context. Student movements were usually cited by urban women in Hauge's study and those in the interviews I conducted as playing an important role in their incorporation into the guerrilla. Due to the length of the Guatemalan conflict, Kampwirth's third personal factor of "Year of Birth" was less important in the Guatemalan context. The length of time in the guerrilla for the Guatemalan women combatants interviewed spanned from 5 to 25 years, and the dates of birth spanned the 1950s, 60s and 70s.

Whether women were pulled to the Guatemalan insurgency by its emancipatory message and political platform, or pushed to the guerrilla as an option to escape state repression, is difficult to define. The women I interviewed, and many of those cited in Hauge's study, indicated that they

joined the URNG out of sympathy for the rebels' cause. For some, this sympathy was engendered by growing up in families already deeply involved in the revolutionary movement, while for others participation in community activities, university studies or the student movement led to increased social consciousness that made them more susceptible to recruitment by the guerrilla. Two of the four women I interviewed and 58% of those interviewed by Hauge also cited state or paramilitary repression as a factor that influenced their decision to join the armed struggle. Whether it was the decisive factor, or if these women would have continued to work in non-violent organizations if they, their families and their communities had not been targeted, is unclear.

Hauge and Thoresen report that the interviews they conducted in 2007 with 44 women who were members of the URNG during the armed conflict indicate that “women experienced more gender equality during the war, when they lived in the mountains as guerrillas.”¹²⁴ The women interviewed told them that men and women participated alike in meetings and equally shared domestic duties. The interviewees told the researchers that they felt respected and valued in the guerrilla. Hauge also observed that the women she interviewed “reported about a great deal of respect from the male combatants with regard to more intimate relationships.”¹²⁵

The responses of the four female combatants I interviewed in the demobilization camps - *Gregoria, Blanca, Ana* and *Yali* – generally support Hauge and Thoresen's conclusions, but with some reservations.

¹²⁴Hauge and Thoresen, “Spoilers or Agents of Change?” 221

¹²⁵ Hauge, *The Demobilization and Political Participation of Female Fighters in Guatemala*, 2007, 9

“The *compañeros* with more experience explained to us that a woman has the same rights as a man. That is, the fact that you are a woman doesn’t mean that you are worth any less than a man,” says *Gregoria*. “I felt great solidarity from them, so I didn’t feel different. Because for a number of years I was alone, among purely men. There was no other woman, but I felt OK.”¹²⁶

However, *Ana*’s description of the delicate dance with feminism in her work as a human rights educator with ORPA is interesting in that it reveals her perception that Guatemalan women in civilian life at that time may have achieved greater equality than those in the guerrilla.

This contradiction may also be related to the different experiences of rural and urban women. Or it may be related to differences within the guerrilla organizations in their approach to feminism and women’s rights. Both *Gregoria* and *Blanca* were members of the FAR, which in 1991, years before the other organizations articulated a position on women’s rights, approved a policy that led with “In Guatemala, women’s liberation is an inseparable part of society’s liberation.”¹²⁷ Hauge and Hauge and Thoresen’s studies, a decade after demobilization, indicate that many female former guerrillas found that reintegration into civilian life was “not very positive.” The women interviewed “complained about reintegrating back into a society with a macho culture and with very traditional gender relations....and that they missed the equality they had experienced in the guerrilla during the war.”¹²⁸

¹²⁶Gregoria, March 1997

¹²⁷Luciak, *After the Revolution*, 2001, 184

¹²⁸Hauge, *The Demobilization and Political Participation of Female Fighters in Guatemala*, 2007, 19

Hauge observes that the women who reinserted into collective communities of former combatants reported less erosion of equality than those who reinserted collectively. She credits for the higher levels of gender equality both the maintenance of the guerrilla's social values in demobilized combatant communities, and the establishment there of social structures such as childcare and women's committees.

While the guerrilla may have treated men and women combatants equally in the mountains, the challenges they faced were not equal. Three of the four female combatants I interviewed – Gregoria, Blanca and Yali – had children with them in the mountains. Raising a family in a guerrilla front is dangerous and challenging, but given the length of the war, there were few options available for women fighters who wished to have children and be mothers.

Approximately half (211 of 420) of the female combatants included in the FGT's survey had children or were pregnant at the time of demobilization.¹²⁹

Based on her interviews with female former URNG combatants, Hauge writes that "Pregnant women and younger children were as far as possible sent to Mexico."¹³⁰ She may have reached this conclusion based on interviews with former EGP combatants, as this organization maintained a safe house near Mexico City where children of their fighters were raised in a collective environment by supporters of the Guatemalan revolution. Given the familial ties

¹²⁹ Hauge, *The Demobilization and Political Participation of Female Fighters in Guatemala*, 2007, 14

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 13

between many combatants and refugees living in camps in southern Mexico, some may have also sent their children to live with relatives there. Several of the 13 combatants I interviewed spoke of their relatives fleeing to Mexico after their communities were attacked by the military.¹³¹ Combatants from the EGP and the FAR may have also had the option of leaving their children with relatives or supporters in the Popular Communities in Resistance (CPR). This would not have been much different than raising them on the guerrilla fronts, as for most of the war, the army considered the CPRs to be military objectives. Like the guerrilla columns, the CPRs had to move frequently to escape aerial bombardments and ground offensives from the Guatemalan military.

Gregoria said it was left up to each couple to decide what to do after a woman gave birth. If they had relatives in nearby communities, the mother could take her child to stay with them for a period of time. “Or they could take the risk and keep their children in the mountains with them. But this was much more difficult and represented a huge sacrifice for the children,” she said. “Still, many of us took this option. I for one, stayed (in the guerrilla) with my children.”

Both *Gregoria* and *Blanca* gave birth in the mountains and kept their babies with them for much of the time. “Sometimes for the very necessity that we faced - the situation we lived in, one can lose one’s shame, and any *compañero* who has a little experience will attend to you.” *Gregoria* said, speaking of her birthing experience. “Because during the time of travelling in the guerrilla,

¹³¹Mention of relatives fleeing to Mexico comes up in interviews I conducted with Walter, *Compañero* Pancho, Captain Pancho, *Gregoria* and *Blanca*.

we learned a lot, and some have developed a little knowledge about medicine - how to attend to a birth. It was a *compañero* who was in the mountains with us who helped me give birth.”¹³²

However, *Blanca* and *Gregoria* also both cited women’s responsibilities for child-rearing as a key reason why there weren’t more of them in the guerrilla. “....there are few women who can decide to leave their children to incorporate into the struggle....When we have arrived at the communities, we can see that the women are moved to see women here (among the guerrillas), but they are prevented (from joining) by their children and their husband.”¹³³

The two female FAR combatants also said that there were options available for combatants involved in romantic relationships who did not wish to have children:

Our leaders made it clear that when we wished to have a child, we had to think it over very carefully. First because of maturity, but more importantly because of the danger of where we were going. Because you weren’t just risking your own life, but also that of your child. So, we used methods to avoid getting pregnant. Many of us went a long time without wanting to have children. When we did, it was a decision made within the couple.”¹³⁴

According to *Gregoria*, the contraceptive pill and condoms were the most common forms of birth control in the guerrilla fronts in the Petén, although in the final year of the war, IUDs also became available.

When asked why there appeared to be no women in positions of command at their camp, *Blanca* and *Gregoria* laughed. Then *Gregoria* spoke of the problem of women not learning to value

¹³² Interview with Cra. Gregoria, March 1997

¹³³ Ibid

¹³⁴ Ibid

themselves and their capabilities. It is “the way our parents raised us, but it is not the fault of them either, but rather the system in which we live,” she said, adding, “We have made the effort to overcome this, and there are some *compañeras* who have taken on responsibilities, not at the highest ranks, but positions of responsibility.”¹³⁵

One such *compañera* was *Capitana María* who, as Rosa Griselda Orantes Zelada, joined the FAR in 1968. *Capitana María* established the FAR’s radio-communications system and other important logistics systems that enabled the FAR to consolidate its fronts in the Petén and expand to new regions. Based in the Petén, *Capitana María* may well have been one of Blanca and Gregoria’s officers, and perhaps their role model.

Capitana María died January 1, 2000, almost three years to the day after the Accord for a Final and Lasting Peace was signed (December 29, 1996). Her ashes nourish a Ceiba tree¹³⁶ in the central plaza of the demobilized FAR combatant community of Nuevo Horizonte, where María’s story inspires new generations of young women.

¹³⁵ Ibid

¹³⁶ The Ceiba is Guatemala’s national tree. For the guerrilla in the Petén this majestic tree, with its wide flat buttress roots, often served them as shelter from the army’s aerial bombings. Traditional Mayan beliefs say the Ceiba links this world with the underworld and the heavens.

Chapter 5: Perspectives on Peace and Demobilization

To demobilize is not to abandon the struggle, but to struggle in a different way.

Lieutenant Silvio, Camp Elvira. February 1997

The questions in the interviews I conducted with the URNG combatants were open-ended. Regarding peace, demobilization and reintegration, I asked for their opinion on the peace accords, if they were confident that the government and army would comply with the accords, how they felt about reintegration into civilian life, and what they expected to do once they had demobilized. Despite the open-ended nature of the questions, there was a high level of coincidence in many of the responses (see table 5 below). For example, nine of the ten participants who spoke of what they would do after demobilizing said that their main goal was to continue working with the URNG as it entered this new phase of struggle as a political party. In this section we explore some of the common concerns and aspirations that the combatants expressed regarding the accords and reintegration into civil society.

The guerrillas I interviewed were decidedly mixed in their feelings about rejoining civilian life. There was a great deal of doubt about whether the army could be trusted to keep its side of the deal:

For my part, I have a lot of fear that without the support of our weapons, they're not going to feel much pressure from us. So, we have a lot of distrust. We have never trusted the enemy. Because the enemy never sleeps and has always sought our death. What can we expect?

- Ana, a non-commissioned officer of ORPA¹³⁷

¹³⁷ Interview with Especialista Ana, Camp Claudia, March, 1997

At the beginning it was hard for us to understand this. Because we knew the army, and for them to come and say, 'we're buddies now?' It was difficult for us to accept.

- *Lieutenant Guiler, EGP*¹³⁸

From the experiences I have had, and from what I have seen them (the army) do, it is possible that they will switch to another way to attack us. Because they know that we who confronted them will no longer have weapons. I suppose they'll figure out some way to keep attacking.... I think that if the enemy is alive, he's going to try to kill our leaders.

- *Compañero Pancho, FAR*¹³⁹

In addition to concern about whether the army would respect the accords, from some of those interviewed there was also an "after all we've been through, this is it?" feeling that what the URNG had settled for was much less than what these combatants had dreamed of when they joined the struggle.

I never imagined that after so many years, we would come to this. I always dreamed of the triumph. I dreamed of arriving armed at the National Palace. And now to come to this, and in other conditions – This is the question that at first it was really hard for me to accept.... All of us, not just me. Because I was in a collective where the majority of us were old insurgents. We had lived together for many years. I think we were the most rebellious....it took a lot of effort from our organization - re-education and self-education - for us to understand the reality.

- *Guiler, EGP*¹⁴⁰

It is a step forward. But with a lot of risk because the old oligarchy is bankrupt and see it also in their interest to sign the accords. There is the danger that they will not want to give up their power. And we definitely don't want them to remain in power.... For my part, I am afraid that without our weapons, they're not going to feel so much pressure from us (to comply with the accords)."

- *Ana, ORPA*¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Interview with Lieutenant Guiler, Camp Toluché I, March, 1997

¹³⁹ Interview with Cro. Pancho, Sacol Camp, March, 1997

¹⁴⁰ Guiler

¹⁴¹ Especialista Ana, March 1997

I am not going to deny that there was sadness. How is it that after so many years of being out here fighting. After so many *compañeros* who we've left behind, who have fallen in combat, and now our struggle ends like this?

- *Gregoria, FAR*¹⁴²

The signing of the peace for me brings something quite good. Because it means that the children who were murdered, cut to pieces, smashed against tree trunks, the women who died after being raped, murdered - with the signing of the peace, this won't happen anymore. The people won't suffer any longer. When the husband goes to work in the fields, his wife won't have to worry that the army may come and kill him...

But will it really stop the repression? Because those who committed the massacres, and those who ordered all the slaughter, are still alive.

- *Compañero Pancho, FAR*¹⁴³

We had a lot of doubt, really, about this turn we're now seeing. It was difficult to be accepting this. But we started to see it was real, and we began to have more faith and confidence. Especially because it was our commanders who were saying that this is the route we're taking, right? If they say this (demobilization) is the way to go, they must know why....

Table 6: Common reactions by URNG combatants regarding the peace accords and demobilization	
Reaction	Out of 10*
Desire to continue the struggle via other means by working in the new URNG political party	9
Hopes to continue to live/work collectively with former comrades	7
Distrust that army/government/oligarchy will respect the accords	7
Fear of loss of the camaraderie experienced in the mountain	6
Satisfaction/pride with changes achieved via the armed struggle	4
After so many years of struggle, this is it? This is all we achieved?	4
Concern about reincorporation into civilian life/ not fitting in with family or community	3
Reluctance or opposition to dissolution of individual guerrilla faction to create a unified political party	2
Anticipation of pursuing personal goals that were put on hold during conflict (eg: having children, marrying)	2

**The interviews with Benjamín, Timoteo Navarajo and Captain Pancho are not included in this table because they did not speak about the peace accords and the demobilization and*

¹⁴²Gregoria, March 1997

¹⁴³ Compañero Pancho, March 1997

When we first joined, the central objective was to take power. But things, at both the internal and the international level, have taken another turn, and this practically forces us to make this change. So now we abandon our weapons, but always remembering that it was those weapons that made these changes possible.”

- *Lieutenant Silvio, FAR*¹⁴⁴

7a. Reintegration into civil society

Several of the combatants expressed trepidation about the challenges of reconnecting with day to day civilian life after so many years of separation.

For me it is actually frustrating! Even using my own name - I've had three different names in different places and also disguises I've had to use. And now I don't know how to behave, or even how to dress. I have lost my old identity. It is really difficult. I don't even know how to begin.

...how are they going to receive us now? The enemy for example. I am still not going to be able to extend my hand to those who persecuted us.... For me, it will be difficult. For me, my future, my emotional life - even with my relatives. If now we're going to be giving our real names? So, this is not easy for me. I don't even want to face it yet. I want to hide myself away for a while.

- *Ana, ORPA*¹⁴⁵

Of course, we're going to miss our rifle, right? Because for 15 years, some more, some a little less, we've been carrying it. It's been our protection during the war, so we'll miss it. But that doesn't mean I won't get used to civilian life.

- *Lieutenant Walter, FAR*¹⁴⁶

I am still not clear on what I'll do, or where I'll go after... I have family, but as I told you before - Yes they sympathize, but economically they're screwed. They study, they work, they rent. And they make certain indirect comments related to 'why did you leave?' because everyone else has achieved something. So, I say, no, for sure I'm going to clash with them. I want to continue in this, the revolution.

¹⁴⁴Lieutenant Silvio, February 1997

¹⁴⁵ Ana

¹⁴⁶ Walter

- Guiler, EGP¹⁴⁷

In this unfortunately, we're a little behind. It's not likely that we'll find specialized work, because many of us were illiterate. Many - probably the majority of us - learned here in the jungle. But we don't have any certificate that recognises our studies and I think that's going to limit us now.

- Gregoria, FAR¹⁴⁸

At the same time, some expressed excitement about seeing family members again after so many years, and the possibilities of leading a normal family life.

After? Well, apart from the political life, the party, training, the constitution and everything political, maybe get married? Have a family? Because there's resources for that now.... If we have somewhere to live, if we have a dignified life for ourselves and our children, then its worth considering, isn't it? Because before no. You had to survive or die.

- Ana, ORPA¹⁴⁹

We thank god that it's not going to continue like before, because too much blood has already been spilled – whether it's by one side or the other. We don't want that anymore... All we want really is a piece of land to work. Or, if that's not possible, a salary that you can live on more or less. All we want is to be able to survive – and that they comply with the peace accords.

- Adán, FAR

7b. Collective Reintegration and carrying the struggle forward without arms

We took up arms because there were no alternatives left to us. It wasn't because we liked to pick up a rifle and kill someone. Before, there was no space in Guatemala to demand your rights. Pure repression was the response we would receive. So, there was no option left but to take up arms and make war, you see? But now, new spaces are opening up.

¹⁴⁷ Guiler

¹⁴⁸ Gregoria

¹⁴⁹ Ana

...Now we begin a new stage in the struggle, but we are still revolutionaries. We will continue to follow our platform. Because just with the signing of the peace, things have not been resolved.

- *Gregoria, FAR*¹⁵⁰

There was an understanding and (sometimes grudging) acceptance among the guerrillas interviewed that the peace accords were not the victory that they had long fought for, rather they set the stage for a new and different phase of the struggle.

The guerrillas recognized that the accords open a social and political space so that they no longer must struggle in secrecy for the changes they seek for their country, and no longer need weapons to defend themselves. Perhaps for this reason, when asked what they would do after reintegration, almost all spoke first about the work they planned to do with the URNG as a political party. Only after further prompting did they speak of personal aspirations.

What we didn't achieve through the peace accords, we will now fight for on the political battlefield.

- *Silvio, FAR*¹⁵¹

I'm going to keep doing the same work. But we're going to be working differently now. We're not going to use weapons now, but we're still going to work. The struggle continues. But it's not the same system, right? Now we're going to fight by talking....

- *Adán, FAR*

As the URNG, we have 3 principal tasks: Build the party, achieve our reintegration into society, and ensure compliance with the peace accords. I will go to do this work wherever the party orders me to.

- *Yali, ORPA*

¹⁵⁰Compañera Gregoria, March 1997

¹⁵¹ Lieutenant Silvio, March 1997

That's why we're going create our political party. So that we can keep living together with all our militants and combatants in a life that is always clearly revolutionary.

- *Walter, FAR*

Walter's statement above reveals a misperception that many of the combatants appeared to have about the role of a political party in liberal democratic societies. For URNG combatants during the armed struggle, the revolutionary organization was everything. It was their employer. It was responsible for their food, shelter and recreation. It was their identity. Many of those interviewed expressed a fear that they would lose the deep sense of camaraderie that they had enjoyed while living in the mountain with a tight knit unit who depended on each other daily for survival. Their responses about their involvement with the URNG after reintegration indicate that many hoped the new party would enable them to continue to experience that solidarity and clarity of purpose in the post-conflict period.

However, parties in capitalist societies like Guatemala's are unable to play the all-encompassing role that the revolutionary organization performed for the guerrillas. The new party would lack the infrastructure and be financially incapable of taking responsibility for the employment, housing, food and other basic needs of all their members. The vast majority of demobilizing combatants would have to find their own way to meet their needs, outside of the party. And in doing so, the role of their organization in their lives would necessarily diminish significantly.

Yet, two months or less before they were to integrate into Guatemalan civil society, very few of the URNG guerrillas interviewed had concrete plans about where they would live and how they would earn a living. Gregoria's description of her post-demobilization plans reflect the thinking

of many of those interviewed, “I still don’t have anywhere to live. I don’t have a clear idea because one of the principles of a revolutionary is that militancy in the organization is unconditional. Wherever our leaders feel we can play a useful role, we’ll go. Our struggle continues, the only thing that has changed is its form.”¹⁵² Guiler was even more uncertain “I haven’t really defined a place to go.” He said that he had been told that there would be some shelters provided for combatants who had nowhere to go once the camps shut down in May 1997 and he expected he would end up there.

In addition to hoping to dedicate themselves to the new party, many of the URNG combatants who discussed their plans for reintegration expressed a desire continue to live or work collectively with their former comrades in arms. This corresponds with data from the FGT’s survey of URNG combatants in early 1997 that indicated 59.8 % were interested in working collectively following reintegration (41.3% wanted to work collectively, and 18.5 wanted a mix of individualized and collective work).¹⁵³ Hauge and Thoreson’s study of former URNG guerrillas a decade after integration indicated that combatants who reintegrated collectively to cooperative communities fared better than those who reintegrated individually.¹⁵⁴ This was in spite the crushing debt-load related to having to pay back loans related to the purchase of land for the reintegrated communities.

¹⁵² Gregoria, Sacol, March 1997

¹⁵³ Hauge and Thoreson, “Spoilers of Agents of Change?” 219

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 231

Similarly, Hauge's 2007 study of the reintegration experiences of women in the URNG found that those who had reintegrated collectively were better able to engage in social and political work outside the home, benefiting from collective infrastructure, such as childcare, and a greater acceptance in the demobilized communities towards women's participation in the public sphere.

Yet, less than 10 % of URNG members who demobilized through the MINUGUA-supervised process were able to reintegrate collectively. The rest were steered towards individual and largely unsuccessful micro-enterprises.¹⁵⁵ This was in line with conventional thinking around DDR that "reintegration is the most effective way to break former combatants ties to their former fighting units..."¹⁵⁶ However, the emphasis on individual demobilization made it more difficult for former combatants to reintegrate successfully, maintain communications with the URNG political party, and engage in non-violent social and political activities aimed at resolving the conditions that gave rise to the armed conflict.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 220

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 231, citing Spear (2002, 145)

Chapter 6: Conclusion

When asked what they planned to do following reintegration, most of the URNG combatants interviewed said that they wanted to dedicate themselves to building the new party. Apart from its political purpose, they saw in the party a space to maintain the sense of camaraderie and belonging that they felt among their units in the mountains and jungle.

With the peace accords removing the risk for the URNG to operate openly and to advance its socialist proposals in the political arena, they believed they could achieve through the ballot box what they had been unable to gain in 36 years of fighting in the mountains, jungle and cities.

To the combatants, who for years had been participating in orientations from their political representatives, their organization's demands for land reform, the redistribution of wealth and power, and an end to racial discrimination were messages that would obviously appeal to the people.

“The party will be the backbone for all of us,” said Lieutenant Walter, “There will be a unity that's stronger than ever.”

“This will be one of the biggest and most beautiful things. But we have to have the capacity to guide and carry forward this struggle,” Lieutenant Guiler told me. “The people are waiting for us.”

They weren't. In the 1999 national elections, the new URNG party ran in a progressive coalition, backing presidential candidate Alvaro Colom Caballeros, who did not belong to the URNG, but was a progressive intellectual whose uncle, Manuel Colom, had been a highly respected left-wing mayor of Guatemala City in the 1970s¹⁵⁷. Colom came a respectable third in a crowded field of 11 presidential candidates in the 1999 election, winning 12.4% of the vote. However, in every election since, the URNG's share of the popular vote has hovered around 3%. In the most recent election, June 16, 2019, the URNG's presidential candidate Pablo Ceto, took just 2.16 % of the vote, while its candidates for congress won 2.78%.¹⁵⁸ A far cry from the URNG combatants' dreams of winning at the ballot box the changes they had been unable to achieve on the battlefield.

What happened? Some of the factors related to the poor showing of the URNG are external to the party and the reintegration process. The peace accords opened the space for the former guerrillas to participate in the electoral field, but they didn't change the rules of the game. In Guatemala, these rules have always favoured the small economic elite. Election campaigns in Guatemala are very costly. Hauge (2008) points out that in the 2003 electoral campaign, the leading right-wing parties spent about USD \$60,4 million on the campaign, while the URNG spent just US \$700,000. The International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), a special UN team that, until September 2019, assisted the Attorney General's office in

¹⁵⁷ Manuel Colom Argueta was assassinated by the Guatemalan army on March 22, 1979. Alvaro Colom was eventually elected president, but not as part of the URNG revolutionary coalition. Colom had formed his own social democratic party the National Union of Hope (UNE), which brought him to the presidency from 2008-2012. Unfortunately, Colom was unable to uproot or withstand the corruption so deeply rooted in the Guatemalan state and his party largely became absorbed into it.

¹⁵⁸ Tribunal Supremo Electoral, Guatemala C.A.

investigating and prosecuting corruption and organized crime within the Guatemalan state,¹⁵⁹ observed that electoral campaigns in Guatemala are the costliest in the region. Guatemalan parties spend more than three times per voter more than what their counterparts in Mexico spend, and double that of El Salvador.¹⁶⁰ CICIG's 2015 investigation on election financing found that in the 2011 and 2015 elections, at least 50% of campaign financing to Guatemalan political parties came from organized crime and other illicit sources.¹⁶¹ The commission warned that this amount of money, and especially the illegal financing, create an "asymmetrical electoral competition and the people who fund the campaigns can end up having more influence than the majority of citizens.... It introduces a bias in the results of the electoral process in a way that elected officials respond more to their financiers than to their constituents."¹⁶²

The URNG also had to contend with the effects of a decades-long propaganda offensive by the government and army that for long after the peace was signed, had many Guatemalans blaming the guerrillas for the violence during the war. This, despite the publication in 1999 of the United Nations Commission of Historical Clarification's *Memory of Silence*, a comprehensive report on human rights violations committed during the armed conflict. This independent "truth commission," established by the government and the URNG in the 1994 Accord on Human Rights, found that the military and its paramilitary allies were responsible for 93% of the

¹⁵⁹ CICIG was established in December 2006 and is a second generation benefit of the 1996 Peace Accords, When MINUGUA's human rights compliance verification mission concluded at the end of 2004, the United Nations and the Guatemalan government negotiated an agreement to send a specialized legal team to assist the country's attorney general in investigating and prosecuting complex cases related to corruption and organized crime within the Guatemalan state.

¹⁶⁰ CICIG, *Financiamiento de la política en Guatemala*, 2015, 35

¹⁶¹ The Guardian, June 13, 2019

¹⁶² CICIG, *Financiamiento de la política en Guatemala*, 2015, 35

violations committed during the war, while attributing 3% to the guerrilla.¹⁶³ The commission was unable to determine the perpetrators for the remaining 4%.

Another challenge for the former insurgents has been ongoing divisions within the political movement. The departure of much of the former FAR membership from the URNG to create a rival party, the Alliance for a New Nation (ANN), was only the first in an ongoing series of splits. There were no less than five parties competing in the June 2019 national elections that could be considered heirs to the guerrilla.¹⁶⁴ Combined, these parties share of the vote in the 2019 elections tallied to about 20% - enough to have put a united left candidate into the second round run-off election for the presidency – if they had been capable of uniting around a single candidate.

An important part of the explanation for the URNG's inability to gain traction following its transition to a political party can also be found in what happened to the organization and its members during the reintegration process. There are three connected issues that occurred during the reintegration process that had a profound impact on the URNG's ability to present itself as a political alternative to Guatemalans:

1. Promised funding from international cooperation to assist the demobilization and reintegration of URNG members was slashed by more than two thirds from the over USD 85 million committed at the signing of the peace in December 1996, to the just USD 27

¹⁶³ C., Lux de Cotí A., & Balsells, Tojo, *Guatemala: Memory of Silence*, 1999, 324

¹⁶⁴ These parties are the URNG itself, Winaq, the Convergence for a Democratic Revolution (CRD), the Popular Liberation Movement (MLP) and Libre.

million that was actually disbursed once the insurgents turned in their weapons. Of these reduced funds, the URNG was permitted to administer only a tiny fraction.

2. Influential organizations among those administering the bulk of the reinsertion funding strongly prioritized individual over collective reintegration, despite some 60% of URNG combatants indicating an interest in collective reintegration. The end result was that nine out of ten URNG members re-entered Guatemalan civil society alone, while the 10% who reintegrated collectively were required to assume most of the costs of their own reintegration, taking on large debt whose payment occupied much of their time.

3. Once the agreement has been reached to fuse the four guerrilla groups into a single political party, the organizations that made up the URNG agreed to dissolve their organizations, with their command chains and communications structures, very soon after the signing of the final peace and before the new party had developed its own structures. This left the “political party without operative structures and with members who were undergoing a radical change in their lifestyle that made it impossible to get involved with the work of the organization and the promotion of the new political party.”¹⁶⁵

The reduced funds available to support reintegration meant that demobilized combatants had to focus much more on basic survival rather than advance the revolution by new political means. The fact that the URNG administered very little of the reintegration funds meant that the recently

¹⁶⁵ Miranda Madrid, “De la Insurgencia a la Legalidad,” 2012, 11

demobilized combatants had to look to international NGOs for support in the process, rather than to the revolutionary organization on which they had depended for so many years.

The dismantling of the communication and command structures of the organizations of the URNG, and the preponderance of individual reintegration, meant that former combatants were alone and isolated at a time when they would have felt most vulnerable. Hauge and Thoreson write that many of the former combatants they interviewed a decade after reintegration said they felt orphaned and abandoned by their organization.¹⁶⁶ One former combatant I had interviewed in 1997, with whom I spoke again in July 2019, concurred with Hauge and Thoreson. He said that he and many of his former comrades in arms had never expected significant material support from their former *comandantes*, but they were deeply hurt that they had not been consulted with, nor enlisted in, the development of the new party.

The eagerness expressed by the combatants I interviewed prior to demobilization to join the new party in carrying forward the struggle, and their faith in their leaders' judgement, had been replaced by disillusionment, resentment and distrust in the leadership.

Building a Better Life for Children is a publication of the international development organization Save the Children that ranks countries on the quality of life of their children. The annual report uses international indicators on infant mortality, access to education, nutrition, and protection against harmful practices, such as child labour, child marriage, homicides and forced

¹⁶⁶ Hauge and Thoreson, "Spoilers or Agents of Change?", 2008, 226

displacement to assess how safe a country is for children and adolescents. The most recent edition, for the third year in a row, ranks Guatemala dead last for Latin America and the Caribbean.¹⁶⁷ Almost one out of two children in Guatemala suffers from growth-stunting chronic malnutrition (46.5% in 2018), the highest rate in Latin America and the sixth highest in the world.¹⁶⁸ In recent years, as an extended drought devastates agriculture in the drier regions of the country, these rates have been rising.

Violence in the country increased in the years following the signing of the peace accords, and organized crime has penetrated even the highest levels of the state.¹⁶⁹ Tens of thousands of Guatemalans, fleeing hunger, violence and underemployment stream North. Those that remain build protective walls sealing off their neighbourhoods and villages - hoping to keep the gangsters out, and their children inside.

In a small community of some 500 people, half an hour's drive from Petén's capital Flores, there is little sign of malnutrition. Even small children play largely unsupervised until well after dark on the wide limestone streets. Teenagers work at the computer lab at the community school or play basketball in the court beside the community theatre, surrounded by buildings covered in revolutionary murals. Adults stand chatting outside the maternal health centre and community clinic, just down the street from the cooperative store run by the women's association.

¹⁶⁷ Telesur, June 28, 2019

¹⁶⁸ World Food Program, accessed Aug 13 2019, www.wfp.org/countries/guatemala

¹⁶⁹ In 2015, then-President Otto Perez Molina was forced to resign after a CICIG investigation revealed that he was running an organized criminal network within the state. He was subsequently arrested on charges of racketeering, as was his Vice-President Roxana Baldetti.

This is Nuevo Horizonte, the largest of the three cooperative communities established through the collective reintegration of some URNG combatants.¹⁷⁰ Several cooperatively owned industries – a fish farm, selective logging of pines in a forest the cooperative planted, a language school, social tourism, a plant nursery -



Image 13. A Ceiba tree grows in the centre of the Nuevo Horizonte Cooperative from the ashes of *Capitana María*, surrounded by a heart-shaped stone fence carrying the names of guerrillas killed during the 36-year armed conflict. - Photo: Steve Stewart. 2019

provide employment and generate funds to operate community services such as the health centre and clinic, the high school and the theatre. Other employment is generated by small workers' coops, but many still must work outside the community to supplement their income, and it is still a significant challenge for the community to pay off the loan that they were provided following demobilization to purchase the abandoned ranch that is now Nuevo Horizonte. But the residents of Nuevo Horizonte are proud of what they have achieved and of their past as guerrillas who fought for a different Guatemala. They seek to make of their community a model of what the

¹⁷⁰ The other two communities are Las Teclas, a small community of former members of the FAR's Santos Salazar Front, and Santa Anita a coffee cooperative of former ORPA combatants and their families located in San Marcos province.

country might have been had the guerrillas been victorious in their struggle. *Nuevo Horizonte* stands as a small island of hope in what sometimes seems to be a sea of desperation in Guatemala. One cannot help but wonder how many more islands there might be if collective reintegration of combatants had been supported, if the promised international support for reintegration had materialized, and if the URNG had been able to maintain the organizational structures that would have made possible effective support for, and engagement with, its former combatants.

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Appendices- Appendix 1: Data on the URNG Combatants Interviewed

Name	sex	age	Date of Interview	Organization	Origins	urban/rural	Ethnicity	Year joined guerrilla	Motive	Mode	Years in the Guerrilla	Age at joining	Rank
Cra. Gregoria	f	35	27-3-97	FAR	Petén	rural	ladina	1980	repression (massacre)	family (parents)	16	19	Specialist
Cra. Blanca	f	27	27-3-97	FAR	Petén	rural	ladina	1987 or 88	repression (massacre)	individual	9	18	Combatant
Cro. Panchito	M	52	27-3-97	13 de Noviembre /FAR	Oriente/ Petén	rural	ladino	1963	repression	family (father)	33	19	Combatant
Capitán Pancho (Vielman)	M		27-3-97	FAR	Petén (Bella Guatemala Cooperative)	rural	ladino	May/ Oct, 1983	repression (massacre)	Community (with 15 other members of coop)	13		Captain
Lieutenant Walter	m	31	Feb. 1997 & March 1997	FAR	Jutiapa/Petén (la Técnica Cooperative)	rural	ladino	1978 / 17-07- 1981	conciencia/ repression (massacre)	Community / collective	15	16	Lieutenant
Lieutenant Silvio	M	43	Feb. 1997 & March 1997	PGT/FAR	Santa Rosa	rural	ladino	1978/81	conciencia (contact with guerrilla organizers)	family (father)	15	28	Lieutenant
Timoteo Navarajo	M		Feb 1997 & March 1997	FAR	Petén (los Josefinos cooperative)	rural	ladino	1979	conciencia (contact with the guerrilla, church group) /repression	individual	17		Specialist
Cro. Adán	M	67	Feb. 1997	FAR	Taxisco, Santa Rosa	rural	ladino	1989	Land struggle	family (with adult & adolescent children)	7	60	Cook
Cra. Ana	f	30	March 1997	EGP/ ORPA	Guatemala City	urban	ladina	1981	Conciencia (church youth group)	family (brother)	15	15	Specialist
Lieutenant Guiler	m	30	March, 1997	EGP	Ixcán, Quiché	rural	Maya Mam	16-01- 1981	Conciencia (forced disappearance of classmates)	individual	15	14	Lieutenant
Sergio	m	32	April, 1997	FAR	Guatemala City	urban	ladino	?	Conciencia	individual	-		Specialist (communications)
Cra. Yali	F		March, 1997	ORPA	Guatemala City	urban	Ladina	1972	Conciencia/ repression (student movement)	individual	24		Specialist
Benjamín (Gonzalo Guerrero)	m		March, 1994	FAR	Mexico	Urban	mestizo	1984	Conciencia - Communist Party	individual	10		Specialist