TO WHOM SHALL THE NATION BELONG?
THE GENDER AND ETHNIC DIMENSIONS OF REFUGEE RETURN AND STRUGGLES FOR PEACE IN GUATEMALA

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Abstract

While the Guatemalan peace accords certainly an end to the civil war, they are only a starting point. In effect, the profound transformation of social and political organization necessary to counteract and dismantle a culture of fear created by decades of militarized violence will require the construction of a new Guatemalan nation. Whose images of the new nation will be taken into account in such a construction? This paper addresses this question on the basis of an exploratory analysis of imaginings and narratives of nation in Guatemala. The study focuses on counter-narratives, that is the constructions of nation being developed by indigenous peoples, women, the poor and the politically disenfranchised -- groups whose views have been suppressed and ignored in the past. In particular, the gendered experiences of exile and return as transformation processes are examined. A central argument is how the interaction of organized refugee women with their own return communities and with non-returnee women in the popular movement can illuminate the possibilities for spaces for transformation within Guatemalan society in the context of a post-war era.

Introduction

> *In the years since exile began for some women, conditions in their countries changed, allowing them to return to their homeland. They discovered the irreversible nature of the exile experience. Not only has their country changed, but they themselves are no longer who they were when they left. They learned that once one looked at one's home from outside, as a stranger, the past, whether in the self or in the land, cannot be recaptured.*
>
> **-** Mahnaz Afkhami**, *Women in Exile*

While the Guatemalan peace accords certainly signal an end to the civil war, they are only the starting point. In effect, the profound transformation of social and political organization needed to counteract and dismantle a culture of fear created by decades of militarized violence will require the construction of a new Guatemalan nation. We may therefore ask: Whose images of the new nation will be taken into account in such a construction? Or, as Susanne Jonas asks, "to whom shall the Guatemalan nation belong?" (1991, 225) Will it incorporate the voices and imaginings of indigenous communities? Of women? Of refugees?[1]

This paper addresses the above questions through an exploratory analysis of imaginings and narratives of nation in Guatemala. I focus on counter-narratives, that is the constructions of nation being developed by indigenous peoples, women, the poor and the politically disenfranchised -- groups whose views have been suppressed and ignored in the past. The objective is to offer a preliminary assessment of very recent developments by examining the relationship between counter-narratives and a still dominant national narrative of the past which sought to obliterate contesting imaginings. Particular attention is paid to the events of 1994, based on documents collected and fieldwork carried out in that year. The perspective is partial because it arises from a study of particular interactions between returning refugee women, women within organized civil society, the wider popular movement, and certain elements of the international community. It is also partial in that observations and interviews are based on visits to Guatemala City, the Petén and Chiapas, Mexico, over a period of two and half months.

There are three main sources of data for this work. The first is existing studies covering the historical background and developments up until the recent period, as well as some key theoretical influences. Second, several types of documents were collected while in the field, in particular newspaper articles, papers, newsletters and journals.[2] The third source of information comes from observations made during fieldwork, and from the twenty-three informal interviews I conducted, which were open ended and exploratory in nature. The participants were key actors in refugee women's organizations, refugee groups, a government human rights institution, international organizations (such as the United Nations) involved with the return process, international non-governmental organizations, Guatemalan research institutions, and several Guatemalan and Mexican NGOs.

In the following section I present an historical perspective on the inclusionary and exclusionary practices by which "the nation" is constituted, with particular emphasis on those who are constructed as "other" through the intertwining practices of class exploitation, ethnic oppression and gender exclusion. I then delineate counter-narratives that challenge that version of the national imagined community as it is constructed

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[2] Such documents came mainly from the Assembly of Civil Society, the Permanent Commissions, and Mama Maquin.

by the country's controlling forces. I focus in particular on the gendered experience of exile as a transformation process, my source of data coming mainly from fieldwork. Finally, again using field data, I explore how the interaction of refugee women with their own return communities and with "those who stayed behind" can illuminate the possibilities for spaces for transformation within Guatemalan society in the context of a post-war era.

The Dynamics of Inclusion and Exclusion

Contextual perspectives on complex systems of problems emphasize their wide-ranging and overlapping character. This section provides a general background, and some key references, to the conceptual approach and historical perspective which informs my exploratory study of recent developments in Guatemala. Here, I consider the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion at work in constructing national boundaries, and the nature of what Edward Said describes as "the perilous territory of not belonging" (1984, 51), looking in particular at the positioning of indigenous communities and women within this context.

The nation-state emerged during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Europe in its absolutist form (Anderson 1979), and then evolved in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries into the modern nation-state with the development of the notion of citizenship in terms of membership of the collectivity and of an administrative system backed by the rule of law (Urban and Sherzer 1991, 8). "The specific character of indigenous encounters with nation-states are linked to the peculiarities of the state system that grew up in Europe and took root in the New World" (ibid). Khachig Tololyan (1991, 6) neatly sums up the ability of the modern nation-state to both incorporate difference and develop the boundaries of citizenship:

> In [the nation-state], differences are assimilated, destroyed or assigned to the ghettos, to enclaves demarcated by boundaries so sharp that they

enable the nation to acknowledge the apparently singular and clearly fenced-off differences within itself, while simultaneously reaffirming the privileged homogeneity of the rest, as well as the difference between itself and what lies over its frontiers.

Guatemala's independence in 1821 and the formation of the modern nation-state should not be seen as a unilateral transition from the violence of conquest and colonization to the just and impartial rule of law. Rather, the primary practice of difference continued, with modification to its discourse and methods, either through the overt practice of segregation or through incorporation. As Díaz-Polanco (1992, 13) states with respect to the situation in Latin America more generally:

> The colonial regime took as its point of departure ethnic inequality, the nation formal equality under the law, but in both cases difference itself -- self-determination for the Indian communities -- was denied any recognition whatsoever. Later Liberals would even come to deny different ethnic groups the right to exist.

While the colonial state's goal was to obtain the labour of the Indian population by means of coercion, the purpose of the post-colonial nation-state was to "transform Indians into citizens", subject to the rule of law of the state, and to "gain sovereignty simultaneously over their lands" (Urban and Sherzer 1991, 9). The nation-state requires a sense of nationalism on the part of its citizens, a sense of belonging to what Anderson (1983) calls the national "imagined community", that is, a system of cultural representation through which identification with an extended group of people is possible. However, as Rigoberta Menchú states in her testimonial account of her life and that of her people, *her* country is not the Ladino nation-state.

2

> We didn't even understand what our parents told us -- that the *ladinos* had a government. That is, the President who had been in power all this time, was, for my parents, for all of us, President of the *ladino's* government. It wasn't the government of *our* country. (Menchú 1984, 26)

Carol Smith argues that the construction of difference between Indians and non-Indians over time has not been based on biological heritage, but rather has depended on a "changing system of social classification, based on ideologies of `race', class, language and culture which have taken on different meanings over time" (1990, 3). Those conquest survivors who continued to identify themselves as Maya retained a core of beliefs and traditions. Indians also identified themselves as belonging to particular communities (rather than to the Guatemalan indigenous population as a whole), which, to a certain extent, corresponded to the *municipio* (municipality) (ibid).

To Indian communities, it is not identity but justice that is the most pressing concern. "Most Indians wish to retain their distinctive traditions, while taking a position of economic and political equality with others in a modern multicultural nation" (Smith 1990, 5; also see COCADI 1989). Indian intellectuals, however, came to see the question of non-Indian identity as crucial, an identity that they asserted cannot exist without an oppressed "other". They claimed that "non-Indians could not accept the possibility of a modern nation being multicultural" (Smith 1989, 5; see, for example, Cojti Cuxil 1989).

In post-1954 Guatemala, the homogenization of the "nation" was achieved through extermination, difference being interpreted as resistance. Beatrice Manz (1994) argues that the counterinsurgency campaigns were fuelled by nationalism and anti-communism. "The subversives -- in the military's mind not simply armed combatants but anyone who opposes the status quo -- were portrayed as servants of a `foreign ideology' capable of destroying the nation itself. Those who organized cooperatives ceased to be loyal patriotic Guatemalans and became linked to `international communism'. Few countries saw the cold-war rationale inflated to such excess." (Manz 1994, 200) The double spectre of the "other" is described by Gleijeses: "The Bolshevik fiend and the savage Indian: two words, one threat" (1988, 3). The Guatemalan flag was raised and lowered on a daily basis by villagers in even the most remote rural areas to avoid the risk of association with international communism (Manz 1994, 200).

During this time the military was able to continue, accentuate and finally complete a process begun at the time of conquest in 1542 -- domination of the countryside and the shattering of any sense of village autonomy (Handy 1984, 254). By the time that the dictatorship of General Ríos Montt was overthrown in August 1983, the military had successfully completed its project of national political dominance. In the army's own words, "the supreme expression of the state" could not construct a "national destiny" without first wielding "national power" (cited in Lovell 1995, 76).

Falla argues that the massacres that occurred during this time should be seen as "a new expression of the existing conflict between the corporate indigenous community and the ladino state" (1994, 184). However, Jonas argues that the class dimensions of the repression should not be ignored -- the bourgeoisie must not be allowed to disappear. Over the centuries, the bourgeoisie sought a protector to maintain and expand its lands and property privileges, be it Spanish or home-grown dictators, United States marines, the CIA or the army. And what of the nationalism of the bourgeoisie?

> This upper class is proud of being Guatemalan, of Guatemala's past as the seat of the *Capitanía General de Centro América* in colonial days, and of Guatemala's traditional role as the strongest country of Central America since independence -- strongest economically and militarily. It is proud of its country's beauty -- of its volcanoes and its mountains,

of its tropical birds and its Mayan ruins. And it is proud of itself...It is not proud, however, of its countrymen. Its nationalism is warped. It loves an estate, not a nation. It loves a Guatemala which includes only a few thousand Guatemalans: for the rest -- for the Indians and for those Ladinos who are not upper class -- it feels no kinship. It feels contempt. (Gleijeses 1988, 23)

In the face of this "contempt", thousands died during the late 1970s and early 1980s, with hundreds of thousands more fleeing to Mexico and beyond, or becoming internally displaced. The counterinsurgency campaign generated pervasive and deep-rooted terror and fear amongst the population -- a "culture of fear", which became an integral part of everyday life (Gleijeses 1988; Green 1994). A local militia, known as the civil patrol system (PACs), was established by the Guatemalan army as the cornerstone of its rural counterinsurgency program. The civil patrol system was particularly invasive as it effectively inserted "the enemy" within the community.

For the most part, "the other" has been understood from the perspective of the Ladino population as being Indian or Maya. There was, however, yet another, gendered, dimension to this particular dichotomy. Nations are often constructed symbolically through the iconography of familial and domestic space (McClintock 1993, 63) (which of course varies cross-culturally and historically). While sovereignty can be conceived of as masculine, the nation is always feminine. Women are often represented as symbols of that feminized nation. Because of their reproductive capacity, women are seen as transmitters of group values and traditions and as agents of socialization of the young. When group identity becomes intensified, women are elevated to the status of symbol of the community, becoming "iconic representations" responsible for the reproduction of the group. Nevertheless, according to Anne McClintock, "no nationalism in the world has ever

granted women and men the same privileged access to the resources of the nation-state" (1991, 105). Access to the nation has often been through marriage to a male citizen. In this way, women have been "subsumed only symbolically into the national body politic", thus merely becoming "the limits of national differences between men" (ibid).

Cynthia Enloe argues that the women most directly affected by militarized violence and war, and who have much to contribute to peace processes, are precisely those who are denied the means to disseminate their views and opinions: "Societies in the grip of foreign or civil war and those dominated by militarized regimes have not been receptive to women's need to have their ideas taken seriously. Indeed, women who question their own subordination are often perceived as threats to national security" (Enloe 1993, 38). With a rigidly defined sexual division of labour restricting them to the private sphere, women in Guatemalan society have mostly remained "outside" the public sphere of the political activities of the nation. Rigoberta Menchú and other indigenous women argue that they suffer doubly as a result of ethnicized and genderized oppression.

It has been difficult for me as an indigenous woman to find the confidence to speak publicly, particularly since we were raised to believe that the only role for women is to maintain a household and bear children. If you broke with this role, you were seen as abandoning tradition and you would lose the respect of the people. (Menchú 1993, introduction)

In her analysis of the identity of Guatemalan communities in Mexico, Nash finds that an important component of a "fictive or imagined representation of a distinct ethnic identity is the gender specialization in responsibility for adhering to custom" (1995, 14-15). But she also argues that "this stereotype of women as culturally conservative carriers of tradition has been attacked in feminist revisions of Latin American history"

4

(ibid), and has shown that "this stereotyping falsifies female participation in the labour force over time" (ibid). Thus she argues that the imagined representation of identity fails to illuminate the reality of women's lived experience, which is ever-changing and dynamic. Around the world women are in demand in the workforce -- both as labour for transnational corporations, and selling so-called "traditional" handicrafts to global consumers (ibid). Their lived experience belies their perceived symbolic status within the community.

The construction of the "other" has been integral to the formation of the modern Guatemalan nation. Historically, indigenous communities, women and the poor have formed the markers of difference, perceived as threats to the "national" interest, whether through segregation under colonialism or the violent homogenizing practices of recent counterinsurgency campaigns. In the following section, I will examine how indigenous communities in exile, particularly refugee women, have mounted a challenge to the dominant national narrative of the country's controlling forces through their experience of organization.

Counter-narratives

> Counter-narratives of the nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries -- both actual and conceptual -- disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which "imagined communities" are given essentialist identities. (Bhabha 1994, 149)

Homi Bhabha describes refugees as "wandering peoples who will not be contained within the *Heim* of the national culture and its unisonant discourse, but are themselves the marks of a shifting boundary that alienates the frontiers of the modern nation" (1994, 164). Guatemalan refugees in Mexico were considered "subversive" by the Guatemalan state and military. On the one hand, they have been portrayed as mere pawns of the insurgency, while on the other hand they have been perceived as an organized threat to the homogeneous construction of the nation. In this section, I consider the counter-narratives that were constructed by organized refugees, particularly women, as they returned to Guatemala and encountered "those who stayed behind".

The scorched earth offensives resulted in new organized forms of community, in particular the Communities of Population in Resistance (CPRs) in the Ixcán, and the refugees in Mexico who organized under the umbrella of the Permanent Commissions of Guatemalan Refugees in Mexico (CCPP). As Falla notes, "these communities have continued to resist and distrust the army and the Guatemalan state." He goes on to say, however, that "their vision has also widened as a result of the level of confrontation, the mixture of tongues and ethnic groups, and their contact with different government and non-governmental forces. Their situation has transcended the interests of the local indigenous community, and has a national relevance beyond that of independent communities in conflict with the state" (Falla 1994, 187).

In his essay *The Mind of Winter: Reflections on Life in Exile*, Edward Said describes exile as "an unhealable rift forced between the human being and a native place, the self and its true home" (1984, 49). However, the experience of exile can also result in the remaking of self. Refuge cannot be simply equated with victimization: the struggle for recovery occupies a central place in the lives of many refugees. Helene Moussa describes how, for refugees, "the search to belong is a complex process of mourning what one has lost and coping with that pain, as well as feeling sufficiently safe and protected when re-negotiating and re-constructing one's identity within a different cultural context, including returning to one's country of origin" (1993, 246). The notion of "transcultural identity", put forward by some Latin American social scientists and therapists working with Latin American exiles, addresses the possibility of feeling that one can belong to two countries and two cultures (see for example CIMADE 1981; COLAT 1981; FASIC 1986; de Rocha Lima 1982;

5

Vasquez 1981; Vasquez et al 1979). Many Guatemalan refugees in Mexico felt the tug of transcultural identity as they began to return to their country of origin. The "remaking process" has had a particular impact on women, affecting their relationships with men, their families and communities (see Torres' chapter in this volume).

Agger (1994) talks about the identity conflict that women can experience when they leave their life in the private sphere and move out into political space, challenging male power. This move from the private to the public is a violation of boundaries. By moving out into the public sphere, women become visible, and visible women become dangerous women -- both sexually and politically. This is particularly true for women who have undergone a process of transformation in exile, and then return to their country of origin. Guatemalan refugee women who organized in Mexico made the transition from private to public sphere which Agger describes. Women increasingly assumed positions of leadership within the refugee movement in Mexico, helping their community come to terms with the violence and trauma it had experienced and looking to the future as a time of growth and strength.

In many ways, the exile experience violates the traditional ways in which men and women define themselves and each other. I began this chapter with a quote from Afkhami in which she describes how women (from such diverse countries as Afghanistan, Chile and El Salvador) returning to their country of origin discovered "the irreversible nature of the exile experience. Not only has their country changed, but they themselves are no longer who they were when they left" (1994, 16). Given the strength and depth of the change process, returning to the country of origin is necessarily very difficult for men, women and children, as the exile experience is in many ways irreversible -- an "unhealable rift", as Said wrote.

In Guatemala, Maya Indians identified particularly with their own community and ethnic group, rather than with the indigenous population as a whole. The composition of the Guatemalan refugee population in Mexico, however, was heterogeneous, not just in ethnicity, language, and religion, but also in political views. What the refugees did have in common was that they were peasants, and they shared a common experience of having fled the army's violence. Moreover, they had been labelled by the Guatemalan military as subversives. When faced with difficult conditions in refugee camps, the common goal of survival created a sense of unity among refugees. In exile, according to one refugee woman, "indigenous identity has become more generic" (Mama Maquin 1994), and, as Stepputat (1994) found, refugees began to identify themselves as Guatemalans whereas previously, to say you were "Guatemalan" meant you were from Guatemala City. The construction of an "imagined community" among refugees from different ethnic groups, in turn, created a space for organization.[3]

Most of the women who had fled to southern Mexico were indigenous peasants who were often illiterate and spoke only indigenous languages. In Guatemala, the refugee women said, they were often dismissed by the military as *vientras que producen guerilleros* (guerilla-producing wombs) (Mama Maquin 1994, 14). When first arriving in Mexico, unable to communicate in Spanish, women were isolated and had little contact with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Mexican authorities, the international community or local solidarity groups. According to the women themselves, refugee women were subordinated at all levels of the refugee community, and this was reflected in the way that aid and development projects were carried out (Mama Maquin 1994). Many of the women were not allowed to leave their houses without permission from their husbands. Women who were heads of households (ten per cent of the total number of families) suffered additional discrimination for assuming a traditionally male role. Up until l989, women mostly organized for the production of *artesanía* (handicrafts).

In the camps in Campeche and Quintana

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[3] The data in the remainder of this paper is drawn from field notes and observations, unless otherwise indicated. All translations are by the author.

Roo, exposure to different cultural influences resulted in a perceived loss of indigenous identity. Maya women expressed concern over this loss. As the keepers of the culture, Maya women became increasingly worried and upset about young people "going away from the culture". In Mexico, young people were presented with different opportunities and greater possibilities. Many found work in tourist resort towns such as Cancún. Some women felt that it was important to return to Guatemala so as not to lose the young people. Parents listed drug addiction and social disintegration as the most troubling problems affecting their children. In the space of one generation, a culture and a way of life was rapidly disappearing. Many of the women stopped wearing their traditional costumes or *traje* -- often for work-related reasons as their employers did not want to get into trouble with Mexican immigration. The *traje* was in many ways the external symbol of communal identity, a symbol of cohesion. It marked the divisions between different ethnic groups. Since colonial times, each ethnic group, and consequently almost every municipality, had its own *traje* (often used to control the movements of the indigenous population). When the *traje* was no longer worn, women felt that community identification was lost (Mama Maquin 1994; Crosby fieldnotes 1994).

Maya women felt it was their duty to maintain the traditions of the community. Displacement and exile resulted in the breakdown of both community systems and familial structures. Without the social system that formerly acted as a safety net, many women said that the pressures of exile often led to an increase in violence against women.

However, changing relations within the community and family also resulted in identity transformation. The loss of previous forms of "traditional" social cohesion, and the mixing of different ethnic groups, customs and identities generated a search for new forms of community. More and more women began to participate in the daily running of the camps, as well as preparing for organized, collective returns. Women cited "learning to deal with their husbands" as a particular challenge while living in exile. This

process in itself contributed to changing relations between men and women within the family system.

A second arena for women's organization was through the UNHCR workshop series, The Rights of Women and Children. Until then, the concept that women had rights was an alien one. UNHCR, the European Community and local Mexican NGOs also began to provide training in such areas as reproductive health, nutrition and administration, as well as workshops on women's rights.

Third and finally, the formation of the Permanent Commissions provided an organizational umbrella for other related groups to begin to organize. In 1987, the Permanent Commissions were elected by the refugees themselves to begin negotiations for a safe, dignified, and collective return. Two of the first eight elected representatives of the Commissions were women (Arbour 1994).

The process of becoming organized placed many additional burdens on the women: In addition to their traditional responsibilities within the family, the women had to contribute to the family economy through wage labour. For women in the camps, a typical work day lasted from 5 A.M. until 9 or 10 P.M. (Mama Maquin 1994). In order to cope, the women sought time-saving measures such as cooperative, mechanized tortilla making and cooperative child care. These measures allowed the women to participate more fully in political, organizational, productive and other important activities (Arbour 1994). Many women also learned to speak Spanish, thus enhancing their ability to communicate.

The first Guatemalan refugee women's organization to emerge publicly was Mama Maquin, founded on 25 May 1990.[4] Their name honours the memory of a Kekchi woman assassinated by the Guatemalan military in a 1978

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[4] Although the scope of this paper only allows for discussion of Mama Maquin, three other refugee women's organizations also organized returns: Ixmucane (which participated in returns to northern Guatemala; Madre Tierra (returns to the southern area of Guatemala); and the Association of Guatemalan Dispersed Women "Ixchel Flor de la Esperanza" (collective returns to southern Guatemala).

massacre of indigenous peasants seeking land rights. Mama Maquin came to represent about 8,000 refugee women from eight different indigenous groups who lived in the Mexican refugee camps located in the states of Chiapas, Quintana Roo, and Campeche. Mama Maquin defined itself as being part of the Guatemalan popular movement. It identified its biggest challenge as enabling refugee women to participate on equal terms within the community power structures and decision-making processes. Two areas of particular concern were improving women's economic situation, and providing more training for women. "One of our biggest objectives is to train ourselves, in order to develop a knowledge of new things, and in particular our rights as women, and how to defend those rights. Above all, we want to be in control of our own futures" (Mama Maquin 1994, 58).

In its first year, Mama Maquin carried out a survey of refugee women in the camps. The survey sought to obtain general information concerning their situation. The objective was to determine the extent of women's participation within their communities, and thus find ways to involve women in self-sufficiency projects being carried out by the Mexican Commission to Aid Refugees (COMAR) (Mama Maquin 1994). The women within Mama Maquin learned a great deal from the survey experience, having discovered the differences and similarities in women's problems within the various refugee communities. Not surprisingly, they also encountered opposition within certain communities. Sometimes the men would want to respond for the women: "They don't know how to talk; I'll answer your questions" (quoted in Mama Maquin 1994, 61). The results of the survey conveyed the needs of refugee women, thereby allowing Mama Maquin to design its work specifically around those needs, and were they published (in conjunction with a local Mexican women's organization) as a journal entitled *De Refugiadas a Retornadas: Memorial de Experiencias Organizativas de las Mujeres Refugiadas en Chiapas* (1994).[5]

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[5]From Refuge to Return: The Organizational Experiences of Refugee Women in Chiapas.

The most pressing desire expressed by the refugee women Mama Maquin talked to was to return. Mama Maquin became a major player in the negotiated process of return alongside the Permanent Commissions. Preparing women for the return became one of its principle activities in Mexico.

Return: Struggle not Resignation

The refugee return was described by one member of the international diplomatic community as "peculiar" because it took place in the midst of ongoing conflict within Guatemala (Crosby fieldnotes, 1994). The slogan of the return became "return is struggle, not resignation" (Stepputat 1994, 15). The negotiation of the return process was an extremely politicized struggle between the government and the Permanent Commissions. The attitude of the Guatemalan authorities, to some extent, had shifted since the period of extreme violence in the 1980s, but many still considered the refugees to be subversives in disguise. The returnees themselves had deeply ingrained anti-state attitudes: "Their imaginations and practices are informed by their experiences with state-terror and more than a decade of life in refugee camps" (ibid).

One area where several returns occurred was the Ixcán, in the northwestern part of the country. The Ixcán was a conflictive area, where the war had become an integral part of people's lives. The guerilla movement, the URNG (Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca), maintained a presence until the ceasefire in 1996. Mama Maquin played a vital role in the first and second organized returns to the Ixcán, which took place in January 1993 and January 1994. The group represented 670 women returnees to the first return community, Victoria 20 de enero, located in the Quiché province. Four members of the leadership also returned to that area.

Mama Maquin described the returning women as being "different": they had higher self-esteem, more spaces in which to organize, and "more strength and hope for the future" (1994, 78). Four main organizational objectives were

identified upon returning: to extend the organization to the surrounding communities; to strengthen women's participation within the community; to integrate into the popular movement; and finally, to establish relationships with the Communities of Population in Resistance (CPRs) (Mama Maquin, Plan de Trabajo). Moreover, in the camps in Quintana Roo and Campeche women had had access to piped water, *molinos* (corn mills) and tortilla makers. In Mexico they had schools and clinics. In exile, they had come into contact with a system of government that provided at least some services for the people. Upon their return the women saw the need for schools and clinics as fundamental.

According to both refugee groups and international organizations, the women encountered many problems upon returning. As previously discussed, in the camps, new conditions and shifting relations created spaces for women in which to organize. But more traditional structures where roles for women and men were more rigidly defined awaited them in their home communities. Although the return communities were intent on re-establishing the organizational structures they built in Mexico, the refugee men began to reassert their traditional roles and authority through contact with Guatemalan society.

At its inception, the return process seemed to have had the effect of weakening rather than strengthening women's organizing in terms of power and vision. The main purpose of organizing in Mexico was to prepare women for the return. Once back, though, there were difficulties in meeting the stated objectives for return. They had not been prepared for the reintegration process. An additional issue concerned women's rights with respect to cooperatives and land. The Accords signed between the government and the Permanent Commissions allowed for one plot of land per family, registered in the name of the head of household (almost always the man). For returning women, this land titling practice was just one of the many problems they faced that related to traditional views of women's social position.

The return community of Victoria 20 de enero organized itself as a cooperative. The social structures in the cooperative gave overwhelming power to the central organizing committee (*comite de desarollo*). Any projects that women's organizations wanted to undertake had to be cleared with the committee. The community had difficulty dealing with issues of power and organization. To complicate matters, the tradition of not admitting to problems within the community was ingrained. Should women fight to change the social arrangements within the cooperative? Or, as one woman NGO worker asked, "should the women inscribe themselves as separate members of the cooperative, thus splitting the conception of the family?" (Crosby fieldnotes, 1994) However, with the second return (to Chacula) women's needs were not only recognized, but steps were taken to establish women's position on a more equal footing. The structures were not so hierarchical. Efforts were made to get women into the central committee. Nonetheless, when women became involved in the central committee, they felt torn between their duties on the committee and their loyalty to their organization.

It became apparent early on that the central issue for the women returnees revolved around a delicate balancing act: how to respect the communal structures of the return communities while at the same time increasing women's participation in community life. Upon their return, the communities built houses, established food co-ops, and so on, while women's organizing was not regarded as a priority.

Mama Maquin's Plan of Action for the Future emphasized the establishment of links with non-returnee women in other communities. The big question was how to go about this. Some cases of integration did not go well as the non-returnee women often saw returning women as aggressive. As one of the strongest refugee organizations in Mexico, Mama Maquin had a very clear focus: preparing women for return. Upon return, however, new questions arose. What should they do next? Should they remain an indigenous refugee women=s organization? Should they open their membership to non-returnee women? What would their relationship

9

with other women's organizations in Guatemala be?

Women's Organizing in Civil Society

At the time that the refugee return began, the Guatemalan popular movement was predominantly urban, Ladino and middle class. The effect of years of militarized violence on the popular movement was very apparent: It was fragmented and polarized. As one female activist put it, "We are the result of so many years of disintegration" (Crosby fieldnotes 1994). This started to change as Maya groups, refugees, and women began to actively participate. An emerging identity of a women's movement is now challenging the gender divisions within organized civil society.

Within the Guatemalan popular movement, some women said they "have had to struggle for their own identity" (Crosby fieldnotes, 1994), identifying the trade union and popular movements as strong influences on women's self-definition. With respect to their participation in conflict-resolution, the question many women asked was, "What is relevant to women's lives?" Another question frequently posed was, "What women are we talking about?" (ibid). It is essential to consider the boundaries of "race", ethnicity and class when considering women's participation. Those women who were involved in the popular movement tended to be Ladino, although indigenous women also organized themselves (the National Coordination of Guatemalan Widows -- known as CONAVIGUA -- is predominantly indigenous). Racial boundaries with respect to organizing are clearly maintained, although this was recognized as a problem which needed to be overcome.

The women's movement in Guatemala in the mid-1990s was still in the infancy stage -- some women even claimed it did not exist. Only one organization, Tierra Viva (Living Earth), actually referred to itself as "feminist". There were, however, other women's organizations. Tierra Viva wished to be "a presence among many" and wanted women to organize to become

autonomous. But Tierra Viva also argued for the development of various forms of alliances between women, and within the popular movement more generally, and for the need to look for "other types of possibilities" for civil society (Crosby fieldnotes, 1994). This was very difficult given the context of social disintegration (for a more detailed discussion of women's organizing in Guatemala, see Blacklock in this volume). As one female member of the popular movement stated:

> There is no respect for diversity, for the idea that others can have their own voices. The militarized identity of Guatemalan society has allowed few possibilities for socialization. It is very difficult to be a feminist in this kind of culture (ibid).

This began to change however, particularly with the formation of the Assembly of Civil Society when the agenda for the peace negotiation process was set during the March Accords in 1994. The trade unions, the popular movement, and the University of San Carlos together provided the major impetus for the process. The main purpose of the Assembly was to allow civil society to respond to the issues being debated in the peace process.[6] Although the Assembly argued that it would be inconceivable to visualize a peace process without the active participation of as many diverse organized sectors of society as possible, women were not, initially, going to be included as a sector in the Assembly. The Assembly cited as its objectives the fostering of maximum consensus among diverse sectors, the identification of common interests, and the negotiation of points of conflict. In this way, it would be able to give recommendations and suggestions to the formal peace process (Assembly of Civil Society, Internal Documents).

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[6] These themes were: resettlement of populations displaced by armed conflict; identity and rights of indigenous peoples; socio-economic issues and the agrarian question; strengthening of civil society and the role of the military in a democratic society; constitutional reforms and the electoral process.

At first, women from various elements of the popular movement had to fight to be represented. They presented their arguments to the chair of the Assembly, Monseñor Quezada, and, after much struggle, were admitted as a sector (*La República*, 10 May 1994). Their colleagues in the Assembly had difficulty accepting their presence, and their derision ranged from heckling to indifference to frank opposition. Gradually, though, they started to listen to the ideas and suggestions put forward by the women's groups. The women also experienced many internal problems and tensions but eventually started to coalesce, learning much from having to work collaboratively and discover common ground. They noted that the lessons learned from this experience must not be lost, and that they must learn to duplicate the process in other situations. Only by working together could spaces for women be created and opened up. In the end, all elements of civil society participated, including the trade union and the popular movement, research institutions, human rights groups, Maya associations, the press, women, the Catholic Church and political parties. The only group that declined to participate was the private sector.

At the same time, returnee and non-returnee women were beginning to explore the possibilities of collaboration. Local women's groups began to develop contacts with returning refugee women's organizations in 1994. One early example of successful collaboration were the demonstrations in the Ixcán against the military presence there. Some international non-governmental organizations started projects that included both returnee and non-returnee women. However, tensions and differences were also acknowledged: the returned women "have been through a process. They have had the possibility for self-evaluation" (Crosby fieldnotes, 1994). The refugee women were seen as not having defined the nature of their presence upon return. What kinds of relationships do they want to establish? As Guatemala moves towards a post-peace accord era, what are the implications of the politics of negotiation between returnee and non-returnee women for the popular movement as it meets the challenges of difficult and uncertain times?

Conclusion: To Whom Shall the Guatemalan Nation Belong?

As this chapter has shown in an exploratory fashion, counter-narratives being shaped by indigenous communities, refugees and women are challenging the dominance of traditional elites within Guatemalan society, but such contestations are fragile and fragmented. The capacity of still dominant national narratives to suppress any external threats must not be underestimated, as the military's massacre of eleven people in the refugee return community of Aurora 8 de octubre, Xmán in 1995 violently demonstrated.

I have attached particular importance to the space currently being negotiated by returnee and non-returnee women within the Guatemalan popular movement, and the possibilities that this presents for enabling civil society to meet the challenges of the post-peace accord era. These women have demonstrated a capacity for innovation that is eroding the dichotomizing and polarizing ways of thinking created by a culture of fear. The women who took part in the Assembly of Civil Society and who worked together to form a women's sector emphasized the importance of the experience of discovering common ground. Returning refugee women and women within the Guatemalan popular movement identified the need to construct a Guatemalan women's movement. Such a movement is needed to enable women to play a decisive role in their country's future -- "peace is to be lived daily" (Crosby fieldnotes, 1994).

These various dialogues across the boundaries, which in particular encompass new, previously unimaginable, practices of cooperation, and an acceptance of difference, are resulting in an emerging alternative sense of ownership of the "nation". As the women say, "We are Guatemalans, and we need to feel that we are a part of the Guatemalan nation" (Crosby fieldnotes 1994). The challenge is to search for ways of building on and strengthening this active and participatory sense of national belonging.

11

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