2015-01-01

La Otra Frontera: Exiles, Engineering, and State Power in the Chiapan Borderlands

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LA OTRA FRONTERA: EXILES, ENGINEERING, AND STATE POWER IN THE CHIAPAN BORDERLANDS

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Dedication

To Natalia and Sofia.

LA OTRA FRONTERA: EXILES, ENGINEERING, AND STATE POWER IN THE CHIAPAN BORDERLANDS

by

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DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

the University of Texas at El Paso

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

or the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of History

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

May 2015

Acknowledgements

I want to thank all the great faculty and the fellow students at The University of Texas at El Paso for their scholarly support. Special thanks goes my chair, Sam Brunk, for his patience in advising me through the process. Finally, thanks to my family, friends, and an infinite thank you, hug, and promise of a vacation soon to Natalia.

Abstract

This dissertation examines the political, cultural, and economic history of the Chiapan borderlands from its political incorporation into the post-independence Mexican state in 1821 until the arrival of Guatemalan refugees in the 1980's. This history is explored through the directives, interactions, and policies of officials from Mexico City as the borderlands drifted in and out of the orbit of the priorities of the changing governments of independent Mexico.

A large part of the dissertation examines how the post-revolutionary Mexican state re-discovered and conceptualized the borderlands as a both a threat to national security and a potential site of energy derived from its natural resources, especially the Usumacinta and Grijalva rivers. Utilizing national archives the narrative traces how the growing federal bureaucracy sought to control the borderlands through demographic commissions, increased border patrols, and finally the many arms of national security apparatus. Meanwhile, Mexican diplomats and engineers viewing the history of their interactions with the United States through optimistic lenses, sought to engage their traditional rival of Guatemala in transboundary cooperation. For decades Mexican officials presented plans for shared demarcation and management of borderland rivers to their Guatemalan counterparts, a necessary step for Mexican engineers to build planned massive hydroelectric dams on rivers that began south of the boundary line. Finally, the dissertation examines the reaction by key departments of the Mexican state, such as the military, to the arrival of thousands of Guatemalan refugees fleeing the brutal counterinsurgeny of the 1980's. As Mexican officials sought to close the border, the influential Dioceses of San Cristobal de las Casas, led by Bishop Samuel Ruiznon-government institutions in the absence of moral state power.

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Introduction:
Glimpses of the Chiapan Borderlands

Mexico's southern border stretches for seven hundred miles from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic; the Chiapan borderlands comprise four hundred of those miles. Most of the border, like its northern counterpart, is defined by water. The Suchiate river plays the role of the Rio Grande, the Usumacinta and Grijalva rivers those of the Colorado and Tijuana. Starting from the Pacific, and going against the current, the Suchiate runs east past the Chiapan borderland's most populous region, Soconusco. It passes by refurbished German coffee plantations now part of heritage tours and carries the brisk illegal exchange of people and goods back and forth between Guatemala and Mexico on pieced-together homemade *lanchas* that threaten to disintegrate into the water. The Suchiate then heads northeast, moving under recently completed bridges connecting towns with dueling nationalistic names, such as Tecún Umán, Guatemala and Ciudad Hidalgo, Mexico. The Suchiate then rises into the Sierra Madre of Chiapas. There the Tacaná Volcano, the source of the Suchiate, marks the northern end of an active range of peaks stretching south into Guatemala. As the border continues east, the high peaks of the Sierra Madre descend into the cattle-grazing plains of the region known as La Mesilla; the markets of the main urban center, the city of Comitán, attract Guatemalan and Mexican traders.[1] The plains stop at the Lacandon Jungle. For years the jungle remained a blank spot on the map, home to countless plants and animals, Mayan temples, and the decayed remnants of the hastily built structures of the nineteenth-century loggers and chicleros who braved its isolation in the pursuit of riches.

[1] In 1915 the city changed its name to Comitán de Domínguez to honor its native son, the revolutionary martyr Belisario Domínguez. Elected to the Senate in 1912, his public speeches denouncing President Victoriano Huerta caused his death at the hands of Huerta henchmen, on October 13, 1913. The text reflects the common usage in the region and refers to the city simply as Comitán.

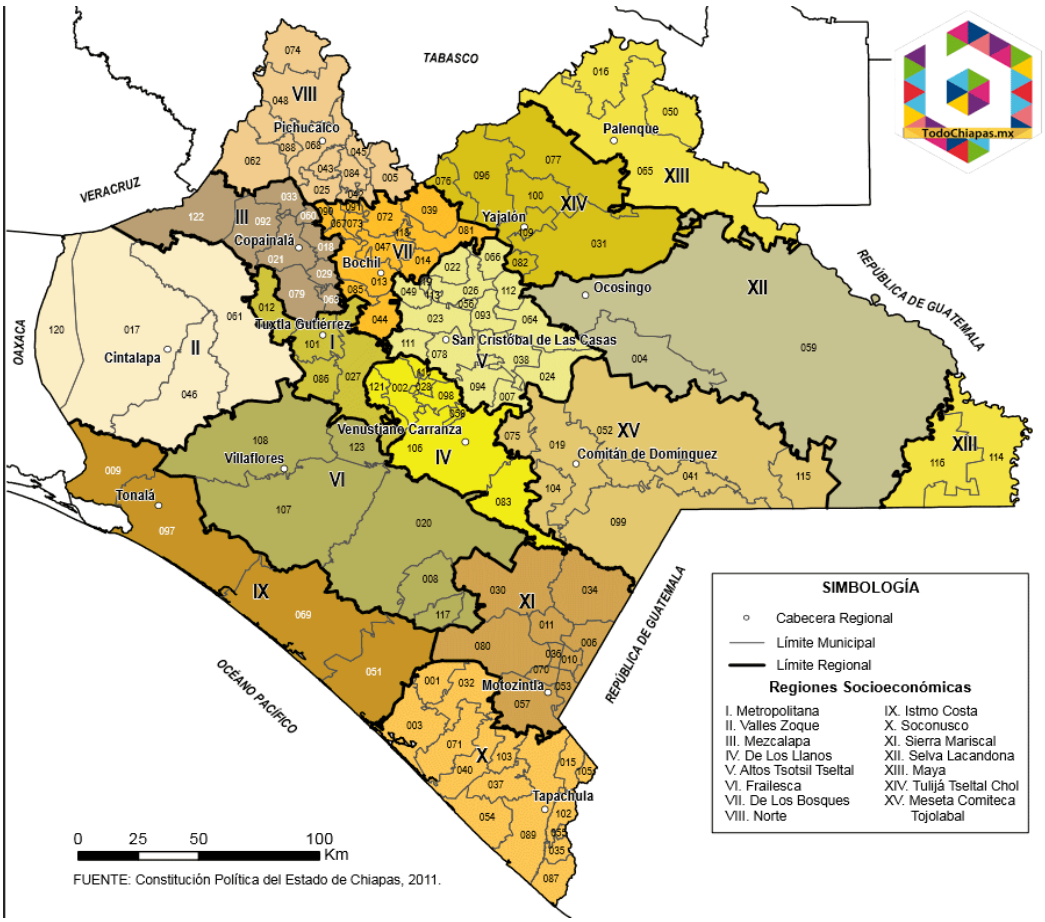

Figure 1 "Mapas geográficos." Gobierno del Estado de Chiapas, Accessed March 19, 2015 http://www.chiapas.gob.mx/mapas/#territoriales

These Chiapan borderlands are relatively new. Guatemala only officially conceded that Chiapas was part of Mexico in 1882, and the outlines of the political boundary were only agreed upon in 1895. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, in comparison to the rest of the country, the Chiapan borderlands have remained sparsely populated. In 1910, on the eve of the revolution, in a nation of around fifteen million, approximately 80,000 people called the municipalities of the Chiapan borderlands home. The entire state of Chiapas could only claim

440,000.[2] That pivotal event in Mexican history, the revolution, according to both academic and popular thought, never arrived in Chiapas. Or at least, if it did arrive, according to this viewpoint, then the counter-revolutionaries put it down.[3]

In 1948 the Pan-American Highway, which stretched across Mexico from the northern border city of Ciudad Juárez to the southern town straddling the Guatemalan border, Ciudad Cuauhtémoc, finally was completed. In the borderland city of Comitán, only a few dozen miles from the end of the line, a dirt road was replaced with pavement, connecting it with the rest of the country. An abundance of new cars, new fashions, and new people arrived. The men in town multiplied, as salesmen and travelers from the north passed through looking for female companionship, disrupting the traditional rituals of courtship. The 1950 Pan-American Race brought the world to the city of Comitán, as racers from around the globe made their way to the borderlands. Without electricity during the day, and therefore unable to know from the radio who was winning, families from the borderland city camped out along the road all day, waiting to catch a glimpse of the international group of drivers.[4]

Jorge Carrillo Olea, the longtime Mexican government insider, related an anecdote to me regarding his brief stint in 1976 as the Undersecretary of the Treasury. New to the job, he embarked on a tour to the north and the south to analyze the trading zones Mexico shared with the U.S. and Guatemala. Upon reporting back to President Echeverría — with whom he shared a close relationship — Carrillo told him, "You know we have two borders."[5] Along the U.S.-

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[2] Manuel Angel Castillo, Mónica Toussaint Ribot, and Mario Vázquez Olivera, *Espacios diversos, historia en común: México, Guatemala y Belice, la construcción de una frontera* (México: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2006), 28-29.

[3] Juan Pedro Viqueira, "Los Peligros del Chiapas Imaginario," *Letras Libres* 1 (1999): 24.

[4] Caroney de Zebadúda María Antonia, "Aquella carrera panamericana," in *Diez Ramas de un Árbol* (Comitán de Domínguez, Consejo Municipal de la Crónica, 2012), 129-134.

[5] Jorge Carrillo Olea, interview with author October 2, 2012, Cuernavaca, México.

Mexico border he surveyed the bustling trade of the burgeoning maquilas. In the *zonas libres* connecting sister cities like Tijuana-San Diego and Ciudad Juárez-El Paso, he saw the constant stream of trucks carrying goods back and forth. In the Chiapan borderlands he watched with the border guards the home-made *lanchas* cross.

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries for many Mexicans in the center of the country the Chiapan borderlands were at best a series of brief exotic vignettes, a region disconnected from the national narrative and the imagined community of Hidalgo and Villa.[6] The dense landscape and the indigenous people of the Lacandon Jungle anchored the romantic and derogatory image of backwardness connected to a pre-Hispanic past. In the twentieth century the region became an opportunity for intrepid adventurers to travel back in time by interacting with the region's indigenous people. For example, in 1961 the Sonoran journalist Tito Gallegos S. traveled into the bush to meet with, "the chiefs of the jungle: the Lacandones, direct descendants of the Mayas, a race that still enjoys universal acclaim for its knowledge and its refined artistic spirit reached in its greatest epic." Gallegos described their curious accents, their short stature, and the jungle overgrowth that seemed limitless.[7] In 1970, when Comitán native Jose Gustavo Trujillo left to study architecture at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, he remembers his *chilango* classmates asking him if he lived with monkeys back home.[8]

For many political observers and the average Mexican, the rise of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Ejército Zapatista de Liberacióenousn Nacional) in 1994, brought Chiapas out of its historic isolation, thrusting the state into the national and world spotlights. After the revolt a cartoonist depicted President Carlos Salinas de Gortari exclaiming, "Damn! We forgot

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[6] For the concept of imagined communities, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

[7] Tito Gallegos S., "En La Legendaria Selva Lacandon," *La Voz del Sureste,* April 29, 1961.

[8] Jose Gustavo Trujillo, interview with author December 5, 2012, Comitán de Domínguez, México.

that Chiapas is also part of Mexico!"[9] The communiques from Subcomandante Marcos in the Lacandon Jungle seemed to reinforce this narrative as he highlighted the immense poverty in the state:

> Education? The worst in the country. At the elementary school level, 72 out of every 100 children don't finish the first grade. More than half of the schools only offer up to a third-grade education and half of the schools only have one teacher for all the courses offered….Industry? Look, 40% of Chiapas's "industry" consists of Nixtamal mills, tortillas, and wood furniture mills…..Fifty-four percent of the population of Chiapas suffer from malnutrition, and in the highlands and forest this percentage increases to 80 percent. A campesino's average diet consists of coffee, corn, tortillas, and beans."[10]

It is impossible to talk about the Chiapan borderlands without mentioning its role in the world's first major post-Cold War political revolt. However, this dissertation is not interested in connecting the history of Chiapas to what academics, and sympathizers, tend to depict as an inevitable reaction by the region's indigenous people to the new world economic and political order symbolized by the North American Free Trade Agreement.[11] Instead, one of the questions guiding this dissertation, not often asked by historians of the region, is whether Mexico really did forget about the borderlands (and if so, why). This dissertation complicates the question and the answer by exploring the interactions between the borderlands and the central Mexican

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[9] Jorge Volpi Escalante, *La guerra y las palabras: una historia intelectual de 1994* (México: Ediciones Era, 2004), 21-22.

[10] Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, *Zapatistas!: Documents of the New Mexican Revolution: December 31, 1993-June 12, 1994* (New York: Autonomedia, 1994), 23.

[11] See for example Tom Hayden, *The Zapatista Reader* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press/Nation Books, 2002). With contributions by such luminaries as Gabriel García Márquez, José Saramago, Homero Aridjis, and Elena Poniatowska, the Zapatista Rebellion gave a post-Cold War Left a new cause, globalization, to rally against, and a new hero, Marcos, to replace Che Guevara and Fidel Castro.

government. The policies enacted by the state neither entirely ignored nor abandoned the borderlands, but rather reflected an understanding of the borderlands as foreign, a door to Central American political disorder and, finally, a source of great natural resources for the Mexican nation.

This dissertation takes a broad view of the history of the borderlands beginning in 1821 with Mexican independence and the decades-long struggle to incorporate Chiapas into the new state and continuing through the Guatemalan Refugee Crisis of the 1980's. By spanning nearly two centuries, it can better examine issues such as historical memory as well as the changes in the region during the whole of the 20th century with the introduction of the modern Mexican state. This breadth also allows me to contextualize the state of Chiapas in its entirety as a borderlands region: for much of the nineteenth century the defining political, cultural, and economic aspect of the region was its contested border with Guatemala. This perception, I argue, defined Chiapas as a borderlands state well into the twentieth century, with meaningful implications for the region. Although much of the dissertation focuses on areas close to the political border, the state as was often understood in popular thought as a region more Guatemalan than Mexican. Much as the historiography of the U.S.-Mexico border has expanded the conceptualization of borderlands past the narrow region that straddles the political boundaries of neighboring nations, I will examine the greater borderlands area of Chiapas.

The viewpoint of this dissertation is from the center. In large part this reflects the archival material consulted in Mexico City. From the Archivo General de la Nación I utilize the memos, regional evaluations, and the reports of agents and soldiers in the field from the Secretariat of Defense, the Federal Security Directorate and the General Directorate of Political and Social Investigation to study the concerns of the officials of the Mexican national security

apparatus. The Presidential Archives located at the AGN, ranging from that of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) to that of Miguel de la Madrid (1982-1988), provide a key insight into the initiatives and viewpoints emanating from Los Pinos, while the dialogue between federal and state officials at the border and in Mexico City reveals the development of policy and the impressions of the border of those close to power. Finally, at the Secretariat of Foreign Relations, the archives of the International Boundary and Water Commission between Mexico and Guatemala are valuable in documenting the work of the engineers, surveyors, and bureaucratic officials working on the border itself.

Considering the region's history from the center allows me to explore issues not previously studied, such as national security and infrastructure development. Historians of Mexico have cautioned us to avoid the reification of the Mexican state, noting that "the state is not a thing."[12] The increasing presence of the state, however, and especially of powerful bureaus such as the Secretariat of Hydraulic Resources, was critical in the Chiapan borderlands. State actions seemed even more powerful in the post-revolutionary years because for a large part of its history, from 1821 to the end of the nineteenth century, the Mexican state was largely absent from the borderlands, as its sovereignty was contested by Guatemalans that cited historical, colonial claims. Thus, an important and understudied aspect of the history of the borderlands is the introduction of the policies and representatives of the state and their interactions with the region. But it is true that the state was not a monolith. Rather, it was composed of officials, soldiers, and national security agents sent to enact policy, create commissions, and guard against foreign — that is, Guatemalan — incursions. This dissertation examines the impact of the state though the actions of such figures. Using censuses,

[12] Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniel Nugents, eds. *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994).

demarcations, border-patrol checkpoints, and hydrometric surveys, they sought to control, exploit, and incorporate the borderlands into Mexico.

A large part of the history of this incorporation is how Mexican officials came to understand the southern border and their relationship with Guatemala through the lens of their experiences on the U.S.-Mexico border. Mexican diplomats chose to interpret and promote their interactions with the United States as positive, especially regarding transnational management of the border. They ignored clear examples of the United States rejecting cooperation, such as U.S. refusal to abide by a 1911 international arbiter's decision to return the bulk of the Chamizal to Mexico. In that instance, a Canadian mediator decided against the United States' argument that the shifting of the Rio Grande also moved the political border, and in the case of the Chamizal, legally added land to the United States.[13] Mexican diplomats ignored this instance of bullying by their northern neighbor and instead emphasized agreements leading to joint energy and irrigation projects. The 1944 Treaty for the Utilization of Waters of the Colorado and Tijuana Rivers and of the Rio Grande, in particular, became key to this interpretation, its impact measured in the building of bi-national dams and the watering of millions of acres of desert. With examples of cooperation like this fresh in mind, Mexico often sought to emulate the bi-national framework of the northern border, a situation with which their Guatemalan counterparts had no experience, in the Chiapan borderlands.

Finally, a key, and often overlooked, element of the Mexican state's policies towards the borderlands was the control and monitoring of the transnational movement of Guatemalans by the modern Mexican security apparatus. Guatemalan laborers, exiles, and those borderlanders who routinely lived and worked on both sides of the political boundary worried Mexico City

[13] Jeffrey M. Schulze, "The Chamizal Blues: El Paso, the Wayward River, and the Peoples in Between," *Western Historical Quarterly* 3 (2012): 301-324.

officials and politicians. They feared that exiles could promote political discontent in Mexico and erode already tense relations with Guatemala by utilizing the borderlands as a staging ground for revolution.

This dissertation examines these multifaceted interactions by conceptualizing the Chiapan borderlands as a fugitive landscape. I borrow the concept from historians Raymond B. Craib and Samuel Truett. Truett utilizes the concept of "fugitive landscape" to describe a mostly "wild frontier" in the borderlands of Arizona and Sonora, rich with copper and other economic promise. He focuses on how the capitalist dreams of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century U.S. entrepreneurs met loud and costly deaths from labor revolts, a formidable geography of mountains and desert and, finally, political strife.[14] Craib focuses on the nation-building significance of the work of surveyors deployed by the nineteenth-century federal Mexican government. Much like Matthew Edney's work on colonial India, Craib examines the close relationship between cartography, spatial knowledge, and state power.[15] Unlike those of Truett, Craib's fugitive landscapes were not borderlands, but the increasingly intersecting communities of Veracruz. He explores how bureaucrats who were employed in surveying had to satisfy conflicting claims by communities disputing scarce land and other resources. The territory and people in Craib's study lay outside the state's ability to codify and control -- especially in terms of the government maps that, symbolically and practically, signified the political and economic integration of the region into the Mexican state.[16]

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[14]Samuel Truett, *Fugitive Landscapes: The Forgotten History of the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New Haven: Yale University Press: 2006).

[15] Matthew H Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765-1843* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997). Edney borrows Michel Foucault's interpretation of the panopticon to describe the spatial power of state mapping.

[16] Raymond B. Craib, *Cartographic Mexico: A History of State Fixations and Fugitive Landscapes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

Truett and Craib's fugitive landscapes are important as conceptual paradigms in approaching the Chiapan borderlands. A helpful theoretical context for how Mexico City sees such borderlands is James Scott's *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. Although Scott's explorations of the societal and political conditions motivating such state-sponsored disasters as China's Great Leap Forward do not fit exactly with the events covered in this dissertation, his points are highly relevant regarding the state's desire and willingness to control landscapes and communities. The Mexican government's plans for the borderlands invoked larger national goals that, to borrow from Scott, only a state could see, such as national security, energy development, and sovereignty, all of which would demand a degree of control of a fugitive landscape.[17]

But while a landscape might seem fugitive from the perspective of state security officials, or even surveyors, it is important to note that for many borderlanders there was nothing particularly fugitive about their home. This proved true especially for those borderlanders who simply gave little thought to Mexico's federal government or a political boundary never recognized on the ground. Those that avoided the encroaching presence of the state, such as smugglers, were simply continuing a practice that existed long before the arrival of the newly established border patrol in the 1920's. However, just as often as borderlanders deliberately or inadvertently ignored the state, the dialogue between the Chiapan borderlands and the center exposed an anxiousness for the state's attention in the form of funding for infrastructure and communication with the interior of Mexico. Throughout much of the period examined in this dissertation, many Chiapanecos lamented the state of the borderlands, which often seemed more forgotten than fugitive.

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[17] James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

Historiography

Until very recently the same, slightly paraphrased, question posed by Carrillo to President Echeverría could have been posed to U.S. and Mexican historians of the Chiapan borderlands: "you know, Mexico has two borders."

The works of Rosalva Aída Hernández Castillo and Catherine Nolan-Ferrell are among the few to focus on and adopt a borderlands approach to the Chiapan borderlands. Both historians examine migrating indigenous Guatemalan workers attracted to Chiapas, and in particular the region of Soconusco, by employment opportunities in its booming coffee fields. Nolan-Ferrell analyzes late nineteenth and early twentieth century Soconusco, populated by a transient workforce and racist, mostly German, planters who promoted a eugenics infused notion of progress. Nolan-Ferrell argues that Soconusco failed to form a Mexican national identity, remaining a coffee island on the edge of the country. Hernández Castillo analyzes the Mayan Mam who first came to Chiapas from Guatemala during the early part of the twentieth century. She analyzes government efforts, underlined by an indigenista ideology, during the post-revolutionary period, to suppress Mam cultural practices identified as foreign, while also tying Mam communities to the state through the National Indigenist Institute.[18]

There is a greater number of works focusing on the political and economic formation of Chiapas from the sixteenth century Spanish *entrada* to the early twentieth century. As in the works of the noted historian of Chiapas, Jan de Vos, they incorporate the frontier as a gateway, noting the cultural and economic influences and similarities shared by both Guatemalan and

[18] Rosalva Aída Hernández Castillo, *Histories and Stories from Chiapas: Border Identities in Southern Mexico*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001); Catherine Nolan-Ferrell, *Constructing Citizenship: Transnational Workers and Revolution on the Mexico-Guatemala Border, 1880-1950* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012).

Mexican indigenous groups, though avoiding extensive discussion of the interaction of Mexicans with the historical actors beyond the political boundary, which is a key component of borderlands scholarship.[19] Two comprehensive edited volumes, the first in 1985 and the second in 2006, seek to fill in the gaps in Mexican historiography, highlighting Mexican aggression during post-Independence territorial squabbles with Central America, and the powerful role of transnational corporations in shaping political boundaries.[20] Monographs by Jennifer P. Mathews and Gillian P. Schultz, and Mario Eduardo Valdez Gordillo, along with a few articles, have concentrated on the process and role of chicle extraction in the jungles of the southern border in attracting investment, workers from across Mexico and Central America, and political pressure from North American corporations.[21]

Especially helpful have been those works that examine the history of twentieth century politics in Chiapas by studying the often byzantine and violent histories of politicians, finqueros, labor organizers, and revolutionaries. Thomas Benjamin's detailed examination of the political and economic machinations of Chiapan elites during the twentieth century reveals the cauldron of social unrest and economic inequality that simmered beneath the surface. Benjamin's work has become a touchstone in the historiography by describing how local forces, often in league

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[19]For representative example of his work see Jan de Vos, *Oro verde: la conquista de la Selva Lacandoña por los madereros tabasqueños; 1822 – 1949* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1988); Jan de Vos, *Vivir en frontera: la experiencia de los indios de Chiapas* (Tlalpan: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, 1997).

[20] Mariano Baez et al., *La formacion historica de la frontera sur* (México: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, 1985); Manuel Angel Castillo, Mónica Toussaint Ribot, and Mario Vázquez Olivera, *Espacios diversos, historia en común: México, Guatemala y Belice: la construcción de una frontera* (México: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2006).

[21] Jennifer P Mathews and Gillian P. Schultz, *Chicle: the Chewing Gum of the Americas, from the Ancient Maya to William Wrigley* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009); Mario Eduardo Valdez Gordillo, *Desencuentro y encuentro de fronteras: El Petén guatemalteco y el sureste mexicano, 1895-1949* (Tuxtla Gutiérrez: Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas, 2006); Oscar A. Forero and Michael Redclift, "The Role of the Mexican State in the Development of Chicle Extraction in Yucatán, and the Continuing Importance of Coyotaje," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 38 (2006), 65-93.

with national allies, violently resisted any efforts by Chiapanecos to claim the revolution's promise of agricultural, labor, and political reform. The state's resources, the rich land with its cattle and coffee, became closed off to those not connected to the levers of power.[22] Stephen E. Lewis's examination of the impact of Cárdenas-era education policy has been especially helpful in revealing the difficulties the state experienced in implementing its policy initiatives in Chiapas. The Cárdenas regime became the first post-revolutionary government intent on extending its reach into the borderlands. The local elite's resistance to the socialist federal schools revealed the difficulties the federal government had in promoting its cultural, educational, and economic programs in the distant state.[23]

Andrés Aubry's study *Chiapas a contrapelo: Una agenda de trabajo para su historia en perspectiva sistémica* (2005), has helped me conceptualize the periodization of Chiapan history and the region's situation in world, national, and regional history. Aubry characterizes the latter half of the twentieth century as "la política del crímen," when the Mexican state violently repressed resistance to the post-revolutionary order, and "la mutación de Chiapas," when the exploitation of the valuable natural resources of the region caused further political, economic, and ecological misery.[24]

Especially illuminating in helping me think about issues of resistance have been those works examining the burgeoning social movements, starting in the 1970's, among the indigenous communities. In particular Neil Harvey's *The Chiapas Rebellion: The Struggle for Land and Democracy* (1998) has served as great resource in charting the development and struggles of the

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[22] Thomas Benjamin, *A Rich Land, a Poor People: Politics and Society in Modern Chiapas* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).

[23] Stephen E. Lewis, *The Ambivalent Revolution: Forging State and Nation in Chiapas, 1910-1945* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005).

[24] Andrés Aubry, *Chiapas a contrapelo: una agenda de trabajo para su historia en perspectiva sistémica* (México: Centro de Estudios, Información y Documentación Immanuel Wallerstein, 2005).

number of local and statewide organizations that advocated for political and economic rights.[25] Related works examining the political and social impact of the Diocese of San Cristóbal led by Bishop Samuel Ruiz García have helped me in understanding the practical and theological evolution of the church. Considering the important role the church played upon arrival of thousands of Guatemalan refugees, Jean Meyer's, *Samuel Ruiz en San Cristóbal 1960 - 2000* (2000) has been invaluable in explaining intellectual influences and on the ground pastoral experiences that shaped the church's eventual approach to the refugees.[26]

After the flood of refugees into Chiapas in the early 1980s, social scientists conducting fieldwork and working with NGOs such as Americas Watch have focused on the impact and treatment of the Guatemalan refugees by national and local Mexican governments.[27] A few of the key works include Beatriz Manz's *Refugees of a Hidden War: The Aftermath of Counterinsurgency in Guatemala* (1988), the edited volume, *La experiencia de refugio en Chiapas: nuevas relaciones en la frontera sur mexicana* (1993), and the recent collection, *Flujos migratorios en la frontera Guatemala-México* (2009). Guadalupe Rodríguez de Ita's book *La política mexicana de asilo diplomático a la luz del caso Guatemalteco, 1944-1954* (2003), explores older policies toward exiles: the Mexican government's policy towards Guatemalan politicians, labor leaders, and others connected to the October Revolutionary government who were forced to flee Guatemala after the military coup of 1954.[28]

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[25] Neil Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion: The Struggle for Land and Democracy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

[26] Jean Meyer, *Samuel Ruiz en San Cristóbal 1960 - 2000* (México: Tusquets Ed, 2000).

[27] See Americas Watch Committee, *Creating a Desolation and Calling It Peace: May 1983 Supplement to the Report on Human Rights in Guatemala* (New York: Americas Watch, 1983); Eliecer Valencia, *Guatemalan Refugees in Mexico, 1980-1984* (New York: Americas Watch Committee, 1984)

[28] Beatriz Manz, *Refugees of a Hidden War: The Aftermath of Counterinsurgency in Guatemala* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988); Rosalva Aída Hernández Castillo et al., *La experiencia de refugio en Chiapas: nuevas relaciones en la frontera sur mexicana* (México: Academia Mexicana de Derechos Humanos, 1993); María Eugenia Anguiano Téllez, and Rodolfo Corona V. eds., *Flujos migratorios en la frontera Guatemala-México* (México: SEGOB/Instituto Nacional de Migración/Centro de Estudios Migratorios, 2009); Guadalupe

The historiography of refugees and exile is often connected to national security issues, but very few historians have focused on the development and workings of the modern Mexican security state. A notable exception is historian Sergio Aguayo. His many works on the people and policies motivating powerful government bureaucracies such as the Federal Security Directorate have brought the study of national security out of the realm of journalistic exposes and into academic discourse. Though much of the history of institutions such as the DFS is filled with examples of corruption and human rights abuses, Aguayo aptly argues for the need of historians to examine the logic, fears, and paranoia that guided the national security apparatus of twentieth century Mexico.[29]

Many national security concerns were prompted by the political upheaval of Guatemala during the twentieth century. Studies by both Jim Handy and Piero Gleijeses focusing on the tumultuous decade of 1944-1954 place that country's social, political, and economic history in an international context. Appearing in their works are the political exiles who, depending on what side they found themselves on, called Mexico home briefly or for the rest of their lives. Understanding their role during the October Revolution has helped me contextualize Mexico's national security apparatus's response to those seeking safety in the borderlands and Mexico City.[30] Nick Cullather's *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954* (2006) also features many of the Guatemalan exiles who fled to Mexico. Cullather's detailed examination of the United States role in the 1954 coup informs the cautious

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Rodríguez de Ita, *La política mexicana de asilo diplomático a la luz del caso Guatemalteco, 1944-1954* (México: Instituto Mora, 2003).

[29] See Sergio Aguayo, *La charola: una historia de los servicios de inteligencia en México*. (México.: Grijalbo, 2001); Bruce Michael Bagley and Sergio Aguayo eds., *Mexico: In Search of Security* (Coral Gables: North-South Center, University of Miami, 1993).

[30] Jim Handy, *Revolution in the Countryside: Rural Conflict and Agrarian Reform in Guatemala, 1944-1954* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944-1954* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991)

approach Mexico took on the diplomatic stage in publicly supporting the Árbenz Regime as it unsuccessfully sought allies in its final moments.[31] Finally, Susanne Jonas's *The Battle for Guatemala: Rebels, Death Squads, and U.S. Power* (1991) examines the economic, political, and social history following the 1954 coup. She describes the complex history of military controlled governments connected to large landowning elites violently suppressing efforts at reform, and later revolution, by the largely indigenous population. Jonas's work explains not only the history behind the violent counterinsurgency of the late 1970's early 1980's, but also motives for Mexican elites to worry over the similarities between the conditions of social unrest in Guatemala and the Chiapan borderlands. [32]

Finally, the dissertation owes an intellectual debt to the expansive historiography on the U.S.-Mexico Border. Foundational studies such as David Weber's, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846: The American Southwest Under Mexico* (1982) and *Foreigners in their Native Land: Historical Roots of the Mexican-Americans* (1972), have provided a conceptual model and reminder to situate the Chiapan borderlands both in and outside of the narrative of the nation state.[33] Kelly Lytle-Hernandez's study of the United States border patrol serves as an instructive model in describing national and local efforts to harden a border. Her detailed examination of policy and those called to enforce the policy have been helpful in understanding the development of efforts at border enforcement in the Chiapan borderlands.[34] Finally, though not a borderlands

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[31] Nick Cullather, *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2006).

[32] Susanne Jonas, *The Battle for Guatemala: Rebels, Death Squads, and U.S. Power* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991).

[33] David Weber, *The Mexican Frontier: 1821-1846 the American Southwest Under Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982); David Weber, *Foreigners in their Native Land: Historical Roots of the Mexican Americans* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1972).

[34] Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Migra! A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

work, Fredrich Katz's *Secret War in Mexico*, which conceptualizes of the closing of Mexico's northern frontier during the Porfiriato through the introduction of large scale capital and development of infrastructure, prompted a similar question regarding if, and when, the Chiapan borderlands lost its porous nature.[35]

This dissertation adds to this diverse historiography through its exploration of the relationship between the center and the borderlands through its examination of previously unstudied federal bureaus such as the International Boundary and Water Commission between Guatemala and Mexico and the Demographic Commission of 1935. Through the study of the motivations of the politicians who formed and directed these fragments of the state, as well as the officials who carried out their mandates, this dissertation studies the effort by the center to integrate the Chiapan borderlands into the nation through control of the movement of people across the border and exploitation of the region's resources.

This dissertation brings both Katz's and Truett's conceptualizations of the borderlands south. Drawing on Katz, I ask if the introduction of capital and efforts by the center at political integration truly hardened the southern frontier into a border, bringing the region under the control of the center. For Truett, capital alone could not control a fugitive landscape. His borderlands were outside of the gaze of national history, its people beyond state control, its political boundaries ignored or willfully avoided. I answer that the Chiapan borderlands retained aspects of a fugitive landscape much as Truett described well into the twentieth century as the arrival of the Guatemalan revolutionaries and refugees demonstrated that despite the large-scale infrastructure projects of the sixties and seventies, and the increasing presence of national security officials, control of the region was at times illusory. Precise survey maps and mega-

[35] Friedrich Katz, *The Secret War in Mexico: Europe, the United States, and the Mexican Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

dams managed by the engineers of newly created government bureaus did not mean a government presence in areas like the Lacandon. Finally, the proximity of a genocidal civil war in Guatemala meant any hardening of the border, giving the line on the map real significance on the ground, only made it more attractive for Guatemalans seeking safety by crossing it, bringing with them a conflict the Mexican government wanted no part of, but ultimately could not avoid.

Structure of the Dissertation

Chapter one, "A Stateless Land: 1821-1882," places the Chiapan borderlands within the larger history of nineteenth century Latin American boundary disputes. Following independence, Guatemala and Mexico, like many newly formed states in the region, struggled to manage the transition from preexisting colonial jurisdictions to modern political boundaries. This chapter examines the diplomatic and often violent struggle over Chiapas between state and non-state actors representing Mexico and Guatemala, and the impact of press accounts reinforcing among the larger Mexican public the image of a lawless borderlands. The latter half of the chapter highlights the history of Matias Romero's struggles in the borderlands. In the 1870's the former ambassador to the United States attempted to become a Soconuscan coffee farmer, buying land he believed pertained to Mexico due to the suggestion of Guatemalan strongman and fellow finquero Justo Rufino Barrios. Upon a disagreement with him -- Barrios later claimed Romero took Guatemalan land -- the former diplomat fled the borderlands in fear of his life, his failure a potent symbol of the stateless nature of the borderlands. Romero's subsequent determination to forge a boundary treaty and his boosterism of the borderlands were the start of a century long effort by the Mexican state to promote the natural resources of the

region. Finally, his history promoting Chiapas's integration as a state into Mexico represents the foundation of the historical narrative of Chiapanecos choosing to be part of the Mexican state.

Chapter two,"The State Approaches: Logging, Revolution, and the Demographic Commission: 1882-1956" picks up from the signing of the 1882 Treaty of Limits. This chapter examines the contentious binational demarcation of the border, the sale of large tracts of the Lacandon to foreign logging companies during the Porfiriato, the muted impact of the revolution in Chiapas, and the establishment of the 1935 Demographic Commission. The chapter's examination of these pivotal events in the borderlands reflects the history and nature of the changing federal government. From the laissez-faire auction of natural resources during the Porfiriato to the xenophobic policies of the post-revolutionary government, the political priorities of the federal government found their extreme expression in the borderlands. The Demographic Commission is a crucial part of this chapter. Its composition represented part of the Cárdenas regime's attempt to establish a federal government presence in the region. Plagued by corruption, discontent of federal officials assigned to what was considered a hardship post, and the porous nature of the border, its ultimate failure symbolized the difficulties encountered by the state in its efforts to harden the political boundary.

Chapter three, "Engineers Come to Chiapas," pivots on post-revolutionary Mexico's diplomatic approach to Guatemala, as concerns the shared management of resources in the borderlands through replication of the International Boundary and Water Commission between Mexico and the United States. For decades, until finally securing the establishment of the Mexican-Guatemalan Commission in 1961, Mexican diplomats stubbornly attempted to convince their longtime rivals of the value of cooperation, especially as concerned the region's rivers. A shifting Suchiate potentially meant a change in the border and even a loss of land,

similar to what occurred with the Chamizal along the Rio Grande. In addition, the sources of the powerful Usumacinta and Grijalva rivers were located in Guatemala, and any interference upriver would disrupt Mexico's planned mega-hydroelectric projects of the 1960's and 1970's. Securing cooperation became a key part of Mexico's efforts to harness the resources of the borderlands to provide power for the growing economy of the nation.

Chapter four, "Exiles in the Borderlands: Generals, Intellectuals, and the October Revolution: 1944-1954," situates the history of exile in the borderlands within the larger history of exile in Latin America, exploring the region as a particular site of exile for Guatemalans since independence. Guatemalan adventurers, politicians, and would-be national leaders, such as Barrios, had retreated to the borderlands to escape persecution, gather resources, and plan triumphant returns. This chapter focuses in particular on the impact, reaction, and policies of the Mexican government towards Guatemalans in exile from the 1944 October Revolution until the dissolution of the October Revolutionary government in 1954. For first time in borderlands history, a burgeoning Mexican security apparatus attempted to control the activities of Guatemalan exiles, and in the case of many high profile right wing generals and politicians in 1945, ensure their distance from the border to protect the revolutionary Guatemalan government. This chapter examines the intersection of Mexican national security concerns in the borderlands with foreign policy, Cold War politics, and internal political rivalries.

Chapter five, "Students, Guerrillas, and the First Wave of Revolution: 1960-1972," continues the examination of the borderlands as a site of exile, focusing on the initial wave of Guatemalan guerrilla groups, their utilization of the borderlands as a site of operation, and how during the height of Mexico's Dirty War (Late 1960's-1970's) the borderlands became an entrance point of insurgency in the national security calculations of the Federal Security

Directorate and the Mexican military. Mexican national security concerns shifted from how Guatemalan exiles could affect the politics of their southern neighbor to how they could contribute to the growing left-wing opposition inside of Mexico.

Chapter six, "Guerrillas, Refugees, and the Church," examines the borderlands during the height of the Guatemalan Civil War (Late 1970's -1980's) when the larger second wave of the Guatemalan guerrilla movement, like the insurgent movement of previous years, utilized the borderlands to escape Guatemalan counter insurgency efforts. It also examines how the Mexican national security apparatus assessed this development in the context of the growing activism in the borderlands inspired in part by the Diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas. For that reason the federal government interpreted the arrival of thousands of refugees -- a different form of exile, these were people who were forced to participate in the political violence of the time -- as a threat to political stability. This assessment led to their forced removal from the borderlands, a violent reaction stemming from security rather humanitarian concerns.

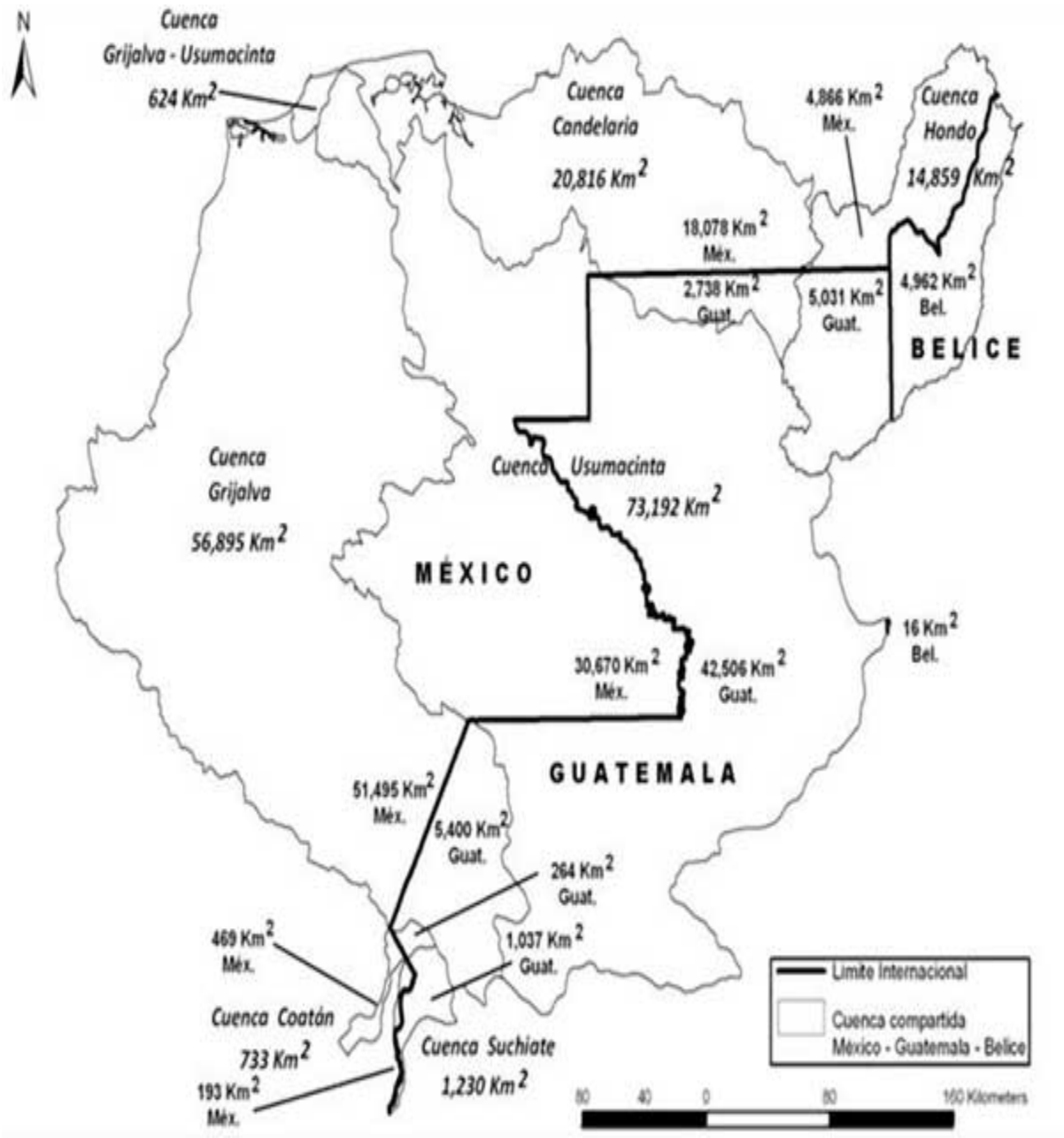

Table 1 "Cuencas compartidas." in La Jornada del Campo, June 23, 2012, Accessed May 19, 2015, http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2012/06/23/cam-cruces.html

Chapter One: A Stateless Land: 1821-1882

On February 6, 1930, Joaquín Cruz, a Guatemalan Forest Inspector assigned to the northern Petén to stop the lucrative contraband trade in the region, crossed into Mexican territory to attack the chicle camp of La Fama with a group of men from the Forest Police and the Guatemalan Army under his command.[36] After destroying the camp--wrecking furniture, cutting ropes, and overturning supplies of water crucial for the chicleros camping in the middle of the jungle--the rampaging Guatemalans turned south, leading seventeen captive employees of La Fama and eighteen mules, while leaving in their wake hundreds of pounds of chicle strewn on the forest floor. Crossing back into Guatemala, Cruz and his men then assaulted the other nearby camps, Las Ruinas and Las Fuentes, of Mexican chicle entrepreneur Francisco Buenfil. Finally, the group of prisoners and their Guatemalan escort arrived at the small town of Ciudad Flores, Petén, where Cruz locked the hapless employees of La Fama in jail, seemingly unaware he had just sparked an international dispute between Guatemala and Mexico.[37]

Though the Guatemalan Forest Inspector eventually released the jailed employees, his "invasion" of Mexico prompted years of diplomatic arguments between the two neighboring countries as to what exactly happened and who was at fault: did Cruz defend Guatemala, invade a sovereign Mexico, or act as some type of border bandit? [38] These questions were ultimately

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[36] Though it was never mentioned specifically what contraband Cruz was supposed to intercept at the time, there was a lucrative trade in transporting chicle from Mexico to Belize, skipping Guatemala as chicleros sought to avoid the higher taxes there. Jennifer P. Mathews and Gillian P. Schultz, *Chicle: The Chewing Gum of the Americas, from the Ancient Maya to William Wrigley* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009), 56.

[37] "Reclamación por asalto en estación chiclera de la Fama," Acervo Histórico Diplomático de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores (Hereafter AH-SRE), Legajo 333-11 Expedientes 204-211.

[38] Cruz's and Buenfil's activities along the border were for the most part characterized as an invasions in the diplomatic exchanges. See for example the Mexican Ambassador Eduado Hay's August 1931 letter to Mexico City summarizing negotiations in Guatemala City, "…Cruz no habría cometido el inexplicable error, por ignorancia de la frontera, de invadir nuestro territorio si no hubiera sido por las noticias que se tenían de que la gente de Buenfil estaban invadiendo y explotando, como se demostró, una ancha faja de territorio guatemalteco." "Relativo al asalto a

not answered, nor was the fundamental one: just where the border between the two "sister republics" actually lay. It is helpful to examine the La Fama incident of the 1930's in brief detail to illustrate how the conflictive political, economic, and cultural integration of the Chiapan borderlands into the Mexican nation during the 19th century shaped the reality and image of the border during the twentieth.

Joaquín Cruz's intrusion had immediate precedents. Just a year before, in May 1929, the Mexican chiclero Jose Maria Barragán complained to the Mexican Secretariat of Agriculture and Development--after being rebuffed earlier in the year by a local Guatemalan official--that in January of that year, upon his absence from his camp of San Pedro, over four hundred kilos of chicle and some mules were stolen by Guatemalan officials from Ciudad Flores. Arriving at the camp right after the theft, Barragán rushed across the border to Ciudad Flores only to have to pay two hundred dollars to the local officials to recover his mules.[39] Accepting the loss of chicle and money, Barragán instead complained that, "the border between our republic and the neighbor's has been lost." He not only sought protection from the Mexican government for himself and the other chicleros from frequent Guatemalan incursions but demanded something more profound: that the border drawn on maps become something real on the ground, that it become significant to both Mexican and Guatemalan borderlanders.[40]

Barragán's story lacked the dramatic details of La Fama. In addition, the Mexican ambassador to Guatemala at the time, Eduardo Hay, explained that the matter could be dismissed, as he had been informed that arrangements had been made to satisfy Barragán. Hay,

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las fincas chiclera que se mencionen," Eduardo Hay to Genaro Estrada, Guatemala, April 20, 1931, AH-SRE 333-11 Expediente 88.

[39] One mule, complained the chiclero, died on the way back.

[40] Jose Maria Barragán to Secretary of Agriculture and Development, Mexico, May 14, 1929, AH-SRE Legajo 331-7 Expediente 1.

however, could not escape the border incident of La Fama, nor dismiss it as easily. Making front-page news as far away as San Francisco and eventually ending up in the 1930 Presidential Address of Pascual Ortiz Rubio, Cruz's actions had repercussions far beyond the jungle-covered border.[41]

As Hay would soon find during his own investigation, the assault on La Fama encapsulated the confusion surrounding the stateless Mexican-Guatemalan border that would persist into the late twentieth century. The La Fama incident had many contributing factors: the actions of the Mexican chicleros that prompted it, the sudden violence of state actors, and the general lack of awareness, or at least respect, by both Mexican and Guatemalan borderlanders, of the border and its concomitant rights for resource extraction. In the constant private correspondence Hay sent updating the Mexican Secretary of Foreign Relations on his research into the events leading to La Fama, he admitted that the 1919 concession to collect chicle granted to Buenfil by the Mexican Secretary of Agriculture and Development was at least partly to blame for his incursion into Guatemalan territory. Hay privately acknowledged that the contract described the camps Las Ruinas and Las Fuentes as if they were in Mexican territory, when, in fact, Guatemalan Oficials had known for years that the two camps were in Guatemalan territory. However, as Hay discovered, Buenfil was not some particularly brazen entrepreneur within the borderland environment. Indeed, in the chicle extraction business, and among those who worked and lived on the southern border in general, there was little respect for international boundaries, especially considering the lack of border fencing and the fact that border monuments, where they existed, were often deeply covered in vegetation. Hay found this out for himself after he hired

[41] "Como Fue el Asalto a la Finca "La Fama," *Hispano-Americano*, March 29, 1930; Pascual Ortiz Rubio, "Informe de Gobierno del Presidente Constitucional de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos Pascual Ortiz Rubio," September 1, 1930. Accessed May 4, 2013, http://www.diputados.gob.mx/sedia/sia/re/RE-ISS-09-06-06.pdf.

an engineer and local guides to take him to the ruined chicle camps, acknowledging that only those well versed in the region would have any vague idea where the international border might be.[42]

In 1931, the arrival of the antagonistic Jorge Ubico to power in Guatemala put a halt to the negotiations over Guatemalan payments to Buenfil for the damages to the camp and to the Mexican chicleros for their imprisonment. Until his ouster in 1944, Ubico remained a predictable adversary of Mexico. Like many of his compatriots, he resented the unequal balance of power that existed between the two countries and viewed the Mexican Revolution as a Communist victory and thus a threat to Guatemala.[43] Due to his intransigence, the detailed parsing of lost revenue and the claims of lost wages by the captured chicleros were lost in the final lump sum payment of $10,000 dollars to the Mexican government in 1934. By then the man who had sparked the incident, Cruz, had fled to Honduras to escape prosecution.[44] Hay's proposal to have Guatemala send detectives to return him to justice was ignored, and the assault on La Fama became just another incident, another "invasion" of Mexico.[45]

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[42] "Viaje a la frontera, del embajador Hay," AH-SRE Legajo 333-11 Expediente 47-51; *Nuestro Diario,* April 22, 1930. Hay often alluded to this fact in his correspondence to the Mexican Secretary of Foreign Relations in an attempt to explain Mexico's weakened negotiating position and Guatemalan intransigence.

[43] See Kenneth J. Grieb, *Guatemalan Caudillo, the Regime of Jorge Ubico: Guatemala, 1931-1944* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1979), 207.

[44] Eduardo Hay to Genaro Estrada, Guatemala, July 17, 1931, AH-SRE Legajo 333-11 Expedientes, 13-21; Gustavo Serrano Gómez to Secretary of Foreign Relations, Guatemala, July 29, 1933, AH-SRE Legajo 333-11 Expediente, 185; Gustavo Serrano Gómez to Secretary of Foreign Relations, Guatemala, August 17, 1933 AH-SRE Legajo 331-16 Expedientes 202-203.

[45] Eduardo Hay to Secretary of Foreign Relations, Guatemala, July 8, 1931, AH-SRE Legajo 333-11 Expediente 203-211.

Post-Independence Borders and the Struggle for Chiapas

Older Mexicans following the drama of La Fama would have felt a sense of déjà vu as they read the alarmed reactions by Mexican officials towards an incursion by Guatemalans in distant, but still Mexican, Chiapas. From independence in 1821, until the Treaty of Limits of 1882, when Guatemala formally renounced its claims to Chiapas, Mexico's southern borderlands remained in contention at local and international levels. During that period, the national press frequently reported on the chaotic on the ground violence similar to that experienced by the hapless chicleros of La Fama. Frequent uncontested incursions by Guatemalan nationals across a stateless border gave the impression of a region lost to the rest of the nation.

In addition, this period defined the intellectual and popular struggle to identify Chiapas as part of the Mexican story. The Chiapan borderlands had no natural historical adhesion to the Mexican state that emerged in 1821. For all of its history organized as a formal colonial administrative unit, nearly three hundred years stretching from 1528 to independence in 1821, the province of Chiapas had pertained to the Captaincy General of Guatemala.[46] The political, economic, and cultural implications of this bureaucratic arrangement meant that during the colonial era Chiapanecos often looked south, to Guatemala City. The province remained largely isolated, in part due to the imposing geography of the Sierra Madres, the only well maintained road being the Camino Real along the Pacific Coast, maintained in parts by villages, on which depended the commercial traffic that wound south from Chiapas into Central America.[47]

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[46] Gudrun Lenkersdorf, "La resistencia a la conquista española en Los Altos de Chiapas," in *Chiapas: los rumbos de otra historia*., ed. Juan Pedro Viqueira Albán and Mario Humberto Ruz (México: Centro de Estudios Mayas del Instituto de Investigaciones Filológicas y Coordinación de Humanidades UNAM, 1995), 80-81.

[47] Sidney David Markman, *Architecture and Urbanization in Colonial Chiapas, Mexico* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1984), 4; Edith Ortiz Díaz, "El camino real del Soconusco: eje de articulación comercial entre la provincia de Oaxaca y la audiencia de Guatemala en el siglo XVI," in *Caminos y mercados de*

Guatemalan Officials were responsible for tribute collection from the large indigenous population, official inspections of the province, as well as the religious administration of the dioceses.[48] Even today, a visitor can see in the architecture of colonial era churches and homes the cultural affinity of the two regions.[49] Though Chiapanecos certainly made connection with the cities of New Spain, for example in trade with Tabasco, the colonial connections formed between Chiapas and Guatemala were powerful economic, cultural, and political attachments.

Due to this history connecting Chiapas to its southern neighbors in the colonial era, it had to be argued into the Mexican nation after independence from Spain. During the 19th century Mexican writers, especially the politician Matías Romero, shaped the narrative of how exactly Chiapas belonged into the Mexican nation. His writings were part of a transnational dialogue with Guatemalan writers, each side arguing for the historical precedents that argued for inclusion of the region in their respective post-independence nations. The narrative constructed by Mexican intellectuals focused on two themes and eras: pre-colonial and colonial, and the post-independence era. These writers argued that during the pre-colonial and colonial era, Chiapas formed a powerful cultural, economic, and political connection to central Mexico. Secondly, they focused on Chiapas's 1824 statewide plebiscite, in which it voted to join Mexico. This event became an accomplishment of popular sovereignty and a celebration of Mexicanness during an era when the political state of Mexico seemed to be disintegrating both from the inside, through political turmoil, and from the outside through foreign invasion. This narrative, combined with the potential riches of areas such as Soconusco, culminated in the Treaty of 1882,

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México, ed., Amalia Attolini Lecón and Janet Long (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2010), 241-260.

[48] Jan de Vos, *Vivir en frontera: la experiencia de los indios de Chiapas* (Tlalpan: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, 1994), 113-127.

[49] Markman, *Architecture and Urbanization,* 84.

when the political space of Chiapas became without a doubt Mexican. However, the success of the historical narrative on the ground remained in doubt well into the twentieth century, as seen in incidents like La Fama.

In nearly all of Latin America, independence from the Spanish Empire meant a diplomatic and, at times, military fight over the demarcation of the region's new borders. Mexico and Guatemala were no different. Any regional unity that existed in the fight against Spain proved to be easily torn apart in the territorial confusion following independence, due to the fractious ambitions of the new independence era. The Mexico and Guatemala border dispute places the region within this wider history of conflictive Latin American boundaries, some of which have continued to produce inter-state conflict until the present day.[50] .

As the last diplomatic and military victories across the Americas finally dissolved the centuries long imperial administration of Madrid, regional gatherings, such as the Bolivarian inspired Congress of Panama of 1826, sought a unified "Hispano America."[51] However, the optimism fueling large national projects like Gran Colombia was quickly discouraged as political rivalries and claims over natural resources sparked regional conflict. Emerging political leaders rallied followers around new national identities based on the boundaries of former colonial administrations such as Venezuela or Guatemala.[52] By 1848, the idea of a Bolívar-inspired unity

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[50] For example, until the outbreak of conflict and subsequent mediation in 1995, both Perú and Ecuador claimed sovereignty over their shared Amazonian region with its valuable access to the great river. Each based its claims over the details of a 1541 expedition. See Bryce Wood, *Aggression and History: The Case of Ecuador and Perú* (Ann Arbor: Published for Institute of Latin American Studies, Columbia University by University Microfilms International, 1978); Carlos R Espinosa, *Exorcising the Demons of War: Memory, Identity, and Honor in the Ecuador-Perú Peace Negotiations* (Cambridge: David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, 1999).

[51] Mónica Herz and João Pontes Nogueira, *Ecuador Vs. Perú: Peacemaking Amid Rivalry* (Boulder: L. Rienner, 2002), 24; for a discussion on the Congress of Panama's role in forging a Hispanic American identity see, Germán A.De la Reza, "The Formative Platform of the Congress of Panama (1810-1826): the Pan-American Conjecture Revisited," *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional* 56 (2013): 5-21. Accessed May 2, 2014, http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0034-73292013000100001&lng=en&tlng=en. 10.1590/S0034-73292013000100001

[52] Carlos A. Parodi, *The Politics of South American Boundaries* (Westport: Praeger, 2002), xiii, 21-23. At the time of Independence colonial Latin America was divided into four viceroyalties (Nueva España, Perú, Nueva

in Latin America proved unattainable. In consequence, the Lima Conference of that year coalesced regional consensus behind the legal formulation of *uti possidetis* to determine boundary disputes.[53]

Uti possidetis dated back to Roman legal theory; the concept emerged as method to settle property disputes. In the case of conflict, usually over land, the property holder retained possession of the property in question while the legal system determined the legality of each party's claim. Possession trumped other considerations, as burden of proof rested on the accuser.[54] During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the concept expanded to wartime conquests. For example, the prominent international legal theorist Hugo Grotius defended the right of booty taken by ships of the Dutch East India Company. In the midst of an era of frequent conflict, an increasing number of legal theorists joined Grotius, and in time so did warring nations, in applying *uti possidetis* to negotiated peace treaties. Frequently this meant aggressor nations retained possession of lands and objects gained during an ex-post facto agreed time of conflict. For example, the 1667 Treaty of Breda between France, England, and the Dutch allowed the continued possession of land and vessels taken before May 20, but not after. This concept also served as a useful legal foundation from which to mediate clashes over exploration and mineral rights. For the emerging states of newly independent Latin America seeking a legal

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Granada, and Buenos Aires), eleven audiencias (Santo Domingo, México, Guadalajara, Guatemala, Panamá, Lima, Santa Fe de Bogotá, Charcas/Alto Perú, Quito, Chile, Buenos Aires), and seven capitanes generales (Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guatemala, Yucatán, Caracas/Venezuela, Santo Domingo, and Chile).

[53] See Suzanne Lalonde, *Determining Boundaries in a Conflicted World: The Role of Uti Possidetis* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 26-27.

[54] W. W. Buckland and Peter Stein, *A Text-Book of Roman Law from Augustus to Justinian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 734.

framework to fix boundaries, *uti possidetis*, and through it the inheritance of colonial borders, seemed to be a solution to halt conflicts over boundaries.[55]

However, the rhetoric of inheritance of borders espoused by new national leaders ran into various on the ground challenges, many of which were present in the Chiapan borderlands. The colonial legacy left uncertain delimitations of national political boundaries as various religious and secular offices, as well as the reach and subsequent duties owed to such institutions, produced a confusing landscape of twisting and overlapping boundaries.[56] In addition, the natural boundaries cited in official colonial documents and maps, such as rivers, mountains, and hills, were often mislabeled or impossible to verify.[57] Finally, regional ambition frequently trumped cooperation as throughout the two continents new nations fought and schemed to shape advantageous political boundaries.

The imperial dreams of Augustin de Iturbide and the Plan de Iguala were clear examples of this ambition. Though short-lived, Iturbide's territorial designs irrevocably shaped the future claims of Guatemala and Mexico regarding Chiapas. The grandiose plan, which called for a Mexican Empire stretching from California to the Isthmus of Panama, ignored the preexisting border between the previous Captaincy General of Guatemala and the Viceroyalty of New Spain. Though the empire endured no more than a couple of years, it established a lasting foundation for a tense relationship between militarily dominant Mexico and the weaker Guatemala, akin to that which developed between the United States and Mexico.

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[55]Lalonde, *Determining Boundaries in a Conflicted World*, 11-21. During the 1990's, national leaders evoked *uti possidetis* during formation of national boundaries after the break-up of the Soviet Union. See Enver Hasani,"Uti Possidetis Juris: From Rome to Kosovo," *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 27 (2003): 85-98.

[56]Juán de Dios Gutiérrez Baylón, "1810 y la doctrina del uti possidetis en el derecho internacional," in *Varia Iuris Gentium: Temas Selectos De Derecho Internacional Público En Homenaje a Víctor Carlos García Moreno,* ed. Carlos García Arrellano (México: Editorial Porrúa México, 2001), 273-285.

[57]Lalonde, *Determining Boundaries in a Conflicted World*, 30-31.

The Plan de Iguala undermined the script of regional elites forming nations around former colonial borders. In Chiapas, Iturbide's ambition presented an opportunity to the elites of Ciudad Real (present-day San Cristóbal de las Casas) to break away from the dominance of Guatemala City. They rallied support and attached the region to imperial Mexico for a variety of reasons: a lingering resentment of the power exercised by Guatemala City officials during the colonial era; the perception that Mexico represented a much wealthier alternative; and the mutual appreciation Chiapan elites shared with those of Mexico City of the strategic position of Chiapas. Both viewed the region as essential to secure in case of foreign invasion, and above all, as a site for a future transatlantic canal. In addition, Mexico City told *coletos* (residents of Ciudad Real) that they would invest Ciudad Real with greater regional power.[58] Imperial officials planned to redraw the administrative provinces of the region. They sought to make Ciudad Real the titular capital of a new southwestern unit consisting of Tabasco and parts of Guatemala, a plan that coincided with a similar plan hatched by elite *coletos*, which they had proposed and had rejected years before by colonial Spanish authorities. In sum, independence allowed local elites the ability to negotiate the future political and economic allegiances of the borderlands. In 1822, Iturbide announced that Chiapas was incorporated forever into the Mexican Empire; soon after this ambitious pronouncement, however, in 1823, Iturbide and the nascent Mexican Empire collapsed.[59]

The disintegration of the empire presented the opportunity for the formation of the United Provinces of Central America by Central American political elites, who officially adopted the

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[58] Mario Vázquez Olivera, "Chiapas Mexicana," *Península* 3 (2008): 30-31.

[59] Mónica Toussaint and Mario Vásquez Olivera, *Territorio, Nación y Soberanía: Matías Romero ante el conflicto de Límites entre México y Guatemala* (México: Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores, 2012), 15-17; Manuel Ángel Castillo, Mónica Toussaint Ribot, and Mario Vázquez Olivera, *Espacios diversos, historia en común: México, Guatemala y Belice: la construcción de una frontera* (México.: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2006), 48.

colonial boundaries of the Captaincy General of Guatemala, including Chiapas. Composed of Guatemala, San Salvador, Costa Rica, Honduras y Nicaragua, the United Provinces challenged the political affiliation of Chiapas to the Mexican state. In the meantime, Chiapaneco elites resisted entreaties from Mexico and the United Provinces — each too weak militarily to simply possess the region by force at the time — to incorporate the region into their respective nations. In July 1823 representatives from major Chiapan cities met in Ciudad Real to discuss the issue of the region's sovereignty. They produced the Decreto de Bases. It was a declaration of possible territorial actions revealing the political and economic calculations of Chiapaneco elites and the weakness of both Mexico and the United Provinces. The Decreto laid out the territorial options under consideration: union with Mexico, the United Provinces, or a possible new nation composed of Chiapas, Oaxaca, Tabasco, and Yucatán.[60] Chiapan elites had decided to weigh which option best suited them.

In Mexico City, Secretary of Foreign Relations Lucas Alamán directed a campaign to influence the Chiapanecos to join Mexico. He utilized the country's nascent legislative body and national press to both pressure and persuade them that union with Mexico would further their political and economic interests. In addition, Alamán worked with pro-Mexicanist *coletos* to place allies in key municipal bodies wavering between incorporation with Mexico or the United Provinces, such as in the southeastern border city of Comitán. Alamán's efforts went relatively unopposed by the United Provinces due to fighting between rival Liberals and Conservatives for political power, which sapped their resources and above all, distracted their attention.[61]

In May of 1824, Alamán and the Mexican Congress increased the pressure on Chiapanecos by threatening military action: Chiapas had three months to decide regarding their

[60] Toussaint and Vázquez, *Territorio, Nación y Soberanía*, 20-21.
[61] Ibid., 28.

incorporation to Mexico, or else a military expedition would settle the issue. Taking advantage of this bluff, pro-Mexican elites organized a municipal plebiscite regarding territorial integration into Mexico, each vote weighed according to the population of each city. The structure of the vote gave the advantage to pro-Mexican bastions such as Ciudad Real and Comitán, assuring the result of the historic plebiscite before it took place: Chiapas became part of Mexico.[62]

The United Provinces reacted to Mexico's addition of Chiapas by announcing the unilateral incorporation of the state's coastal region, Soconusco. A narrow strip of land adjoining Guatemala and sandwiched between the Pacific Coast and the Chiapan highlands, Soconusco and its principal city, Tapachula, maintained close economic and political relations with northern Guatemala and the city of Quetzaltenango throughout the precolonial and colonial eras. As a result, throughout the debate, the intrigue, and finally the plebiscite regarding incorporation into Mexico, Soconuscans favored adhesion to the United Provinces. They feared that policies from a distant Mexico City would harm their economic and political interests. Consequently, when the regional Chiapan government reacted to the United Provinces' declaration by reaffirming Soconusco as part of Chiapas -- and therefore, Mexico – Officials in Tapachula responded by declaring their union with the United Provinces. Soon after, a small contingent of troops from Guatemala arrived to reinforce the break-a-way Soconusco, while Mexico announced its own military expedition. Much as was occurring in the newly independent South American states, it seemed regional conflict would erupt in the Chiapan borderlands over the composition of post-independence borders. However, as Mexican troops began to arrive in Soconusco, intimidated Guatemalan troops retreated and open conflict was avoided. As both countries could ill afford a costly conflict, an unlikely truce developed

[62] Ibid., 28-29.

between Mexico and the United Provinces. Both renounced the use of force to decide the fate of Soconusco, though significantly neither renounced its claim of sovereignty over the strip of land by the Pacific.

The truce did not diminish violence, as non-state actors continued to battle for political influence in Soconusco. Rival factions of local Mexicanists and Central Americanists battled in the streets and the countryside for control of key local government seats. Occasionally irregular bands of Guatemalan troops assisted in these local conflicts, but any similar Mexican forces were too distant to help. Mexico City residents could read about this violence in newspapers like *La Lima de Vulcan* which published a front page article on February 10, 1838, detailing the "invasion of troops led by the agitator D. José Miguel Gutiérrez," from Central America, who caused the "the ruin of Chiapaneco families."[63] Soconusco became a violent, state less region pulled between Mexico and the United Provinces.[64]

In Mexico City, diplomats of the frequently rotating governments occasionally sparred with their counterparts of the United Provinces over Soconusco, though for much of this time Chiapas remained isolated, cut off from the economic and political currents affecting the rest of Mexico. The few and difficult roads that existed between Chiapas and the rest of the Mexican nation only connected major urban areas such as Tuxtla and Ciudad Real located in the center and northern half of the state. The southern region close to Guatemala had little contact at all with central Mexico, or even eastern neighbors such as Tabasco, the Lacandon Forest proving to be a formidable barrier. In addition, due to tensions surrounding the territorial demarcation, the official trade that had existed with Guatemala dried up as Soconusco and its port city of

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[63] *La Lima del Vulcan,* February 10, 1838.

[64]Castillo, Toussaint, and Vázquez, *Espacios diversos, historia en común*, 54-56; Jürgen Buchenau, *In the Shadow of the Giant: The Making of Mexico's Central America Policy, 1876-1930* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1996), 16-21.

Tapachula remained effectively closed towards Guatemalan merchants. Meanwhile, trade through the state's other major border city, Comitán, consisted of mostly contraband aguardiente. An example of region's isolation was seen in 1834 when a cholera outbreak in central Chiapas stayed in the highlands.[65]

In addition to the state's isolation, the state and federal governments in Ciudad Real and Mexico City remained in ignorance as to the extent of the territory and borders claimed by Chiapas, especially as concerned the vast Lacandon Jungle. The humid, tropical forest covers over two thousand square miles, broken by mountain peaks rising as high as 4,000 feet and traversed by the Usumacinta, Perlas, and Lacantún Rivers along with their countless tributaries.[66] During the colonial era, in urban mestizo centers such as Ciudad Real and Comitán, the area and the indigenous people that lived within it obtained an almost mystically fearsome reputation resulting in scant exploration and the corresponding blank sections of maps: the vast forested area gained the ominous moniker of Desert. In 1826, the federal Mexican government sponsored an expedition to fill in the blankness of the map. The small party that headed out from Comitán hoped to document navigable rivers that could be used to traverse the Lacandon, and establish a foothold in the jungle for subsequent logging expeditions. The failure of the trip, and the hasty conclusion drawn from the experience, that the Lacandon remained impenetrable, discouraged future surveying trips from the government; the region acquired the reputation as a distant, exotic wilderness.[67]

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[65] [65]Castillo, Toussaint, and Vázquez, *Espacios diversos, historia en común*,, 58-61,68.

[66] Florencia Montagnini and Carl F. Jordan, *Tropical Forest Ecology: The Basis for Conservation and Management* (Berlin: Springer, 2005), 15.

[67] Jan de Vos, *Oro verde: la conquista de la Selva Lacandón por los madereros tabasqueños, 1822-1949*. (México: Gobierno del Estado de Tabasco, Instituto de Cultura de Tabasco, 1988), 15-21, 41-50.

In August 1842, Mexico City dramatically broke the region's isolation as Antonio López de Santa Anna marched troops into Soconusco. Santa Anna's bold move came in reaction to international and national political dynamics. First, the United Provinces had collapsed in 1839, dragged down by the constant fighting between Liberals and Conservatives and fierce regional rivalries. Though during its existence it never proved to be a regional power, it remained a formidable obstacle to Mexican territorial ambitions. Second, upon his seizure of power Santa Anna found a fracturing Mexico as regions spun away from the center. In the north, an independent Texas seemed certain to provoke a war with the United States, while a successful secessionist movement in the Yucatán only needed enough votes in Washington D.C. to become a new U.S. state. In the southern borderlands, a relatively weak Guatemala claimed Chiapas, while one of its key regions remained for all purposes cut off from Mexico.[68] In a reaction to this international image of weakness, and in part to send a message to the United States, Santa Anna ordered a small contingent of Mexican troops to occupy Soconusco. He effectively ended any notion of the region's neutrality, annulling Guatemala's claims with bayonets.[69]

Though Santa Anna's actions might have officially ended Soconusco's status as a neutral sliver of land wedged between the competing powers, it did not settle Mexico and Guatemala's competing claims on Chiapas. That fundamental disagreement was not resolved until four decades later. In the meantime, elites from both nations remained occupied with national and international challenges. For Mexico, these included a crippling debt owed to European powers; internal political strife causing a rotating cast of presidents; a devastating war with the United

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[68]Will Fowler, *Santa Anna of México* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 216. For the history of the Yucatan's secession see Terry Rugeley, "The Brief Glorious History of the Yucatan Republic: Secession and Violence in Southeast México 1836-1848," in *Secession as an International Phenomenon From America's Civil War to Contemporary Separatist Movements,* ed. Don Harrison Doyle (Athens: University of Georgia, 2010), 214-236.

[69] Mariano Báez Landa,"Soconusco: Región, Plantaciones y Soberanía," in *La Formación Histórica de la Frontera Sur,* ed. Andrés Fábergas Puig (México: Cuadernos de las Casa Chata, 1985), 151.

States; and, finally, a civil war followed by an occupation by a foreign power. In Rafael Carrera dominated Guatemala, the nation often found itself in conflict with its Central American neighbors. The Conservative Carrera fought to forge regional unity under his rule, utilizing Guatemalan arms and men to ensure that pliant allies maintained themselves in power. For both countries, especially Mexico, the Chiapan-Guatemalan border dispute seemed to pale in significance to the never-ending battle for political stability and territorial integrity.

In addition, a diplomatic solution remained difficult due to the importance Chiapas played in the domestic cultural and political landscape of Guatemala. Carrera, like future Guatemalan leaders, utilized the country's colonial claim on Chiapas to rally domestic support for his regime, making it politically difficult to negotiate with Mexico. For example, in reaction to Santa Anna's march into Soconusco, Carrera published a broadside directed to the Guatemalan public reiterating the country's claim on Chiapas. It read, "they [Chipanecos] appealed daily to the government of Central America and General Carrera, lamenting bitterly the slavery to which those defenseless peoples have been subjected by Mexican Forces." Labeling himself the "The Faithful Observer of the Rights of the People That Compose Central America," Carrera noted that his government would not use force to press its historic claims; instead they hoped to find a peaceful solution with its "sister republic." [70] Throughout this period an underlying sense of loss, and the hope for possible recuperation of Chiapas, propelled Guatemalan sentiment. For example, upon Santa Anna'a return to power in 1853, an article in the official *Gaceta de Guatemala* speculated about whether Guatemalans might take advantage

[70] Ralph Lee.Woodward, *Rafael Carrera and the Emergence of the Republic of Guatemala, 1821-1871* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993).

of Mexico's precarious situation — tense negotiations with the United States and another possible war — and reclaim Soconusco, "to undo what happened in 1842."[71]

Carrera went even further than rhetoric to undermine Mexican political stability. For example, during the War of Reform he assisted the cause of Mexican Conservatives through the transfer of arms, money, and, above all, by providing a safe refuge in the northern Guatemalan borderlands. As the long war turned in the Liberal camp's favor, fleeing Conservatives found safe exile in Guatemala, and a platform from which to harass and threaten nearby Mexico. Upon Carrera's death in 1865 and the assumption of power by the Liberal regime of Barrios in 1871, a key roadblock to a potential compromise disappeared. Though sensitive to Guatemala's historical claims, Barrios shared a similar political and economic ideological outlook with the Mexican regime.[72]

Coffee and Matías Romero

Further impetus to find a diplomatic solution to Chiapan sovereignty came from the economic potential of coffee, which had already demonstrated its value, as well as the ability to attract sought after European immigrants, in Central America. Beginning in the 1820's German, Spanish, and Guatemalan entrepreneurs had begun to establish coffee plantations and export houses in Costa Rica for European and domestic consumption in Central America. In the intervening decades, the technology of shipping improved and steam-powered boats allowed traders to go against the strong seasonal Caribbean winds, making export to foreign markets a viable and profitable enterprise. By the 1860's a full-fledged coffee boom began to ripple

[71] *La Gaceta de Guatemala,* May 20, 1853.
[72] Buchenau, *In the Shadow of the Giant,* 16-21.

through Central America, and especially Guatemala, which had previously relied on cochineal and cotton exports as its main source of revenue. In 1871, the Liberals gained power while coffee also attained its ascendency, outpacing cochineal for the first time as the country's number one export.[73]

This coffee boom had the potential to travel north into Chiapas and, in particular, Soconusco, where the soil and climate were particularly well situated for the crop. One of the earliest and the most high-profile supporters of coffee's potential in the borderlands was Matías Romero, the former Secretary of Treasury under Benito Juárez. The Oaxacan Liberal's difficult experience in cultivating coffee in Chiapas reflected the frustration felt by the Mexican government; it could not guarantee to potential European investors the security of planting in a Chiapan borderlands not fully integrated into the nation. Romero's experience demonstrated that custom and the threat of violence held sway in the region, making it difficult to establish a capital fueled enterprise, such as a coffee farm, that demanded as a prerequisite clearly demarcated land. Romero's personal experience proved to be a cautionary tale of optimistic intentions waylaid by fugitive borderlands.

Born in 1837 in Oaxaca, at an early age Romero gained increasingly important government positions after the assumption of power by the Liberal regime of 1857. That year, he joined his mentor, and fellow Oaxacan, Benito Juárez's government as member of the department of Foreign Affairs. During the War of Reform as well as the French Intervention, Romero played a key role in lobbying the United States government, gaining cautious support, both material and political, for the Liberal cause, as well as restructuring Mexican debt

[73] Robert G. Williams, *States and Social Evolution: Coffee and the Rise of National Governments in Central America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press: 1994), 28-33.

agreements with the United States.[74] Upon returning to Mexico City, Romero joined the triumphant Liberal government as Secretary of Treasury, advising Juárez in his bold decision to suspend Mexico's debt payments. During the same period, he compiled the exhaustive *Memoria de Hacienda 1870*, detailing the Mexican national economic situation. This reflected his propensity for research and writing on large national questions.[75] In 1872, disagreeing with his erstwhile ally regarding his reelection, Romero quit the Juárez government and retired to Chiapas, where he hoped to prosper as a coffee farmer "in the fertile regions of Soconusco, of whose natural advantages I have the most esteemed idea." He began the venture despite Soconusco's "abandonment by the central government," and "the lack of the demarcation of limits with Guatemala."[76]

The ex-government minister turned coffee farmer did not intend to retire to a life of leisure in the borderlands. Coffee, for Liberal elites like Romero, represented another one of Mexico's natural resources to exploit and sell to foreign markets, principally the United States, and Romero envisioned Mexico surpassing Brazil as the world's number one producer. He praised coffee's potential, claiming it might become one of the country's "most lucrative industries." Combining the personal and the political, the former diplomat to the United States enlisted the American officials and businessmen with whom he had developed relationships while representing Juárez in the 1860's to promote Mexican coffee. Romero had little personal

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[74] Matías Romero and Thomas David Schoonover, *Mexican Lobby: Matías Romero in Washington, 1861-1867* (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1986), xi-xiii.

[75] Barbara Tenebaum, "Manuel Payno, Financial Reform, and Foreign Intervention in México, 1855-1880," in *Liberals, Politics, and Power: State Formation in Nineteenth-Century Latin America*., ed. Vincent C. Peloso and Barbara A. Tenenbaum (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 227.

[76] Matías Romero, *Refutación de las inculpaciones hechas al c. Matías Romero por el gobierno de Guatemala* (México: Imprenta.poliglota de C. Ramiro y Ponce de Léon, 1876), 12.

success in farming coffee, but his boosterism for the crop proved to be a factor in increasing exportation to the United States toward the end of the nineteenth century.[77]

Romero documented his experience in coffee cultivation in Chiapas, providing a revealing snapshot of the political, economic, and social state of the borderlands before the border treaty of 1882. Romero wrote two disparate works, the guardedly optimistic, *Cultivo del café en la costa meridional de Chiapas* originally published in the Mexico City magazine, *El Porvenir*, in 1874, and the 1876 work, *Refutación de las inculpaciones hechas al c. Matías Romero por el gobierno de Guatemala*, written after his Chiapan venture had definitely failed.[78] The two works are capped by Romero's historical analysis and documentary collection, *Bosquejo histórico de la agregación a México de Chiapas y Soconusco y de las negociaciones sobre límites entabladas por México con Centroamérica y Guatemala,* published in 1877, which is discussed below.[79]

At the time he published his 1874 work, Romero still possessed some of the optimism in the region's potential that had initially lured him to Chiapas in late 1872. Most of the 160 page *Cultivo de Café* has the ring of the boosterism of Mexico and its natural resources that would define his stint as minister plenipotentiary to the United States from 1882 to 1898. It is also an example of a detailed elite effort to describe and make plain the exotic through the language of science, in this case, Romero's advice on coffee cultivation. The bulk of *Cultivo de Café* serves as a primer for the large-scale farmer Romero envisioned as developing the Chiapan coffee-frontier. According to Romero, successful planting in the verdant borderlands required a

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[77] Mabel M. Rodríguez Centeno, "Fiscalidad y café mexicano. El Porfiriato y sus estrategias de fomento económico para la producción y comercialización del grano (1870-1910)," *Historia Mexicana* 93 (2004): 103-108.

[78] Matías Romero, *Cultivo del café en la costa meridional de Chiapas* (México: Oficina de la Secretaria de Fomento, 1893), 12.

[79] Matías Romero*, Bosquejo histórico de la agregación a México de Chiapas y Soconusco y de las negociaciones sobre límites entabladas por México con Centroamérica y Guatemala* (México: Imprenta del Gobierno, 1877).

little effort, the specialty knowledge he supplied, and capital. Though Romero takes care to point out that the capital outlay was not extensive, his vision did not include the small-scale peasant farmer that constituted the early stages of coffee frontiers in places such as in Costa Rica, Colombia, and Venezuela.[80]

Romero put up his own capital in early 1874 when he purchased Cafetal Juárez on the Petacalapa River. The process of by which he chose the property illustrates the confusion on the ground regarding the political boundaries of Mexico and Guatemala. Upon arriving, he surveyed the area on horseback with Barrios, the owner of the nearby finca of Malacate. Upon arriving at the site of the future Cafetal Juárez, Romero noted that, "he [Barrios], the one and only owner of Malacate," assured him that though some considered it part of Guatemala, the land belonged to Mexico, a startling admission from a Guatemalan politician. When Romero further balked at purchasing the land by pointing out the presence of the surrounding indigenous villages of Tajumulco and Sibinal whose inhabitants often planted nearby, Barrios assured him that he would take care of them. He told Romero "it suits us that they stay on the land and that way there are laborers: either way, I will make sure they don't harm the finca." Besides, Barrios assured his Mexican friend, he had instructed the authorities of the nearby department of San Marcos to make known to the surrounding indigenous villages of Sibinal and Tajumulco to respect his property.[81]

Romero's purchase of the land at the suggestion and assurance of Barrios reflected the former finance minister's attitude during his stay in the borderlands: a reliance on his friendship

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[80]See Doug Yarrington, *A Coffee Frontier: Land, Society, and Politics in Duaca, Venezuela, 1830-1936* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997); Lowell Gudmundson, *Costa Rica Before Coffee: Society and Economy on the Eve of the Export Boom* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986); Catherine LeGrand, *Frontier Expansion and Peasant Protest in Colombia, 1830-1936* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986).

[81] Romero, *Refutación*, 16, 26.

with the Guatemalan, viewing him as a totem for his success and failings in the region. Upon first meeting Barrios at his finca Malacate, he was impressed. The energetic Guatemalan caudillo widely praised the Juárez government's reforms — policies that Romero no doubt played a large part in implementing — and expressed the desire to enact similar transformations in Guatemala. Romero was so impressed with Barrios that he recommended him to the President of Mexico as an ally of the country and a future leader of Central America. He later admitted that this burgeoning friendship with the Guatemalan politician finally sealed any doubts he might have had about settling in the borderlands.[82]

According to the new finquero Soconusco presented few challenges in building a coffee empire. For example, Romero claimed that unlike other coffee-growing regions of Mexico, such as Colima and Córdoba, the borderlands needed no extensive irrigation, as the rains lasted six months and the nearby ocean kept the air advantageously humid yearlong. The region seemingly offered every advantage: cheap land, low cost of labor — which came from Guatemala — and the ability to supplement income by the cultivation of sugar for the production of aguardiente for the neighboring indigenous communities.[83]

He quickly learned the practices of coffee growing which he laid out in *Cultivo del Café*. In it, he cited specific agricultural techniques, the majority from the writings of Ceylon coffee farmer, William Sabonadière. The Mexican coffee promoter detailed the practice and use of shading, the correct transport of seeds, the cleaning process, and the correct way to prune the coffee plant.[84] Romero even listed the calculated four-year expenses of cultivating two *caballerias* of land in Soconusco (about 70 acres) compared to the distant Ceylon, coming to the

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[82] Ibid., 13-15.

[83] Romero, *Cultivo de Café*, 12-17

[84]Ibid., 54- 91; William Sabonadière, *The Coffee Planter of Ceylon* (Guernsey: Mackenzie, Son and Le Pastoral, 1866).

forgone conclusion that the potential coffee entrepreneur's capital would go much farther in the Chiapan borderlands.[85]

Though *Cultivo del Café* reflected his initial optimism, his brief review of the challenges of coffee cultivation in borderlands reveals the land tenure challenges prevalent in the contested region and, in particular, the practice of indigenous Guatemalan communities of cultivating crops far into Soconusco. Romero warned that the Mexican state offered no recourse to a potential coffee farmer who attempted to expel the Guatemalans who planted in lands they claimed to be Guatemalan, and were backed by the nearby Guatemalan authorities of the more populous Guatemalan borderland towns like San Marcos. He warned:

> If you try to force them [Guatemalans] from the terrain they have invaded, all the advantages are for the Indians. Besides being very numerous and united to defend what they consider their lands, they have the decisive support of the Guatemalan authorities, they consider any armed force to protect Mexican land as an aggression against Guatemalan territory, which they always repel….[86]

Romero proved to be prescient regarding the potential for conflict with indigenous Guatemalans. Only a year after publishing his mostly laudatory estimation of the prospect of coffee production in Chiapas, Romero fled the region in fear of his life. Already while writing the 1874 publication, Romero watched with worry as indigenous Guatemalans, as they had done for years, planted corn on the property that the former Secretary of Treasury claimed to belong to

[85] Romero, *Cultivo de Café*, 134.
[86] Ibid.,20-24.

him and Mexico. The inevitable confrontation occurred: in 1875 a large group of Guatemalans invaded Romero's Cafetal Juárez. They destroyed equipment, dwellings, and killed some of the workers. The incident forced Romero to flee Soconusco as well as lose his property. After he fled, fellow finquero Barrios accused Romero of bringing the two countries to the brink of war.[87]

In the 1876 *Refutación*, Romero detailed his version of the circumstances leading to the attack on Cafetal Juárez. Supported by hundreds of pages of letters, Mexican government documents, and judicial testimony, Romero blamed Barrios for his misfortune. Soon after his purchase of Cafetal Juárez the friendship between the two soured. In late 1873, Barrios blamed Romero for encouraging an inept military revolt launched by a handful of Guatemalans from Tapachula. In response, Romero claimed that Barrios encouraged and allowed the nearby indigenous communities of Sibinal and Tajumulco to attack his property.[88]

While Romero's belief that such an attack needed Barrios's permission makes sense considering the sway of the Guatemalan caudillo's political power at the time, it is also evident from a detailed reading of Romero's recollections that borderland Guatemalans clearly contested his claim to the land. To them, Cafetal Juárez surely represented an episode in the new Guatemalan Liberal regime's attack on communal property. Indigenous communities around the country were well aware of elite efforts to convert such property to large-scale private estates,

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[87] Toussaint and Vázquez, *Territorio, Nación y Soberanía*, 69-72.

[88] The filibusters in question, no more than three or four, were detained in Tapachula, according to Romero, at his suggestion since he learned they had intended to assassinate Barrios at his finca. Romero includes in *Refutación* his January 11, 1874 deposition as a Tapachula court advisor. Though he admitted there was a lack of concrete evidence against the "pernicious foreigners," he also noted that the Constitution did not apply to non-Mexicans and they should be detained indefinitely. Against his wishes, they were released and proceeded to the nearby department of San Marcos, Guatemala, where they killed various administrative Oficials and met their own demise from Guatemalan militia men. Guatemalan borderlanders suspected that Romero encouraged the filibusters. According to them, Romero, the powerfully connected landowner who appropriated Guatemalan land, supported attempts to remove troublesome Guatemalan Oficials that might have prove a roadblock to his, and Mexico's, territorial ambitions. Romero 1876, 23,43-49, 141-143, 186-187.

and they worked to secure long-held productive land before private interests could claim it.[89] It is likely that the indigenous communities that attacked Cafetal Juárez did not need too much encouragement from Barrios to secure land they often used to supplement their annual crops. A much more likely assessment is that Barrios simply decided to allow the indigenous borderlanders to do what they intended from the beginning, kick Romero off property they considered their own, and Guatemalan.

From Romero's first efforts to map his property and thus to claim a piece of the borderlands, he provoked a strong response from the Guatemalan borderlanders that he observed in his initial survey of the land with Barrios. In the days following the purchase of Cafetal Juárez, the nearby village of Sibinal sent Romero a note asking his intentions, warning that "there would be fatal consequences" for taking land belonging to Guatemala and used by the people of the region.[90] After receiving the threatening note Romero, the former diplomat, visited with some of the indigenous families on the land he had just bought, hoping to broker peace. Romero gave a speech to the crowd that assembled upon his arrival. He informed them that they had been living in Mexico, and he was going to buy the land. He told them, however, not to worry: they had the opportunity to continue farming their plots in exchange for their labor on the coffee farm he had planned to erect. With that Romero left, convinced that he had won them over. He noted that nobody protested when, in the presence of the indigenous families, he and his team of laborers and surveyors began setting up boundary markers to demarcate Cafetal Juárez.[91]

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[89] George W. Lovell, "The Century after Independence: Land and Life in Guatemala, 1821-1920."*Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Latino-Américaines Et Caraïbes* 19 (1994): 243-260.

[90] Romero, *Refutación*, 189.

[91] Ibid., 22-25.

The indigenous borderlanders Romero was convinced he had converted into future laborers had many opportunities to observe the establishment of Cafetal Juárez by following the actions of the surveyor, Jose Encarnación Ibarra. As Encarnación later recounted, many indigenous families from Tajumuclo, Tacana, and Sibinal came to observe the work of he and his team, though as they did during Romero's visit, they did not protest or attempt to stop him. Despite the absence of a border treaty, the surveyor claimed he demarcated the finca, "without introducing a single hand into the neighboring Republic." Instead of state-produced maps, Encarnación based his calculations of the property's limits on surrounding property and staying to the west of the Suchiate and Candelaria rivers, the customary local boundaries separating Guatemala and Mexico. Encarnación describes the scientific limits of his mapping, for example, by describing a large pile of cocoa branches used to mark the western limit of Romero's land, and a pile of fig tree branches in the shape of a cross that was laid at the edge of an indigenous household. In very practical terms the limits of Romero's property, and hence Mexico's border, were temporary, and in violation of the boundaries established by local tradition and knowledge.[92]

A commission formed after the destruction of Cafetal Juárez by the municipal authorities of Tapachula at the request of the Mexican president collected testimony regarding the circumstances leading to the attack. The commissioners interviewed local officials, landowners, Romero — safe in Mexico City — as well as some of the indigenous members of the raiding villages. Although in *Refutación* Romero cast blame on Barrios and the Guatemalans to whom he so graciously offered employment, the information collected by the commission reveals a

[92] Ibíd., 172-173.

borderlands landscape in which there was widespread disagreement over the location of national boundaries.

The commissioners called residents from the village of Tuxtla Chico -- far enough north of the natural boundary of the borderland rivers to be safely considered Mexican -- as expert witnesses on the location of the traditional border. They testified that everyone knew that the division of the two neighboring countries was the mouth of the Petacalapa River. They were quick to add, however, that indigenous Guatemalans had been farming in an area considered Mexican for generations due to the acquiescence of the authorities based in populous San Marcos, a few miles south in what was clearly Guatemala. In the commission's interview with a pair of indigenous raiders, they blamed the municipal leaders of San Marcos for the destruction of Romero's farm. They claimed officials there ordered the "invasion" of Mexico after receiving the complaints of the surrounding villages regarding the establishment of Cafetal Juárez. Further testimony by residents of nearby Union Juárez, further north in Soconusco, claimed Guatemalans frequently "committed abuses" in Mexico. These borderlanders, though, were not clear if the attack on Romero's property constituted another instance of such abuses. Tiburcio Escobar of Union Juárez admitted to having doubts as to who owned the land upon which Cafetal Juárez lay, but he reasoned that since Mexican authorities were there investigating what happened, the land must belong to Mexico.[93]

[93]Ibíd., 191-198.

Figure 2 "Carta Postal de la República Mexicana. Estados de Tabasco, Campeche, y Chiapas." 1905. David Rumsey Historical Map Collection, Accessed May March 21, 2015, http://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~265311~5525284:Carta-Postal-de-la-Republ

Newspapers and Chiapan History

In distant Mexico City, readers followed Romero's tribulations in newspaper articles. In official and non-official periodicals such as the *Revista Universal* and the *Diario Oficial*, writers

decried the lack of a government presence in the region, Guatemalan designs on Chiapas, and violent territorial incursions by both state and non-state actors.[94] These articles were the latest in what were years of accounts depicting a violent borderlands, its people at the mercy of Guatemalan raiders eager to recover the region.

An illuminating example of this type of stories occurred in late 1852 and early 1853, as the local Mexican militia faced a group of armed Guatemalans led by a Mexican filibuster, ousted Comitecan caudillo, Ponciano Solórzano. After a failed attempt to overthrow state authorities in 1849, Solórzan took refuge in Guatemala with the blessing of Rafael Carrera. He returned a few years later, leading a force of Guatemalan irregulars in a raid on Tapachula intent on seizing the territory for Guatemala. In February 24, 1853, the Mexico City periodical *El Siglo Diez y Nueve* published a series of dramatic letters from the municipal authorities of Tapachula to the governor of Chiapas, Fernando Nicolás Maldonado. The emotions of the capital's readers must have ranged from impassioned to disheartened upon reading the letters of the besieged and outmanned Chiapanecos. Surrounded by more than two hundred Guatemalans and their artillery, in the words of the Tapachula municipal president, the Mexican defenders were "sustaining the national government" with the "the patriotism that burns in the hearts of all Soconuscans," although the central government had been deaf to their lamentations. Eventually, both the Mexican and Guatemalan governments mobilized small contingents of armed forces to the region, though they avoided engaging in a larger conflict at the last minute both nations found a convenient scapegoat in Solórzano.[95]

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[94]Ibíd., 205-209; *Revista Universal,* June 21, 1874*; Diario Oficial,* June 24 1874*; Revista Universal,* June 26, 1874*; Diario Oficial,* June 26, 1874.

[95] Castillo, Toussaint, and Vázquez, *Espacios diversos, historia en común*, 83; *El Siglo Diez y Nueve,* February 23, 1853.

A reader of *El Siglo Diez y Nueve* could expect more than just accounts of Guatemalan invasions, but also histories of Chiapas explaining, in part, why he or she should care about this distant part of Mexico. Often, these histories were written in context of or in reaction to specific events in the borderlands. Just as frequently, they served as counter-arguments, nationalist histories refuting those of Guatemalan writers who portrayed Mexico's policy towards Chiapas as criminal: a land-hungry bully that stole land from Guatemala. Beginning to appear in the middle of the nineteenth century, these transnational debates in the popular press would crop up periodically throughout the twentieth century.

In general, the Mexican histories followed consistent themes. They argued that since the pre-Hispanic era the borderlands and the region of central Mexico had forged enduring economic, political, and cultural ties. Most important for these writers was the crucial plebiscite of 1824. In these nationalist histories, this act of free expression forever cemented Chiapas to the Mexican nation: Chiapanecos chose to become part of Mexico. The vote became an enduring element of the character of Chiapas that endures to this day through government-sponsored celebrations of the anniversary of the state's integration into Mexico.[96]

By briefly exploring these Mexican texts we can see how they formed a part of elite efforts to craft a national history in the latter half of the 19th century, a practice that would culminate in the publication of the monumental *México, a través de los siglos* in 1889. In the aftermath of the defeat by the United States, the War of Reform, and the French Intervention,

[96] See for example the Mexican Presidential Decree officilay celebrating the 150th Anniversary celebration of the historic September 14th vote in 1974. *Diario Oficial de la Federación: Órgano Constitucional de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos*, September 14, 2007. In addition, see public celebrations of the anniversary covered in *La Voz del Sureste,* September 17, 1974.

Mexican intellectuals constructed a patriotically fulfilling and progressive history from the nation's pre-Hispanic roots to the present day of a nation united spatially and politically.[97]

The Chiapaneco lawyer, politician, and historian Manuel Larráinzar became the first to publish a historical defense of the inclusion of Chiapas and Soconusco. Born in 1809 in Ciudad Real to one of the principal families of the region, Larráinzar left home to receive a law degree in Mexico City. Upon returning to Chiapas the conservative *coleto* quickly embarked on a political career occupying a variety of prominent local positions, such as a judgeship, and later national positions, representing Chiapas, for example, in the Mexican Congress. In 1865, after receiving an invitation to join the short-lived imperial project of the Literary, Artistic, and Scientific Commission of Mexico, Larráinzar conceived of a book project he called "Unas ideas sobre la historia y la manera de escribir la de México, especialmente la contemporánea, desde la Independencia hasta nuestros días." Later, in a more formal proposal to the Mexican Society for Geography and Statistics his ambitious project came into focus as he outlined the general chronological parameters of the country's history from the Pre-Colombian and Colonial periods, to the first decades after Independence. For Larráinzar a general history of Mexico constituted an essential foundation, a substratum of knowledge necessary for the country's political and economic progress. Upon the defeat of the Conservatives in 1867, Larráinzar found himself in the court of the Russian tsar, an ambassador without a government, and forced to wander in exile. Though his earlier ideas of a general history of Mexico served as outline, he did not receive an invitation to contribute to *México a través de los siglos,* [98]

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[97] Antonia Pi-Suñer Llorens, "Introducción," in *En busca de un discurso integrador de la nación, 1848-1884*, ed. Antonia Pi-Suñer Llorens (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 1996), 9-30; Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *Nature, Empire, and Nation: Explorations of the History of Science in the Iberian World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 140-142.

[98] Miguel Angel Soto Abrego, "Manuel Larráinzar," in *En busca de un discurso integrador de la nación, 1848-1884*, ed. Antonia Pi-Suñer Llorens (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 1996), 527-548; Manuel Larráinzar, *Unas ideas sobre la historia y la manera de escribir*

In 1843, a year after Santa Anna forcefully incorporated Soconusco, Larráinzar wrote *Noticia Histórica de Soconusco, y su incorporación a la República Mexicana.* The Mexico City newspapers, *El Siglo Diez y Nueve* and *El Mosquito Mexicano* serializad the polemical history. Larráinzar became inspired to pick up his pen in order to counter the various Central American writers that attacked the Mexican government's obligation "conservation of the territory of the Republic" and the protection of "little known Chiapas."[99] The three works referenced by Larráinzar as his inspiration, which bore titles such as *Soconusco, territorio de Central América, ocupado militarmente por el órden de gobierno mexicano,* painted a history of an expansionist Mexico manipulating and coercing the Chiapanecos into integration.[100]

Throughout the nearly two-hundred-page folio, Larráinzar exhaustively refutes Guatemalan claims of fraud while concentrating on the historic September 1824 vote. The *coleto* paints a patriotic narrative of Chiapanecos freely choosing their adhesion to the Mexican nation. Larráinzar, a member of the same Chiapan elite that manipulated the historic plebiscite, praised the patriotism of the leading Chiapanecos, promoting the mestizo landowners as Mexican founding fathers. In Larráinzar's telling, they ignored the Machiavellian whispers of the United Provinces and brought the rich paradise of Chiapas into the Mexican bosom.[101]

Larráinzar also connected the struggle over Chiapas to what at the time seemed the disintegration of Mexico's peripheral states. Only a few years after Santa Anna's defeat at the

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la de México, especialmente la contemporánea, desde la Independencia hasta nuestros días (México: Imprenta de Ignacio Cumplido, 1865).

[99] Larráinzar, *Noticia Histórica de Soconusco,* 5-13.

[100] No author is listed for *Soconusco territorio ocupado*. The other two works listed by Larráinzar are: *Bosquejo histórico de las revoluciones de Central-América escrito por D.A. Marure,* and *La reclamación dirigida a Exmo. Sr. ministro de relaciones exteriores de esta república por el secretario del gobierno estado de Guatemala D.J. J. Aycinena el 12 de septiembre 1842.*

[101] Larráinzar, *Noticia Histórica de Soconusco,* 138-139, 139-154.

Battle of San Jacinto in 1836, and in the climate of an expansionist and hostile United States, the Mexican historian reflected on the errant territories of Texas and the Yucatan stating that;

> …not in Chiapas, nor in Texas, nor in the Yucatan, nor in any part, should the rights of the Nation be in doubt or uncertain, or abandoned, and its dignity be cast away and humiliated; it [the Nation] should be respected and assured in the center as in the periphery.[102]

Back from exile in 1875, Larráinzar published *Chiapas and Soconusco con motivo de la cuestión de límites entre México y Guatemala,* in reaction to Andrés Dardón's, *La cuestión de límites entre México y Guatemala, por un centroamericano.*[103] At the time of Larráinzar's publication, Dardon's work had circulated widely around elite circles in Mexico City, its abundance of government documents giving weight to the claim that the author served as an unofficial spokesperson for the Guatemalan government. In the context of Romero's misfortunes and increased diplomatic grumbling in the press as Guatemalan and Mexican officials each blamed the other for the inability to secure a broader border deal, the nationalist intensity surrounding the polemics was heightened. This tension no doubt played into the Liberal government's decision to publish parts of Larráinzar's latest history in the *Diario Oficial.*[104] Despite nearly thirty years separating this 1875 history and Larráinzar's first defense of Chiapas's integration, *Chiapas and Soconusco con motivo de la cuestión de límites* generally followed the same argument as his 1843 work, at times even copying large parts of that earlier history. One notable difference, perhaps reflecting his attempt to ingratiate himself with the new

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[102] Ibíd., 162.

[103] Manuel Larráinzar, *Chiapas and Soconusco con motivo de la cuestión de límites entre México y Guatemala* (México: Imprenta de Gobierno de Palacio, 1875); Andrés Dardón, *La cuestión de límites entre México y Guatemala, por un centroamericano* (México: Imprenta de Ignacio Escalante, 1875).

[104] Matías Romero notes that the December 1875 *Diario Oficial* contained parts of Larráinzar's work. See Romero*, Bosquejo histórico*, XII.

Liberal government, was Larráinzar's interpretation of the 1824 vote in a federalist framework.[105]

The latter part of the 1875 polemic disengaged from the refutation of Guatemalan arguments and instead focused on the lack of spatial knowledge of the borderlands. Larráinzar complained about the minimal representation of Chiapas in Antonio García Cubas's grand project, the 1857 *Atlas geográfico, histórico, y estadístico de la República Mexicana*. García Cubas's compilation of local maps served a score of purposes: the demarcation of land for the Liberal project of colonization, disentailment of church property, and the removal of indigenous people from land deemed productive for the newly envisioned export economy. It also marked a parallel effort to that made by those historians busy creating a national identity, by assembling a visual Mexico to accompany the idea of a united Mexico that had emerged out of the furious violence of the first decades of independence.[106] But for the Chiapan historian the project remained incomplete. He notes, for example, that Garcia Cubas listed only one recent map of Chiapas and that made by the "simple surveyor" Secundio Orantes, whose 1856 map provided different figures of longitude and latitude for Chiapas than did the larger map of Mexico in the *Atlas.* To the further consternation of Larráinzar, Garcia Cubas relied upon a late colonial survey of the border between Mexico and Central America, which ceded a substantial amount of land to Guatemala. In other words, the Chiapan borderlands were literally not on the map that the intellectual elites in central Mexico began to form of the nation in the crucial years of national identity formation in the latter half of the nineteenth century.[107]

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[105] Larráinzar *Chiapas and Soconusco,* 1-27, 66-73, 124-125.
[106] Craib, *Cartographic Mexico*, 29-32.
[107] Larráinzar, *Chiapas and Soconusco*, 128-130.

Larráinzar's own suggestions about how to demarcate the border reflected the general lack of cartographic knowledge that he himself criticized. His exacting proposals were based mostly on local knowledge, echoing Romero's surveyor in their reliance on landmarks. Larráinzar suggests that surveyors start on the beach in Soconusco and make their way to the ranch known as La Encantada. From there the historian leads the reader east, suggesting tributaries of the Suchiate River as markers, such as the mouth of the Petacalapa River, where Matías Romero built Cafetal Juárez. Going all the way to the Lacandon Forest, Larráinzar notes that its limits as well as those of the regions of Tabasco, Campeche, and the Yucatan remained unexplored and not part of the discussion, requiring the work of a binational team of surveyors and engineers from Mexico and Guatemala. [108]

At the time of Larráinzar's publication Romero had already returned to Mexico City, where he joined the new Díaz government as Secretary of Treasury in 1877. In the meantime, he did not forget about Chiapas. Throughout 1876, in the *Diario Oficial,* he published parts of what would become an extensive historical account of Chiapas's incorporation into Mexico*, Bosquejo histórico de la agregacion á México de Chiapas y Soconusco y de las negociaciones sobre límites entabladas por México con Centro-América y Guatemala. Colección de documentos oficiales que sirve de respuesta al opúsculo de d. Andres Dardon, intitulado "La cuestión de límites entre México y Guatemala*. *Tomo I. 1821-1831.*

Unlike *Refutación,* this massive undertaking of a little over 800 pages did not detail the personal experiences of Romero. Rather, like Larráinzar, Romero took Dardon's work as an opportunity to argue for the irreversible legal, cultural, and economic union of Chiapas and Mexico. Taking advantage of his position within the government and his access to historical

[108] Ibid., 151-154.

documents, Romero and an assistant compiled scores of archival materials regarding the crucial decade of 1821-1831. The breadth of the research established *Bosquejo* as a valuable resource in the historiography of post-independence Mexico, becoming a touchstone for future Mexican historians and popular writers examining the Chiapan borderlands.[109]

Due to Romero's influence in the central government, his eventual appointment as special representative to the United States in 1882, and his role in the final border negotiations with Guatemala, the main arguments in *Bosquejo* served as a foundation for Mexico's Oficial position vis-à-vis Chiapas.[110] Much like Larráinzar, Romero focuses on the theme that the people of the southern borderlands chose to be part of Mexico in 1821, and crucially in September of 1824.[111] The plebiscite of that year confirmed for Romero that in Chiapas, "the opinion for Mexico was so generalized and decided that at last, it [the vote] prevailed, despite all the difficulties that it had to fight to succeed." It also made future Guatemalan incursions that much more criminal as they sought to undermine the will of the Mexican people.[112]

Though he mentions his own experience with Cafetal Juárez only once, Romero documents Guatemalan influence in the borderlands as violent.[113] For example, he examines the obligation of priests to swear an oath of allegiance to the Mexican government after the 1824 plebiscite. Romero documents how the *jefe político* of Soconusco, Manuel Escobar — who voted yes on integration into Mexico but in the nebulous neutrality that prevailed after 1824 shifted his loyalties — prevented priests who had sworn the oath to enter Soconusco. In the various letters, reproduced by Romero, between the Chiapan governor, the exiled priests, and

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[109] Toussaint and Vázquez, *Territorio, Nación y Soberanía*, 111-114, 120.
[110] Ibid., 115-116.
[111] Romero, *Bosquejo*, 449.
[112] Ibid., 465.
[113] Romero quotes Dardon who wrote, "el incendio del Café tal Juárez es una fábula ridícula inventada por algún vecino de Soconusco." Ibid.,,6.

Escobar himself — who, safely ensconced in distant Tapachula, denied involvement — it became clear that the priests could only return if they pledged allegiance to the United Provinces. Ultimately, it is unclear what happened to the priests, though a letter by one indicated he would attempt to go back to his abandoned flock. For Romero, the incident highlights two themes of relations on the ground in the borderlands: nefarious Guatemalan meddling and Mexican restraint. Romero praises Mexico's choice of issuing a diplomatic complaint rather than responding with violence to Guatemalan provocations.[114] Romero fails to note, however, that the incident in question occurred only because of the clear absence of the Mexican state: a note of protest remained the only option available to Ciudad Real and Mexico City.

Though Romero intended to continue his detailed documentation of the challenges of Chiapas's political incorporation into Mexico, his personal and professional ambitions drew him away from the exhausting work of compilation and writing. Entrusting the remaining work to an editor of the *Diario Oficial*, Romero began his new position as Secretary of Treasury in 1877.[115] Once again he combined the personal and professional, embarking on a series of partnerships with American political luminaries, contacts he had made as Juárez's representative in the United States in the 1860's. For example, he began a failed venture with Ulysses S. Grant to build a railroad through the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. In the United States, Romero became a key agent for the Porfirian plans for Mexican national development, selling the natural resources of the nation to the American market.[116] And, as minister plenipotentiary to the United States in 1882, he became a key figure in the territorial negotiations between Mexico and Guatemala. This gave Romero the opportunity to construct an economic opportunity for himself and the country in the

[114] Ibid., 520-546.
[115] Toussaint and Vázquez, *Territorio, Nación y Soberanía*, 112.
[116] Ibid., 78-80. Constituted in New York City in 1881, the Southern Railroad Company headed by Grant lost its concession in 1885 after it failed to start construction.

borderlands: the consolidation of a burgeoning coffee frontier in Soconusco that he had sought for so long.

Though Romero and other Mexican officials might have been skeptical, by 1882 Barrios was ready to settle the boundary dispute with Mexico. He desperately wanted to dispense with what had become more than a major annoyance to his efforts of forging a Guatemalan led Central American union.[117] Romero's exit from the region did nothing to diminish the often violent encounters between Guatemalans and Mexicans in the Soconusco region, events dutifully reported in the Mexican press. For example, in late 1879, and throughout 1880, a handful of Guatemalans — the few caught claimed to have been sent by Barrios, who denied responsibility — sacked Tuxtla Chico, whose residents had earlier testified in the Cafetal Juárez commission. As would be the case throughout the twentieth century, the Mexican press wrote sensational accounts of the incident, reporting that a filibustering gang of Guatemalans, Central Americans, and even some Mexicans looted and terrorized the population.[118] In October of 1881, Mexican President Manuel González sent close to five thousand troops to the borderlands with an accompanying message to the Congress on the need to defend territorial integrity. Conflict between the two neighbors seemed to be imminent.[119]

In June 1881, Barrios asked the U.S. administration of James Garfield to arbitrate the limits of Mexico's southern border, including deciding the question of Chiapas and Soconusco. This invoked a fury of Mexican nationalism as it linked the present debate surrounding the Chiapan borderlands to the still painful loss of Mexico's northern territory four decades earlier.

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[117] Early historic interpretations by Guatemalan writers willfully ignored this motivation, instead framing Barrio's willingness to compromise as a sign of mature diplomacy, or simply ignoring the context. For example, see *The Questions between México and Guatemala* (Guatemala: El Mensajero de Centro-América, 1895), 41.

[118] Miguel Martínez, *Cuestión Entre México Y Guatemala: Colección De Artículos Publicados En La Voz De México* (México: I. Escalante, 1882), 122-123.

[119] Castillo, Toussaint, and Vázquez, *Espacios diversos, historia en común*, 115-116.

Barrios felt confident in allowing the United States to decide such vital questions as he enjoyed the support of the political and business elite of New York and Washington D.C. These Manifest Destiny schemers calculated that a Barrios led Central American political confederation could produce a Nicaraguan government amiable enough to allow an inter-oceanic canal through its territory. The Mexican press expressed the expected outrage at the idea of letting the United States decide any question involving Mexican territorial integrity. For example, a front-page editorial in the March 2, 1882 edition of *El Siglo Diez y Nueve* mockingly asked how the neighbor to the north would feel about a friendly nation deciding if Texas belonged to them or Mexico.[120] The press also added its nationalist rancor against Guatemalan diplomats stationed in the United States, accusing them of bribing politicians and planting the idea in Washington political circles that Mexico planned an invasion of Central America. These accusations of influence peddling were not so farfetched, as Barrios demonstrated a willingness to go to great lengths to secure support. At one point, he suggested to American diplomats that the United States should occupy Soconusco, an idea quickly rejected and not mentioned again.[121]

Against this backdrop, tense negotiations began in Washington D.C. in 1882 between Romero and his Guatemalan counterpart Lorenzo Montúfar. Montúfar's political background suggested difficulties. As the former Guatemalan Minister of Education, he encouraged the production of historical works emphasizing the legacy of the colonial Kingdom of Guatemala, which included Chiapas. Like many Guatemalan elites, Montúfar looked on the colonial past as a territorial roadmap for a future Central American union that could treat equally with the United

[120] *El Siglo Diez y Nueve,* March 2, 1882.

[121] David Healey, *James G. Blaine and Latin America* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 22-36.

States.[122] Talks between Romero and Montúfar rapidly stalled. At one point, Romero seemingly gave the impression of agreeing to submit to United States arbitration the legality of the adhesion of Chiapas to Mexico, a claim Romero dismissed as a conjecture based on private conversations with his Guatemalan counterpart. In the meantime, parallel negotiations began in Mexico City between the Mexican Secretary of Foreign Relations and the Guatemalan ambassador. These talks, following the advice of Barrios, focused on the placement of the border with the assumption that Guatemala agreed to renounce its claims on Chiapas. When that news reached the patriotic Montúfar, he quit in protest.[123]

The Mexican press kept the public abreast of the proceedings as, as had Alamán nearly six decades earlier, the federal government worked hand-in-hand with the print media to drum up patriotic support for the distant region. For example, Secretary of Foreign Relations Ignacio Mariscal arranged for *La Voz de México* journalist Miguel Martínez to compile his coverage of the negotiations into a single book, *Cuestión entre México y Guatemala: Colección de artículos publicados en La Voz de México*. Amply supplied with Mexican, Guatemalan, and American diplomatic letters by Mariscal's Secretariat of Foreign Relations, Martínez framed the boundary debate around the issue of patriotism. Even if a Mexico City reader could not locate Ciudad Real on a map, he or she understood the nationalist pain of Mexico losing territory. The loss of the northern borderlands decades earlier underlined and added a tenacity to the negotiation. Martínez put the potential loss of Chiapas in historical context:

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[122]Steven Palmer,"Central American Union or Guatemalan Republic? The National Question in Liberal Guatemala, 1871-1885,"*The Americas* 49 (1993): 513-530.

[123]Toussaint and Vázquez, *Territorio, Nación y Soberanía*, 83-87.

> The Mexican nation has not ceased to exist since those days [1821]. Much has been its vicissitudes and its disgraces from then until today; but it has not lost its autonomy. The territory has had great losses, tightening its confines; but that has not happened in the seas that limit it in the west and the east. Neither has it been diminished in the south. [124]

Barrio's impatient desire to secure support for his Central American union plan finally brought the negotiations to a close. In late April of 1882, he wrote to a rubber-stamp Guatemalan Congress asking for powers to negotiate personally, "I ask the National Congress if it esteems it opportune to concede [to me] special and ample authorization conferred in a Decree, to put an end to [the negotiations] in the way that I judge to be the best path, which coincides with the true interests of the Republic."[125] Barrios continued to insist on the intervention of the United States, a non-starter for Mexico and rejected by the new administration of President Chester Arthur without the approval of both parties. As Barrios eyed an upcoming European trip to secure political and economic support for unification efforts, he wanted to leave the borderlands problem behind him by securing a treaty with Mexico. Therefore, the owner of Malacate sat down with his former friend Romero to hammer out a deal. The final agreement, though it left in place the possibility of future United States arbitration over the exact placement of the boundary, obtained Guatemala's official renunciation of Chiapas and Soconusco.[126]

The agreement vaguely outlined the border. Based on faulty maps and the local knowledge displayed by Chiapanecos like Larráinzar, the treaty described the demarcation route of a seven hundred mile border in a few sentences: it essentially started at the Pacific Ocean,

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[124] Miguel Martínez, *Cuestión Entre México Y Guatemala,* 14.

[125] Fernando Cruz, *La verdad histórica acerca del tratado de límites entre Guatemala y México* (Guatemala: Tipografía "La Unión," 1888), 3-4.

[126] Toussaint and Vázquez, *Territorio, Nación y Soberanía*, 88-92.

followed the Suchiate River east, and disappeared into the unknown Lacandon.[127] Crucially, Article Four of the treaty created a binational boundary commission to demarcate its placement. As we will explore in the next chapter, and as revealed in the attack on La Fama, the demarcation and knowledge on the ground of the political boundary would be an ongoing, incomplete process, finished on maps in 1895, but remaining a source of tension between the two neighbors well into the twentieth century.

After the signing of the four-page treaty in Mexico City in September of 1882, Barrios turned his attention back to the ambitious dream of reuniting Central America under his leadership. In February of 1885, the Guatemalan Congress declared him president of the newly declared Central American Union. The new chief executive quickly set out to back up his title by force against the resistance of isthmian states that balked at submitting to Guatemalan leadership. Mexico's reaction to Barrios's political ambition proved that the diplomatic agreement of 1882 did little to curb the potential for violence in the borderlands or fear of Guatemalan intrusion. Porfirio Díaz, fearful that a revitalized Barrios might attempt to invade Chiapas, sent a small force military force to the region, diverting a large number of Guatemalan troops while also sending a clear signal of Mexico's displeasure with the Guatemalan dictator's ambitions. In the United States, Romero worked his American counterparts, assuring them, despite Barrios's accusations of meddling, that Mexican troop movements were defensive in nature and did not indicate a future military incursion into Central America. Romero's lobbying

[127] From Article 3 of the Treaty, "Los límites entre las dos naciones serán a perpetuidad los siguientes: 1°. La línea media del río Suchiate, desde un punto situado en el mar a tres leguas de su desembocadura….pase por el punto más alto del volcán de Tacaná….que pase por las cumbres de Buenavista e Ixbul…hasta encontrar el canal más profundo del río Usumacinta, o el del Chixoy, en el caso de que el expresado paralelo no encuentre al primero de estos ríos. ….a, hasta encontrar la meridiana que pasa a la tercera parte de la distancia que hay entre los centros de las plazas de Tenosique y Sacluc, contada dicha tercera parte desde Tenosique. "Tratado sobre Límites entre México y Guatemala, celebrado en 1882." Accessed November 3, 2014, http://www.sre.gob.mx/cilasur/images/stories/tratado1882mexguat.pdf

and the United States' wariness of unrest in the region eventually led to a denunciation in the Senate of the establishment by force of a united isthmus, a startling rebuke to Barrios who enjoyed widespread support a few years earlier. All the diplomatic and military posturing quickly came to close in April 1885, when Barrios fell dead in battle against Salvadoran forces. His death and the ineffectual efforts of his successors to continue his expansionist policies put an end to the period in which Guatemala might have launched an effort to occupy the Chiapan borderland force.[128]

In the meantime, with a treaty that offered greater guarantees to investors, Matías Romero continued his boosterism of Mexico and the borderlands among the financial and political elite of the United States. In private meetings, in the press, and in public Romero stressed the potential returns on investment in Mexico's natural resources offered to foreign capital.[129] Romero found willing audiences. For example, in 1891 the Democratic Club of New York hosted a "Mexican Night," inviting Romero as the guest of honor. In his introduction the prominent lawyer Walter S. Logan, extolled Romero and the government of Díaz, "the deliverer of Mexico," as having "started the ball of education and civilization in Mexico." That civilization, Logan stressed, had all the hallmarks appealing to those interested in investing in a politically secure country: a functional tax system, a budget surplus, and peace. In Mexico, explained Logan, "not a battle has been fought….save for a few skirmishes with Apache and Yaqui Indians."[130]

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[128] Buchenau, *In the Shadow of the Giant*, 34-38.

[129] *New York Times,* October 14, 1882.

[130] *A Mexican Night: A Toast and Responses at Complimentary Dinner given by Walter S. Logan at the Democratic Club, New York City, December 16th, 1891, to Senor Don Matías Romero, Mexican Minister to the United States* (New York: Albert B. King 1892), 10-11.

Romero's speech reflected his earlier works and efforts at promotion of capital development in the borderlands. He described Mexico's natural resources much as he once wrote about the borderlands, a cornucopia waiting to be tapped and brought to market:

> "You all know, gentlemen, that the wealth of Mexico is really astonishing….she alone can provide all the coffee, sugar, vanilla, and india rubber and other tropical products needed to provide the large market of the United States…. It will be an act of foresight to enter at once in the large and rich field offered by Mexico, at the very doors of the United States.[131]

Romero's pitch and the allure of profits to be made in Mexico appealed to at least one investor in the room, William E. Dodge Jr., who dreamed of extending his copper empire into Mexico's northern borderlands.[132] Due in part to Romero's efforts the Chiapan borderlands were open to investment to dreamers like Dodge, uniting both edges of Mexico in the common Porfirian experience of frenzied foreign capital speculation. .

After the signing of the 1882 Boundary Treaty, both the private and public sectors of Mexico promoted investment in the Chiapan borderlands to foreign investors, especially in coffee. The 1889 Universal Exposition in Paris displayed, at the behest of the governor of Chiapas, Manuel Carrascosa, samples of amber, textiles, and coffee, demonstrating to potential investors the riches of the region. In the accompanying literature, the governor emphasized the availability of a pliant indigenous workforce ready to be employed as cheap labor.[133] By the

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[131] Ibid., 16-17, 20. A few years later, in 1901, the prolific Romero wrote *Coffee and India-rubber Culture in Mexico*. In the introduction, he glosses over the circumstances concerning his "sudden departure" from Soconusco, noting instead that the coffee trees he planted bore fruit, eventually helping a relative make a large fortune. Matías Romero, *Coffee and India-Rubber Culture in Mexico* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1901), 1.

[132] Truett, *Fugitive Landscapes*, 55-56.

[133] Aaron Bobrow-Strain, *Intimate Enemies: Landowners, Power, and Violence in Chiapas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 54-55.

1901 Pan American Exposition in Buffalo, the Mexican government noted that coffee had become, "one of the most important articles of export."[134] Catherine Nolan-Ferrell examines how in this period of the late nineteenth century private/public partnerships, such as the Mexican Land and Colonization Company, sold to American and European investors the idea of a verdant Chiapas. The discourse they utilized in their advertisement often depended on the same optimistic language as Romero had used in describing an empty region: it was a "vacant" coffee frontier, simply waiting for an intrepid investor to plant seeds.[135]

The confidence given by the 1882 treaty, efforts by individuals like Romero, and foreign investment brought a coffee boom to the borderlands: by 1895 the region counted approximately one million planted coffee trees.[136] By 1911, the majority German coffee farmers had invested nearly 4,500,000 pesos in rural Soconusco land purchases. The massive and rapid expansion caused inflation in land prices from 60 centavos a hectare in 1880, to approximately 300 pesos by 1910.[137]

Conclusion

The 1882 Boundary Treaty marked a diplomatic triumph for a nineteenth century Mexico that had witnessed the loss (or threat of loss) of much of its territory since 1821. Against the backdrop of Mexico's experience in the northern borderlands, the Chiapan borderlands took

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[134] Mexico, *Official Catalogue of the Mexican Exhibits at the Pan-American Exposition at Buffalo, N.Y., U.S.A. May First to November First 1901* (Buffalo: White-Evans-Penfold, 1901), 5.

[135] Catherine A. Nolan-Ferrell, *Constructing Citizenship: Transnational Workers and Revolution on the Mexico-Guatemala Border, 1880-1950* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012), 26-32.

[136] Jan Rus,"Coffee and Recolonization of Highland Chiapas, Mexico: Indian Communities and Plantation Labor, 1892-1912," in ed. W. G., Clarence-Smith and Steven Topik, *The Global Coffee Economy in Africa, Asia and Latin America, 1500-1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 260.

[137] Sarah Washbrook, "Enganche and Exports in Chiapas, Mexico: A Comparison of Plantation Labour in the Districts of Soconusco and Palenque, 1876-1911," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 39 (2007): 804-805.

on an added importance. The 1824 plebiscite became a triumph, an example of the free popular expression of a region choosing Mexico — notably unlike Texas, for example. Though a Chiapaneco like Larráinzar acknowledged that for most of Mexico, "the little known Chiapas" did not figure in the national spatial imagination, in times of potential conflict such as 1842 and 1882, the national press picked up and repeated this attractive patriotic narrative of Mexicans choosing to be Mexicans.

The narrative also presented and laid a foundation of difficulties, which impeded the center, Mexico City, from truly integrating the borderlands. Works and experiences such as Romero's, coupled with frequent newspaper accounts of violent incidents, associated the borderlands with the narrative of invasion in the minds of many Mexicans. Though the 1882 Boundary Treaty gave confidence to investors to purchase land, the Mexican government did nothing to harden the border. On the ground, as seen in the La Fama incident nearly forty years after the border treaty, this narrative of territorial violation continued to exist.

Yet, at the least, the Chiapan borderlands became part of the Mexican story, albeit in a reduced role. For example, the epic 1889 *México a través de los siglos* only mentioned Chiapas briefly, in the section regarding independence. Acknowledging its previous adhesion to the Captaincy General of Guatemala, the work notes that at the time of the pronouncement of Independence in 1821, "The people of Chiapas pronounced spontaneously, on their own, their incorporation into the Mexican Empire."[138] Through the coverage was brief, Larráinzar and Romero would have approved the sentiment.

[138] Vicente Riva Palacio, *México á través de los siglos: Historia general y completa del desenvolvimiento social, político, religioso, militar, artístico, científico y literario de México desde la antigüedad más remota hasta la época actual* (Barcelona: Sepias y compañía, 1888), 748.

Chapter Two:

The State Approaches: Logging, Revolution, and the Demographic Commission: 1882-1956

During the first few months of 1956, Engineer Armando Trueba Quevedo of the Mexican Boundary Commission with Guatemala led a small team of surveyors and support staff on a demarcation expedition in the eastern region of Chiapas's border with Guatemala. To fulfill their assignment the group traveled through the municipalities of borderland towns such Las Margaritas, Ocosingo, and Comitán. Along the way they experienced a land and climate different from the humid coastal plains of the more populous western Chiapan borderlands of Soconusco. Trueba and his group tracked over cool highlands and dropped into stretches of almost impassible jungle, but overall the engineer noted that the region offered the ideal climate and soil for the cultivation of corn, coffee, and cattle. [139]

For Trueba the most notable observation was the visible *brecha* or break in the border coming south from Guatemala. He looked out over a vast expanse of isolated borderlands without any infrastructure or connection to the interior of Chiapas – except for a clearing of crops. This intrusion, the large thumbprint of foreign cultivation, stood in contrast with the seclusion of these Mexican borderlands from the remainder of Mexico.[140] In the face of this boundary violation, the engineer's role changed. No longer was he simply delineating the border; he now considered himself a political, demographic, and economic official of the federal Mexican government, intent on investigating the extent of the Guatemalan intrusion. Trueba

[139]Armando Trueba Quevedo to Manuel Medina, Tacubaya, July 20, 1956, AH-SRE Legajo 339-6 Expediente 3.

[140] Trueba to Medina, Tacubaya, July 20, 1956, AH-SRE Legajo 339-6 Expedientes 3-4.

traveled up and down this eastern stretch of the borderlands, interrogating the scattered local Chiapan officials and residents about Guatemalan cultivation and inhabitation.

Trueba's findings and actions during his 1956 journey are a revealing introduction to the historical context that led to the increasing efforts by the Mexican national government after 1882 to establish a state presence in the Chiapan borderlands. Under the terms of the 1882 Treaty of Limits, Guatemalan officials renounced their claims to the region, but those claims did not immediately disappear. Rather, they continued to appear in strident nationalist tracts and domestic posturing throughout the twentieth century. The continuing resentment of Guatemalans towards the 1882 Treaty, as well as the value politicians found in occasionally lambasting Mexico, helps explain why the fundamental promises of that treaty -- binational cooperation, and a greater Mexican state presence in the borderlands -- only became a reality in 1961 with the establishment of the International Boundary and Water Commission between Mexico and Guatemala (Comisión de Límites de México con Guatemala, CILA).[141]

During the period between the signing of the Treaty of Limits to the establishment of the CILA in 1961, Mexican government officials from the president to key officials such as the Secretaries of Defense and Foreign Affairs, gradually became both more intrigued by the region's possibilities and increasingly alarmed by a series of discoveries concerning the Chiapan borderlands: poorly demarcated boundaries, rivers that eroded away Mexican territory, a region populated by culturally and politically foreign Guatemalans, frequent "invasions" by Guatemalans, and finally, the lack of diplomatic mechanisms to solve transnational issues. The

[141] Since the 1882 treaty, Mexico and Guatemala alternatively sparred and ignored each other, as Mexico sought to establish a leadership role in Central America. This effort went up against a Guatemalan state that since independence in 1821 had often edged close to war with Mexico, and utilized the loss of Chiapas as a way to rally and at times, distract a domestic audience. See Jürgen Buchenau, *In the Shadow of the Giant: The Making of Mexico's Central America Policy, 1876-1930* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1996); Isami Romero Hoshino, "Conflicto y conciliación: las relaciones México-Guatemaltecas de la década de 1960," *Waseda Global Forum* 7 (2010): 305-337.

Chiapan borderlands, parts of which in 1882 were literally blank on the official maps of the Mexican nation, persisted in being a fugitive landscape in a number of ways. [142]

Trueba must have felt that his trip demonstrated that the borderlands were a mixture of both forgotten and fugitive. As the engineer continued his tour of the border, he found an abundance of corn and coffee, as well as various vegetables destined for the feeding of pigs and other animals. Based on the growth of the trees, the Mexican engineer calculated that some of the clearings had been there for at least ten to fifteen years. Small, temporary homes lay scattered among the fields, destined for the workers from Guatemala who occasionally came to check on the crops and beat back the ever-encroaching jungle. The cultivation efforts were extensive: in some places, the crops extended as far as six kilometers into Mexican territory. Trueba noted that the food, all destined for Guatemalan villages, constituted contraband: it passed over an international border without the knowledge of the Mexican state.[143]

Trueba also detailed another invasion. This much more "serious" intrusion into Mexican territory involved families of Guatemalans that had established permanent ranches along the border in Mexican territory, some as far as twenty kilometers from the border. Trueba focused on two particular Guatemalans, the Mauricio brothers, whose path toward the Chiapan borderlands demonstrated the ease with which people and goods could cross over the poorly defined border during this period. [144]

Around the age of eleven or twelve, the brothers left their town in the Guatemalan department of Huehuetenango to join their father in Zapaluta, Chiapas.[145] A few years after

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[142]See Chapter one's discussion of post-independence tensions between the United Provinces of Central America, Guatemala, and Mexico.

[143] Trueba to Medina, Tacubaya, July 20, 1956, AH-SRE Legajo 339-6, Expediente 5.

[144] Trueba to Medina, Tacubaya, July 20, 1956, AH-SRE Legajo 339-6, Expediente 6.

[145] Trueba does not specifically note how the elder Mauricio ended up in Chiapas, but it is likely he emigrated to Soconusco to work on the coffee fincas and simply stayed on the Mexican side.

emigrating, the brothers began to clear jungle growth and cultivate large tracts of coffee and corn on land near the border, which in Trueba's word, because of its "legendary unhealthiness," Mexican farmers had not dared to enter, the area becoming "more myth than reality." Despite Trueba's fantastical language, common in official Mexican description of the borderlands, scores of Guatemalans did find their way to the property to work--or even, as Trueba suggested, to escape debt or a labor contract across the border, a common practice dating back decades.[146] So settled were the brothers that Trueba noted that Guatemalan campesinos paid the brothers for the right to clear and cultivate on the Mexican side of the border. In addition, the Mexican engineer was convinced that the ranch had become a way station for contraband such as alcohol and cattle.

Mariano Montes, another Guatemalan landlord in the region, stayed for most of the year at his home in San Mateo Ixtatán, Guatemala, about forty miles from the border. Despite his time away, Trueba calculated that Montes had developed nearly 2,500 acres of land wedged between the Patara, Hormiguero, and Pohom Rivers. Like his earlier assessment of the Mauricio's brothers' land, Trueba describes an exotic entrance to Montes's ranch; he cut his way through deep jungle to emerge into a large area where coffee, corn and bananas were cultivated by indigenous Guatemalans. Though nearly inaccessible from the Mexican side, a clear-cut path south demonstrated that the cultivation was destined for the Guatemalan market, a clear case of contraband from Trueba's point of view.

Trueba sent indigenous laborers from Montes's ranch to fetch their employer; upon questioning, Trueba learned that Montes had inherited the title to the land from his father-in-law,

[146] Catherine Nolan-Ferrell, "De Facto Mexicans: Coffee Workers and Nationality on the Guatemalan-Mexican Border 1931-1941," in *Workers Across the Americas: The Transnational Turn in Labor History,* ed. Leon Fink (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 144-146.

Eusebio González Díaz. González applied for ownership through the post-revolutionary August 2, 1923 Decree, popularly known as the Law of Free Lands. Issued by President Álvaro Obregón, the law allowed any Mexican over the age of eighteen to acquire undeveloped public land through the simple act of occupation and improvement, followed by notification to the Secretariat of Agriculture and Development. Within two short years, the popular law encouraged approximately 16,000 petitions for lands equaling over seven million acres. By 1926, the post-revolutionary regime replaced the Law of Free Lands because its vague nature caused conflict on the ground.[147] In Chiapas, however, the Law of Free Lands became useful to those hired to begin the construction of the Pan-American Highway in 1931, as the roadway expanded from the center of the state south. Many workers, including the Guatemalans hired as cheap laborers, married into the rapidly expanding villages connected to the highway, and through these unions, acquired land. Montes's father-in-law acquired virgin land under the authorization of a defunct decree still respected, or at least referenced, in the distant borderlands.[148]

In claiming that his father-in-law had applied for land through the Law of Free Lands of 1923, Montes strategically utilized the agrarian reforms of the Mexican government to justify his land tenure. His reference to that older law was a reflection of the fact that this part of the central and eastern borderlands had escaped the complicated legal, culture, and economic conflict that occurred during the 1930's in the much more populated Soconuscan area. There, coffee-workers, long-time resident campesinos, and finca owners alternatively fought with and

[147] New laws became increasingly detailed in outlining the requirements to obtain unexploited lands, culminating in the Law of Colonization in 1946, which required, for example, infrastructure development, and

[148] Lucio Mendieta y Núñez, *Síntesis del derecho agrario* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Jurídicas, 1971), 200-202; María Eugenia Reyes Ramos, *El reparto de tierras y la política agraria en Chiapas, 1914-1988* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Centro de Investigaciones Humanísticas de Mesoamérica y del Estado de Chiapas, 1992), 70-74.

appealed to a federal government attempting to enact the numerous post-revolutionary agrarian reform decrees. Internal and external battles over land ownership frequently turned upon nationality, as feuding parties claimed Mexican citizenship and hurled accusations of being Guatemalan at adversaries.[149]

Perhaps feeling pressure from Trueba, or perhaps wanting to placate the Mexican official, Montes pointed out other Guatemalan landowners in the region. Trueba questioned them and other suspected Guatemalan farmers, demanding proof of citizenship and land ownership. All refused to comply, leading the determined Mexican engineer to denounce his suspects, recommending that Comitán Customs or the Forest Office of the Secretariat of Agriculture investigate and presumably take action.

Dissatisfied with the lack of federal response, Trueba then took it upon himself to negotiate a memorandum of understanding with the municipal authorities of nearby Guatemalan villages. In Guatemalan territory, on the bank of the Patara river, the self-appointed diplomat Trueba met with the Auxiliary Officials of Chaquenal, Ixcanzán, and Nacional Río Seco of the Department of Huehuetenango. Citing the cases of cultivation by Guatemalans in Mexican territory, and recognizing that some of the infractions were due to ignorance over the boundary lines, the memorandum allowed the violators four months to collect and clear their crops from Mexican territory. The memorandum pointed out Montes in particular, mentioning that after an extensive review of the documents as well as interviews by Trueba, the Guatemalan had a year to vacate his extensive holdings.[150]

In a letter to superiors after the riverbank summit, Trueba recognized he overstepped his authority. His superiors agreed, and Trueba's actions earned him a stern rebuke after the

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[149] Nolan-Ferrell, *Constructing Citizenship*, 97-116.
[150]Trueba to Medina, Tacubaya, July 20, 1956, AH-SRE Legajo 339-6 Expedientes 11-14.

Secretary of Foreign Relations received strongly worded protests from his Guatemalan counterpart.[151] Trueba's justification for his actions, quoted below, reveals the deep frustrations of confronting a borderlands that lacked attention from the center. The memorandum of understanding signed at the river's edge served as a type of protest against the federal government's inattention to Mexican sovereignty, while also providing a stark reminder that despite sharing a common boundary, Guatemala and Mexico had no diplomatic mechanism to work out disputes, share resources, or together determine where their countries ended and began.

> I recognize having exceeded my duties and on occasion, having proceeded, up to a certain point, arbitrarily, but in my view I believe that due to the lack of any other authority, and with the possibility of acting immediately, I attempted, as an Official Representative, as a Mexican, to provisionally remedy the situation, though I hope that in the near future once the respective departments become aware of the issue, they will pay more attention to [this] piece of Mexican land forgotten by us.[152]

Logging and the Revolution

Trueba's fears were partly unfounded: the region did not lie as far out of the federal bureaucratic gaze as he feared. In fact, he was there precisely as part of the increasing efforts by the Mexican government since 1882 – and growing in intensity since the post-revolutionary period of the 1930's – to document the political, demographic and cultural character of the

[151] Trueba's superior did defend him to Guatemalan authorities for the engineer's assistance in constructing a landing strip for the small population in Ixquisis, even reproducing a letter from the village thanking Trueba. Medina to Ventura Nulia L. (No date given) AH-SRE Legajo 339-6 Expedientes 21-22; Nulia to Medina, Cobán, June 27, 1956, AH-SRE Legajo 339-6, Expedientes 17-18.

[152]Trueba to Medina, Tacubaya, July 20, 1956, AH-SRE Legajo 339-6, Expediente 10,

southern border. This effort emerged in internal and external (diplomatic) bureaucratic efforts. The government had authorized studies, formed commissions, enlisted on-the-ground help, reviewed data and finally decided, in the context of increasing international and national priorities and pressures, what were the next steps in engagement with a southern periphery largely forgotten for most of independent Mexico's existence.

The first step by the Mexican government consisted of simply demarcating the southern boundary. Article Four of the 1882 Treaty created a temporary binational boundary commission to survey a border largely defined by local custom and colonial boundaries.[153] Until an ad-hoc border treaty in 1942, the 1882 boundary commission's acrimonious and difficult existence served as the only experience the two countries had with a binational organization committed to resolving problems and improving conditions on the southern border. The often bizarre and violent events delaying the initial 1882 Commission's work – it was not until 1895 that both countries agreed on a common demarcation – presaged the years of mistrust between the two neighbors and augured difficulty in establishing a twentieth century organization.

It soon became clear from Guatemala's choice to lead its commission, the U.S. engineer and astronomer from the Washington Naval Observatory, Miles Rock, that the southern borderlands boundary survey would not proceed smoothly. Rock served as the major impediment to a work that the treaty estimated would be completed in a time span of two years.

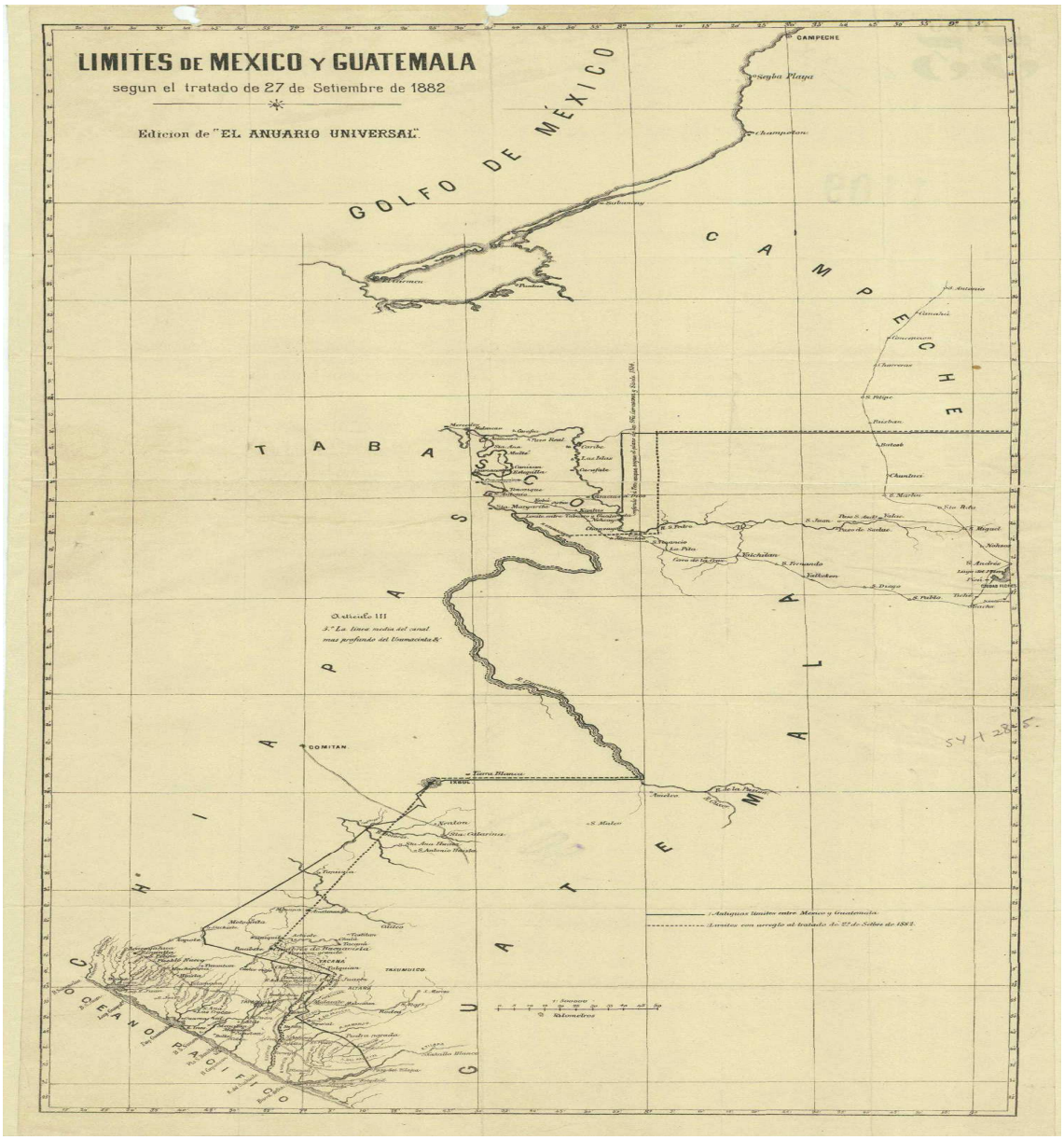
[153]See the original language of the Treaty, which called for a time period of two years to demarcate the entire border. "Articulo IV, Para trazar la línea divisoria con la precisión debida en mapas fehacientes, y establecer sobre el terreno monumentos que pongan a la vista los límites de ambas Repúblicas, según quedan descritos en el anterior artículo, nombrará cada uno de los dos Gobiernos una Comisión científica. Ambas Comisiónes se reunirán en Unión Juárez…Llevarán diarios y levantarán planos de la misma, y el resultado de sus trabajos, convenido por ellas, se considerará parte de este Tratado y tendrá la misma fuerza si estuviera en él inserto. El plazo para la conclusión de dichas operaciones será de dos años, contados desde la fecha en que las Comisiónes se reúnan. Los dos Gobiernos celebrarán a la mayor brevedad un arreglo para determinar los detalles relativos a estas Comisiónes y sus trabajos. "Tratado sobre Límites entre México y Guatemala, celebrado en 1882," Accessed February 8, 2015, http://www.sre.gob.mx/cilasur/images/stories/tratado1882mexguat.pdf.

In the estimation of the Mexican historian Daniel Cosío Villegas, he seemed to be more of a partisan for Guatemalan interests than were many Guatemalans.[154]

From the beginning of his appointment in 1884, the American engineer faithfully executed the Guatemalan government's strategy of delaying the demarcation of the border through the deliberate misinterpretation of the treaty. The Guatemalans took this tack when they discovered that following the demarcation stipulated in the treaty would mean Guatemala would lose nearly six percent of the national territory they had not intended to surrender, around the Lacandon Forest and in the northern department of Petén. As the demarcation efforts moved east from the Pacific, the Suchiate no longer served as an obvious boundary marker as it turns south and the border leaves it approximately fifty miles northeast of Tapachula. The lack of reliable maps of the area added to the confusion that had caused Barrios to push through a treaty that gave Mexico more land than he had intended; for example, those used during the negotiations mislabeled the many rivers traversing the Lacandon. Despite the confusion, the 1882 treaty clearly laid out how the demarcation of the eastern border of Chiapas should proceed: it began as a line that extended along parallel 17° 49', named the Santiago Vertex, until reaching the "deepest channel of the Usumacinta river or of the Chixoy river should the parallel not meet the first river." Following that line, the eastern border of Chiapas, according to the 1882 treaty, extended into what had been traditionally accepted as part of Guatemala (See Map 1). Rock and the Guatemalan commission's maps, on the other hand, reflected the traditional boundary: their border followed the Santiago Vertex for only a few miles and then abruptly turned northeast, as seen in the map below. This map was produced by the famed Mexican cartographer Antonio

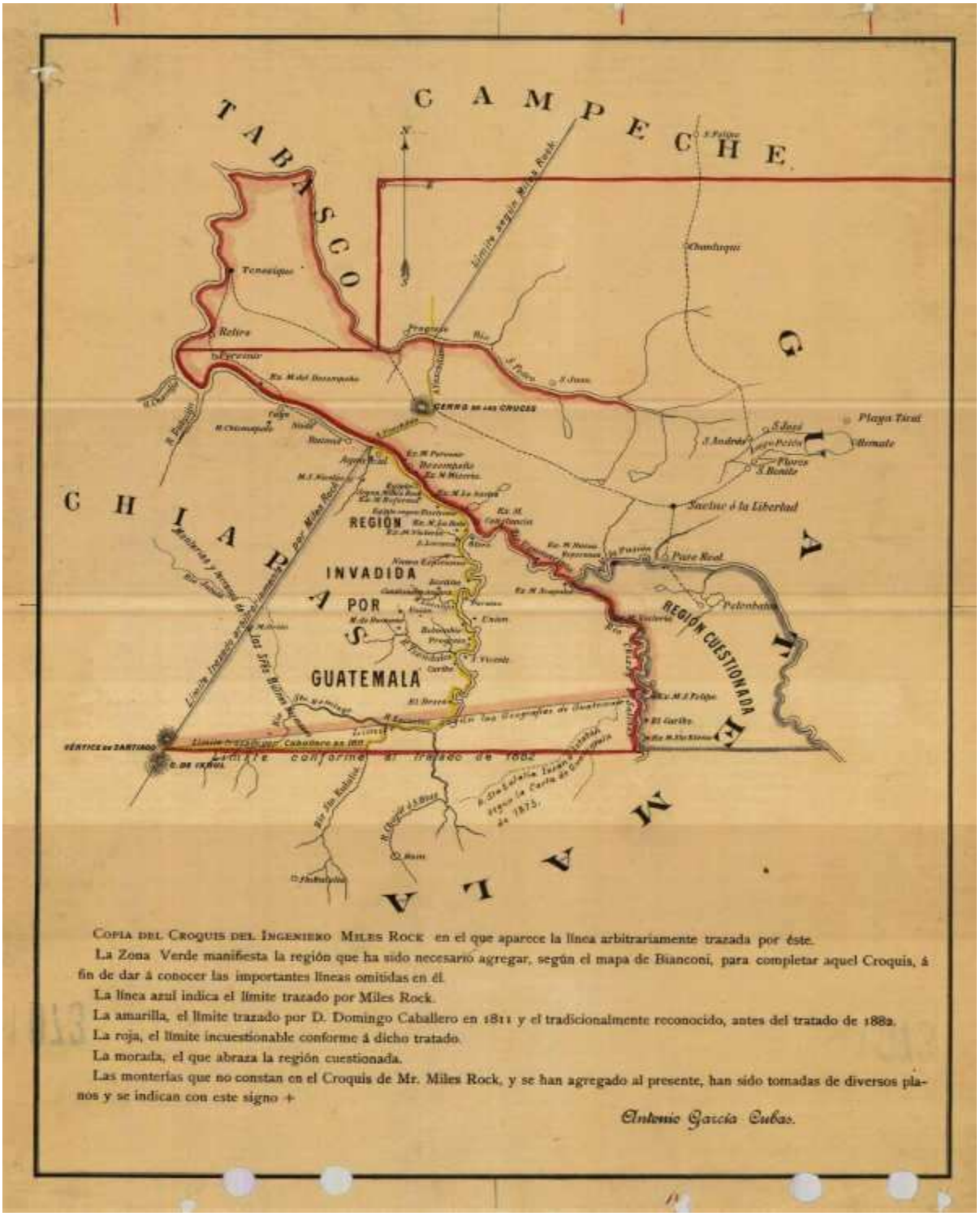
[154] Daniel Cosío Villegas, *Historia Moderna de México. El Porfiriato. La Vida Política Exterior. Parte Primera: Con Guatemala y Centro-América* (México-Buenos Aires, Editorial Hennes, 1960), 297, cited in de Vos, *Oro verde*, 107.

Garcia Cubas, who labeled Rock's boundary an "arbitrary line," as it claimed for Guatemala a large swath of the Lacandon Forest – which Garcia Cubas labelled on the map as "land invaded by Guatemala" – which was a clear deviation from the territorial outlines of the 1882 treaty.[155] (See Map 2)



Map 1 "Limites de México y Guatemala según el Tratado del 27 de Septiembre de 1882," Asociación para el Fomento de los Estudios Históricos en Centro América.

[155] Ibid., 104.



COPIA DEL CROQUIS DEL INGENIERO MILES ROCK en el que aparece la línea arbitrariamente trazada por éste.

La Zona Verde manifiesta la región que ha sido necesario agregar, según el mapa de Bianconi, para completar aquel Croquis, á fin de dar á conocer las importantes líneas omitidas en él.

La línea azul indica el límite trazado por Miles Rock.

La amarilla, el límite trazado por D. Domingo Caballero en 1811 y el tradicionalmente reconocido, antes del tratado de 1882.

La roja, el límite incuestionable conforme á dicho tratado.

La morada, el que abraza la región cuestionada.

Las monterías que no constan en el Croquis de Mr. Miles Rock, y se han agregado al presente, han sido tomadas de diversos planos y se indican con este signo +

Antonio García Cubas.

Map 2, "Copia del croquis del Ingeniero Miller Rock en el que aparece la línea trazada arbitrantemente trazada por este," Asociación para el Fomento de los Estudios Históricos en Centro América.

For ten years both the Mexican and Guatemalan border commissions failed to find a solution to their competing claims in the eastern borderlands. In contrast, the demarcation and erection of monuments proceeded fairly quickly in the populous and well-mapped Soconusco region, taking about six months. There, Guatemala actually gained approximately 2,000 square miles as Mexico relinquished its right to some land claimed south of the Suchiate river.[156] In the Lacandon region each border commission sent occasional surveying expeditions into the disputed area, but this political disagreement was mostly carried out in dueling maps and pronouncements in the press. Rock and the Mexican Border Commissioner Miguel Pastrana never actually met to discuss their differing viewpoints, and it is unclear how valuable such a meeting would have been. In this way, for years, the borderlands dispute simmered as Rock and Pastrana directed surveying expeditions in other, less controversial areas where Guatemala bordered Tabasco and Campeche. Adding to the difficulty from the Mexican side was Pastrana's difficulty in recruiting laborers and engineers to perform the precise surveys as well as the arduous work of clearing jungle and erecting monuments. News of the difficulties involved, such as death of 300 *macheteros* from fever in 1886, along with low pay, discouraged borderlanders from joining the border commission. In contrast, the Guatemalan commission had a much easier path into the Lacandon, the land leading up to it consisted of flat plains, which enabled Rock and his team of surveyors and Guatemalan officials to visit and, as we will see, exert greater control of the borderlands.[157]

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[156] de Vos, *Oro Verde*, 106.

[157] de Vos *Oro verde,* 106-111; *New York Times,* February 1, 1895; Miles Rock, *Map of the Republic of Guatemala* (Philadelphia, M.H. Mueller, 1895).

Adding to the difficulty in resolving this dispute were the continuing operations as well as contracts granted to numerous logging firms by the state governments of Tabasco and Chiapas, and the department of San Marcos in Guatemala. After 1882 Guatemalan officials continued to accept large amounts of money for extraction rights within territory ceded to Mexico as outlined in the boundary treaty. These officials justified their actions based on the maps Rock's commissions produced. Logging companies, intent on securing access to the valuable forest, paid off those local officials that had the greatest presence in the region, which because of the greater ease of access, meant Guatemalan authorities. For example, a new enterprise called Casa Romano, backed by vast amounts of Spanish capital, competed against well-established firms such as Casa Jamet y Sastre, for access to the lucrative mahogany trade by pouring money into the pockets of Guatemalan officials in towns such as San Marcos. As a result, the logging camps scattered over the vast borderlands territory became sparks of contention, symbolic of a lack of a mutually agreed upon border. In scattered incidents from 1889 onwards, Guatemalan soldiers dislodged or arrested logging firm contractors under the pretense of illegally operating in Guatemalan territory. These loggers had fallen in disfavor because they began to pay Mexican officials for extraction rights in reaction to the spatial outlines of the 1882 Treaty. The appeal by the logging companies to local and federal Mexican governments often resulted in official protests against Guatemalan actions, but no binational or diplomatic steps cleared up an uneasy status quo that often turned violent. [158]

Tensions heightened considerably in May and June of 1894, when Miles Rock led close to one hundred members of the Guatemalan militia on a tour of logging camps granted rights by local Mexican officials in the disputed section of the Lacandon Forest. Rock and the men under

[158] de Vos, *Oro verde*, 112-119.

his command arrested the loggers for being in "Guatemalan" territory, confiscated material, and burned camps. They were confronted at one camp by a Chiapan government inspector, leading to a violent disagreement that forced the Mexican official to flee under a hail of gunfire. In response to the Mexican government's protest, Guatemalan officials refused to either condemn Rock's action, or curb their surveyor's provocative violent actions.[159]

War seemed imminent. In his September 16, 1894 address to the nation, Mexican President Porfirio Díaz denounced the conflict on the southern boundary. He demanded the Guatemalan government pay reparations to the logging firms and their employees as well as punish those responsible for the "abuses" committed in "land that had always belonged to the state of Chiapas."[160] Despite Díaz's insistence on attempting a peaceful solution, martial fever seemed to spread. Eight state governments began to raise militias, plans were drawn up to invade Guatemala -- columns would march from Tapachula, Comitán, Tabasco, and Campeche -- and the public began to donate funds for an extended conflict.[161] In the borderlands, Guatemalan refugees were fleeing to the Comitán region, reportedly escaping impressment into the army of Jose Maria Reyna Barrios, the nephew of the late caudillo Barrios.[162]

Then the two governments walked back from the brink of conflict. Díaz did not want war. Based on information received from long-time Mexican Ambassador Matías Romero, he calculated that Guatemala enjoyed the support of the United States, while he became increasingly alarmed at the funds expended in preparations for a war. In Guatemala, the border

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[159] Ibid., 120-121.

[160] Ricardo Rodríguez, *Historia auténtica de la administración del Sr. Gral. Porfirio Díaz. Contiene: Introducción. Breve reseña histórico de México. El Sr. Gral. Porfirio Díaz ante la historia. Los informes leídos por el señor presidente ante el Congreso de la unión, desde el año de 1877 hasta 1880, y desde 1885 hasta 1904 en que termina su actual período constitucional* (México: Oficina de la Secretaría de Fomento, 1904), 64-65. In the same address, Díaz also mentioned the successful demarcation and erection of monuments by the Mexican and U.S. Border Commission of the western, non Rio Grande, part of the border.

[161] de Vos, *Oro verde,* 123.

[162] *New York Times*, February 10, 1895.

proved to be a convenient and timely rallying cry for the faltering government of Reyna Barrios, but no appetite existed there either for an actual conflict. Meeting in Mexico City in April 1895, Mexican and Guatemalan diplomats came to an agreement. Guatemala dismissed Miles Rock and reaffirmed the 1882 territorial claims of Mexico in the disputed Lacandon region. Mexico agreed to not press for compensation for troop mobilization, while as part of the negotiation, they submitted claims of indemnification to the mutually agreed upon arbitrator, the Spanish Minister in Mexico, for the damages caused by Rock and his crew.[163]

Much like the confidence Soconuscan coffee investors obtained from the 1882 treaty, the 1895 agreement between Mexico and Guatemala sparked a capital-fueled race to extract lumber, and a new commodity, chicle, from the eastern part of the borderlands. Assisting would-be logging and gum magnates were the land tenure laws developed during the early years of the Porfiriatio, which laid a legal foundation for the auctioning off of the Lacandon to the highest bidder. Instead of establishing the state in the borderlands, the Mexican government chose to contract the use of the border out to the highest bidder; in the offices of the Secretary of Development, large companies parceled off and bought huge swaths of land, often sight unseen.

The 1894 Regulation for Exploitation of Woods and Unoccupied and National Lands (Regulación para la Explotación de los Bosques y Terrenos Baldíos y Nacionales) facilitated the sale of the Lacandon by private interests. The Regulation allowed contractors to lease millions of acres of national land for the purpose of extracting "lumber, rubber, and resin." In addition, key wording allowed the contractors the option to buy the land they leased. [164] An example of

[163] Verónica González Arriaga, *La política exterior de México hacia Centroamérica, 1890-1906* (Morelia: Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, Departamento de Historia Latinoamericana, 2000), 101-104.

[164] Jan de Vos, "Una legislación de graves consecuencias: El acaparamiento de tierras baldías en México, con el pretexto de colonización, 1821-1910," *Historia Mexicana* 34 (1984): 89-91.

the magnitude of the process with which Mexico City auctioned the borderlands is the enormous amount of territory granted in 1905 to the wealthy Spanish nobleman Claudio López Bru, or the Marqués de Comillas. A recent addition to noble ranks – King Alfonso XII of Spain created and granted the title to his father in 1878 in recognition of financial assistance to the state – López formed the Compañía Ibero Mexicana in 1887 to demarcate and colonize parts of Guerrero, one of the many such enterprises formed under the Law of Colonization of 1883.[165] Due to complications that developed with that lease, the Secretary of Development offered López a similar sized property in another part of Mexico. In 1904, López's Compañía Ibero demarcated nearly 500,000 acres of land in the southeastern corner of the Lacandon. In 1905, the Mexican government gave the title to 320,000 acres of land to López, while selling the leftover plot of land allocated by law to public auction to a logging firm.[166] In this way, on the eve of the Mexican Revolution, the Secretary of Development had converted over one million acres of the Lacandon Forest into the private property of logging firms, one of which, in the case of the entirely foreign controlled and financed Aguas Azul, controlled close to 300,000 acres.[167] It was only the overthrow of Díaz that stopped the auction, saving thousands of acres of forests from the logging camps. [168]

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[165] The first major land tenure law to open up Mexican land, the decree allowed private companies to demarcate and buy over 6,000 acres of unoccupied land for the purposes of habitation. Over 200 concessions were granted in ten years, totaling over 120,000,000 acres, or nearly a fourth of the Mexican republic. Despite ambitious sounding projects, such as a plan to settle 10,000 Gallegos –from the Spanish region of Galicia -- in southern Chiapas just outside the Lacandon Forest, most of contracts were bought for the purpose of land speculation. de Vos, "Una legislación de graves consecuencias," 82-83.

[166] de Vos, *Oro verde*, 159-160. In 1999, the *Marqués* de Comillas became one of the 119 municipalities of Chiapas, covering nearly one percent of the state with a population of approximately ten thousand. Accessed February 9, 2015, http://www.e-local.gob.mx/work/templates/enciclo/EMM07chiapas/municipios/07116a.html.

[167] Ibid., 164-169.

[168] Philip Howard, "The History of Ecological Marginalization in Chiapas," *Environmental History* 3 (1988): 360.

The Mexican Revolution jarred loose the Porfiriato, but when the revolution arrived in Chiapas, it looked very different from the way it did in the rest of Mexico.[169] The course of the revolution in the borderlands revealed the region's isolation from the political, economic, and social movements wracking the rest of the country. Instead, the revolution in Chiapas reflected the interests and struggles of local elites. The border itself became a became a site of violent utility, as opposing forces crossed back and forth, escaping into a Guatemala eager to foment political strife in neighboring Mexico.

The first few years of the conflict became defined by the conflict between conservative San Cristóbal and the progressive stronghold and state capital, Tuxtla Gutiérrez. For example, the short 1911 rebellion led by San Cristóbal elites, joined by thousands of highland indigenous troops, against Tuxtla Gutiérrez had little to do with the Madero movement, or events further north. Instead, it was a rejection of the economic and political changes enacted by the *científicos* (technocratic officials intent on modernizing Mexico along positivist principles) sent to govern during the Porfiriato, such as attempts to modernize labor relations and, above all, the transfer of the state capital from San Cristóbal to Tuxtla. The Mano Negra rebellion lasted only a few weeks. With the Caste War of 1867 fresh in the minds of both groups of opposing elites, the indigenous allies of San Cristóbal were quickly dismissed, and the mestizo elites decided to conduct their battle through political intrigue and threats of violence instead.[170]

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[169] Historians are reexamining the common refrain that, "The Revolution never arrived in Chiapas." For the most recent interpretations see Justus Fenner and Miguel Lisbona. *La Revolución mexicana en Chiapas: un siglo después: nuevos aportes, 1910-1940* (San Cristóbal de las Casas: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Coordinación de Humanidades, Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas, Programa de Investigaciones Multidisciplinarias sobre Mesoamérica y el Sureste, 2010).

[170] Thomas.Benjamin, "¡Primera Viva Chiapas! Local Rebellions and the Mexican Revolution in Chiapas," *Revista Europea De Estudios Latinoamericanos Y Del Caribe / European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 49 (1990): 39-44.

Open fighting, if not outright civil war, next erupted in the summer of 1914, when General Jesus Agustín Castro arrived to consolidate revolutionary leader Venustiano Carranza's rule in isolated Chiapas. His address to an assembled crowd upon arriving encapsulated the approach he and the over thousand-man Carrancista force took towards the now occupied state, "Chiapaneco cowards, while the north is struggling, you are enjoying peace, but I will teach you to feel the effects of the revolution."[171] Through the burning of fincas, arrests, and outright violence, the general attempted to enforce a series of far-reaching progressive reforms. Most significant were labor laws which, among other changes, abolished debt servitude and introduced requirements for land-owners to provide a minimum wage, health care, schools, and housing.

A minor landholder, Fernando Ruiz, led a small group of mestizos in opposition, attacking troop convoys, robbing travelers on the Pan-American highway, and raiding Carrancista garrisons. The Mapache Rebellion—the rebels were called *los mapaches*, raccoons, for their habit of attacking at night—was initially composed of "frontier finqueros and ranchers" who were fighting against an occupying army, rather than against the progressive reforms brought from the north. Though at the outset Ruiz adopted the banner of Zapatismo because of Emiliano Zapata's opposition to Carranza, the growing Brigada Libre de Chiapas had nothing to do with the central Mexican revolutionary's national program. Instead, as in 1911, the revolution became a civil war for state power, as Ruiz welcomed to his ranks disaffected elites, some even with family members in the new government.

Though the *Carrancista* regime was able to implement reforms in key areas of the state, including in the borderlands region of Soconusco, the inability of the revolutionary regime to control the traffic of arms and men across the border allowed the increasingly bloody conflict in

[171] Ibid., 44.

Chiapas to continue until 1920.[172] Exacerbating the *Carrancistas' security* problem were the actions of Guatemalan president Manuel Estrada Cabrera (1898-1920). In Mexico's national confusion, Estrada saw an opportunity to weaken Guatemala's traditional rival regardless of any ideological affinity he might have had with any revolutionary group. Throughout the revolution, Estrada maintained an antagonistic posture to domestic peace in Mexico expressed through his policy of assistance to the Mapaches. Some authors have even suggested that a dementia-inflicted Estrada might have contemplated retaking Chiapas from a weakened Mexico. Regardless, Estrada's assistance provided the Mapaches a lifeline. When facing superior forces, Mapache groups simply escaped across the border. The Guatemalan caudillo also played a key role in supporting the largely symbolic counter-revolutionary efforts of Felix Díaz, Porfirio Díaz's nephew. After a failed uprising in Veracruz in 1916, Díaz and his band of Felicistas operated out of northern Guatemala until 1920, occasionally joining the Mapaches in their attacks throughout the countryside.[173]

In 1920 the former Mapache leader Fernando Ruiz became governor of Chiapas. Ruiz's inability to control the emerging social forces demanding reform, along with a lack of support from the federal government, made it impossible for Ruiz to hold power. Ruiz simply ignored or, barring that, delayed through lack of funding, the enforcement of the economic and political reforms brought by the revolution, such as the 1914 Labor Laws, which banned the notorious engache system that had long plagued Chiapas. Long a source of derision by outside observers--many called it slavery--this labor arrangement tied mostly indigenous laborers to large-scale fincas through inescapable debt. As far as reconstruction, in part to rebuild the damage inflected

[172] Thomas Benjamin, *A Rich Land, A Poor People,* 129-132.
[173] Benjamin, *A Rich Land*, *A Poor People*, 128-129.

by his revolutionary band, Ruiz concentrated on the central valley in and around Tuxtla Gutiérrez, neglecting the borderlands.[174]

Resistance to Ruiz's rule came from the borderlands and ensured his downfall. The Chiapan Socialist Party, which drew its strength from Soconuscan coffee workers, ensured in 1924 that incoming president Calles would not support the Mapache's hand-picked successor. The election of the Socialist Party's leader, Carlos Vidal, to the governorship finally brought a small degree of the land and labor reform promised in the revolution to Chiapas. For example, during the Vidal years, newly approved state agrarian laws allowed the distribution of nearly 200,000 acres of land to over six thousand families.[175] As Trueba discovered nearly thirty years later, borderlanders, regardless of nationality, took advantage of these opportunities, and the state lacked the bureaucratic infrastructure to ensure that only Mexicans benefited from the revolution.

The reforms Vidal promoted came to abrupt halt upon his death in 1927. Opposed to the dual caudillo team of Plutarco Elías Calles and Álvaro Obregon's hold on power as Obregón campaigned to return to the presidency, he was assassinated by their supporters at a military checkpoint.[176] The Calles administration's choice for governor, Raymundo Enríquez, ensured that reforms in the valuable coffee borderlands of Soconsuco did not affect the important generation of funds. Indeed, Enríquez lowered taxes on coffee, while also ensuring that national agrarian reform did not lead to the partition of the large coffee fincas that were responsible for nearly 80 percent of all state revenue. The last pre-Cárdenas state governor, Victórico Grajales, a central valley rancher, concentrated on economic modernization, transforming local government

[174] Ibid. 149-153.
[175] Ibid, 164.
[176] Ibid, 168-169.

into a tool for landowners. The state budget for roads almost doubled, leading to an even greater demand for labor from Guatemala, while industry taxes were eliminated..[177]

Between the end of the revolution in 1920 and the election of Lázaro Cárdenas in 1934, the post-revolutionary state paid little attention to issues such as the demographics of the borderlands or hardening of the border. Coordinated efforts by the federal government to address the borderlands through policy and direct intervention of officials sent from Mexico City were ad-hoc reactions to events on the ground. On the eve of the Cárdenas administration's intervention into the region, the federal government's initial examination of who lived in the borderlands brought up alarming xenophobic denunciations of a Guatemalan invasion. In early 1935 a wide ranging tour of the entire Chiapan borderlands by an official inspector with the Secretariat of the Interior (Secretaría de Gobernación*)* laid bare the result of this migration as well as the lack of effective border controls from Soconusco to the Lacandon Forest. The inspector visited the nascent Immigration Inspection Service (Servicio de Inspección de Migrantes, SM, discussed in detail below) offices, noting the "absolute lack of border vigilance." As a consequence, the inspector wrote alarmingly of the composition of the borderlands:

> The writer in his tour heard the clamor of [the Mexicans in the borderlands] that see themselves surrounded by people not beholden to the central government or the Mexican nation, that cheer Guatemala, and on the smallest occasion insult our country…the sentiment of this grand mass of humanity, whose numbers grow, it is estimated to be 50,000 souls, is through and through Guatemalan.[178]

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[177] Ibid., 180-185.

[178] Informe rendido por el C. Inspector Miguel Jiménez sobre la comisión conferida en la frontera con la Republica con Guatemala, March, 1935, Archivo General de la Nación-Archivo Presidencial de Lázaro Cárdenas del Río Caja 905 Expediente 8. (Here forth AGN-APLCR)

Cárdenas and the Borderlands

The elevation of Cárdenas to the presidency in 1934 brought the post-revolutionary Mexican state to the Chiapan borderlands. If elsewhere in Mexico Cardenismo sought to transform the countryside, organize the workers, and strengthen the state, in Chiapas Cardenismo also meant making the region "Mexican." Federal bureaucrats arriving in the Chiapan borderlands sought to both transform and incorporate the region into the national fold through reforms in the areas of education, land tenure, and labor. These benefits, promised to Mexicans as part of the revolution, became contested in the borderlands as both borderlanders and the state worried that Guatemalans were enjoying the social and economic fruits of the revolutionary struggle. In reaction to this alarm, Cárdenas became the first post-revolutionary president to pursue policies directly related to the perceived demographic problems in the borderlands. The federal government attempted to tame this fugitive landscape through documentation, registration, and deportation of Guatemalans, while at the same time trying to establish binational cooperation with the Guatemalan government regarding shared transnational issues.

Unlike the failure of past national regimes to assert themselves in Chiapas, the Cárdenas administration made a special effort to bring the federal government to the distant province. Indeed, Cárdenas scheduled his first state wide tour outside of Mexico City in Chiapas, promising to a crowd in the borderland town of Comitán to "bring the benefits of the Revolution."[179] The trajectory of one of these benefits, Article 123 schools, in Chiapas during the Cárdenas regime reveals the limits of state intervention in the borderlands, as well as the

[179] Antonio García de León, *Resistencia y utopía: memorial de agravios y crónicas de revueltas y profecías acaecidas en la Provincia de Chiapas durante los últimos quinientos años de su historia* (México.: Ediciones Era, 1985), 400-401.

reaction by federal employees new to Chiapas to a unique borderlands demographic.[180] Named for the provision which created them in the 1917 Constitution, the curriculum developed by the Ministry of Public Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública, SEP) in the 1930's began to reflect the intellectual elite's radicalized interpretation of the revolution's causes, and ultimately its future. This trajectory culminated in 1934 with an embrace of socialist education. Textbooks became vehicles to explain the evils of capitalism and the sins of the Porfiriato, such as a slavish embrace of foreign capital. The revolutionary SEP fashioned an idea of Mexican citizenship around the ideal of hardworking rural peasants, women and men alike, encouraged to demand rights enshrined in the progressive 1917 Constitution.[181]

Efforts like the Article 123 schools brought to the attention of the federal government the issue of nationality in the borderlands. For example, Stephen Lewis relates how these teachers, "state-building shock troops for the central government," in addition to promoting agrarian reform and workers' rights, also worried about the suspected national allegiance of borderlanders.[182] In Mexico City, higher ups in the SEP, as well as functionaries and teachers on the ground in borderlands communities such as La Libertad and Tuxtla Chico, complained about children and parents suspected to be more Guatemalan than Mexican. One SEP inspector claimed the emotional reaction by some borderlanders at the appearance of the Guatemalan flag, a supposed misty reverence, revealed the dangerous patriotic attachment of borderlanders who

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[180] Notably Alan Knight questioned the ability of Cardenismo to combat powerful entrenched interests. See Alan Knight, "Cardenismo: Juggernaut or Jalopy?" *Journal of Latin American Studies* 26 (1994): 73-107. For a review of the most recent historiography on Cardenismo see Luis.Anaya Merchant, "*El cardenismo en la revolución mexicana*; *conflicto y competencia en una historiografía viva,*" *Historia Mexicana* 238 (2010): 1281-1355. For regional studies see Adrian Bantjes, *As if Jesus walked on Earth: Cardenismo, Sonora, and the Mexican Revolution* (Wilmington: SR Books, 1998); and Ben Fallaw, *Cárdenas Compromised: The Failure of Reform in Postrevolutionary Yucatán* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

[181] Mary Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press. 1997), 34-46.

[182] Stephen E. Lewis, *The Ambivalent Revolution: Forging State and Nation in Chiapas, 1910-1945* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), xxii.

claimed to be Mexican. Schooling — if they could find properly patriotic Mexican teachers, a worry of officials — became even more important, as it represented a vehicle to mold Mexican citizens.[183]

Like education, agrarian reform brought the issue of nationality in the borderlands to the surface. Instead of forging "Mexicans," the Cardenista land tenure laws prompted local struggles over who could claim Mexican citizenship. In her study of the formation of ejidos constructed by Soconuscan communities from the expropriation of coffee fincas, Catherine Nolan-Ferrell examines how land petitions among coffee workers turned upon claims of Mexicanness, and their rights as citizens. In response, landowners anxious to keep land protested to officials of the SM and the Secretary of Interior that Guatemalans were forming ejidos. In one instance in 1934, SM officials forcibly deported the men, all laborers in the coffee fields, from the newly formed community of Colonia Salvador Urbina based on a rival landowners' accusation of Guatemalan nationality. After nighttime crossing back into Mexico over the Suchiate River, the returning men protested to the Secretary of the Interior, claiming their Mexicanness was attacked by the German landowner. Eventually successful in their petition, the inhabitants of the ejido Salvador Urbina proved how fluid and potent a claim of Mexican citizenship was for the new rights promised by Cardenismo in the Chiapan borderlands.[184]

With the introduction of federal government through the Cárdenas-era reforms, Mexico City bureaucrats and the president himself turned their attention to the demographic composition of the borderlands. On March 18, 1935 Cárdenas created, by presidential decree, the Intersecretarial Demographic Commission (Comisión Demográfica Intersecretarial, CDI). Composed of representatives from the Secretariats of the Interior, Foreign Relations, and

[183] Lewis, *The Ambivalent Revolution*, 111-118.
[184] Nolan-Ferrell, *Constructing Citizenship*, 97-116.

Agriculture, the CDI was charged with studying the "demographic problems of the Guatemalan-Mexican border." The CDI concentrated on the Soconusco region and adjacent Mariscal municipality, because of its high concentration of Guatemalan laborers migrating to work in the coffee fields, and as the most populous region of the borderlands. It operated until July 1941, when by residential decree Manual Ávila Camacho replaced it with the Intersecretarial Demographic Commission of Soconusco (Comisión Demográfica Intersecretarial de la Zona de Soconusco, CDIS).[185]

The CDI's charge to study perceived demographic problems occurred in the context of growing national concerns during the 1930's about the perceived arrival of unassimilated, dangerous, or unhealthy immigrants in Mexico. Such concerns led to increasingly strict, nationalist, and racist laws restricting the right of foreigners to live and work in Mexico. The 1930 Migration Law tightened the control of labor, requiring employers, for example, to pay a fee in the case of repatriation of their foreign employees. It also established racial and moral guidelines for the admittance of foreigners barring immigrants with supposed physical and educational defects, or barring those that practiced national customs perceived to be harmful to Mexico, such as some Arab immigrants. The growing xenophobia culminated in the 1936 General Population Law. Based on a eugenically inspired view of economic competition, this law set quotas on nationalities perceived to possess unfair economic advantages, such as immigrants from China. Ultimately, potential immigrants were judged on their labor and if they would contribute to the Mexican nation in transferring skills, or if they would simply take away jobs.[186]

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[185]Miguel Alvarado, et al., to Secretario de Gobernación, et al., México, December 29, 1941, AH-SRE Legajo 334-1, Expediente 93.

` [186] Tonatiuh García Castillo, "Él estatus de extranjería en México propuestas de reforma migratoria," *Boletín Mexicano De Derecho Comparado* 64 (2012): 64-67.

Ancillary to the legislation were efforts around the country to understand and "fix" this perceived immigration problem. For example, in Mexico City, a School for the Mexicanization of Immigrants opened up in 1934.[187] In the early 1930's the recently formed National Revolutionary Party commissioned the demographer and economist Gilberto Loyo to write a study about the demographic composition of the country, which was published in 1935 as *La política demográfica en México* (Demographic Policy in Mexico) Loyo considered his work to be more than mere statistics, emphasizing his duties "in the defense of the life, national integration, and assuring the historical continuity of the nation." In his review of expulsions of foreigners since 1921, Guatemalans occupied the top space.[188]

Chiapas presented a unique situation to authorities worried about foreign influence as by the 1930s historical, economic, and political factors created a confusing and chaotic situation with regard to registration of nationality. A memo justifying the labor of the CDI traced the existing confusion back to the 1882 Treaty of Limits when, similar to the stipulations in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Guatemalans living in the Chiapan territory ceded to Mexico suddenly became Mexicans.[189] However, this stipulation only added to the confusion in the region as the lack of state presence in 1882 meant it was impossible for the Mexican state to determine in 1935 who had obtained citizenship, or inherited Mexican citizenship, from Article

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[187] Theresa Alfaro-Velcamp, "When Pernicious Foreigners Become Citizens: Naturalization in Early Twentieth-Century Mexico," *Journal of Politics and Law* 6 (2013): 46-47.

[188] Pablo Yankelevich, "Extranjeros indeseables en México (1911-1940). Una aproximación cuantitativa a la aplicación del artículo 33 constitucional," *Historia Mexicana* 211 (2004): 701-707.

[189] See Article V of the Treaty. "Los nacionales de cualquiera de las dos Partes Contratantes que, en virtud de las estipulaciones de este Tratado, queden para lo futuro en territorio de la otra, podrán permanecer en ellos o trasladarse en cualquier tiempo a donde mejor les convenga… Los que prefieran permanecer en los territorios cedidos, podrán conservar el título y derechos de nacionales del país a que antes pertenecían dichos territorios, o adquirir la nacionalidad de aquel a que van a pertenecer en lo adelante. Más la elección deberá hacerse entre una y otra nacionalidad dentro de un año contado desde la fecha del canje de las ratificaciones del presente Tratado; y los que permanecieren en dichos territorios después de transcurrido el año, sin haber declarado su intención de retener su antigua nacionalidad, serán considerados como nacionales de la otra Parte Contratante." Tratado Sobre Limites, Celebrado el 27 de Septiembre de 1882, Accessed March 20, 2015, http://cila.sre.gob.mx/cilasur/images/stories/tratado1882mexguat.pdf

V of the 1882 Treaty. Underlining all this uncertainty was the estimation that 95 percent of Soconusco inhabitants had no form of identification for any country.[190]

Indeed, since 1882 borderlanders had generally made do without any form of identification of nationality; whether born in Guatemala or Mexico, many did not need to obtain proof of citizenship to carry out day-to-day activities. For some, according to the CDI report, bureaucratic impediments were listed as reasons they never got around to applying for official documentation. Borderlanders complained that the four or five cent fee demanded by the Chiapan Civil Register for a birth certificate was too much. A vast majority took their newborns to Guatemalan churches for free baptisms; all that was needed there was to state the baby was born in Guatemala. Besides, anti-church revolutionaries had destroyed many Mexican baptism records. Borderlanders who claimed Mexican citizenship became notorious for refusing to obtain any form of documentation, claiming they did not need any to prove their Mexicanness. The coffee bonanza of the early twentieth century further added to the confusion, especially when world prices jumped during 1921-1934, which brought approximately six to ten thousand central Guatemalans north into Soconusco each year to work the harvest. Finqueros "spilled money into open hands" to make this happen, bribing state and municipal authorities, as well as federal officials in Migration, the military, and the Secretariat of Labor, up to a thousand pesos to look the other way. Many of the Guatemalans who came to work decided to stay and make a life in the borderlands.[191]

The corruptibility of SM officials in Chiapas made it impossible to enforce increasingly strict immigration laws and to regulate citizenship for both Guatemalan and Mexican

[190] Miguel Alvarado, et al., to Secretario de Gobernación, et al., México, December 29, 1941, AH-SRE Legajo 334-1 Expediente 107.

[191] Miguel Alvarado, et al., to Secretario de Gobernación, et al., México, December 29, 1941, AH-SRE Legajo 334-1 Expediente 108.

borderlanders. The SM, reconstituted under the authority of the Secretariat of the Interior in 1926, became an example of the difficulty the federal government faced in carrying out policy through bureaucratic institutions. Shaped on the model of the United States Border Patrol, the SM had its primary presence on Mexico's borders. In theory they worked alongside another Interior department, the Office of Population and Migration, (Oficina de Población y Migración, PM) in borderland communities. Population and Migration was responsible for internal immigration enforcement, working with municipal officials to enforce regulations determining residency and citizenship.[192] In practice, as we will discuss below, the line of authority between Population and Migration and the SM was never clearly defined, as the Chief of Immigration Service of the Southern Border directed all federal officials responsible for immigration under the SM. Perhaps contributing to the bureaucratic chaos was the poor professionalism displayed by officials, who were poorly paid and underfunded. Rampant alcoholism among higher ups combined with strict laws utilized to shake down individuals and businesses produced an institutionalized acceptance of corruption.[193]

In Soconusco, SM officials, along with their local municipal counterparts, utilized the new immigration laws, the increasing xenophobia directed at Guatemalans, as well as the overall lack of individual identification, to demand money from borderlanders and their employers. Together, Mexican and Guatemalan workers became a "vein of exploitation…an inexhaustible source of money." Officials had many ways to abuse their power for financial gain. For example, borderlanders were picked up on the suspicion of "being Guatemalan" and forced to pay a fine or be deported to Guatemala even when they were, in fact, Mexican. SM officials

[192]"Acerca del INM: Antecedentes," Secretaria del Gobernación: Instituto Nacional de Inmigración, Accessed March 25, http://www.inm.gob.mx/index.php/page/Antecedentes.

[193] Pablo Yankelevich, "Corrupción y gestión migratoria en el México posrevolucionario," *Revista De Indias.* 72 (2012): 433-463.

would often go to fincas to shake down workers, transporting groups over the border to Guatemala if they failed to pay. Finqueros also bribed the same officials to deport unruly workers agitating for greater rights, with the result that as they crossed back into Chiapas, authorities registered Mexican workers as Guatemalans.[194]

In part, the arrival of CDI officials and greater enforcement from the Secretariat of the Interior lessened the corruption as federal officials sought to develop an accurate census picture of the region. However, those working for CDI faced a daunting task in documenting the citizenship of borderlanders. Setting up in borderland towns, such as Tapachula, Suchiate, and Unión Juárez, CDI officials required heads of families to register their nationality. Absent a birth certificate or baptismal record, census takers relied on testimonies of neighbors or, finally, an individual swearing under oath that he or she was a Mexican citizen. Census workers especially took into consideration those who had children born in Mexico, claiming they had "legal and moral ties [arraigo] to Mexican nationality." [195]

In this manner from 1935-1941 CDI registered 46,434 individual heads of household, or a calculated 151,028 inhabitants of the municipalities of Soconusco and Mariscal as Mexican citizens, leaving approximately 19,045 unidentified.[196] Of those 46,434 heads of household, 37,542 were registered as Mexican, while 1,368 children of foreigners opted for Mexican citizenship. The CDI registered 6,306 residents as foreigners or Latin Americans, noting that the majority were Guatemalan. The Guatemalans who chose to come to the municipal office and register with CDI officials had some form of identification. This fact can be seen in the final

[194] Miguel Alvarado, et al., to Secretario de Gobernación, et al., México, December 29, 1941, AH-SRE Legajo 334-1 Expedientes 109-111.

[195] Miguel Alvarado, et al., to Secretario de Gobernación, et al., December 29, 1941, AH-SRE Legajo 334-4, Expedientes 26-29.

[196] Miguel Alvarado, et al., to Secretario de Gobernación, et al., December 29, 1941, AH-SRE Legajo 334-4, Expedientes 12-13.

report, which notes that the majority of those identifying as Guatemalans had or were in the process of receiving naturalization papers, while others had requested or had an official work permit from the Secretariat of Foreign Relations.[197]

Despite claiming to have registered 75 percent of the inhabitants of Soconusco and 25 percent of those of Mariscal, the CDI admitted the likelihood that a large number of Guatemalans who had recently entered the country had avoided registration. The report noted the probability that after of few years of work in the borderlands, many of these unregistered Guatemalans would seek to obtain recognition as Mexican citizens, joining the ejido they worked on or, echoing the complaints of finqueros, attempt to form ejidos with other Guatemalan finca workers.[198] Finally, as if to indicate the incompleteness of their work, the CDI listed 242 ejidos in Soconsuco and Mariscal in which they still had not defined the nationality of the ejiditarios.[199]

Despite the knowledge that thousands of borderlanders escaped registration by the CDI, federal officials adopted a nuanced view of the threat posed by unregistered Guatemalan immigration. Officials from the Secretariats of Labor, Foreign Relations, Agriculture, and the Interior, reviewing the work of the CDI in 1941, concluded that the majority of Guatemalan immigrants lacked "the education and mental capacity" to cause much harm. Within their demeaning view of the Guatemalan laborers was a more sophisticated analysis of the borderlanders' conception of place. Though some "detestable" Guatemalans might refer to colonial claims on Chiapas and declare they were actually in their "own country," for the most part Guatemalan and Mexican borderlanders had a much more localized sense of belonging to a

[197] Informe de los Labores Verificadas por la Extinta Comisión Demográfica Intersecretarial, Tapachula, June 12, 1941, AH-SRE Legajo 334-4 Expedientes 84-97.

[198] Informe de los labores verificadas por la extinta Comisión Demográfica Intersecretarial, Tapachula, June 12, 1941, AH-SRE Legajo 334-4 Expediente 86.

[199] Nombres de los ejidos que tienen sin definir la Nacionalidad de sus Ejidatarios, Tapachula, June 11, 1941, AH-SRE Legajo 334-4 Expedientes 137-142.

village in Guatemala left long ago, or a present-day ejido in the borderlands. Indeed, these officials noted that, for the most part, Guatemalan ejiditarios, in customs indistinguishable from those of Mexicans, were content with and appreciative of the parcel of land received from their newly adopted country.[200]

Controlling the Border

Officials of the newly developed Intersectional Demographic Commission of Soconusco (CDIS) in 1941 did not take such a relaxed view of Guatemalan immigration as the officials of the CDI. For one thing, they worried about the potential political and social harm the socialist education introduced during Cardenismo could produce amongst borderlanders. This attitude reflected the arrival in power of the more conservative Manuel Ávila Camacho administration (1940-1946). At a national level, the SEP removed socialist education from schools, replacing it with an education that emphasized an imagined harmony of the rural countryside and the rapidly developing urban Mexico. Above all, instead of the development of a socially conscious student, the new curriculum emphasized the development of complacent workers, ready to contribute to economic development, without much complaint, and certainly not unrest.[201] In the borderlands, officials worried about the lasting impact of the "pernicious labor…of rural, especially federal [teachers], who, imbued with exotic ideas and wanting to play politics, have disoriented the rural [campesino] class." Instead of a class-oriented education, CDIS officials "truly urged" the

[200] Miguel Alvarado, et al., to Secretario de Gobernación, et al., December 29, 1941, AH-SRE Legajo 334-4 Expedientes 15-18.

[201] Federico Lazarín, *Educación para las ciudades: las políticas educativas 1940-1982. Revista Mexicana De Investigación Educativa* 1 (1996): 166-169; Stephen E. Lewis, "Una victoria pírrica en el México posrevolucionario: Los finqueros alemanes, las escuelas artículo 123 y la formación del estado en la costa de Chiapas, 1934-1942," *Anuario De Estudios Americanos* 67 (2010): 445-465.

"indispensable" work of fostering an education that "created a sense of country and nationalism."[202] In this instance, the worries of CDIS were soon placated. Since their introduction local Chiapan landowners had resisted Article 123 schools, and many of the previous most energetic administrative reformers, in the interest of job security, suddenly "discovered" the folly of radical education, ensuring that local teachers followed a more conservative emphasis in schools throughout Chiapas.[203]

The officials of the CDIS urged additional measures, such as an increase of SM officials along the border, to guard against the potential impact that agrarian rights under Cardenismo might have in increasing undocumented Guatemalan immigration. They speculated that ejidatarios of Guatemalan origin were enticing relatives to come to the borderlands, where they would eventually demand land as Mexicans. In addition, they worried about the continued labor flows of workers to coffee plantations and ejidos, as these Guatemalans, after a season or two in Mexico, would claim the rights of Mexicans. They instead suggested a concentrated effort to recruit indigenous Chamulans from the Central Highlands; the promised Pan-American Highway, connecting the border towns of Tapachula and Comitán to San Cristóbal de las Casas, offered a manner to distribute cheap seasonal labor from the middle of the state to the Soconusco region.[204]

Above all, the CDIS suggested a more expansive and active federal government, coordinating in part with state officials, to halt undocumented immigration, register inhabitants,

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[202] Miguel Alvarado, et al., to Secretario de Gobernación, et al., December 29, 1941, AH-SRE Legajo 334-4 Expediente 21.

[203] Lewis, *The Ambivalent Revolution*, 189-202.

[204] Miguel Alvarado, et al., to Secretario de Gobernación, et al., December 29, 1941, AH-SRE Legajo 334-4 Expedientes 15-30. Some Mexican officials envisioned darker schemes motivating the movement of Guatemalans into the region. For example, the Mexican ambassador in Guatemala, Francisco del Río y Cañedo, warned that Jorge Ubico might be following the "Hitlerian example" of attempting to "reconquer" Soconusco by encouraging the movement of Guatemalans into Chiapas. Manuel Tello to Jefe del Departamento Jurídico, México, October 25, 1941, AH-SRE Legajo 334-1 Expediente 75.

and deport "illegal" Guatemalan immigrants, not just in Soconusco, despite the name of the Commission, but throughout the borderlands. They envisioned increased patrols of the PM, suggesting that they increase deportation of unregistered Guatemalans, or ominously, considering the common lack of documentation, those for whom it was impossible to "determine their Mexican citizenship." For those Guatemalans that slipped through the net, or had obtained legal residency, the federal government would work with the state government to move — how is not specified — the Guatemalan population away from the border. They recommended increased staffing in the Secretariats of Agriculture and Development, as well as Labor and Social Welfare, to carry out investigative functions, as well as the completion of another census in the areas of Soconusco, Mariscal, and Comitán.[205]

Finally, after "settling the population" to the extent possible, that is removing unregistered Guatemalan and establishing effective control of the movement in the borderlands, they proposed wide-ranging assimilation, admitting the impossibility of removing all undocumented borderlanders who had made a life in the region in towns such as Tapachula, and the ejidos established since 1935. They recommended removing any type of legal difference between Guatemalans and those who were Mexicans by birth, fully incorporating those Guatemalans, "until the memory of the previous nationality of being Guatemalan disappears."[206]

The CDIS lasted until 1947 and it had mixed success in its goals of registering borderlanders, reducing the continued influx of Guatemalan immigrants, and ensuring the creation of patriotic Mexican borderlanders.[207] In part its work was complicated by Mexico's

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[205] Miguel Alvarado, et al., to Secretario de Gobernación, et al., December 29, 1941, AH-SRE Legajo 334-4 Expediente 36-41.

[206] Miguel Alvarado, et al., to Secretario de Gobernación, et al., December 29, 1941, AH-SRE Legajo 334-4 Expediente 42.

[207] México, *Diario oficial de la federación: órgano constitucional de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos*, October 23, 1947.

entrance into the war against Germany in 1942, and the takeover of German-owned coffee fincas by the newly created Mexican bureau, the Board of Administration and Supervision of Foreign Property (Junta de Administración y Vigilancia de la Propiedad Extranjera. JAVPE). Rife with corruption, the JAVPE undermined the mission of the CDIS by hiring cheaper Guatemalan laborers in order for the new government appointed finca administrators to increase the profits of the fincas they suddenly found in their possession.

In 1944, for example, President Ávila Camacho's office received a series of complaints from the Tapachula region regarding preferential hiring of Guatemalan workers. The Federation of Chiapaneco Workers (Federación de Trabajadores del Estado de Chiapas*)* cited in particular the case of the ex-Guatemalan coronel José Quiñones, who had risen to be the Section Chief of the Coffee Fiduciary of Chiapas (Fideicomisos Cafetaleros de Chiapas). Quiñones, explained the complaints, encouraged the hiring of Guatemalan workers over Mexican, while setting a "despotic" work regimen that violated labor law.[208] The note contained a series of complains about the inaction of the CDIS. It related how in the presence of a Confidential Agent of the CDIS, Quiñones maneuvered to hire Guatemalans in various managerial posts throughout the Tapachula coffee region, including some with known criminal backgrounds.[209]

Whether in the office of coffee administrators or out in the field, officials of the CDIS began to acquire a reputation as corruptible; indeed the CDIS itself acquired the nickname of "Manufacturer of Mexicans." Community struggles over who had rights to land continued into the 1940's as ejiditarios accused CDIS officials of having creating Mexicans "out of thin air,"

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[208] Luis Topete Bordes to J. Jesús González Gallo, México, September 18, 1944 Archivo General de la Nación-Archivo Presidencial Manuel Ávila Camacho Caja 0789 Expedientes 11215 (Here forth AGN-APMAC); Gustavo Tovilla to Presidente de la Republica, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, September 7, 1944, AGN-APMAC Expediente 26273; Jesús Jiménez and Romeo Noriega to Presidente de la Republica, Tapachula, September 7, 1944, AGN-APMAC Expediente 23744.

[209] Luis Topete Bordes to J. Jesús González Gallo, México, April 10, 1944, AGN-APMAC Caja 0789 Expediente 395.

giving out the most productive pieces of land to Guatemalans. Some borderlanders demanded a new commission to sort out the problems of the old one.[210] Even the head of the 31st Military Zone in Tapachula, José Dominguez Ramírez Garrido, complained a year after the CDIS's demise of the Guatemalans that, "through magic transformed into Mexicans." He complained that they cultivated coffee on prime land while living in Guatemala, occasionally returning to Soconusco to check on their cash crop. In the event of a referendum on Chiapas's nationality, he pointed out, it would surely go back to Guatemala, much as it had belonged to the Captaincy General during the colonial era. Overall, he warned how this "pacific invasion" constituted a danger for national security.[211]

Despite these public and official outcries against Guatemalan immigration, some borderlanders complained about government efforts at removing a Guatemalan presence from fincas and ejidos. For example, at the same time as the president's office received complaints about a Guatemalan invasion in the 1940's, borderland ejiditarios enlisted the help of the newly formed General Union of Workers and Campesinos (Unión General de Obreros y Campesinos de México, UGOCM) to protest deportations of Guatemalan laborers.[212] The UGOCM complained that throughout the region officials from the Secretariat of Agriculture were removing ejiditarios with Guatemalan backgrounds from their land, even though they were counted in 1935 by the CDI as Mexican. In essence, the government was taking land from "new" Mexicans simply because of their Guatemalan background.[213]

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[210] Felipe Bodegas Muñoz and Moisés Muguerza to Miguel Alemán Valdés, Archivo General de la Nación - Archivo Presidencial Miguel Alemán Valdés Caja 0598, Expediente 31846 (Here forth AGN-APMAV).

[211] José Domínguez Ramírez Garrido to Miguel Alemán Valdés, Tapachula, October 4, 1948, AGN-APMAV Caja 0598 Expediente, 27367.

[212] For a short discussion of UGCOM's role in agrarian politics see Hubert C de Grammont et al., "Campesino and Indigenous Social Organizations Facing Democratic Transition in Mexico, 1938-2006." *Latin American Perspectives* 36 (2009): 21-40.

[213] Agustín Guzmán V and Vicente Padilla to Miguel Alemán Valdés, México, November 25, 1949, AGN-APMAV Caja 0598 Expediente 28128.

Corruption in the Borderlands

Part of the failure of the federal government in general to tame their fugitive borderlands along the lines outlined by ad-hoc groups like the CDIS was due to the incompetence and corruptibility of officials coming from the center and north of Mexico and their cultural distance from the borderlands. New financial and economic programs enacted during the years of Cardenismo, as well as increased vigilance regarding the movement of goods and people across the border, brought scores of federal officials into the region to manage a transnational flow with traditions long pre-dating the establishment of the 1882 Treaty, or the Demographic Commissions of the post-revolutionary governments. An undated memo from the head of the CDIS, Salvador Cardona, addressed the potential clash between Chiapanecos and representatives of the center. Though he characterized Chiapanecos as "extremely provincial, violent, and arrogant," he explained their "admittedly justified….bad attitude" toward the Federal government based on the history of their relationship with the center:

> Really, the Federation has done little for Chiapas and when it has paid attention to it, it is only to extract some resources without compensation. The means of communication are horrible; the state is isolated from the rest of the country. There is no commercial or cultural exchange…You have to keep in mind…the sending, to occupy various Official Federal positions, by discredited individuals by the Federal Government is as a punishment, or for them to enrich themselves. Alcoholism is a prevailing vice, and the government employees live in the worst of ways.[214]

[214] Salvador Cardona, (No Date Given) AH-SRE Legajo 334-4 Expedientes 66-68.

Cardona's worries regarding the quality of federal employees sent to the borderlands seemed to be justified in the case of arguably the most important federal official on the southern border, the Chief of Immigration Service of the Southern Border. The chief led SM officials in the efforts to regulate the immigration laws within borderland communities. Stationed in Tapachula, the Chief of Migration regulated the flow of people and goods that entered Mexico through official ports, including those carried by the increasing number of trains heading north. In addition, he also ensured the proper registration of borderlanders already in living in the region. Laborers, employers, and businesses fell under the purview of SM agents who had the power to demand documentation verifying nationality, or permission to work and live in the borderlands. This expansive regulatory and investigative power invested in the office led to numerous abuses from agents, and in particular the Chief of Migration.

In 1941, at the same time that the CDIS was proposing heightened vigilance on the border and increased regulation, employees under the Chief of the SM, Francisco Ochoa Zamudio, were writing the Secretariat of the Interior about their boss's violent, corrupt, and irregular tendencies. One accused Ochoa of suddenly pulling a gun on him, threatening to shoot him for supporting a complaint against him written by the wife of a Guatemalan official. Once safely ensconced in Guatemala, the woman in question wrote how Ochoa had stalked her through Tapachula, entering her hotel room, and holding her immigration papers in the hope that she would attempt to retrieve them so he could take her on a car ride, "to a more discreet place where nobody would notice."[215]

In 1949, the Secretariat of the Interior once again received complaints regarding the Chief of Migration, Belisario Villa Constantino, from employees. Villa obtained the position thanks to

[215] Memorándum Confidencial, June 10, 1949, Archivo General de la Nación-Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, Caja 0082, Expediente 20 Folios 10-14. (Here forth AH-DGIPS)

his connections to the top of the local and national Mexican political hierarchy, through his powerful brother-in-law, Dr. Pascacio Gamboa, former Governor of Chiapas (1940-1944) and the national Secretary of Public Health (1946-1952). Before arriving in Tapachula, Villa had already obtained an infamous reputation as the former Chief of Sanitary Police in Mexico City and Mayor of Tapachula, for his "ambitious bribery." Their list of complaints ranged from "intolerable" working conditions that included long and irregular hours, as well Villa expanding the scope of corruption. As before with Ochoa, Interior sent an investigator to check on the claims of the Chief of Migrations employees. He shook down tourists, finca owners, and Guatemalan immigrants, organized and ran gambling rings, protected sexual trafficking and abused employees, eventually prompting an investigation by the Secretariat of the Interior.[216]

What troubled the investigating Interior official most were the large-scale violations of immigration law. The federal government was resigned, in part, to a certain level of corruption; the inspector attributed many of the employee complaints to an unequal distribution of bribes. However Villa, through the placement of friends and family members in key SM positions, converted his office into a fiefdom dedicated to profiting off the avoidance of the federal governments' dictates to control the flow of unregistered Guatemalans into the country. In some respects Villa's conduct was not unusual. He continued the tradition of officials accepting money from Soconuscan finca owners to facilitate the entrance of Guatemalan braceros, while at the request of the same coffee farmers deporting those braceros agitating for better pay or working conditions. But Villa went beyond the usual abuse of power. The Interior official also noted the many prominent local businesses in Tapachula owned by unregistered Guatemalans, who relied on bribes to Villa to stay in the country. In addition, Villa's border guards were

[216] Emilio Prospero Calderón et al., to Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, Tapachula, May 8, 1949, AH-DGIPS Caja 0082 Expediente 26 Folios 4-5, 8.

facilitating the migration of Guatemalans throughout the state, and indeed all of the country. Guatemalans, warned the report, were not staying in the borderlands, but moving to the north of Chiapas, or even ending up in Mexico City or cities on the northern border. Small-scale Guatemalan businesspersons "know perfectly…the authorities [Migration] and know perfectly also what the fee [gratificaciones] is for each one." Though the official recognized that unregistered immigration into the Chiapan borderlands was almost impossible to stop because of the "unpopulated and forested region of the border," the report expressed concern about Villa's attempts to extend his reach beyond the SM to other aspects of the federal bureaucracy on the border.[217]

The archives are unclear about the fate of Villa following the Secretariat of Interior investigation, though the regional press continued to denounce the consequences of the corruption, and inactivity, of SM officials. A September 3, 1956 editorial in La Voz del Sureste, headlined "Illegal Entrance of Guatemalans into the Country," called for the posting of more immigration agents along the border. In addition to the ease of Guatemalan immigration into Mexico, the article noted how Mexican chicleros crossed the border south without any difficulties. Another article claimed SM agents stationed in Comitán were supervising the contraband trade in corn. It also noted, just as Trueba discovered, the practice of Guatemalans living "part-time" in Mexico, cultivating their crops in ejidos or vacant land.[218]

[217] Memorándum Confidencial, June 10, 1949, AH-DGIPS Caja 0082 Expediente 20 Folios 12-25.
[218] *La Voz del Sureste,* September 3, 1956; *La Voz del Sureste,* July 8, 1957.

Guatemalan Immigration post-1950

Beginning in the 1950's the federal government no longer undertook large-scale efforts such as the Demographic Commissions of the 1930's and 1940's. In part, this might have been due to the fact that the local struggle over the rights accorded Mexicans prompted by Cardenismo had largely subsided as borderland communities, of Guatemalan origin or not, had settled into a new status quo. Nationalist tinged alarms became muted as it became clear that Guatemala would not attempt to "reclaim" Chiapas. In addition, that country's Civil War ensured that the focus of the Guatemalan elite was on quashing internal dissent and maintaining power. There would be no other large-scale federal government intervention regarding borderland demographics until the arrival of thousands of Guatemalan refugees in the early 1980's.

Throughout this time period seasonal Guatemalan laborers continued to arrive for the Soconuscan coffee harvest. This transnational flow acquired increased importance as the traditional supplemental Mexican labor from the central highlands of Chiapas went east, to the opportunities afforded by virgin land in the Lacandon. There, encouraged by governmental policy, they trudged through the undergrowth, traveled on barely passable roads made by timer companies, and formed new communities that were relatively free, at least until the 1970's, of much of a government presence.[219] (The political implications of this move are discussed in chapter five)

[219] Thomas Benjamin. "A Time of Reconquest: History, the Maya Revival, and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas," *The American Historical Review* 105 (2000): 435-436; Nicola Piper, *New Perspectives on Gender and Migration: Livelihood, Rights and Entitlements* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

Coffee finca administrators complained about the occasional instances of federal government officials deporting Guatemalan workers. For example, in April of 1963, the Soconusco Coffee Farmer Association (Asociación Agrícola de Cafeticultores del Soconusco) protested about the years long harassment of Guatemalan braceros by two Secretariat of Interior employees. These seasonal workers, noted the finca owners, filled out all the proper paperwork, and were only hired after giving every opportunity to Mexican workers to work the harvest. The Association claimed that without the labor of these transnational laborers the harvest would surely be lost.[220]

It is not clear if the federal employees referenced above had finally exhausted the patience of local coffee farmers with demands for money, or if they were instead acting on pressure to make an effort to address the "Guatemalan problem" that occasionally was hyped in local media. Such was the case of the September 19, 1962 headline that declared, "Mexicans Displaced in Chiapas by Guatemalans: Five Thousand Guatemalan Braceros Enter Illegally into Country." The article attempted to compare Mexico's two borders, noting that while Mexicans crossed into the United States because of a lack of land, in Chiapas, a "constant wave" of Guatemalans continued to appropriate Mexican land and jobs." [221]

Despite the alarming rhetoric Guatemalan migrants had long been a familiar sight in the borderlands, part of the local economy, though associated with poverty in the eyes of Mexican borderlanders.[222] Women migrants in particular became victims of sexual violence or, for lack of other opportunities, often became sexual laborers in order to support themselves and their

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[220] Rodríguez R. Enrique et al., to Adolfo López Mateos, Tapachula, April 9, 1963, Archivo General de la Nación-Archivo Presidencial Alfonso López Mateos Caja 0657 Expediente 6810 (Here Forth AGN-APALM).

[221] *La Voz del Sureste,* September 19, 1962.

[222] Hugo Ángeles Cruz, "La frontera sur de México y las migraciones latinoamericanos," in *Migraciones: un juego con cartas marcadas*, ed., Francisco Hidalgo (Quito: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador, 2004), 195-196.

families.[223] In addition, many households in urban centers such as Tapachula employed Guatemalan women as maids, as they often accompanied their husbands across the border. [224] Paralleling attitudes of Americans on the U.S-Mexican border, borderlanders increasingly characterized the work undertaken by Guatemalan migrants as being beneath their dignity.[225] By the latter of half of the twentieth century, in a dramatic change of opinion from the 1930's, Guatemalan laborers no longer constituted a silent invasion but a needed workforce for harvest time, or a cheap alternative labor source to do household chores. A transnational labor flow established itself, informally regulated by market demands.

Neglected Borderlands

During the 1950's the borderlands entered a period of budget abandonment by Mexico City, becoming a landscape of governmental neglect. The 1930's and 40's post-revolutionary federal officials sent south discovered a foreign borderlands, disconnected from the Mexican state, and upon arriving back to Mexico City adjusted national budgets accordingly. Decreasing investments in roads, water, and electricity led borderlanders to decry the state of their communities. For example, in late 1959 the office of President Adolfo López Mateos (1958-1964) received a series of telegrams and letters from Tapachula protesting the lack of roads and the delay in building a coastal highway. The Tapachula Chamber of Commerce bemoaned the

[223] Olivia T. Ruiz Marrujo, "Women, Migration, and Sexual Violence: Lessons from Mexico's Borders," in *Human Rights Along the U.S.-Mexico Border: Gendered Violence and Insecurity,* eds. Tony Payan et al. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009), 31-47.

[224] Hugo Ángeles Cruz, "La frontera sur de México," 200.

[225] Marie-Christine Renard, "Free Trade of Coffee, Exodus of Coffee Workers: the Case of the Southern Mexican Border Region of the State of Chiapas," in *Globalization and the Time-Space Reorganization of Capital Mobility in Agriculture and Food in the Americas*, eds., Alessandro Bonanno and Josefa Salete Barbosa Cavalcanti (Bingley: Emerald, 2011), 150-151.

lack of transportation from the border to the rest of the country, "Tapachula and Ciudad Hidalgo are the principal points of entry for visitors from Central America, and the lack of the highway connecting the region to the rest of the Republic diminishes tourism." Though their letter, as was typical in these types of communications about increasing travel in the borderlands, substituted Central Americans for Guatemalans, and tourism for the flow of transnational labor , it was clear that the business elite in this borderland community desired a firmer connection to the south. Laborers wanted the same, as evidenced by a coalition of official and non-official unions of Tapachula signing on to a telegram which pressed for better roads and noted that, "With sadness we see in the north of the country a network of roads…we are drowning for a lack of communication." [226]

Regional media frequently pointed out the lack of attention from the federal bureaucracy, including the lack of potable water. For example, a March 1969 editorial in La Voz del Sureste began, "The noble people of Tuxtla Gutiérrez ask for water, they have been patiently waiting for six years for a solution to this grave problem." The writer notes that finally, after years of ignoring petitions, the Secretariat of Hydraulic Resources indicated a willingness to work with the state government in finding a solution to supply the capital city with an amount of water adequate to the population.[227]

In February 1962, a few months after a presidential visit from López Mateos, the borderland city of Comitán fell into darkness as the city's energy supply could not keep up with the needs of the growing population. The Federal Electricity Commission promised a solution if the city could supply enough private funding.[228] Finally, a December 12, 1965 headline read,

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[226] Enrique González Sánchez et al., to Presidente de la Republica, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, June 25, 1962 AH-APALM Caja 0569 Expedientes 2617

[227] *La Voz del Sureste,* March 10, 1969.

[228] *La Voz del Sureste,* February 28, 1962.

"S.O.S on the Border." The emergency was the city of Talisman located southeast of Tapachula, which the paper found, "abandoned to its fate by official neglect, as underbrush covers and entombs it with foliage, mildew, and rot helped by the humidity of the sub-tropical climate."[229]

The national government had retreated. Xenophobic fears, coupled with alarm that Guatemalans would take advantage of the economic and political rights garnered from the revolution and especially the populist administration of Lázaro Cárdenas, prompted a flurry of attention during the 1930's and 1940's regarding the "demographic problem" suddenly discovered by federal officials. However, bureaucratic corruption, the economic necessity of the transnational labor flow and, finally, the inability to arrest the binational cultural, economic, and political reality of the borderlands rendered the federal government's attempts at control ultimately fruitless. As we will see in the next chapter, instead of redoubling its efforts, Mexico City decided to concentrate on extracting resources from the borderlands.

[229] *La Voz del Sureste*, December 12, 1965.

Chapter Three:
Engineers Come to the Borderlands

Parallel to the effort to register and control the flow of Guatemalans in the Chiapan borderlands were the Mexican federal government's attempts to scientifically manage and exploit the region. Engineers of the growing bureaucracy in Mexico City who were tasked with providing the rapidly industrializing country and region with resources such as electricity and irrigation were impressed with the region's potential. Just as quickly as they arrived on the border they soon realized they needed Guatemalan cooperation. The nationalism of both Guatemalan politicians and public -- many still convinced that Chiapas, or at least the Soconusco region, was stolen from Guatemala -- complicated collaboration. In the meantime, the rivers of the borderlands stubbornly surged and diverged from their banks, mindless of a line on a map and demanding a binational response.

Mexico had experience treating with rivals across a border: the United States, in their northern borderlands. Though imperialist expansion birthed Mexico's northern border in the nineteenth century, for much of the twentieth, the binational team of engineers of the International Boundary and Water Commission between Mexico and the United States (Comisión Internacional de Límites y Aguas entre México y los Estados Unidos, or as of 1961, CILA-Norte) established a productive working relationship. By the time of the Cárdenas administration, new agreements lent momentum to greater cooperation, leading eventually to the pivotal 1944 Treaty, "Utilization of Waters of the Colorado and Tijuana Rivers and of the Rio Grande," which allocated a critical supply of water to the bone-dry northern Mexican borderlands. As Stephen Mumme, expert on the Commission, has noted, "The International Boundary and Water Commission may well represent the finest example of functional

cooperation in transboundary resource management between highly dissimilar countries anywhere on the globe."[230]

Underlying much of this chapter's examination is how Mexican policy towards the Chiapan borderlands was based on their experience with the United States. As Mexican officials sought solutions to similar border issues that arose in the Chiapan borderlands, they referred to Mexico's positive experience in CILA-Norte. Their experience with the United States, especially in the post-revolutionary period, presented key opportunities, such as the Chamizal Convention of 1963, which returned land previously lost due to a shifting river bed to Mexico, to exert claims of sovereignty, and attempt to treat on close to an equal diplomatic and political basis with their traditional rival. It was a history constantly interpreted in positive tones in the diplomatic instructions sent from Mexico City to ambassadors in Guatemala, and in on the ground assessments by engineers from bureaucracies like the Secretariat of Hydraulic Resources. The message: recreate the northern borderlands in the southern borderlands. Through exploration of the Mexican archives, however, it is clear that Mexico officials felt that a significant challenge on their southern border was overcoming the objections of a neighbor that refused to see the value in cooperation.

First Efforts: Presidential Commission on the Study of the Southern Border

Though it only lasted a year, the 1936 Presidential Commission on the Study of the Southeastern Border (Comisión de Estudios de las Fronteras del Sureste, CEFS) prompted the

[230] Stephen Mumme, "Innovation and Reform in Transboundary Resources Management: A Critical Look at the International Boundary and Water Commission, United States and Mexico," *Natural Resources Journal* 33 (1993): 93.

Mexican government to concentrate on a borderlands which, in words of the CEFS, "has been up to this day almost forgotten."[231] The Commission's creation sparked more focused studies, prompted efforts at demarcation, and began in earnest Mexico's decades-long effort to establish the International Boundary and Water Commission between Mexico and Guatemala (Comisión Internacional de Límites y Aguas entre México y Guatemala, CILA). In sum, it brought engineers to the borderlands.

The goals and conclusions of CEFS revealed the federal government's anxieties about and vision of the southern borderlands. The mission of the CEFS was twofold: examine, manage, and exploit the natural landscape, specifically the watery border's potential for energy and irrigation, while also, "preventing the international problems that may occur, sooner or later, with our neighbor to the south, through treaties that could be managed by a Boundary Commission identical to that which manages problems that we have on our northern border."[232] The assembled expertise of the CEFS reflected its wide-ranging purpose. Under the guidance of the Secretariat of Foreign Relations engineers from a number of federal bureaucracies participated. A pair of petroleum and mining experts represented the Secretariat of Economy, an engineer, the Secretariat of Communications and Public Work, while another engineer from the Secretariat level National Commission on Irrigation was tasked to the group. A surveyor from the Department of Geographic Studies under the Secretary of Agriculture and Development, and a representative from the Department of Forestry, Fishing, and Game rounded out the specialists sent to the region.[233]

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[231] Gustavo P. Serrano and Lorenzo L. Hernández to Secretario de Relaciones Exteriores, México, March 16, 1936, AH-SRE Legajo 322-2 Expediente 2

[232] Proyecto de Presupuesto para la Misión Científica Investigando de los Recursos Naturales de las Regiones Fronterizas del Sureste, July 27, 1936. AH-SRE Legajo 322-2 Expediente 99.

[233] Proyecto de Presupuesto para la Misión Científica Investigando de los Recursos Naturales de las Regiones Fronterizas del Sureste, July 27, 1936. AH-SRE Legajo 322-2 Expedientes 99, 95, 97.

These experts were to focus on exploiting the commercial potential of the border's natural wealth, as well as ensuring that the region remained Mexican, either through hardening the border by protecting the region from incursions from its southern neighbor or through colonization. Though more scientific in scope, the CEFS also reflected the nationalist anxieties driving the Demographic Commissions of 1935 and 1941. For example, engineers from the Department of Forestry, Fish, and Wildlife were to survey the forests of the border, "a vulnerable source of wealth….and to organize an expedition that would declare said riches as reserved exclusively as forest." In addition, they also were to study the most effective locations to conduct military patrols to prevent foreign exploitation of the vast reserves they cataloged. The proposed scope of studies by other members of the CEFS reflected this nationalist agenda. Representatives of the Secretariat of Agriculture and Development were tasked to explore the most adequate places for colonization in Chiapas, Quintana Roo, Campeche, Tabasco, and the Yucatan, while alongside them engineers from the Secretariat of Economy would study the possibility of establishing free-trade zones for the future colonists.[234]

Many of the CEFS's proposed studies reflected the federal government's interest in utilizing the rivers of the southern borderlands. Representatives from Irrigation were to examine the potential of the Hondo, Suchiate, Usumacinta, and Chixoy Rivers for irrigation and hydroelectric use. In addition, engineers from the Secretariat of Communication and Public Works focused on studying the same rivers for navigation, commerce and the economic

[234] Programa de Trabajo de la Comisión Científica de Estudio de las Fronteras del Sureste, Aprobado en Sesión de 16 de Octubre de 1936 por la Comisión de Estudios de las Fronteras el Sureste, México, October 1936, AH-SRE Legajo 322-2, Expedientes 198-200.

development of the region. These studies and their recommendations would be the basis of a future binational treaty to regulate and control the watery border.[235]

Unlike the Demographic Commission, with its calls for increased border enforcement, officials at the highest levels of the federal government realized that developing the borderlands resources would require some form of cooperation with Guatemala. However, Guatemala and Mexico had agreed on little since independence. This lack of cooperation between Guatemala and Mexico was laid bare when, in 1936, Cárdenas himself asked in a session with top officials from the Secretariat of Foreign Relations what border treaties Mexico had signed with its southern neighbor since the 1882 Treaty and received the response that there had been none.[236]

The 1931 ascension to power in Guatemala of strongman Jorge Ubico did not bode well for a warming of relations between the two neighbors. As a former top official in the borderlands province of Retalhuleu, Ubico had often harassed Mexican travelers, and upon taking the office of president continually denounced Cárdenas's reforms as part of an international Communist plot.[237] A fervent anti-communist, he openly denigrated the Mexican Revolution, cultivated U.S. support in the case of a potential conflict with Mexico, and denounced supposed Mexican interference in Guatemala's other long simmering territorial conflict with Belize.[238] Ubico's rhetoric, coupled with his reputation, was bellicose enough that by the late 1930's some Mexican national security officials became worried that he was contemplating military action to "reclaim" Chiapas for Guatemala. Based on rumors, and

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[235] Programa de Trabajo de la Comisión Científica de Estudio de las Fronteras del Sureste, Aprobado en Sesión de 16 de Octubre de 1936 por la Comisión de Estudios de las Fronteras el Sureste, México, October 1936, AH-SRE Legajo 322-2, Expediente 199-200.

[236] Gustavo P. Serrano and Lorenzo L. Hernández to Secretario de Relaciones Exteriores, México, March 16, 1936, AH-SRE Legajo 322-2 Expediente 2.

[237] Buchenau, *In the Shadow of the Giant,* 188-189.

[238] Romero, "Conflicto y conciliación," 313-314.

bolstered by the national security fears commonly associated with the borderlands, they grew concerned that the Guatemalan president planned on utilizing German-Guatemalan planters in Soconusco as a fifth column, while a Guatemalan army, supplied with arms from a Nazi regime that Ubico openly praised, swept across the contested border.[239]

Despite the history of animosity and mistrust that could cause such outlandish rumors to be taken seriously in some corners of the Mexican security apparatus, the 1936 study made clear that Mexico could not unilaterally address the transboundary challenges anticipated by their engineering teams. The CEFS commission even drew up a draft of a proposal for a binational commission. Though never presented to Guatemalan diplomats, it stood as a blueprint for future efforts.[240] In late 1937, the ambitious projects of CEFS had run out of money, the many proposed projects simply stretched the budget as the consultant to CEFS, Lorenzo L. Hernández, intimated in a letter to Secretary of Foreign Affairs Eduardo Hay. Large-scale colonization schemes and hydrometric studies would have meant an extensive allocation of funds to a region long ignored by the government and with no large bureaucratic structure to coordinate such projects such as existed on the northern border in CILA-norte. Above all, the lack of an international body served as a major roadblock. In the same letter to fellow engineer Hays, Hernández laid out the next steps needed for any Mexican government action in the borderlands:

> …given the numerous expenditures that the government must make in their intensive constructive work, it will not be possible to obtain the funding need for next year to carry out the program, and on the other hand, due to the numerous the problems occurring on the

[239] Lewis, *The Ambivalent Revolution*, 111.

[240] Proyecto de convenio entre Los Estados Unidos Mexicanos y la Republica de Guatemala, para establecer una Comisión Internacional de Límites y Aguas, que decida las cuestiones internacionales que susciten a lo largo de las fronteras terrestres y fluviales entre ambos países, AH-SRE Legajo 322-2 Expedientes 183-189.

> border with Guatemala as well as in British Honduras, it is not possible to form an opinion regarding the correct and convenient action to take for lack of a bureau devoted to its study. It is undoubtedly necessary to create such a bureau although it be with much more modest proportion than that imagined for the Commission of the Southeast Borders. This body cannot be anything but the International Boundary and Water Commission…[241]

International Park

Despite the long simmering tension with Guatemala, officials at the highest level of the Mexican government mixed anxiousness with optimism in their efforts to establish transnational cooperation with their southern neighbor. At times, this enthusiasm to bridge historical animosity took on a quixotic aspect, such as the proposal by the noted environmental engineer and head of the Department of Forestry, Fishing, and Game (Departamento Forestal y de Caza *y* Pesca*,* DFCP) Miguel Ángel de Quevedo to build an international park between Guatemala and Mexico.[242]

The inspiration for the idea came from a similar project on Mexico's northern border in the Big Bend region of Texas.[243] Proposed by the United States in part as an extension of the Good Neighbor Policy, the initial negotiations encompassed even larger goals of borderlands management, including conservation and reforestation in areas along the Rio Grande in

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[241] Lorenzo L. Hernández to Eduardo Hay, México, September 3, 1937, AH-SRE Legajo 322-2 Expediente 150.

[242] The appointment of Quevedo, the "Apostle of the Tree," in 1935 to head the newly elevated cabinet level Department of Forestry, Fishing, and Game, reflected Cárdenas's commitment to environmentalism. See Christopher R.Boyer, "Revolución y paternalismo ecológico: Miguel Ángel de Quevedo y la política forestal en México, 1926-1940," *Historia Mexicana* 57 (2007): 91- 138.

[243] Lorenzo L. Hernández to Jefe del Departamento Diplomático de Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores, México, August 9, 1939, AH-SRE Legajo 332-10 Expedientes 35-36.

Chihuahua and Tamaulipas. In November 1935, Quevedo met U.S. officials from the National Park Service and the Civilian Conservation Corps in El Paso, Texas, where talks touched upon access to the region for tourists. Despite the initial optimism, the park never materialized on the Mexican side. DFCP officials conducted surveys of the land proposed by U.S. Park Service and found it inaccessible to future tourists, the main economic motivation for the park. Instead, Mexican government officials decided to retain the land for the much more economically viable cattle grazing. Cárdenas's nationalization of the oil industry in 1938 undermined further attempts at compromise, and future efforts, most notably during the Manuel Ávila Camacho administration (1940-1946) were waylaid by trade disputes. It was not until the 1990's and the Carlos Salinas de Gortari administration (1988-1994) that the original proposal came to fruition.[244]

Despite the inertia on the Mexico-U.S. park, Quevedo proposed a similar project with Guatemala after being inspired by the natural landscapes of the region. In early 1939, the environmentalist traveled on the recently completed Pan-American Highway to Tapachula, continuing on to the Guatemalan capital to discuss a binational conservation treaty. The nearly 300-mile trip, which passed through "beautiful forests" as well as "magnificent coffee and banana plantations" impressed Quevedo. Upon returning to Mexico he received support for his proposal for a southern borderlands park from President Cárdenas, no doubt seeing the work involved in setting up and maintaining the park as fulfilling some of the aims of binational cooperation he outlined only years earlier for the failed Commission. The former CEFS consultant, Hernández, also supported Quevedo's vision, writing this time in 1939 as the director

[244] Emily Wakild, "Border Chasm: International Boundary Parks and Mexican Conservation, 1935-1945," *Environmental History* 14 (2009): 453-475.

of CILA-norte.[245] In a letter to Secretary Hay, Hernández expanded on the elements of Quevedo's vision of an international park, incorporating many of his previous suggestions regarding securing the border, many of which had no obvious relation to a park: a government body to protect the natural landscape, clearer demarcation of the national boundaries, and even reforestation efforts around population centers to "improve conditions of urban hygiene, esthetics, and recreation." Above all, Hernández noted that despite optimism in preliminary talks with a Guatemalan acquaintance regarding the park, the lack of an international body similar to that existing between the United States and Mexico impeded efforts to enact Quevedo's plan.[246] Though Hernández envisioned the park's completion as a means to begin to establish state control of the borderlands, others imagined its completion as a means to erase the boundary. In the words of one DFCP engineer sent to scout the planned location outside of Tapachula, the park would be a place "where the work of the Creation, showing itself in its splendor, would so encourage man to make them forget the fictitious borders that separate nations."[247]

Despite the lofty rhetoric, the two rivals never built the "living museum" the DFCP imagined, as international and domestic politics led to bureaucratic foot-dragging, dooming the project. In a December 1939 letter to Secretary Hay, the Mexican ambassador to Guatemala Salvador Martínez de Alva put the possibilities for the park at "very unlikely." Martínez de Alva questioned the infrastructure building ability of the Guatemalan government, explaining that they were still attempting to complete surveying work for the Pan-American Highway. Besides, noted the ambassador, the point man for any project, General Roderico Anzueto, the National

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[245] Roderic Ai Camp, *Mexican Political Biographies, 1884-1935* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), 1946.

[246] Agustín Leñero to Secretario de Relaciones Exteriores, México, July 7, 1939, AH-SRE Legajo 332-10 Expediente 33-34.

[247] Antonio Sosa to Miguel Ángel de Quevedo, México September 22, 1939 AH-SRE Legajo 332-10 Expediente 51.

Police Director and the official in charge of infrastructure development, was maneuvering for a presidential run and sought the support of the United States government. The Guatemalan politician needed to avoid cooperation with Mexico due to the controversial oil expropriation a year earlier. Attempts, suggested by the ambassador, to appeal to the economic benefits the project would bring to Guatemala, failed to persuade Mexico's southern neighbor.[248]

Modus Vivendi and a Bridge over the Suchiate

The optimism behind the international park proposal, Mexican diplomatic actions based on references to their northern border, and the hesitation from Guatemala encapsulated the interactions in the initial years regarding the formation of CILA. CEFS consultant Lorenzo Hernández's "we need a CILA" memo was quoted in marching orders sent from Mexico City as each incoming Mexican ambassador to Guatemala in subsequent decades engaged his Guatemalan counterparts in discussions regarding the formation of a comprehensive boundary commission. In the decades leading to the formation of CILA in 1962, Mexican diplomatic efforts produced small, but important steps, in encouraging cooperation against a backdrop of profound changes in Guatemalan and international politics. The most important accomplishment was the 1942 Modus Vivendi, the first diplomatic agreement signed between the two rivals since the 1882 treaty. The accord and its central goal, construction of a permanent bridge over the Suchiate River, came about from the persistence of Mexican diplomats and the United States' need for wartime raw material from the Central American isthmus. Crucially, it laid a

[248] Salvador Martínez de Alva to Secretario de Relaciones Exteriores, Guatemala, December 11, 1979 AH-SRE Legajo 332-10 Expedientes 91-92; Vázquez de Mercado Secretario de Relaciones Exteriores, México, April 5, 1940, AH-SRE Legajo 332-10 Expedientes 93-96.

diplomatic framework for CILA, as well as prompting dialogue and the occasional on-the-ground cooperation between officials of both countries.

Mexican diplomatic efforts leading up to the 1942 agreement were based on their experience with the United States. They attempted to convince Guatemala of the need for cooperation by bringing up the lessons they learned in their northern borderlands. Secretary of Foreign Relations Hay and others at the top level of the Mexican government stressed a boundary agreement as way to avert future conflicts, in particular those related to water distribution. During the 1930's, the communities and agricultural regions of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands faced the challenge of water scarcity due to the unequal 1906 treaty, "Convention between the United States and Mexico on the Equitable Distribution of the Waters of the Rio Grande." Pro-American Porfirian diplomats signed the agreement, ignoring the recommendations of the Mexican border commission. The treaty only allocated 60,000 acre-feet of water from the Rio Grande for growing borderland communities like Ciudad Juárez. Post-revolutionary Mexican diplomats such as Hay regarded the 1906 treaty as a cautionary yardstick in their dealings with the watery southern border. It was not until the 1944 treaty with the U.S., "Utilization of Waters of the Colorado and Tijuana Rivers and of the Rio Grande," which designated the equal allocation as well as management of the rivers of the northern border that relief came to northern Mexican communities."[249]

Guatemalan diplomats remained unconvinced as Mexican diplomats continually ran into naked antagonism during the Ubico period. Yet, efforts beginning in 1936 demonstrated that at least as concerned the border, Mexican diplomats and engineers took a nuanced view of the

[249]Memorándum acerca de la forma que México y los Estados Unidos de América han vendido resolviendo gradualmente sus problemas de límites terrestres y fluviales, desde 1848 a la fecha, México, August 9, 1958, AH-SRE Legajo 332-5 Expedientes 46-48.

bellicose rhetoric of Ubico, while ignoring the alarming conclusions of such entities as the 1936 and 1941 demographic commissions concerning Guatemalan influence in the borderlands. Mexico sought commercial, political, and cultural influence in the region, at the cost to a United States that often backed compliant Conservative regimes, such as in Nicaragua, that were antagonistic to Mexico's exportation of the revolution's liberal domestic polices and the larger goal of Pan-American unity. The border, in many ways, became the point of entrance to a productive transnational relationship, even if Guatemala seemed intent on not having one.

Efforts by Ambassador Martínez de Alva towards the end of the Cárdenas Administration are revealing regarding the lengths the diplomatic corps were willing to go to improve Mexican-Guatemalan relations. For example, a lengthy June 1939 letter to Cárdenas recounted Martínez de Alva's recent trip to the Chiapan border. There, the ambassador met with officials from the Immigration Inspection Service, the Secretariat of Communications and Public Works, and the governor of the state. Visiting during the time of the Demographic Commission and heightened anti-Guatemalan hysteria, Martínez de Alva expressed concern about how the often corrupt and overtly hostile actions taken against Guatemalan borderlanders by Mexican officials could negatively impact relations with Guatemala. In a meeting with the governor, the ambassador suggested that teachers of the federal 123 schools stop utilizing Ubico and Guatemala an example of bad government. After touring the official border crossings over the Suchiate River outside Tapachula, he, like others, complained about the migration and customs officials, the length of the wait, and the often corrupt practices displayed. He also talked at length with the Mexican Chief of Immigration, Francisco Ochoa Zamudio, and his subordinates, imploring them to take an attitude of "mindfulness, gentleness, and cautiousness" in their dealings with Guatemalans. He urged them, in the case of any doubts of how to proceed with an individual, to

contact the Mexican Embassy in Guatemala. Finally, he exhorted a representative of the Ministry of Communications to hurry the construction of an international radio line connecting the two countries.[250]

In the final months of the Cárdenas administration, Ambassador Martínez de Alva continued his efforts to substantially repair the over hundred-year rivalry between the two neighbors in a few months. In April 1940 he presented a "Draft of a General Treaty of Peace and Friendship Between Mexico and Guatemala." This effort should not be interpreted merely as the work of an energetic diplomat; as the Ambassador noted, "…all this has been possible….through the instructions received …to erase all the motives of distance that before existed." The ambitious, and like Quevedo's international park idea, idealistic plan for a treaty essentially sought to end the long history of tension between the two neighbors. The articles in the documents called for the two rivals to renounce war, interfering in each other's national affairs, prohibit the production of harmful propaganda, and submit any future conflicts to international mediation.[251]

In addition to the peace treaty, the ambassador worked out a separate draft treaty concerning the management of water on the border. In his notes on the proposed agreement, Martínez de Alva alluded to recent developments between Mexico and the United States while many of points of the treaty echoed the suggestions of the CEFS. The articles called for arbitration of problems caused by the shifting of the river, regulation of agricultural use and, finally, cooperation in the establishment of future hydroelectric dams. The treaty also

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[250] Martínez de Alva to Lázaro Cárdenas, Guatemala, May 3, 1939, AGN-APLCR Caja 0621 (No Expediente listed).

[251] Anteproyecto de Tratado General de Paz y Amistad entre México y Guatemala En….El Día…. De 1940, AG-APMAV Caja 1317 (No Expediente listed)

anticipated new challenges by calling for the establishment of a binational commission to resolve future conflicts.[252]

Despite this last-minute push by the Cárdenas administration, no overarching treaty between Ubico's Guatemala and Mexico materialized. It was unlikely that a flurry of diplomatic maneuvering at the end of the Cárdenas sexenio could erase so much accumulated animosity between the two countries. Surprisingly then, only a couple of years later, in 1942, the two neighbors signed their first diplomatic agreement in over fifty years, the Modus Vivendi.

Against this backdrop of the history of antagonism the 1942 accord seemingly came out of nowhere. Guatemala, however, did not suddenly discover the value of friendship on its own, but was pushed by the United States' entrance into the Second World War. The conflict focused attention on the isthmus's valuable raw materials. In Central America the United States military procured sought after resources such as lumber. For example, they contracted the United Fruit Company in Guatemala, Costa Rica, and Honduras to grow the abaca plant to help meet the growing demand for marine cordage. However, because of German U-Boat fears, it became essential to transport these crucial supplies over land. In light of the poor railroad and road networks, the U.S. Congress allocated funding to hire six thousand Central Americans, under the guidance of the U.S. Corp of Engineers, to complete the still unconstructed Pan-American Highway. From there, the war material pass into Mexico via Chiapas and the newly created bridge over the Suchiate river, which was to become the centerpiece of the Modus Vivendi.[253]

Since being aided by the United States in his ascension to power in 1931, Ubico's public and private actions had consistently demonstrated staunch support for Mexico's powerful

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[252] Anteproyecto de Tratado General de Paz y Amistad entre México y Guatemala En….El Día…. De 1940, AG-APMAV Caja 1317 (No Expediente listed)

[253] Thomas M. Leonard, "Central America: On the Periphery," in *Latin America During World War II* eds. John F. Bratzel and Thomas Leonard (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 44-46.

neighbor to the north.[254] For example, during World War II, despite the potential harm to the Guatemalan economy, Ubico acceded to United States pressure and expropriated large coffee fincas run by ethnic Germans who had emigrated to Guatemala decades before. He also forcibly rounded up and sent thousands of Guatemalans of German heritage to the United States. There, these suspected "fifth columnists," many of them anti-Nazi or even Jewish, were questioned by U.S. military interrogators about their suspected conspiratorial links to their ancestral home.[255] It was likely then that Ubico would be willing to overcome his reticence towards cooperation with Mexico if the U.S. requested it.

Though archival evidence does not specifically point to U.S. involvement in forcing a Guatemalan agreement with Mexico, public and private documents suggest it, and that Guatemala was a reluctant partner. For example, a cynical editorial demonstrated at the least, the continued resentment many Guatemalans felt towards Mexico. In addition, press censorship under Ubico, though it did not approach total editorial control, surely must have been taken under consideration by the writer when commenting on such an important topic, making it reasonable to assume his viewpoint was not too far off from the government's own.[256] Written weeks after the signing of the Modus Vivendi doubted the rhetoric of "brotherhood" accompanying the construction of the temporary bridge, noting that the whole project:

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[254] See Kenneth J. Grieb, "American Involvement in the Rise of Jorge Ubico," *Caribbean Studies* 10 (1970): 5-21; Kenneth J Grieb, "The United States and General Jorge Ubico's Retention of Power," *Revista de Historia de América* 71 (1971): 119-135.

[255] Max Paul Friedman, *Nazis and Good Neighbors: The United States Campaign against the Germans of Latin America in World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 111-123, 184-186.

[256] Grieb, "The United States and General Jorge Ubico," 123.

> …was saved by the intervention of Americans, who believe a railroad or a highway is enough to strengthen the ties of unity between the nations of Central America. The bridge was constructed because it had to be. [257]

A March 1943 letter from the Mexican Ambassador to Guatemala, Francisco del Rió y Cañeda, to the office of the Mexican Secretary of Foreign Affairs further alluded to the reason behind the bridge, noting that that so far the Guatemalan government had devoted the entire railroad line heading to the Suchiate bridge to "sending by railroad to North America those strategic materials not produced in Mexico."[258]

In contrast to the cynicism in Guatemala, the Mexican press celebrated the Modus Vivendi as a sign of Guatemalan and Mexican friendship. Above all they focused on the agreement's most visible aspect, the binational construction of a railroad bridge over the Suchiate River. This started with a quickly erected temporary bridge, to be followed by a more permanent one, finally connecting the two countries by rail and road.[259]

Regardless of the motivations behind the construction, borderlanders had been waiting for decades for a permanent bridge connecting Mexico to the rest of Latin America. For years, for the goods and people riding the train down the Pacific Coast of Mexico into the Soconusco region the Suchiate station represented the end of the line; to cross into Guatemala passengers disembarked and either walked across hastily assembled planks wobbling over the narrow parts of the river, or they took one of the innumerable rafts waiting to ferry passengers back and

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[257] *El Diario de Hoy*, December 10, 1942.

[258] Francisco del Rió y Cañeda to Secretario de Relaciones Exteriores, March 2, 1943, AH-SRE Legajo 335-1 Expediente 31.

[259] "Primeros Trenes por el Suchiate," *Nuestro Diario,* November 5, 1942.

forth.[260] The bridge's absence reflected the history of uneasy relations between the two countries.

Bilateral discussions and efforts to build a permanent bridge stretched back to 1919. In May of that year, the president of the Mexican National Railroads visited the southern limit of his domain and confidently predicted a permanent bridge in a few months' time, the costs split between the two countries.[261] However, funding delays plagued the start of construction, and the Guatemalan dictator Estrada Cabrera (1898-1920) eventually soured on the idea, even as Mexican engineers from the Secretariat of Communications and Public Works began the process of selecting the location of the link that would connect the Americas.[262] The impetus to build a permanent railroad was lost. As late as 1939 a *New York Times* travelogue on the still uncompleted Pan-American highway wrote of sleeping on the banks of the Suchiate and being "poled across the sluggish river."[263]

Though the bridge represented a long sought after local connection with potential international economic implications, the Modus Vivendi also laid the basis for the future CILA. Unable to secure a broader border treaty with Guatemala, Mexican diplomats put within the Modus Vivendi a framework for future bilateral cooperation. Crucially, Article X designated the first binational engineering body, the Mixed Commission of Engineers. Later renamed the International Commission of the Suchiate River (ICSR), these engineers were tasked to erect a permanent bridge, to study the utilization of the Suchiate River for irrigation, and to prevent

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[260] *La Opinion,* September 11, 1914; *El Universal,* May 21, 1917; *El Universal,* July 23, 1922. In contrast, permanent bridges over the Rio Grande had been constructed as early as the late nineteenth century. See *Galveston Daily News,* October 13, 1888*;* Beatriz Eugenia De La Garza,*: A Personal History of the Place and the People* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013), 186-187.

[261] *El Demócrata,* May 5, 1919.

[262] *El Universal,* November 20, 1920; *El Universal,* July 11, 1921.

[263] *New York Times,* March 19, 1939.

flooding, which could lead to major deviations of the border itself. Unlike past governmental bodies devoted to the study of the southern border, the Mexican officials in the ICSR worked with Guatemalan counterparts.[264]

Though the Modus Vivendi established the foundation for the future border commission and further focused the attention of Mexican engineers on border issues such as demarcation, its passage did not lead to the binational resolutions Mexico wanted to enact regarding resource management. In part, Guatemalan reticence to commit funding or follow through on diplomatic advances continued to delay the comprehensive border treaty Mexico desired. This situation remained consistent throughout the period, despite the dramatic change in Guatemalan governments in 1944 and 1954.

As before, Mexico acted with a greater sense of urgency than Guatemala to secure a binational treaty and expand the parameters of the Modus Vivendi. In matters of water rights, especially, Mexican economic planners envisioned the borderland rivers, the Grijalva and Usumacinta, which began in Guatemala, contributing hydroelectric energy to the rapidly industrializing country. For example, a 1948 article by Andres Garcia Quintero, Director General of the Secretariat of Hydraulic Resources, noted the scarcity of water in the deserts of the country's northern and central plains. However, the article emphasized, "Mexico has just started to develop her hydraulic resources… Mexico to date has utilized less than one-tenth of her hydraulic resources."[265] A 1954 study done by noted water expert Pablo Bistrain spoke to

[264] Modus Vivendi entre Los Estado Unidos Mexicanos y la Republica de Guatemala con relaciona al Puente Internacional Sobre el Rio Suchiate, AH-SRE Legajo 335-2, Expediente 73.

[265] Andres Garcia Quintero, "Hydroelectric Potentiality of Mexico," *Transactions of the American Institute of Electrical Engineers* 67 (1948) 993-994.

that potential in the southern borderlands. Bistrain wrote, "The Grijalva and Usumacinta system potentially represents 50% of the possible developable hydraulic energy in the nation."[266]

For a short time after the signing of the 1942 agreement the binational cooperation needed for such ambitious goals as shared hydroelectric development seemed to be progressing. In early 1943 Guatemalan and Mexican ICSR representatives conducted a joint survey of the region outside of Tapachula. Tracing the footsteps taken by Barrios and Matias Romero nearly fifty years earlier, the two new colleagues walked along the Suchiate River mapping the vegetation, population centers, tributaries, and the ad-hoc works on both sides of the river erected against flooding. For the first time the representatives from the two nations treated the body of water separating them as something shared, with the understanding that what one did on one side would affect the other. They planned a future topographic survey, beginning from the Pacific Ocean to go upriver a distance of approximately fifty miles, to Talismán, Chiapas. In addition, they planned to erect four hydrometric stations, to measure the speed and flow of the river.[267]

The Mexican delegation urged speed in the study and the creation of new works to "defend" the northern banks before the annual floods arrived. For years levees on both banks had warped the path of the Suchiate and, coupled with natural erosion, had literally caused Mexican land to become Guatemalan in some parts; in others, the bank simply fell into the water. For example, an investigation of the region in 1936 by an engineering team sent from Mexico

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[266]Planeación Integral del Sureste Rio Usumacinta Diversos Aspectos del Estado Campeche y su Incorporación al Sistema Económico del País," October 15, 1954, AGN-APALM Caja 0003 Expediente not listed; For Bistrain see Luis A Aguilar, "The Transnational Dimensions of Mexican Irrigation, 1900-1950,"*Journal of Political Ecology* 19 (2012): 70-80; Pablo Bistráin and Luis Aboites. *Pablo Bistráin, ingeniero mexicano* (Tlalpan: Ciesas, 1997).

[267] Ernesto Álvarez and Armando Santacruz Jr. to Secretario de Relaciones Exteriores, Guatemala, January 23, 1943, AH-SRE Legajo 335-2 Expedientes 166-170.

City found that the locations of the Mexican and Guatemalan border posts outside of Talismán, Mexico and El Carmen, Guatemala had actually switched places years ago, as the local officers reacted to a rapidly changing river course.[268] A typical complaint was the one sent in 1945 by Colonia Libertad ejidatarios. Located along the Suchiate River, they wrote that surging water caused by the recent cyclone season stripped away nearly 85 percent of their crop. In addition, they had lost nearly 500 acres of land to their Guatemalan neighbors across the river because the latter had prepared defensive measures along the banks, changing the course of the Suchiate.[269]

The symbolic centerpiece of the 1942 Modus Vivendi, however, the construction of a permanent bridge, faced a lack of diplomatic cooperation during the Ubico regime. The construction of a permanent bridge became plagued by setbacks, false starts, and negotiations defined by a history of mistrust. For example, a May 1943 visit to Guatemala by representatives of the National Railways of Mexico (Ferrocarriles Nacionales de México) with the leading executives of the International Railroads of Central America (Ferrocarriles Internacionales de Centro América, FICA) resulted in angry denunciations by Mexican officials regarding the lack of Guatemalan cooperation. Suggestions by the Mexican engineers to improve the efficiency and reach of service were rejected. For example, Mexican Railway officials suggested selling transnational tickets throughout Central America, as was done for Mexico's northern border, as opposed to only at the border station. The suggestion to build additional rails in Guatemala to speed up the transfer of goods sent across the bridge, meanwhile, was rejected out of hand by Guatemalan representatives. A Mexican embassy official reporting to the Secretariat of Foreign Relations angrily denounced FICA and Guatemalan diplomatic obstructionism, noting that the

[268]Salvador Martínez Mercado to Secretario de Relaciones Exteriores, México, May 23, 1936 AH-SRE Legajo 332-3 Expedientes 2-3.

[269]Roberto Amorós G. to Manuel Ávila Camacho, Tapachula, November 4, 1945 AGN-APMAC Caja 0012 Expediente 29332.

meeting "gave the impression that the same spirit of opposition exists for a stable connection between Guatemala and Mexico." The official prognosticated that "at the end of the war, when not confronted…with the vested interests that oblige them to maintain the movement of goods and people between Mexico and Guatemala, at the precise moment they can, they will cut communications, leaving the two republics isolated."[270]

The overthrow of Ubico in 1944 and the election of the October Revolution government under President Juan José Arévalo (1944-1951) in December of that year symbolized the possibility of a new positive chapter in diplomacy between the two rivals; as Guatemalans shed their repressive past, Mexican officials were hopeful it meant forgetting old antagonisms. In Guatemala a broad based middle-class and intellectual coalition, supported by a peasantry that demanded an end to institutionalized repressive measures such as vagrancy laws, became an unstoppable force for change. Demonstrations demanding democracy and an equitable economic policy signaled a wide-spread frustration with the nineteenth century caudillo governing style of Ubico and his predecessors. Suddenly, Guatemala seemed like it had renewed hope for the future.

Despite political optimism, the incoming October Revolution government faced a daunting financial situation, hindering Guatemala's capacity to contribute to the construction of a permanent bridge, and also serving as a reminder of Mexico's more dominant economic role in their relationship. For example, the Guatemalan economy was dominated by agriculture, especially the export of banana of coffee which accounted for 90 percent of the country's foreign exchange. Any price fluctuation in the international market for either crop would have halted

[270] Federico A. Mariscal to Secretario de Relaciones Exteriores, Guatemala, May 29, 1943, AH-SRE Legajo 335-1 Expedientes 41-43.

any economic growth.[271] In addition, for the length of the October Revolution, the Guatemalan government had to deal with a substantial trade deficit, dating back to 1935, due to the high freight charges demanded by the United Fruit dominated national railroad. As the October Revolution seemed to become more radicalized under Árbenz, nervous foreign governments began to call in bonds issued by the Ubico regime, in part to intimidate the revolutionary regime from initiating drastic nationalizing reforms. In 1951 alone, a British bond payment of $1 million counted against an overall budget of $60 million.[272] This debt made it difficult for the government to enact large and expensive social programs, in part based on the New Deal, the scope of which embodied the key promises of the revolution, and which were urgently needed to combat decades of corruption and bad government.[273]

For Mexican diplomats, the bridge project became a priority, a symbol of a more amiable and constructive relationship with Guatemala's new "revolutionary" government. In March 1946, the Mexican ambassador to Guatemala, Vicente Benítez, wrote back to the Secretary of Foreign Relations in Mexico City**:**

> Fortunately, the good sense of prosperous and Revolutionary governments like those of Guatemala and Mexico, have decided in a practical form, the immediate execution of such an important project [bridge construction] which in other times and for reasons incomprehensible and unjust, was systemically combated by the previous administration….The Secretary [Francisco Castillo Nájera] knows well the eagerness and effort that have marked my activities

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[271] Paul J. Dosal, "The Political Economy of Industrialization in Revolutionary Guatemala," *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies / Revue canadienne des études latino-américaines et caraïbes* 29 (1990); 19-20.

[272] Robert Wasserstrom, "Revolution in Guatemala: Peasants and Politics under the Árbenz Government," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 17 (1975): 448-449, 454.

[273] Raymond N. Ruggiero, "The Origins of a Democratic National Constitution: The 1945 Guatemalan Constitution and Human Rights" (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2013), 154-198.

> since my arrival to this country….[I have been] attempting to resolve in the best manner the obstacles and difficulties confronting border life on the Suchiate.[274]

Benítez assured the Secretary that he had achieved success in his goals of strengthening the cross-border relationship between the two countries, noting that President Arévalo "had been very cooperative in the terrain of the ideal and the practical." Mexican President Ávila Camacho should be told, added the diplomat, that the success of the bridge was a certain fact.

Representatives of the Guatemalan Ministry of Communications and Public Works had signed an agreement with representatives of the National Railways of Mexico in Guatemala City on March 11, 1946.[275] Mexican Railway engineers would lead the design and building of the bridge, and they were to start the planning stage right away to take advantage of the dry season. An appointed Guatemalan engineer would lend oversight and assistance, while companies from each country had a chance to bid to supply materials. The approval and presence of Porter King, representative of the International Railroads of Central America, further added to Benítez's enthusiasm about the agreement.[276]

As had happened with regard to past premature pronouncements, newspaper articles appeared assuring the imminent construction of the permanent bridge. An April 21, 1946 article in *El Universal* noted that "only small details are left…and all the materials are ready to construct the bridge."[277] However, as in the past this latest agreement did not lead to the

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[274] Vicente L. Benítez to Francisco Castillo Nájera, Guatemala, March 13, 1946, AH-SRE Legajo 336-7 Expediente 17.

[275] Vicente L. Benítez to Francisco Castillo Nájera, Guatemala, March 13, 1946, AH-SRE Legajo 336-7 Expediente 18.

[276] Anteproyecto a la construcción definitiva del Puente Internacional sobre el Rio Suchiate," Guatemala, March 11, 1946, AH-SRE Legajo 336-7 Expedientes 32-35.

[277] *El Universal,* April 21, 1946; See also *El Excélsior,* March 9, 1946; *Novedades,* March 9, 1946.

erection of the elusive structure. In part, Guatemala's financial limitations played a role, as the Guatemalan Secretary of Foreign Relations Eugenio Silva Peña intimated to Benítez during their meetings, noting, "since Mexico is infinitely wealthier than Guatemala, and considering it as a gesture of fraternal friendship, maybe Mexico could cover more than the 50 percent share as stipulated in the Modus Vivendi."

Despite his enthusiasm for transnational cooperation, Benítez did not take to the suggestion. Instead, he responded with a complicated logic: he insulted the former Ubico regime, "whose cooperation left much to be desired" but which nevertheless approved the 1942 pact, and gave a roundabout approval to the present "revolutionary regime," imploring them not to "try to put themselves in an inferior position as the previous administration had done to save an insignificant amount of money." At the same time, he recommended that Mexico City not dramatically change the Modus Vivendi to alter the financial obligations of Guatemala. In fact, he suggested extending the agreement to include platforms for foot traffic, allowing individuals to avoid the ubiquitous small rafts going back and forth, as well as the inclusion of houses for custom and immigration agents.[278]

In addition to the financial disparities between Mexico and Guatemala, bureaucratic miscommunication between Mexican officials also served as a roadblock as the region lacked of a CILA like bureau to coordinate infrastructure along the expansive border. The president's office in Mexico City quashed the ad hoc plan crafted in Guatemala City because Mexican engineers had already planned the location of the bridge to coincide with the creation of a town, Ciudad Hidalgo, along with other improvements alongside the river. Located just two miles from Suchiate, the new community would eventually blend with the larger city and, in 1952, the

[278] Vicente L. Benítez to Francisco Castillo Nájera, Guatemala, March 13, 1946, AH-SRE Legajo 336-7 Expediente 18.

much more patriotic, Mexican-sounding city became the seat of the Suchiate *municipio* (county).[279] In addition, engineers planned extensive irrigation works that would bring water to over 18,000 acres along the Suchiate. A planned free trade port at the mouth of the river would complement these efforts. The location of the bridge as stipulated in the Benítez led agreement would be close to two miles away from the heart of these ambitious plans to develop the communities along the Suchiate, too far in the estimation of the president's office.[280]

Ultimately, weather trumped bureaucratic miscommunications and financial difficulties: surging waters caused by Pacific storms destroyed the temporary bridge in the middle of 1946. The destruction proved to both sides just how important the new link had become. Immediately after its collapse, Ambassador Benítez sent an urgent letter to President Ávila Camacho asking to speed up repairs or risk damaging commerce for both countries. He claimed that raft traffic was too congested to carry out the transport of goods, in particular Guatemalan demands for petroleum.[281] Indeed, the language in an agreement parceling out funding commitments for repairs between the Secretariat of Communication and Public Works, the Secretariat of Treasury and Public Credit, and the Mexican Railway noted, "it is indispensable to repair the bridge."[282]

Weather proved to be a persistent obstacle to the construction of the permanent structure. In 1944, 1945, 1949, and 1953 a flooded Suchiate destroyed, or severely damaged the temporary bridge. As stipulated by the Modus Vivendi, Mexican National Railroad engineers repaired the bridge, charging Guatemala after the fact. This funding going to frequent repairs siphoned

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[279] Enciclopedia de los Municipios y Delegaciones de Chiapas, Accesed October 19, 2014. http://www.inafed.gob.mx/work/enciclopedia/EMM07chiapas/municipios/07087a.html.

[280] Anteproyecto a la construcción definitiva del Puente Internacional sobre el Rio Suchiate Guatemala, March 11, 1946, AH-SRE Legajo 336-7 Expedientes 37-39.

[281] Vicente L. Benítez to Manuel Ávila Camacho, Guatemala, May 28, 1946, AH-SRE Legajo 335-1 Expedientes 324-324.

[282] Memorándum para Acuerdo Presidencial: Construcción de puente definitivo sobre el Río Suchiate," México, December 31, 1946, AH-SRE Legajo 336-7 Expedientes 37-39.

money away from the permanent construction. Indeed, by 1947 Guatemala refused to pay its corresponding part of the repairs, claiming that they had only agreed to fund a permanent bridge, not constant repairs to the temporary bridge.[283]

The Guatemalan government, however, did not direct funds to the construction of the permanent bridge despite persistent Mexican lobbying at the highest level. For example, in March 1951 the head of National Railways of Mexico, Manuel R. Palacios, met with newly sworn in Guatemalan president Árbenz the day after his inauguration. The over hour-long talk touched upon the Guatemalan's appreciation of the Mexican Revolution, "the only triumphant Revolution in Latin America," and in an ominously prescient statement, the Mexican government's support of the October Revolution as it weathered increasing "imperialist pressure." Past the diplomatic niceties, on the subject of "concrete issues," the railroadman turned diplomat reported that the new president of Guatemala promised to include in the next annual budget money for the bridge.[284]

In late 1951 Mexican Railway engineers identified a site, developed a new plan for a permanent bridge, and sent the blueprints to Guatemala. There was little response back. Indeed, the matter went no further until 1955, when frustrated representatives from the Mexican Railroad suggested that the government of Mexico simply pay for the bridge itself. The Secretariat of Foreign Relations rejected the idea. Later in the year, echoing previous assurances, the Mexican ambassador sent back messages that the Guatemalan Secretary of Foreign Relations expressed

[283] Memorándum: Resumen informativo acerca del Puente Internacional sobre el Río Suchiate,"Mexico, August 22, 1958 AH-SRE Legajo 332-4 Expedientes 36-38; *Mediodia,* October 19, 1945.

[284] Manuel R. Palacios to Miguel Alemán Valdés, México, March 19, 1951, AGN-APMAV Caja 1039 Expediente 12236.

interest in finally paying for a definitive bridge. Mexico sent back copies of the 1951 plan to Guatemala, but momentum once again stalled until 1961.[285]

Managing Water

Much like the bridge, the pressing issue of water rights also seemed to have stalled despite the importance attached to achieving a broad agreement by Mexican diplomats and engineers. An extensive 1952 memorandum issued by the Secretariat of Foreign Relations for the Mexican Ambassador in Guatemala, Primo Villa Michel, detailed the pressing concerns. Authored by longtime experts on the southern border, former CEFS consultant, Lorenzo Hernández and the head of the 1941 Demographic Commission, Salvador Cardona, the memo frequently referenced the United States-Mexican border.

The meandering Suchiate River, noted the memorandum, continued to threaten communities and change course in ways that called the location of the border into question. Despite a clause in the 1942 Modus Vivendi tasking flood control work on the Suchiate to a binational team of engineers, no work had been done. Indeed, the two engineers assigned to the task, one from the Mexican Secretariat of Hydraulic Resources and his Guatemalan counterpart had not even met, as the authors noted vaguely, for "various reasons."[286]

The authors recommended addressing the issue of a shifting watery border with a treaty modeled after the 1905 Treaty of Elimination of Bancos between Mexico and the United States.

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[285] Memorándum: Resumen informativo acerca del Puente Internacional sobre el Río Suchiate,"Mexico, August 22, 1958 AH-SRE Legajo 332-4 Expedientes 37.

[286] Memorándum Confidencial para el Licenciado Señor Primo Villa Michel Embajador de México en la República de Guatemala, Preparado por la Oficina de Límites y Aguas Internacionales por acuerdo del Señor Don Manuel Tello, Secretario de Relaciones Exteriores," México, January 16, 1952 AH-SRE Legajo 332-5 Expediente 29.

This agreement addressed the problem of the nearly sixty bancos formed on the Rio Grande at the time of the treaty. These bancos were pieces of land that had shifted from one bank to another due to the gradual change in the river's course, effectively ceding territory to the opposite shore. Without any intervention the bancos often grew to large sizes. The 1905 treaty had called for the binational body of engineers to eliminate the development of bancos, while also assuring sovereignty of those bancos which had detached from their respective sides. However, the Treaty asserted a provision that those bancos of over 250 hectares, and containing over two hundred people, would not be subject to the treaty.[287] This provision pointedly referred to the Chamizal tract, which the United States had claimed over Mexican objections since 1884. Cardona and Hernández recommended a treaty between Mexico and Guatemala similar to the 1905 agreement, hoping to avoid a similar Chamizal type dispute on the Suchiate River.[288]

Equally as pressing for the two authors was forging an agreement regarding the utilization of the borderland rivers for irrigation and energy. Since the Modus Vivendi of 1942 and renewed Mexican engagement with Guatemala, Mexican diplomats had been frustrated in moving dialogue towards a comprehensive agreement with their Guatemalan colleagues. Cardona and Hernández claimed that the engineers from the Secretariat of Hydraulic Resources expressed such frustration that they were contemplating unilaterally beginning work on shifting and damming parts of the Suchiate for planned projects.[289]

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[287] United States and William Cullen Dennis. *Chamizal Arbitration. The Case of the United States of America Before the International Boundary Commission, United States-Mexico, Hon. Eugene Lafleur Presiding Under the Provisions of the Convention between the United States of America and the United States of Mexico, Concluded June 24, 1910. With Portfolio of Maps* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1911), 86-88.

[288] Memorándum Confidencial para el Licenciado Señor Primo Villa Michel Embajador de México," México, January 16, 1952 AH-SRE Legajo 332-5 Expediente 30.

[289] Memorándum Confidencial para el Licenciado Señor Primo Villa Michel Embajador de México" México, January 16, 1952 AH-SRE Legajo 332-5 Expediente 30.

No unilateral project went ahead. Though some members of the government had lost patience with the false assurances given by a stream of Guatemalan officials, Mexican officials avoided any confrontation, as they hoped to replicate their positive experience with the United States. Cardona and Hernández noted that "…keeping in mind the experience on our northern border and with the sense of being a good neighbor, it will be better to make a new effort…to arrive at an understanding." The recent 1944 Treaty between the United States and Mexico regulating shared water resources had, in the words of the authors, "proved to be a magnificent experience for Mexico, and demonstrates that neighboring states, even when their powers are varied, can come to an understanding in a spirit of equality and justice." This breakthrough came despite "the differences, which many years [Mexico] had with United States, proving that it is much more sensible to arrive at an international accord before local and national interests trouble such an agreement."[290]

Demarcation

The one bright spot in cooperation between Mexico and Guatemala involved demarcation of the border, which had proceeded in small steps since the Cardenas-era and did not cause the same kind of diplomatic wrangling occasioned by bridge construction despite the territorial implications of the work. This suggested that questions of financing, bureaucratic miscommunication, illustrated by the failure of Benítez bridge deal, and just where the bridge would be placed -- close to a new population center or not -- played a large role in the delay. In 1938 a small team of binational engineers trekked through the isolated regions of the

[290] Memorándum Confidencial para el Licenciado Señor Primo Villa Michel Embajador de México" México, January 16, 1952 AH-SRE Legajo 332-5 Expediente 31.

borderlands, tracking and fixing a handful of border monuments erected during the chaotic survey following the 1882 treaty; vandals, weather, and environmental growth had destroyed or damaged many of them in the decades since their initial construction. This group included the young associate topographer Trueba. The 1938 journey demonstrated the need for the effort as they corrected a major mistake in the placement of monument 35, or Aguas Turbias, at the parallel 17° 49'.[291] Surveyors from decades earlier had placed this monument on the eastern end of the border 200 meters inside the territory of Mexico. Utilizing more advanced "astronomic and geographic" techniques, the engineers now moved the monument to the south, which ensured, in the words of the Secretary of Foreign Relations Manuel Tello, that "our country recovered around eight square miles of territory."[292]

The slow and arduous work of demarcation continued in fits and starts. In May 1950, the newly formed Mexican Boundary Commission, operating under the auspices of the Secretariat of Foreign Relations, planned for a more extensive revision of the placement of the Chiapan border. Despite the auspicious name — the Mexican press labeled the group the International Boundary and Water Commission — it was a small ad hoc bureau that mainly consisted of a now veteran Trueba leading loaned out experts from other government departments in the demarcation mission.[293] Significantly, though, the commission could count on Guatemalan cooperation in an extra-official capacity.

Starting from Tenosique, Tabasco Trueba lead a small survey team composed of a topographer, a meteorologist, a geographer, an archeologist, and two radio operators from the

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[291] Manuel Tello to J.E. de Leguizamó, Mexico, January 16, 1950, AH-SRE Legajo 339-12 Expediente 129.

[292] Manuel Tello to J.E. de Leguizamó, Mexico, January 16, 1950AH-SRE Legajo 339-12 Expediente 130.

[293] Boletín para la Prensa, México, April 22, 1950, AH-SRE Legajo 339-12 Expedientes 107-109; *El Excélsior,* April 23, 1950; *El Nacional,* April 23, 1954

Secretariat of National Defense. Their planned month-long trip would lead them west through the Lacandon jungle to Tapachula, to "investigate the state of [border]monuments…collect all class of information regarding demographic data…[and] study the possibility of utilizing the water of international rivers." A Guatemalan engineer planned to rendezvous with the group close to the border.

The remoteness of the region, as well as the difficulty in recruiting federal officials to work in the borderlands –as examined in chapter two -- seemed to allow Trueba wide latitude in how he chose to carry out the expedition. For example, the day before he began his journey he wrote his superior Lorenzo Hernández — author of the closing memo of the 1937 border study urging the creation of the CILA — to tell him he would not be waiting for the assigned, and a few days tardy, archeologist, Carlos Margáin, to arrive in Tenosique. Trueba took offense at a telegram Margáin had sent, accusing it of containing "veiled orders." The famed archaeologist asked Trueba to arrange mules, guides, and planes in order for him to catch up with the expedition as he had been pulled away to first accompany President Alemán and his wife on a tour of Palenque. Trueba did not follow through on Margáin's suggestions. When the archaeologist arrived in Tenosique, there was no transportation available. He wrote a frustrated telegram to Hernández, explaining that he could not make sense of Trueba's instructions and that nobody knew when or exactly where he had gone.[294]

Margáin's inclusion in the trip revealed the Mexican government's estimation of the unknown nature of the region: the trip could uncover ruins such as recently unearthed in Palenque since Trueba led his expedition through territory untouched by any arm of the Mexican

[294]Armando Trueba Quevedo to Lorenzo Hernández, Tenosique, May 13, 1950, AH-SRE Legajo 339-12 Expedientes 124-125; Manuel Medina to Armando Trueba Quevedo, México, May 18, 1950 AH-SRE Legajo 339-12 Expediente 121; Carlos R. Margáin to Lorenzo Hernández, Tenosique, May 29, 1950, AH-SRE Legajo 339-12 Expedientes 135-136.

government for decades. Utilizing mules and breaking ground through the rough Lacandon Forest, the surveyors traveled up to the Mayan archeological site of Bonampak and later down to inspect the Usumacinta, Chixoy, and Salinas Rivers, and eventually to the city of Comitán. Due to the challenges of this kind of travel, they failed to complete the trip in the planned months' time; instead the expedition lasted almost three. As the engineer explained, since the decline of both the logging and chicle industries, there were no paths and no bridges over the innumerable rivers. Trueba noted of the border monuments he found: "…I can almost assure you that nobody has seen them since their construction." The planned meeting with Guatemalan engineer Ernesto Alvarez at the prescribed meeting spot of monument 47 never occurred. The harsh terrain, coupled with the lack of roads and dwindling supplies, stopped the Guatemalan delegation from arriving.[295]

The difficulty and delays caused by the trip also stopped Trueba from completing the surveying goals that called for him to continue west out of the Lacandon Forest and along the border to the mouth of the Suchiate River outside of Tapachula. He would not complete the second part of this trip until 1956. After finally leaving the jungle, Trueba found himself and his team "isolated at the Santo Domingo River," behind schedule and, most importantly, without sufficient funds to continue the rest of the trip. This forced him to travel quickly to the closest city, Comitán, to contact the Border Commission. In Comitán Trueba wired his superior, Manuel Medina, for more money. He claimed that though some of the crew was tired and all were owed more salary due to the delay, most were ready to continue the trip. Trueba tried to

[295] Armando Trueba Quevedo to Manuel Medina, Comitán de Domínguez, August 14, 1950, AH-SRE Legajo 339-12 Expedientes 141-142.

convince Medina of the necessity of continuing by stressing the important work of demarcation along with the same issues that would cause controversy during his 1956 expedition. He noted:

> In my travels I realized that besides the business with the border there were other issues related to demographics and forestry management, as well as customs related, that you could characterize as illicit and would interest the nation.[296]

Although Trueba had "the working train on the border ready to continue," lack of funding stopped him from completing the trip. Indeed, the renewed focus by the Mexican government on maintaining monuments and clearing away brush from the entire border, all the way to British controlled Belize, accounted for a large amount of resources. In March 1951, a few months after Trueba's trip ended in Comitán due to lack of funding, the Secretariat of Communication and Public Works asked Medina's Mexican Boundary Commission for assistance in situating the entrance of the Pan-American Highway into Mexico at Ciudad Cuauhtémoc. Located approximately forty miles southwest of Comitán, and formerly known as El Octotal, the borderland city took on the more nationalistic Mexican name in 1943. Medina, pleading poverty, arranged for the Department of Roads to loan Trueba a car, a driver, and seven assistants. Once there, Trueba worked with his Guatemalan counterparts to ensure that the Pan-American connection corresponded to the political border.[297]

Following the relatively easy work of the Pan-American highway, Trueba set off at the beginning of 1952 on another tough expedition, this time a two-month tour through the jungles

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[296] Armando Trueba Quevedo to Manuel Medina, Comitán de Domínguez, August 14, 1950, AH-SRE Legajo 339-12 Expedientes 141-142.

[297] Lorenzo Hernández to Antonio Dovali Jaime, México, June 26, 1951, AH-SRE Legajo 339-12 Expedientes 163-164; Lorenzo Hernández to Director General de Cuenta y Administración, México, July 10, 1951, AH-SRE Legajo 339-12 Expedientes 169-170.

of Quintana Roo and Campeche. There he toured the line, demarcating and clearing the border between Mexico, Guatemala, and Belize, jumping from spot to spot by securing a plane to land his team in small clearings in the middle of the jungle. Due to the remoteness of the region, the Mexican Commission assigned a doctor to the trip to take advantage of the group's travels and visit the local population. Trueba, as was his style, made several on the spot decisions he later explained and justified to his superiors. For example, he discovered and reprimanded a series of Mexican loggers and chicleros who crossed over into Guatemala. As Trueba finished his trip, Medina wrote the Forestry Commission and the Secretariat of Agriculture and Livestock to halt the Mexican incursions into Guatemala described by the engineer.[298]

Diplomacy, Threat of War, and the Formation of CILA

As Trueba continued his demarcation work, Mexican diplomats continued to push for the establishment of an international border commission into the 1950's despite the often heightened tensions between the two traditional rivals. The possibility of cooperation over the shared border became a path towards a normalization of relations between Mexico and Guatemala. Continued negotiations over the construction of a permanent bridge over the Suchiate allowed Mexican diplomats the opportunity to discuss a broader agreement over water rights and demarcation to be monitored and supervised by an international body. The continued delays, though, regarding the construction of a single bridge seemed to suggest the impossibility of establishing a binational body such as CILA.

[298] Armando Trueba Quevedo to Manuel Medina, Chetumal, March 21, 1952 AH-SRE Legajo 339-12 Expedientes 170-177.

In addition, the dramatic changes in government in Guatemala following the 1954 overthrow of the October Revolution — discussed in detail in chapter four — played a role in disrupting a larger border agreement. In July of that year, Castillo Armas (1954-1957) a former Guatemalan military officer, led a United States supported coup against an Árbenz regime deemed a security threat to the region because of the president's socialist leanings. Only a few years later, Miguel Ydígoras (1957-1962) a former presidential candidate and a military official, overthrew Castillo Armas Both Castillo Armas and Ydígoras represented a return to the Ubico-style form of government: authoritarian, tied to United States foreign policy, and possessed of a reflexive antipathy towards Mexico.

Regardless of the changes in government, Mexican diplomats continued to push for increased cooperation. As before, Mexico's extensive experience with the United States served as a touchstone. This experience, especially the unequal power dynamics between the two neighbors, influenced from Mexico's perspective its continued patience in the face of Guatemalan intransigence. Mexico, on its southern border, could take the role of the good neighbor. They did this because, ultimately, they understood that cooperation assisted Mexico, just as, on the northern border it helped both countries. A deliberative body like CILA could take politics out of the process of border management. As on the northern border, the history of the border between Mexico and Guatemala was defined by historical accusations of theft, but on the northern border Mexico had been able to transcend its historical resentment. If the U.S. and Mexico could compromise over the Rio Grande, then some type of agreement could be made over the Suchiate.

In August 1958, Luis Padilla Nervo, the Secretary of Foreign Relations, tasked the Mexican ambassador in Guatemala, Francisco de Icaza, to "restart negotiations" with the new

government of Ydígoras. As a guide, the ambassador received a ten-page history of Mexican negotiations with the United States regarding the manner "they have resolved terrestrial and fluvial problems since 1848 until the present."

This history touched upon the key border disputes and agreements since the end of the U.S. War with Mexico, optimistically summarizing a century of potentially explosive disagreements involving the placement of the border itself and the allocation of resources resolved through negotiation. At points the memorandum distilled for the ambassador the key lesson learned by Mexican diplomats regarding the challenges of managing and negotiating with a neighbor over a border defined in substantial part by a river: listen to the engineers.

The summary placed special emphasis on the negotiations and work by the International Border Commission between Mexico and the United States since the 1933 Treaty for Rectification of the Rio Grande in the El Paso-Juárez Valley. Through the work of the binational body of engineers assigned to advise their respective governments, potentially much larger conflicts were avoided. For example, the 1933 Treaty, based on the studies done by the Commission, called for the construction of an artificial channel of the Rio Grande in an attempt to control the annual flooding that frequently shifted the border itself, causing the loss of land for one side or the other. The channeling of the river set a precedent, replacing the 1905 ad hoc work of eliminating bancos where and when they arose and instead allowed the engineers greater control of the river.[299]

The spirit of cooperation between Mexico and the United States culminated in the 1944 "Utilization of Waters of the Colorado and Tijuana Rivers and of the Rio Grande." Managed by

[299]Memorándum acerca de la forma en que México y los Estados Unidos de América han venido resolviendo gradualmente sus problemas de límites terrestres y fluviales, desde 1848 a la fecha, México, August 9, 1958, AH-SRE Legajo 332-5 Expediente 46-47; Rectification of the Rio Grande, Convention Between the United States of America and Mexico, Accessed November 5, 2014, http://www.ibwc.gov/Files/TREATY_OF_1933.pdf.

the engineers of the border commission, it allowed both countries equal rights to the Colorado, Rio Grande, and Tijuana Rivers for the purposes of irrigation and hydroelectric power. The groundbreaking agreement led to the construction by Mexico of the Morelos Dam, diverting water from the Colorado River to the dry Mexicali Valley. It also led to the international Falcon Dam, which provided hydroelectric power to both countries.

The memorandum made clear to de Icaza just how important the 1944 Treaty was to Mexican agricultural and hydroelectric needs, illustrating similar potential in the Chiapan borderlands. For example, it noted that whereas before farmers in the Mexicali Valley only planted 80,000 hectares of land, irrigation allocated by the 1944 treaty allowed them to plant close to 200,000. Indeed, the water proved so important to improving the economy of Baja California that "it could convert from a Federal Territory to a State of the Republic." Results in the expansion of agriculture for the communities straddling the Rio Grande between Fort Quitman and the Gulf of Mexico were equally dramatic: it covered 27,000 hectares before the treaty and 240,000 hectares after. To top it all off, the Falcon Dam supplied 125 million kilowatts of electricity for Mexico, while a second dam, El Diablo, already in advanced planning stages, could dramatically increase the electric supply and irrigation of the both countries in the coming years.[300]

Mexico's interest in exploiting the energy potential of the Chiapan borderlands was finally equaled by its ability to execute large scale hydroelectric projects. Under the auspices of new technocratic agencies such as the Secretariat of Hydraulic Resources (Secretaría de Recursos Hidráulicos, SRH), founded in 1947, plans to tap borderland rivers to supply the

[300] Memorándum acerca de la forma en que México y los Estados Unidos de América han venido resolviendo gradualmente sus problemas de límites terrestres y fluviales, desde 1848 a la fecha, México, August 9, 1958, AH-SRE Legajo 332-5 Expediente 46-47.

energy needs for the growing national economy could become a reality. The dams constructed in Chiapas during the fifties, sixties and seventies were the culmination of a decade's long efforts by politicians, consumers, and labor organizations to secure the country's energy independence from the dictates of foreign owned utilities. Like many key resources, such as oil, electricity remained in the hands of foreign companies after the revolution. For years these private monopolies, such as the largest, the American Foreign and Power Company, weathered consumer and industry resentment over high prices. In addition, they refused to expand a small electric grid to rural areas, where the profit margins were small or non-existent, leaving many Mexican communities literally in the dark. Legislation such as the 1926 National Electric Code declared in principal that electricity was a "public good," yet failed to chart a path to more regulation over the industry and the resolution of issues such as prices and access. Calls for nationalization were met with hesitation by Mexican officials, as American ownership of the private utilities ensured that any intrusion into the industry would cause a diplomatic fight with the United States.[301]

Cheap, accessible energy, however, became a rallying cry for the country in the 1920's and 1930's. Calls for dramatic changes in the industry took concrete shape with the 1937 creation of the Federal Electricity Commission (Comisión Federal de Electricidad, CFE). In addition to developing new energy sources, the CFE began to regulate private utilities, including rate hikes. As result of increased regulation, as well as rhetoric calling for nationalization, foreign owned utilities dramatically reduced their investments in Mexico. The restrictions on resources and capital caused by World War II ensured that from 1936 to 1945 the energy

[301] Miguel S. Wionczek, "The State and the Electric-Power Industry in Mexico, 1895-1965," *The Business History Review* 39 (1965): 534-536.

capacity of Mexico increased by barely one percent, leaving the country with a severe shortage.[302]

The CFE and the newly created SRH became the arms of a federal government determined to develop the country's electric grid to promote economic development, and as a concrete example of the fruits of the revolutionary government. Under the presidency of Miguel Alemán (1946-1952) dams became a major tool to achieve this growth. During his historic tour of the United States in 1947 the Mexican chief executive made an impactful visit to the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). Impressed with the TVA's ability to provide electricity, irrigation, and jobs to a rural population, Alemán decided to import the model to Mexico. His administration formed four river commissions throughout Mexico, including the Grijalva Valley River Commission (Comisión del Río Grijalva, CRG) in Chiapas.[303]

Beginning in the Sierra Madre of Guatemala, the Grijalva River snakes its way across the Mexican border, passes by Ciudad Cuauhtémoc, travels through the Central Valley of the state and the famous Sumidero Canyon, and finally links up with the Usumacinta River in Tabasco. The two rivers discharge nearly 105,200 million cubic meters of water, representing 30% of Mexico's freshwater. This large volume of water, wrote Secretary Padilla in 1958 to the Mexican Ambassador in Guatemala, made the Usumacinta "one of the seven most important rivers in the world." Acting on that appraisal, engineers of the SRH had already begun plans to build Mexico's largest dam, the Malapaso, to take advantage of the powerful borderland river.

[302] Ibid., 540-543.

[303] Niklas F. Robinson, "Revolutionizing the River: The Politics of Water Management in Southeastern Mexico, 1951-1974" (Phd. Diss,Tulane University, 2007), 75-90.

As construction started in 1959 it became even more crucial to obtain Guatemalan cooperation to ensure that there would be no disruption upriver.[304]

Actions by the Ydígoras administration suggested the impossibility of compromise, as highlighted by an attack on a Mexican fishing fleet on December 31, 1958. That day, boats from the Guatemalan navy, accompanied by fighter planes, attempted to interdict and escort to the nearby Guatemalan Pacific Coast port of Champerico, a pair of Mexican fishing vessels supposedly operating in Guatemalan territorial waters. Ignoring the instructions of Guatemalan authorities, the planes strafed the boats, killing and wounded a handful of fishermen and disabling much of the fleet. Guatemalan authorities arrested a handful of the survivors and brought them back to shore as prisoners, while others escaped to Mexico to tell the press shocking details of the unprovoked attack. [305]

The attack on the fishing boats was the culmination of years of tensions between the two neighbors regarding Mexican intrusions into Guatemalan territory and foreign policy towards Belize. Throughout 1957 and 1958, Guatemala complained in the press and to Mexican diplomats about fishing fleets entering their coastal waters, as well as illegal logging expeditions in the Petén.[306] In addition, Ydígoras clashed with Mexico regarding his aggressive policy towards Belize. Like Chiapas, Guatemala claimed the British controlled territory as a pre-independence possession. In early 1958, Ydígoras symbolically crossed into Belize with a handful of supporters and Guatemalan newspaper reporters, vowing to the accompanying press to return the region to Guatemala by force if necessary. Mexico repudiated the bellicosity of

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[304] Luis Padilla Nervo to Francisco A. de Icaza, México, August 22, 1958, AH-SRE Legajo 332-5 Expediente 51.

[305] Thomas Wolff, "Mexican-Guatemalan Imbroglio: Fishery Rights and National Honor," *The Americas* (38) 1981:235-236

[306] Ibid., 236.

Ydígoras's actions and rhetoric. On October 1958, in a speech to the United Nations, Mexican Secretary Padilla Nervo announced for the first time his country's support for Belize's right to self-determination, an action which drew a stern and inflammatory rebuke from the Guatemalan press and Ydígoras himself.[307]

Accordingly, Ydígoras defended the Guatemalan attack on the fishing boats and refused Mexico's request for arbitration at the International Court of Justice in the Hague. Instead, Guatemalan newspapers printed the "confessions" of the captured Mexican fishermen, which indicated they knowingly entered Guatemalan territorial waters. On January 23, a day after the fishermen were returned to Mexico, President Adolfo López Mateos (1958-1964) announced to the nation that he was breaking diplomatic relations with Guatemala.

López Mateos set the tone of public outrage in his address, blaming the Guatemalan government, and not the Guatemalan people, for the hostility. His attitude replicated Mexico's dealing with Guatemala on the border: stern, but leaving room for some form of diplomatic rapprochement.[308] In the borderlands, the Chiapan Governor Samuel León Brindis assured Guatemalans that they were welcome to stay, and even hinted to the press that many Guatemalans sought refuge in Mexican lands to escape the policies of the bellicose Ydígoras. In Comitán public officials, the Chamber of Commerce, as well as local labor organizations offered support to the government's effort to "safeguard national sovereignty." Yet they emphasized that, "like the whole of the border region, [from Comitán] to Ciudad Cuauhtémoc," they continued to support the friendship between the two countries.[309] Meanwhile, President López

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[307] Romero, "Conflicto y conciliación," 315-317. For a concise history of the territorial conflict over Belize, see Mónica Toussaint, "Entre los vecinos y los imperios: el papel de Belice en la geopolítica regional," *Revista de Estudios Históricos* 50 (2009): 105-128.

[308] *La Voz del Sureste,* January 26, 1959.

[309] *La Voz del Sureste,* January 26, 1959.

Mateos received scores of letters offering support and denouncing Ydígoras. As evidence of the patriotic fervor the attack stirred up is the message written by Colonel Francisco Abreu Marin, a "veteran of the Revolution of 1913," who offered his services for his "Patria."[310]

Between the break in diplomatic relations on January 23 and their resumption on September 15 of the same year, tensions between the two neighbors remained high. As in the past, the fear of exiles influencing Guatemalan politics (a subject taken up in greater detail in chapter four) contributed to the animosity between the two rivals. In March, Ydígoras announced that Guatemalan exiles from the Árbenz government were plotting to invade from Chiapas, supported by undisclosed foreign powers who opposed his planned forcible takeover of Belize. Incidents in the borderlands threatened to escalate the situation, such as when Guatemalan borderlanders vandalized the temporary bridge over the Suchiate, or when a handful of Mexicans vandalized the Guatemalan border town of Santa Anna. Finally, Guatemala attracted the support of other Central American nations, included El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua, which saw an opportunity to embarrass Mexico by denouncing their supposed heavy-handedness with their neighbor.[311]

Despite the continued aggressive rhetoric of Ydígoras, in his September 1 Informe de Gobierno, López Mateos signaled a willingness to reengage with Guatemala, indicating that Mexico would be open to a third party to mediate. The Chilean ambassador in Mexico became a de facto mediator in the reconciliation effort. Both sides agreed to share blame in the New Year's Eve incident. Mexico admitted its boats had strayed into Guatemalan waters, while Guatemala admitted to overreacting, and provided indemnification for the sailors killed during

[310] Francisco Abreu Marin to Adolfo López Mateos, El Triunfo, January 18, 1959 AGN-APALM Caja 0003 Expediente 3421.

[311] Wolff, "Mexican-Guatemalan Imbroglio," 242.

the attack. Both agreed to have their respective navies patrol and monitor their fishing fleets to prevent future incursions into each other's waters. Finally, they would refer future disagreements to the International Court of Justice. The matter seemed to be closed.[312]

Ydígoras faced internal and external pressure to settle with Mexico. In his own administration, Vice President Clementine Marroquín Rojas publicly urged the chief executive to compromise in his newspaper *La Hora*.[313] Meanwhile, the United States sought to clamp down on Guatemalan aggression. In 1958 the Eisenhower administration withheld military aid when key policy makers became alarmed over Ydígoras's rhetoric about Belize. The United States added the Guatemalan attack on the Mexican fishing boats as a reason to continue to withhold aid in early 1959.[314] The loss of millions of dollars in aid, as well as the potential protective curtain of a United States that had previously toppled a Guatemalan regime, presented powerful motivations for Ydígoras to reconcile. In the meantime, though Mexico had broken relations, it did not resort to inflammatory rhetoric.

Improved relations on the border became a symbol of reconciliation between the two rivals. In the beginning of March 1960, newly reinstalled Mexican Ambassador Efraín Aranda Osorio and as well as diplomatic General Counsel General Raúl Michel, joined Ydígoras and his wife in a trip to the border. Along with a score of local Tapachula politicians and officials, they were honored guests in a name-changing ceremony for the borderland town of Aytula, to Tecún Unam, named for an indigenous Guatemalan hero.[315] After a traditional meal accompanied by a Guatemalan Army marimba band, the president and the ambassador inspected the repaired

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[312] Wolff, "Mexican-Guatemalan Imbroglio." 1, 244.

[313] Ibid, 242.

[314] Stephen M. Streeter, *Managing the Counterrevolution: The United States and Guatemala, 1954-1961* (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 2000), 94.

[315] *Diario de Centro América,* March 5 ,1960.

temporary bridge connecting the newly baptized Guatemalan border town to Ciudad Hidalgo. The two discussed the dimensions of a permanent connection not so susceptible to destruction from the surging river. They then retired to the house of the Mexican Consul, where the whole party joined in refreshments and pictures. The ambassador and General Michel then returned to Guatemala City with Ydígoras and his wife.[316]

A few weeks later, Ambassador Aranda negotiated directly with Ydígoras regarding the final details of indemnification, as well as broader issues of reconciliation. Despite the public pronouncements only weeks earlier, Ydígoras tried to change aspects of the deal as the Guatemalan pleaded diminished state coffers due to falling coffee prices. He suggested Mexico pay the families of the killed and wounded sailors, which would settle the outstanding debt Mexico owed to Guatemala for previous borderland incursions into their territory. As for the fishing companies, Ydígoras offered exclusive fishing rights instead of monetary compensation.[317]

The bulk of the agenda, according to Aranda's notes, focused on finalizing border agreements concerning water rights, the bridge over the Suchiate, Guatemalan braceros, and trade. Ydígoras agreed to the building of a permanent bridge over the Suchiate, and based on his recent visit suggested a location closer to the towns of Ciudad Hidalgo and Tecún Unam, even if that increased the cost. Ydígoras also agreed to a joint study of the implementation of a Guatemalan bracero program, similar to the one that existed between Mexico and the United States, to help with the Soconusco coffee harvest. And finally, the countries agreed to a

[316] Hector Rangel Obregon to Secretario De Relaciones Exteriores, Tecún Unam, March 24, 1960,AH-SRE LE 510 Expediente 9229.

[317] Memorándum: Incidente Camaronero México-Guatemala, Guatemala, March 28, 1960, AH-SRE Legajo 339-22 Expediente 1.

reduction in Guatemalan tariffs on Mexican trade goods, which was subsequently announced to great fanfare.[318]

This economic agreement coincided with the completion of a Guatemalan highway connecting Tecún Unam to the interior of the country. With the presumed completion of the long-awaited bridge, this policy shift towards liberalizing trade had the potential to spark greater economic ties. Reflecting the historical underdevelopment of trade between the two neighbors, Mexico had not previously had a full-time commercial attaché in Guatemala City, but instead had the ambassador fill the post along with his other duties. Now, for the first time, it appointed one.[319]

Most significantly, Ydígoras endorsed a speedy resolution to a comprehensive borderlands water treaty. Ambassador Aranda indicated that Ydígoras's motivation stemmed from a plan to build a binational diversion dam on the Suchiate, nearly fifty miles upriver from the river's entrance into the Pacific Ocean. Since the beginning of 1958, Mexican engineers from the SRH had been developing plans for a diversion dam to supply the communities straddling the Suchiate outside of Tapachula. Led by Antonio Coria, the Mexican representative of the International Commission of the Suchiate River, the SRH measured the flow and runoff of the river, estimating that the 1302 million cubic meters of water could be utilized to irrigate both sides of the river.[320]

This proposal would be similar to projects developed on the northern border, such as the Morelos Dam, which was built in 1950, a mile from the meeting point of California and Baja

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[318] Memorándum: Incidente Camaronero México-Guatemala, Guatemala, March 28, 1960, AH-SRE Legajo 339-22 Expediente AH-SRE Legajo 339-22 Expediente 3.

[319] *Diario del Sur,* March 26, 1960.

[320]Antonio Coria to Aurelio Benassini, Mexico, December 11, 1958, Archivo Histórico del Agua Caja 1082 Expediente 10490 Fojas 230—235 (Here forth AHA).

California. Mexican engineers, under the auspices of the International Boundary and Water Commission, maintained and controlled the water passing through the structure. In concert with the United States commissioners, they diverted water from the Colorado River, providing irrigation to the Mexicali Valley and flood control for both sides of the border. The construction as outlined by Ydígoras envisioned Mexican engineers leading the effort in dam building, much like had earlier been decided for the much-delayed bridge, with Guatemala contributing fifty percent of the funding.[321]

From February 20-23, 1961, parallel teams of seven engineers and one government representative from both Mexico and Guatemalan convened in the Tapachula Health Center to discuss "issues of international cooperation of great interest for both countries." The binational group elected Medina of the Mexican Boundary Commission to head the proceedings. He set the overall agenda the first day, announcing the goal of "study[ing] the possibility of a Mixed Commission of engineers of both countries."[322]

Though Medina did not mention it to the assembled group, clearly he and the Mexican delegation envisioned the meeting as an opportunity to replace the 1942 Modus Vivendi by forming a permanent and active working group of engineers to study the most pressing borderlands issues within the context of a comprehensive treaty. Months before the Tapachula meeting, Mexican diplomats began to lobby their Guatemalan colleagues and Ydígoras for a border commission. A detailed eight page list of instructions sent in March 1960 from Manuel Tello, the Secretary of Foreign Relations, to the Mexican Ambassador in Guatemala as well as to

[321] Memorándum: Incidente Camaronero México-Guatemala, Guatemala, March 28, 1960, AH-SRE Legajo 339-22 Expediente 2

[322] Acta de la Primera Sesión Plenaria de la Reunión de los Ingenieros de México y Guatemala efectuada en la ciudad de Tapachula, Chiapas, Estados Unidos Mexicanos, Tapachula, February 20, 1961, AH-SRE Legajo 340-1 Expedientes 2-3.

Medina, outlined the familiar list of talking points and details regarding the Suchiate Bridge and the need for cooperation for the utilization of the borderland rivers. However, instead of simply expressing general optimism or imploring the Mexican ambassador to continue convincing his Guatemalan colleagues of the benefits of a treaty, as such instructions had done in the past, this time Tello outlined concrete steps that would lead to a border commission agreement. In addition, the secretary planned for Medina to meet with Ydígoras to hear the Guatemalan president's thoughts on the Suchiate Bridge and share the detailed plans of the bridge designed by Mexican engineers. Medina also was to present Ydígoras with a general proposal for a border treaty. [323]

In addition, Tello suggested the agenda and proceedings for the February meeting of engineers. At Tapachula small groups would break out to discuss the myriad of issues affecting the borderlands, such as bridge construction and water management. Upon reconvening, the assembled engineers would realize that the complexity of issues demanded the need for a border commission modeled after the one between Mexico and the United States. Following this, Mexico would fly the Guatemalan engineers to Ciudad Juárez. There the new members of CILA would have the chance to meet with American and Mexican engineers of the northern border commission for a crash course on the workings of transboundary resource management.[324] From the perspective of the Mexican archives, the lead up to the establishment of CILA seemed to have been choreographed by a Mexican government which had prepared for decades for this moment. This demonstrated a diplomatic savvy in turning a potential conflict with a rival, to a a long-desired bilateral agreement.

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[323]Manuel Tello to Efraín Aranda Osorio, México, May 16, 1960, AH-SRE Legajo 332-4 Expedientes 57-64.

[324] Manuel Tello to Efraín Aranda Osorio, México, May 16, 1960, AH-SRE Legajo 332-4 Expedientes AH-SRE Legajo 332-4 Expedientes 56-.64.

As outlined months before by Tello, the engineers at the historic Tapachula meeting convened in working groups the first two days to discuss such issues as the permanent bridge over the Suchiate River, and the utilization of borderland rivers. The notes from the working groups reveal that discussions mostly revolved around technical aspects, such as the hydrometric flow of the Suchiate. For example, the group devoted to bridge construction focused on obtaining accurate readings of the surging river as well as its effect on irrigation.[325]

Like in the general meeting, Medina led the discussions on the utilization of the Suchiate River. Reflecting their greater technical presence on the border, the Mexican engineers shared details of data collected from aerial and on-the-ground surveys regarding the path and volume of water surging between the two countries. The working group agreed on a pair of main points that demonstrated that the problems of the Suchiate required binational cooperation. First, a joint government commission would study the divergence of the shifting river and a common approach to ensuring that the flooding and twisting Suchiate would ruin neither borderland communities nor the bridge. Second, a similar commission would study potential hydroelectric uses of the borderland rivers.[326]

On the last day of the meeting the engineers convened and, as expected, recommended that both governments "consider the creation of an International Commission" that would be in charge of studying of all the questions of limits and international waters between Mexico and Guatemala."[327] In April of that year, however, Manuel Tello wrote to Ambassador Aranda that Ydígoras had begun to express reservations. As before, the Guatemalan executive pleaded lack

[325] Minuta del acta de la primera sesión de la comisión de trabajo relativo a los estudios del Río Suchiate February 22, 1961, AH-SRE Legajo 340-1 Expedientes 6-8.

[326] Minuta de la tercera sesión de la comisión de trabajo relativo a los estudios del Río Suchiate, Tapachula, February 22, 1961, AH-SRE Legajo 340-1 Expedientes 9-11.

[327] Acta Final de la Reunión de los Ingenieros de México y Guatemala AH-SRE Legajo 340-1 Expedientes 18-23.

of funds, and worried about committing to any borderland project, such as the bridge or a Commission, without first being assured that Guatemalan finances could cover any expenses incurred. Tello instructed Aranda to assure Ydígoras that Mexico would pay for all the planning and designing of the permanent bridge and that, "a Boundary and Water Commission did not imply expenses of any importance, and that in fact it could bring great benefits, which the Commission between Mexico and the United States has demonstrated since its creation in 1889." That commission's total expenses, Tello added, "have remained, without a doubt, below the results and advantages its existence has provided."[328]

In December of that year, in an exchange of diplomatic notes, Guatemala formally agreed to form a commission based on the 1958 organizational outline presented by then Mexican ambassador in Guatemala Francisco de Icaza, who "restarted negotiations" in the closing moments of his appointment.[329] The basis of CILA followed the outlines of the U.S.-Mexican border commission. Finally, the engineers in the Chiapan borderlands could work within the binational organization they requested since they first arrived in a region that the 1936 CEFS claimed "had been forgotten."

Dams and Energy on the Border

The Mexican Secretariat of Foreign Relations wasted no time in bringing the new Guatemalan engineers of CILA north to the United States and Mexican border. A few weeks after the Tapachula meeting -- as suggested by Tello months before -- Mexico flew the

[328] Manuel Tello to Efraín Aranda Osorio, México, August 1, 1961 AH-SRE Legajo 332-4 Expedientes 65-66.

[329] Proyecto de Nota, Efraín Aranda Osorio, México, Guatemala AH-SRE Legajo 332-4 Expedientes 68-72.

Guatemalans to Ciudad Juárez for a two-day meeting with engineers from the International Boundary and Water Commission between Mexico and the United States. Upon arriving, the Guatemalan engineers, as well as a representative from the Ministry of Foreign Relations, received a history lesson. It was a familiar one, told by countless Mexican ambassadors to reluctant Guatemalan officials for years, an optimistic story of cooperation dating from 1848. CILA-norte engineers recounted how for example, demarcation efforts of 1848, 1853, and 1891 were efforts of cooperative success, ignoring the rather acrimonious history of dueling surveying teams.[330] The 1905 treaty eliminating bancos, the 1933 rectification of the El Paso-Juárez Valley, and the 1944 distribution of water were all examples of two rivals able to work together. The Guatemalan engineers also heard about the joint projects bringing water and economic activity to the barren north: the Amistad and Falcon dams, the water treatment plants on the Sonoran-Arizona border that eliminated "aguas negras," and the diversion dam on the Colorado River.[331]

For the remainder of the visit both the American and Mexican engineers answered questions from the Guatemalan engineers and the representative of Foreign Relations. Their queries demonstrated that despite the agreement announced in Tapachula only weeks before, they did not quite understand the extent of the functions, privileges, and responsibilities of a binational border commission. For example, the Guatemalan delegation asked exactly what the "international character" of CILA meant in a practical sense. They were curious about funding: was there a common budget and how were the costs of projects decided? They had questions about particular stipulations of the treaty, such as why each country's section had to be headed

[330] See Rebert, *La Gran Línea*; Werne, *The Imaginary Line.*

[331] Memorándum: Reunión de la comisión el 1 de marzo de 1961 con asistencia de funcionarios de los Gobiernos de México de los Estados Unidos, y de Guatemala, Ciudad Juárez, March 14, 1961, AH-SRE Legajo 339-24 Expedientes 69-72.

by an engineer when a lawyer seemingly could handle the responsibilities. Finally, the Guatemalans asked probably the most fundamental question, what happens when the commissioners disagree?[332]

It is not clear whether the answers provided by the American and Mexican engineers satisfied the Guatemalan delegation, but it was clear that the spirt of cooperation the American and Mexican engineers were proposing did not fit with the recent history of Mexico and Guatemala. An American engineer's answer that in the case of being unable to resolve any serious disagreement, either country could take its case to the International Court of Justice in the Hague must have seemed especially striking as Guatemala had specifically refused to refer the fishing fleet incident to that body.[333] The Guatemalan delegation learned that what Mexico had proposed and what they had agreed to meant a fundamental revolution in relations between the two countries.

As CILA settled into its offices in Tapachula in early August of 1962, the national press in Mexico recorded this bold step in bilateral relations with little fanfare. Typical was the small article that appeared in the August 7 *El Universal*, which essentially was a press release, reporting that both countries' delegations permanently moved to Tapachula and that their most important work was to "take advantage of the borderland rivers for the benefit of both countries."[334] The local borderland press interpreted the agreement differently. There journalists framed the beginnings of CILA as an example of a benevolent Mexico treating with an

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[332] Memorándum: Reunión de la comisión el 1 de marzo de 1961 con asistencia de funcionarios de los Gobiernos de México de los Estados Unidos, y de Guatemala, Ciudad Juárez, March 14, 1961, AH-SRE Legajo 339-24 Expedientes 72-75.

[333] Memorándum: Reunión de la comisión el 1 de marzo de 1961, March 14, 1961, AH-SRE Legajo 339-24 Expedientes 76.

[334] *El Universal,* August 7, 1962.

aggressive borderland neighbor. For example, the August 1 article in *El Diario del Sur* stated that:

> Mexico, which has not sought any reprisals from territorial invasions and violation of its sovereignty, has sought this meeting with great interest. Forcing the meeting are the dams placed in the Suchiate River by Guatemala, and the new boundary markers appearing all over the border up to Belize. But Mexico, authentic Paladin of the doctrine of Good Neighbor, has sought the natural path of the "Conference Table," and that reason and justice will resolve problems.[335]

The immediate work of the newly formed CILA reflected local and federal Mexican governments finally able to act on long delayed plans. A June 1963 progress report demonstrated that Mexican engineers from such departments at the SRH and the CRG immediately set out to complete the studies and on-the-ground work not previously possible. CILA served as a coordinator, the umbrella organization that took in engineers from other government bodies and ensured that the work was done in concert with their Guatemalan colleagues. For example, engineers from the SRH and CRG led hydrometric studies of the Suchiate River to determine how to channel the restless stream. Such efforts included destroying, with Guatemalan permission, three small diversion dams on the southern banks that were causing erosion on the Mexican side. CILA engineers, meanwhile, continued the terrestrial demarcation effort, which sometimes led to territorial reversals. For example, more precise surveying in the borderland municipality of Amatenango de La Frontera, located north of Tapachula, recovered approximately forty acres of land for the El Pacayal ejido to the north of the border, "that had been invaded by Guatemalan farmers." Finally, engineers from the

[335] *El Diario del Sur,* August 1, 1962.

Mexican Secretariat of Public Works began more detailed tests on the water flow of the Suchiate and the soil density of the banks to determine the placement for the permanent bridge as the temporary one once again, noted the report, was in danger of being swept away.[336]

In addition, Mexican engineers continued and expanded the diplomatic aspect of the commission, which had begun with the trip to Ciudad Juárez. From 1962 to 1964, the Mexican members of CILA, joined by representatives from the SRH and GRVC, led the head of the Guatemalan delegation Ernesto Alvarez and his colleagues on a tour of Mexican projects connected with the Mexico-Guatemala border, in the interior of the country, and of course, on the U.S-Mexican border. Given the recent threat of war, the Mexican engineers demonstrated a remarkable degree of openness in sharing design plans, cost estimates, and all the other intricacies that went along with massive engineering projects. They took the Guatemalan delegation to the Falcon and Amistad Dams, the Infiernillo Dam on the Balsas River in *Guerrero*, and most importantly, the recently completed Malpaso Dam on the Grijalva River in Chiapas. The group flew over the border where they could see the entrance of the river into Mexico and the first major project of the many Mexico planned in the Chiapan borderlands.[337]

This cooperation hit a roadblock in 1967, when the Guatemalan Minister of Foreign Relations sent a note hinting at Guatemalan projects upriver that would potentially disrupt the flow of the Grijalva, representing potential problems for the future of hydroelectric energy production in Chiapas. The letter came at a particularly key moment in Mexico's infrastructure development program, as CFE engineers had already begun the preliminary work on the La

[336] Informe de Actividades de Sección Mexicana de la Comisión Internacional de Límites entre México y Guatemala durante el Periodo Comprendido del 1 de Septiembre de 1962 as 31 de Agosto de 1963, México, June 6, 1963, AH-SRE Legajo 332-5 Expedientes 228-231.

[337] Memorándum: Las visitas que realizaron los funcionarios guatemaltecos a la Presa de Malpaso, en 1962 y en 1964, Tlatelolco, October 10, 1968, AH-SRE Legajo 350-2 Expedientes 133-134.

Angostura dam, the first of the projected three mega-dams to be built along the Grijalva, which already constituted an initial investment of nearly three billion pesos.[338] Preliminary studies of the dam site, located in the Sumidero Canyon between Tuxtla Gutiérrez and Chiapa do Corzo, had begun in 1964, with American and CFE geologists confirming the possibility of a constructing a rock-fill dam. By 1966 the CFE had nearly twenty years of hydrometric data on the flow of the Grijalva, and concluded that the projected site would be the biggest in the history of Mexico, taking advantage of nearly 10,000 million meters of runoff and generating a massive amount of energy.[339]

Claims by Guatemalan officials that Mexican development threatened potential Guatemalan projects or might increase did not exactly ring true, as the proposed dam lay nearly a hundred miles downriver from the border.[340] Instead domestic Guatemalan politics, as well as the feeling that Guatemala was not being treated as an equal partner, played a role in the note of "respectful protest" sent on July 25, 1968 concerning Mexico's failure to officially notify Guatemala of work on the Grijalva.[341] This made the construction of La Angostura dam the first major test of the CILA, as both Mexico and Guatemala had to learn how to deal with resource management disputes through the deliberative body, ignoring over a century of hostility.

Since the formation of CILA and the friendly joint flights over border, the political scene in Guatemala had changed dramatically. The Guatemalan backer of the CILA in 1963,

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[338] *El Excélsior*, November 16, 1968.

[339] Planta Hidroeléctrica La Angostura, Chiapas: Informe Preliminar de Proyecto, México, November, 1966 AHA Caja 67 Expediente 543 Fojas 1-6.

[340] Like Mexico, Guatemala sought to exploit the resources of their underdeveloped northern border, or what became known as the Northern Transversal Strip through large hydroelectric projects. But this would be a long time coming. The first and only completed project of these plans was the Pueblo Viejo Dam on the Chixoy River, which came into operation in 1983. Terrance W Kading, "The Guatemalan Military and the Economics of La Violencia," *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 24 (1999): 64-65.

[341] Emilio Arenales to Señor Encargado de Negocio, Guatemala, July 25, 1968, AH-SRE Legajo 350-2 Expedientes 133-134.

Ydígoras, had fled into exile, a victim of one of the all-too frequent violent changes in government in twentieth century Guatemala. The new military leaders controlling Guatemala reverted to the country's standard posture towards its neighbor to the north: resentment and suspicion. The Mexican ambassador to Guatemala, Delfín Sánchez Juárez, intimated as much in a September 1969 cable in which he warned that the vice president, and former exile in Chiapas, Clemente Marroquín Rojas had been loudly denouncing Mexican improvements on the Grijalva in government circles. Author of *México jamás ha poseído territorio propio al sur del Río Hondo,* the nationalist Guatemalan argued, like many of his countrymen, for the nation's boundaries to reflect its colonial past, an issue he also frequently touched upon in his newspaper, La Hora.[342] Attuned to the feelings of the country in which he was posted, Ambassador Sánchez warned that unless Mexico resolved the situation, the vice president and the press were likely to "make a campaign against our country as is their custom."[343]

Mexican diplomats attempted to utilize the CILA to smooth relations while also reverting to their standard narrative of cooperation on the U.S.-Mexico border. A note from the Mexican Secretary of Foreign Relations, Antonio Carrillo Flores, advising Mexico's ambassador in Guatemala emphasized the CILA's role in resolving the issue, while also referring to Mexico's relations with the United States. Carrillo utilized the example of cooperation on the northern border to express the concern many Mexican officials had of an upriver Guatemalan project curbing the flow of water to Mexico. The "peaceful policy" Mexico had with United States regarding the distribution of the Rio Grande and Colorado Rivers, noted Carrillo, should be had

[342] Clemente Marroquín Rojas, *México jamás ha poseído territorio propio al sur del Río Hondo* (Guatemala: Editorial del Ejército, 1962).

[343] Delfín Sánchez Juárez to Antonio Carrillo Flores, Guatemala, September, 13, 1969 AH-SRE Legajo 340-2 Expediente 41.

with Guatemala.[344] Mexican CILA engineers also invited their Guatemalan colleagues to visit the construction site of La Angostura, an offer only taken up after the 1970 inauguration of Guatemalan President Carlos Arana Osorio. In internal memos strategizing their approach, the Mexican diplomat corps emphasized the role of the CILA to mediate. They also advocated sharing plans and designs with their southern neighbor to allay any fears. Though Mexico strongly asserted its sovereign right to development, the diplomats also emphasized that any "reasonable utilization" by Guatemala of the Grijalva "would interest Mexico because of the possibility of a negative or positive effects."[345]

The political usefulness, if not necessity, of attacking Mexico revealed itself a week before the inauguration of Guatemalan President Carlos Arana Osorio in July 1970. As expected and subsequently reported by the Mexican ambassador, the Guatemalan newspapers *La Hora* and *Impacto* ran articles denouncing Mexican projects on the Grijalva River. The stories featured quotes from individuals expected to constitute a key part of the new administration, warning about flooded Guatemalan borderland communities caused by the dams downriver.[346] It was only after Arana took the reins of the presidency that Guatemalan engineers finally visited the Angostura construction site.[347] The timing of the visit suggested that Arana wanted to ensure that the Guatemala public believed his administration ensured that the Mexican project would not harm Guatemala. The visits and cooperation continued well into his administration. In early March 1971 two more Guatemalan engineers visited the Angostura site. Their visit is

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[344] Antonio Carillo Flores to Ramón Ruiz Vasconcelos, Tlatelolco, November 17, 1967 AH-SRE Legajo 350-2 Expedientes 8-10.

[345] Memorándum sobre la nota Guatemala nota 15236, Tlatelolco, June 18, 1969 AH-SRE Legajo 350-2 Expedientes 96; Antonio Carillo Flores to Delfín Sánchez Juárez, Tlatelolco, October 10, 1969, 118, 133-136.

[346] Delfín Sánchez Juárez to Antonio Carrillo Flores, Guatemala, June 26, 1970 AH-SRE Legajo 350-2 Expediente 220.

[347] Memorándum para Información del Señor Presidente de la Republica, Tlatelolco, February 23, 1971, AH-SRE Legajo 350-2 Expedientes 228-229.

not well documented in the CILA archives except for a short note informing the Mexican Secretariat of Foreign Relations of the visit. No doubt already in possession of detailed plans for the massive project, the Guatemalan engineers learned nothing new except to confirm the ambitions of the Mexican government.[348]

Their visit, and the CILA had proven its utility in de-escalating a potentially conflictive situation between the two traditional rivals. The political leadership of both countries could point to engineering reports and studies, the neutral language of science, to assure the public, and their own government officials, that national interests would not be harmed, though in the case of La Angostura that threat did not seem plausible. In 1975 the Angostura dam came online, causing no problems upriver in the Guatemalan borderlands.

The Guatemalan government demonstrated their approval of the dam construction when, shortly after Arana came to power, he visited the Chiapan borderlands in May 1971. In the lead up, the Mexican press reported that the two executives would be discussing hydroelectric projects on the Grijalva and Usumacinta rivers.[349] In an interview before the encounter, the Guatemalan Minister of Foreign Relations made clear that Guatemala was no longer concerned with the potential harm caused by a Mexican project; in fact, they were focused on restarting a joint project on the Usumacinta.[350] Repeating the steps of Ydígoras, the Guatemalan executive met with Echeverría at the border city of Tecún Umán and later Ciudad Hidalgo on May 9, where the guayabera wearing presidents affected a mood of friendship and relaxation. This border summit moved to Tapachula the next day, where the two visited the offices of the CILA, and in a roundtable with Mexican supporters Arana Osorio noted that,

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[348]Guillermo Villarreal Caravantes to Emilio O. Rabasa, México, March 3, 1971, AH-SRE Legajo 350-2 Expedientes 231.

[349] *Novedades,* March 25, 1971.

[350] *Novedades* April 1st, 1971.

"Guatemala has always been a friend of Mexico, we embraced yesterday, we embraced today, and we will embrace forever. And together we will resolve our problems through dialogue and sincere and frank friendship." [351]

Conclusion

A couple of months after the border summit, Echeverría visited Angostura to oversee the mega project, and to personally shepherd the removal of thousands of villagers from their soon to be flooded homes.[352] The CFE promised nearly ten thousand displaced persons from La Concordia and Venustiano Carranza compensation for their land as well as placement in a series of model villages. For the most part these assurances of new accommodations and payment on the estimated loss of land went unfulfilled. When La Angostura finally came on line in 1974 many of the petitions of the displaced were still unanswered, leaving them to search elsewhere on their own for home and livelihood.[353] This loss of land, coupled with governmental incompetence and corruption, added to long-simmering historic tensions in communities such as Venustiano Carranza. There the indigenous community rallied behind local leaders with the help of the activist group, Casa del Pueblo, protesting and agitating against the local landowning clique and its government allies. In addition to local agrarian tensions caused by finquero takeover of communal lands, the lack of compensation from the flooding caused by La Angostura became a key point of contention.[354]

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[351] Estado de Chiapas: Información de Ciudad Hidalgo, AGN-ADGIPS Caja 1128 B Expedientes 454-469.
[352] *El Diario Popular,* July 10, 1971.
[353] Robinson, *Revolutionizing the River*,181-186.
[354] Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion*, 99-117.

As La Angostura began to impound its reservoir in early May 1974, the governor of Chiapas, Manuel Velasco Suárez, and the commissioner of CFE, Arsenio Farrell Cubillas, accompanied the President to inspect the monumental work. The front-page of the regional newspaper *La Voz del Sureste* communicated the spirt the government sought to convey: three-fourths of the page was covered by a photo of the assembled officials gazing at what was then Mexico's largest hydroelectric development. Above the photo was a quote from Echeverría: "Chiapas is a sleeping giant that will not awaken by itself, but only with the participation of Chiapanecos."[355]

As the dammed water of La Angostura flooded the homes of thousands, work began later that year on the second big mega-project on the Grijalva, the Chicosaen Dam. Completed downriver of La Angostura in 1980, the next Grijalva dam, Las Penitas, came on line in 1987. Once they were finished, the three Grijalva dams contributed approximately fifty percent of the hydroelectric energy of Mexico.[356] All that energy flowing across the border did not, however, translate into more development for Chiapas. Only a week after completion of the construction of Chicosaen a conference in Tuxtla Gutiérrez discussion the repercussions of the fact that Chiapas was the state with the least access to electricity.[357]

As the waters of the Grijalva fueled a mega-project boom in Chiapas, in 1980 the binational team of engineers attached to the CILA began to explore joint projects on the Usumacinta. They replaced the original plan, a diversion dam that in part enticed Ydígoras to form the CILA, with a series of hydroelectric dams. [358] Already in 1965, Mexican engineers had conducted geological

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[355] *La Voz del Sureste,* May 23, 1974

[356] Robinson, *Revolutionizing the River,* 200, 202.

[357] *La Voz del Sureste,* December 10, 1980.

[358]Aprovechamiento de las Cuencas Internacionales: México: Guatemala, (No date given) AHA Caja 695 Expediente 19993 Foja 3.

surveys at the site of Boca del Cerro, located in the southeastern corner of Chiapas in the Lacandon Jungle. Beginning in 1980 the new working group visited that site, along with three others in Guatemala, to conduct up to date surveys. At the same time, methods of financing were explored, principally through World Bank loans.[359] By 1987, the Boca del Cerro site was projected to be the pilot project. The CILA, along with the CFE and a Guatemalan government seeking to extract itself from a bloody civil war, were ready to complete another mega-project in the Chiapan borderlands.

This time, however, there were new political considerations. Fierce worldwide opposition met the projected dam as its construction threatened to flood the important Mayan archaeological sites of Piedras Negras in Guatemala and Yaxchilán in Chiapas. In Mexico, in April 1987, the Grupo de los Cien, composed of such cultural luminaries as Octavio Paz, Rufino Tamayo, and José Emilo Pacheco, wrote an open letter to President Miguel de la Madrid protesting the planned dam. This particular hydroelectric project, claimed the group, threatened, "the historic inheritance of Mexico and Guatemala, as well as that of humanity, and the equilibrium of nature and society."[360] Archeologists from around the world and even United States Senator Robert Kasten of Wisconsin joined the protest, asking the multinational loaning institutions to delay financing. The March 31, *New York Times* editorial entitled, "Don't Flood the Maya Vatican," encapsulated the high cultural stakes felt by many opposed to the project.[361]

The protests achieved their desired effect, and the Boca del Cerro dam was shelved. However, both Mexico and Guatemala continued to explore the possibilities, and in 2001 Mexican President Vicente Fox revived the effort, wrapping it within the context of the Plan

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[359] Proyectos Hidroeléctricos, (No date given) AHA Caja 695 Expediente 19993 Fojas -6-10.
[360] Grupo de los Cieno to Miguel de la Madrid, April 1, 1987, AHA Caja 771 Expediente 22212 Foja 3.
[361] *New York Times,* May 31, 1987.

Puebla Panama. This ambitious neoliberal vision to connect Latin American markets across borders aimed to usher Mexico and its new conservative president into a larger regional leadership role. A binational dam seemed to encapsulate this effort at bridging boundaries, though critics of the Plan claimed it sold the region's resources to multi-nationals.[362] Once again, opponents of the dam around the world and in Mexico mobilized to stop the plan. The Grupo de Los Cien wrote an open letter to the president, who also received pressure from other groups, including the rebel Zapatistas whose followers occupied the region.[363] Defeated once again, the plan was recently revived again in 2012, and environmental groups in Mexico and around the world have come together to see if they can hold off this stubborn and destructive example of binational cooperation in the Chiapan borderlands.[364]

[362] Jaime Ornelas Delgado, "El Plan Puebla-Panamá y la globalización neoliberal. "*Aportes* 21 (2006): 137-155.

[363] Jason McGahan, "Maya Site Faces Flooding," *Archaeology,* February 19, 2003.

[364] *Cuatro Poder,* October 29, 2013; *Diario del Sureste,* May 19, 2012.

Chapter Four:

Exiles in the Borderlands: Generals, Intellectuals, and the October Revolution: 1944-1954

In February of 1897 the Mexican Secretary of Foreign Relations Ignacio Mariscal received a letter from San Salvador about a visit from a General Fadeo Trabanino and a revolution in Guatemala against President José María Reina Barrios.[365] From his diplomatic perch in El Salvador the Mexican consul was privy to the political machinations of a group of Guatemalan, Honduran, and Nicaraguan exiles conspiring against their home governments, one another, and in the case of General Trabanino, soliciting the help of the Mexican government to overthrow the Guatemalan president; the would-be revolutionary complained that at the moment he had only managed to secure "sympathy" in the Chiapan border. "[366] The Mexican government offered Trabanino and his fellow revolutionaries no support. Later, Mariscal would learn of the efforts of the Barrios government to plant "spies" in Chiapas among exiled Guatemalans conspiring in the borderlands for a return to political power.[367] The 1897 revolt, led by disaffected *ladinos* (Spanish speaking mestizos that had held political and economic power in Guatemala since independence) concentrated in the Guatemalan highlands, ended in defeat.[368]

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[365] The letter described Trabinino as "un Guatemalteco nacido en el oriente, es un hombre como de cuarenta y cinco años de edad, de inteligencia bastante clara, instruida, que ha estado algún tiempo en Europa estudiando una carrera militar… " N. Kendoiny to Secretario de Relaciones Exteriores, San Salvador, February 2, 1897, AH-SRE, Legajo 1387.

[366] "Ya que no se pudiera conseguir otra cosa en la frontera con Chiapas." Ibid.

[367] Américo Lera to Secretario de Relaciones Exteriores, Guatemala, November, 24 1897, AH-SER Legajo 1387

[368] Greg Grandin, *The Blood of Guatemala: A History of Race and Nation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 155-156.

In 1898 English traveler Edgar Zollinger shot Barrios for unknown motives, though speculation pointed to a plot led by his vice-president, Manuel Estrada Cabrera. Regardless, soon after he was taken into custody, Guatemalan police killed Zollinger.[369] Estrada seized power soon afterwards, leading to another revolutionary effort, led this time by the former Minister of War, Prospero Morales. Morales, a participant and loser in the failed 1897 conflict, who at the time of Barrios's death resided in Mexico City, prepared his would-be march to power in the Chiapan borderlands, where he recruited men and supplies.[370] Morales left the border city of Tapachula with a contingent of both Guatemalans and Mexicans sometime in early August. By the end of the month he and his revolution were defeated.[371]

Both Morales and Trabanino knew they needed support in Chiapas, as already at the turn of the century the borderland comprised part of a long running political tradition in Guatemala: since independence from Spain, Guatemalan exiles, refugees, and revolutionaries had fled to and utilized the Chiapan borderlands as a platform to organize violent political change in the seat of power, Guatemala City. In 1848, for example, the deposed Rafael Carerra rode to the city of Comitán to plot his return to power. His arrival prompted the Mexican federal government to send troops to head off any potential problems among the indigenous population that might have been prompted by the arrival of the charismatic "indio." To Mexico City's relief Carerra left in 1849, riding to power with the help of borderland Chiapanecos.[372] Nearly three decades later Justo Rufino Barrios began his "Liberal Revolution" from his finca in Soconusco. There Barrios found a warm welcome among the local elites, who sheltered and supplied him. Most

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[369] Rodrigo Fernández Ordóñez, "Disparos en la oscuridad. El asesinato del presidente José María Reina Barrios," Universidad Francisco Marroquín, Accessed March 26, 2015, http://educacion.ufm.edu/disparos-en-la-oscuridad-el-asesinato-del-presidente-jose-maria-reina-barrios/

[370] *New York Times*, February 10, 1898; *Sacramento Daily Union*, November 9, 1897.

[371] *San Francisco Call*, August 4, 1898; *New York Times*, August 20th, 1898.

[372] Castillo, Toussaint, and Vázquez, *Espacios diversos, historia en común*, 42-52.

importantly they solicited aid on his behalf from the recently triumphant Liberal government of Benito Juárez. Barrios received thousands of pesos from the Liberal Mexican Regime, assuring his political victory.[373] Morales's gambit and Trabanino's solicitation of aid were both part of a political playbook for insurrection by Guatemalan exiles that would last until the end of the twentieth century.

This chapter examines the trajectory of this tradition between 1944 and 1954. Specifically it examines the Mexican government's policies towards the Guatemalan exiles produced by the October Revolution in 1944, as well as toward those that fled the country after the October Revolution's overthrow in 1954. It examines these two periods of exile in relation to the Chiapan borderlands and how the Mexican national security apparatus utilized the personnel of the Department of Political and Social Investigation (Departamento de Investigacion Política y Social, DIPS) of the Secretariat of the Interior to track, monitor, and control the movements of prominent ex-politicians and military personnel that fled to Mexico after 1944. These officials managed the borderlands, ensuring that these exiles could not effectively foment revolution. During the decade of the October Revolution, the Mexican government ensured that any violent political change in Guatemala would not be coming from the Chiapan borderlands.

The right-wing generals and politicians that fled to Mexico in late 1944 and early 1945, represented the last wave of the traditional Guatemalan political exile.[374] Composed of prominent politicians, landowners, and military officials, they did not attempt to hide as they plotted a return to power and lambasted the "communist" revolution taking place in their

[373] Ibid., 104-105.

[374] Mario Sznajder and Luis Roniger, "Political Exile in Latin America," *Latin American Perspectives* 34 (2007): 19.

country. The Mexican government's security apparatus generally was able to keep track of them and move them from the borderlands where they could potentially threaten the October Revolution. Through its own intelligence efforts, the Guatemalan government also tracked the location of these prominent exiles in the borderlands and worked with the Mexican government to ensure they would be removed from the traditional springboard for a return to power. In the Mexican government's national security approximation the exiles in the borderland posed a threat facing south and not to the body politic in Mexico in the way that later exiles of the Guatemalan Civil War would be perceived to do. Instead, the borderlands hung like a powerful sword of Damocles over the Guatemalan Revolution.

This chapter ends by examining the Guatemalans that fled in 1954, in particular those that crossed into the borderlands. They were not prominent generals or politicians whose plight was recorded in Mexico City newspapers. The fall of the October Revolution government changed the nature of who sought exile in the borderlands. Campesinos, labor organizers, those who participated in or were assisted by the progressive policies of the previous regime, were forced to leave their homes and seek shelter in the borderlands as exiles, but without the resources of national political figures.

Before moving forward a definition of exile is needed. Many scholars have adopted the straight-forward characterization of Hungarian social scientist and exile Paul Tabori,

> An exile is a person compelled to leave or remain outside his country of origin on account of well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, or political opinion: a person who considers his exile temporary (even though it may last a lifetime), hoping to return to

> his fatherland when circumstances permit-but unable or unwilling to do so as long the factors that made him an exile persist.[375]

In his review of European cold-war exiles, Idesbald Goddeeris defines the word exiles as, "refugees or immigrants engaging themselves in opposition politics against their homeland."[376] Or as political theorist Judith Shaklar succinctly notes, exiles are those who simply "cannot accept their political obligations and loyalties as simple habits."

Taking into account the numerous variations on the theme of forced emigration, I utilize a rather broad definition of exile, which includes the political activist forced abroad, the refugee fleeing counter-insurgency and its scorched earth policies, and even the guerrilla who voluntarily chooses to utilize Mexico as a place from which to launch revolution. Including these varied groups under the rubric of exile binds their flight to the political structures of their home country. Above all it gives refugees' agency, a distinction many scholars fail to assign them. In this estimation all the exiles in the borderlands throughout the four decades examined, between 1944 until the mid-1980's, were politically active and presented a challenge to the Mexican state's attempts to control the borderlands. The refugees I explore in chapter six, for example, were not wards to be cared for, but like their fellow exiles, had political agendas developed in large measure in response to the political conditions in Guatemala from which they fled.

In my estimation, the differences that scholars have assigned an individual being either a refugee or an exile hinged on political and economic status. An often unmentioned distinction between the two is method of travel and the economic status that reflects: refugees tend to walk

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[375] Paul Tabori, *The Anatomy of Exile*: *A Semantic and Historical Study* (London: Harrap, 1972), 23.

[376] Idesbald Goddeeris, "The Temptation of Legitimacy: Exile Politics from a Comparative Perspective," *Contemporary European History* 16 (2007): 396.

across borders, carrying only the clothes on their back. On the other hand, exiles' travel are usually arranged and they are reasonably assured of some economic future once settled. One is poor and uneducated, the other connected to power, or in the case of the middle-class students of the 1960's and 1970's, someone who willingly gave up a bourgeois future because of committed political beliefs. All, though, are forced to leave their countries. Expanding on Shaklar's definition, I think it is important to add that political circumstances consistently follow the exile whether he or she desires it or not. In this conceptualization, whether exiles were politicians or laborers with no overt political affiliation, they were irrevocably tied into a violent political milieu that made exile necessary.

For the host government of Mexico, though, these academic distinctions were not important when identifying who was a potential threat to national security or, as examined in this chapter, to the Guatemalan government. It is important then to take into account awareness of the host government of the who, why, and where of the exiles or refugees (were they former government officials, did they have money and connections) in order to understand how that government came to view developments in the region throughout the long conflict. Despite Mexico's reputation as a place of refuge, Mexican officials knew that the Chiapan borderlands were a fugitive landscape and that the presence of exiles there in 1944 could have dire consequences for a new, potentially friendly, Guatemalan government.

1944-1950: Protecting the Revolution

The October Revolution of 1944 that dislodged Jorge Ubico, like wholesale regime changes that occurred before it, prompted a flow of exiles to Mexico. This new wave of right-wing exiles, composed of high-ranking Guatemalan military officers, landowners, and political

activists unwelcomed by the new Arévalo government, fled across the Mexican border on their way to what would be a ten-year sojourn away from home.

Metaphorically they passed exiles from Ubico's Guatemala coming home after a long stay in Mexico, which for most of them had meant living in the Chiapan borderlands. Notable individuals such as the journalist Clemente Marroquin Rojas, the aviator Miguel Garcia Granados, namesake and grandson of the Liberal caudillo who had also spent a period of exile in Chiapas, came back to a friendly Guatemala from their borderland exile.[377] Less notable exiles joined them, such as the Tapachula members of the Democratic Guatemalan Front (Frente Democrático Guatemalteco) who had written to Mexican President Manuel Ávila Camacho in February 1943 to express their thanks for Mexico's warmth and their hopes for the dictator to the south's fall from power.[378] Before his fall from power Ubico worried the about these scattered opposition figures in the borderlands. For example, in 1939 he sent a request through the Mexican ambassador in Guatemala to Mexican President Cárdenas. Though dismissed by the Mexican ambassador as lacking veracity, Ubico accused Garcia Granados as well as other exiles such as Rojas, of being "pseudo-immigrants" intent on subversion, urging the Mexican government to move them away from the border to México City.[379] The antagonistic Ubico found no assistance from the Cárdenas government.

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[377] Rojas literally walked across the border in July 1944, braving jungle paths and river crossings. See Cindy Foster, *The Time of Freedom: Campesino Workers in Guatemala's October Revolution* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001), 77. Garcia Granados wrote to President Lazaro Cárdenas in March 1937 to ask for his discreet support in allowing him to launch a revolution from Chiapas. Cárdenas's response was not clear, even though he Garcia Granados promised to lead a "revolutionary" government. See Lewis, *The Ambivalent Revolution,* 110.

[378] Rubén E. Barrios et al., to Manuel Ávila Camacho, Tapachula, February, 13, 1943, AGN-APMAC Caja 0789 (No expediente listed)

[379] Salvador Martínez de Alva to Lázaro Cárdenas, Guatemala, April 24, 1939, AGN-APLCR Caja 0971 Expediente 11.

Those fleeing the October Revolution, however, found in the borderlands a growing and more ambitious post-revolutionary Mexican state. The Secretariat of the Interior created the DIPS, for instance, in 1942 to control political dissidence. They therefore encountered a much more restrictive atmosphere than that in which previous exiles had lived. In addition, the support of the Mexican public and government for the revolutionary government of their neighbor to the south meant a Chiapan borderlands unfriendly towards those Guatemalan exiles intent on regime change.[380] These right-wing exiles, like the eventual coup leader of 1954, Carlos Castillo Armas, were former military officers, or landowners, adrift in their expulsion from power. Their first months of exile found them in Tapachula hotels, or guests in the fincas of sympathizers. They traded correspondence, plotted or, just as frequently, merely complained about their plight. They were not hard to find.

This made it possible for the Guatemalan government, through its own networks in the borderlands, to identify and pass on to the Mexican government the names, locations, and activities of exiles deemed a threat to the new government. For the majority of the ten-year duration of the October Revolution, the Guatemalan government found a willing partner in the Mexican government: the Secretariat of Foreign Relations received and passed along information about suspect exiles to the Secretariat of the Interior, which handled national security. For the tumultuous first few years of the revolution the Mexican government protected the Arévalo regime. Officials referred to it as the "friendly government" to the south, and it was, besides that of Costa Rica, perhaps the only ideologically compatible, non-despotic ally in the Isthmus. The

[380]Though the increasingly conservative governments of Miguel Alemán Valdes and Aldofo Ruiz Cortines saw the reformist land policies of the Arévalo and Árbenz governments as potentially troublesome examples for a Mexican populace they hoped to channel through recently organized PRI corporate structures, neither supported, for example, any American intervention in Central America. See Buchenau, *In The Shadow of The Giant,* 194-197.

Mexican policy towards Guatemalan exiles helped to protect a Guatemalan government that, for the first time since Independence, was not openly hostile to Mexico.

Beginning in January of 1945 the Guatemalan government began to send its first lists of names of prominent exiles, and if possible their addresses, through the Mexican embassy, requesting the assistance of the Mexican government to relocate them away from the border. On many occasions, in addition to requesting action to remove a threat from the borderlands, the government also cited Mexican and international law. For example, a typical letter sent in January 1945 listed thirty four military exiles and twenty-five civilian exiles along with their addresses in Mexico. It also referred to article one of the accords at the 1928 Sixth International Conference of American States in Havana, Cuba, which noted that governments should make efforts to stop foreign residents from "gathering forces, crossing borders, or utilizing their territory to start or foment a civil war."[381] The letter especially noted the presence of former Ubico strongman, General Daniel Corado, and his son, along with Ada Manrique Rios, all of whom resided in Tapachula and were accused of sneaking arms into Guatemala to opposition groups.[382]

An October 1945 memorandum prepared for the Mexican president based on complaints passed on by the Guatemalan Ministry of Foreign Relations cited the volume of propaganda produced by a group of prominent exiles. It suggested the Mexican government prosecute the offenders through the 1917 Press Law (Ley de Imprenta) and its prohibition against inciting

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[381] *El Diario Oficial de la Federación*, March 18, 1929.

[382] Ezequiel Padilla to Secretario de Gobernación, México, January 9, 1945, AGN-ADGIPS. Caja 750 (No Expediente listed) At least one of the listed Guatemalans, Adan Manrique Rios, reappeared in Guatemala in 1954 as part of the group supporting the CIA backed coup of Castillo Armas. See "CIA Memorandum: Guatemalan Exiles, June 17, 1954." Accessed January 9, 2014, http://216.12.139.91/docs/DOC_0000921821/DOC_0000921821.pdf. See also Victor Perera, *Unfinished Conquest: The Guatemalan Tragedy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 65-66.

attacks against "public order."[383] It listed the names of eighteen exiles who, like former jefe político General José Domingo Juárez Aragón, were connected to the Ubico regime. Focusing specifically on the borderlands, the memo noted the attempts by the group to spread rumors of discontent and rebellion in Guatemala, which had the potential to deter travel and commerce along the shared Chiapan border, as individuals sought to avoid a region supposedly mired in political violence As a solution to the problem, Guatemala suggested moving the group to a northern border state —the costs associated with such an action to be paid for by Guatemala — and requiring them to check in with a Mexican official occasionally to ensure they were not involved in subversive activities.[384]

Though the Mexican government did not move the exiles to the opposite border, they did require many to relocate to Mexico City, where they were placed under the eyes of security services. The federal government sent directives to local and federal officials in Chiapas listing the names and, if possible, the addresses, of those Guatemalans required to move to the capital. In this way, through the DIPS, Mexico tracked and monitored suspected Guatemalans to ensure their distance from the border. One such instance, of exile José Luis Garcia Aceituno, who moved to Mexico City and then returned to the border, reflected the federal surveillance of the region. Granted a twenty day leave to attend to business in Tapachula, Garcia wrote to an official in the DIPS in early November claiming train problems were delaying his return beyond the granted period.[385] A few weeks later Modesto Solís Domínguez, the Jefe de Población of Tapachula, received a telegram from Mexico City tasking him to track down Garcia and another

[383] Raúl Trejo Delarbre, "Ley de imprenta," *Nexos,* July 1, 1999. Accessed March 27, 2015, http://www.nexos.com.mx/?p=9314.

[384]Memorándum, December, 18, 1945 AGN-APMAC Caja 881(No expediente listed).

[385] José Luis García Aceituno to Señor Sub-Jefe del Departamento de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, Veracruz, November 10, 1945, AGN-ADGIPS. Caja 750 (No Expediente listed).

exile, José Ernesto López, and have them report back to Mexico City immediately or risk expulsion from the county.[386]

Despite momentarily losing track of a few exiles targeted for their potential subversion, the Mexican government had relatively few problems finding most of the Guatemalans it sought. The former colonels, generals, and wealthy landowners staying in the region did not attempt to hide. For example, the directive sent to many to relocate to Mexico City prompted obsequious letters to government officials, instead of flight, citing a variety of reasons requiring their stay in Chiapas, such as poverty and health. The aged General Miguel Castro Monzón wrote in July 1945 to the Secretariat of the Interior, claiming surprise at the summons to the capital. After pledging his fidelity to his newly adopted land's law, the seventy-five year old Castro claimed poor health, which was helped by the humid climate of Tapachula, and which also prevented him from making the long trip to Mexico City. He even produced a note from a doctor and suggested as an alternative a move to Minatitlán, Veracruz, it being of a similar altitude to the border city where he currently resided.[387] The Mexican officials refused his request; he was forced to move to Mexico City, where upon arrival he was required to check in with DIPS officials. [388]

The Mexican press seemed to have the same amount of sympathy for the "plight" of generals like Castro as did the DIPS. This was evidenced, for example, by headlines that appeared in newspapers like *El Imparcial*, "The Oppressors of the Guatemalan People Pass Themselves off as Victims in Mexico."[389] Or, in another instance, an article in *El Nacional* condemned the former jefe político of Quetzaltenango, Arturo Ramírez, for comments

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[386] Lamberto Ortega Peregrina to Modesto Solís Domínguez, México, December 11, 1945, AGN-ADGIPS Caja 750 Expediente 01461.

[387]Miguel Castro Monzón to Señor Jefe del Departamento de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales. Secretario de Gobernación, Tapachula, July 1, 1945, AGN-ADGIPS. Caja 750 (No Expediente listed)

[388] Romeo Gout to Lamberto Ortega Peregrina, Tapachula, October 17, 1945, *AGN-ADGIPS*. Caja 750 Expediente 06031.

[389]*El Imparcial,* September 25, 1945.

denigrating the progressive influence of Mexico on Guatemala. The newspaper reproduced his inflammatory statements and shared the name of the hotel where he stayed.[390]

By 1947 the Guatemalan government stopped submitting lists of dangerous exiles to move away from the border as most of the prominent Ubico exiles were accounted for in the capital, safely under the watch of the national security forces of Mexico. The last letter I found requesting to stay in Chiapas was from February 1947. It was addressed to President Alemán and signed by eight Guatemalan generals, including two members of the short-lived, right-wing triumvirate of 1944, Eduardo Villagrán Arizas and Buenaventura Pineda. Claiming poor finances, they asked to stay in Chiapas. The fact that this group produced this request together suggests, as would be expected of former colleagues and fellow exiles, that high-ranking Ubico-era officials maintained contact with each other after being ousted from power. This communication no doubt attracted the suspicion of the DIPS and the Guatemalan government, whether they were actively plotting a return to power or just complaining about their fall.[391]

The removal of the exiles did not stop the rumors of conspiracies and revolutions ready to be launched from the borderlands by prominent exiles: the borderlands became a region of both real and imagined subversion. For a period in 1947 both Guatemalan and Mexican newspapers connected the former short-lived president General Federico Ponce to a borderlands-launched coup attempt. For example, the front page of the October 4, 1947 edition of the Guatemalan newspaper *El Imparcial*, told of a Ponce led-scheme that included recruitment of an eighty man borderlands-based force led by a man simply known as "El Machete," a coordinated reactionary

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[390] *El Nacional,* August 12, 1945. Ramírez commented, "Guatemala a la caída de Ubico, tuvo la poca suerte de haber recibido un verdadera inyección de morbo, que procedente de México, llego a cumplir la misión de transformar aquel país en un sucursal de desorientaciones sectarias. En un foco de ensayo que aquí han causado lo más grandes malos."

[391] Eduardo Villagran Arizas et al., to Miguel Alemán Valdes, México, February 21, 1947, AGN-APMAV Caja 595 Expediente 990.

uprising in Guatemala City, and a shipment of arms passed through a local businessman in Tapachula.[392] A front page story on November 8 in the Mexican newspaper *Novedades* repeating the charges prompted Ponce to write a published letter, in which he did not refute the charges, but instead lambasted an earlier article in which the Guatemalan ambassador in Mexico refuted charges of Arévalo leading a communist regime.[393] Regardless of the newspaper accounts, the Mexican government must have felt it had Ponce under some type of control, as a DIPS agent had visited the ex-president only months before in his Mexico City hotel room. Ponce chalked up any rumors floating around — which at that point charged him with financing subversive propaganda — to the Arévalo government, claiming that similar accusations arose the last time he visited the borderlands two years before to meet friends. Ponce promised to meet with Dr. Pérez Martínez -- the head of the DIPS -- the following day, presumably to clear up any misunderstandings.[394]

Though many of these rumors of plots amounted to nothing, there was evidence of actual attempts by exiles to actively oppose the October Revolution government. It is difficult, though, to sort through the conjectures, which were in part fueled by the paranoia of the revolutionary Guatemalan government that with good reason imagined conspiracies among the exiles that would in fact eventually overthrow it.[395] It is helpful then to examine in short detail

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[392] *El Imparcial*, October 4, 1947.

[393] *Novedades*, November 8, 1947, *Novedades*, November, 17, 1947 and November 22, 1947.

[394] Memorándum, México, August 25, 1947, AGN-ADGIPS Caja 750 (No Expediente listed). Ponce claimed, during his first weeks in exile, to have met years before with then President Avila Camacho. At that time he dramatically offered the Mexican head of state his passport, and a proposal to leave the country, upon rumors of his plotting to try to recover the Guatemalan presidency.

[395] Reflecting the Mexican media's interest in the seemingly constant turmoil of the new Guatemalan government, see the August 13, 1950 edition of *El Universal,* which playfully bestows upon the October Revolution regime the title of "indiscutible campeonato mundial de sublevaciones." Arévalo faced nearly thirty coup attempts during his presidency. See also Jim Handy, *Revolution in the Countryside: Rural Conflict and Agrarian Reform in Guatemala, 1944-1954* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 35.

one would- be plan connected to a prominent exile in 1947 to pass arms to Guatemala through Tapachula, which may or may not been responsible for nearly 24,000 bullets ultimately confiscated by DIPS officials. The case illustrates not only that such conspiracies probably existed, but that exiles found optimal conditions to engage in actions like smuggling in the borderlands due to the lack of any expansive state vigilance on the border. As opposed to prominent exiles that were easier to keep track of, the presence of corruptible Mexican officials accustomed to looking the other way for the right price meant experienced borderland smugglers could play a key role in political conspiracies.

In early 1947 the Guatemalan government alerted the Mexican embassy of a plot led from Mexico City by the exiled coffee hacienda owner and losing candidate in the 1945 presidential election, Ovidio Pivaral, to introduce arms into Guatemala.[396] The embassy provided a supposed letter to Pivaral from an Arab storeowner in Tapachula, Tobías José, in which José notes he could not procure all the suggested product but could obtain ten thousand of the items. The embassy charged Tobias with previously suggesting an arms deal to the current Guatemalan ambassador Adolfo Monsanto, which could also explain the worries of the Arévalo government.[397]

DIPS agents promptly launched an investigation into both José and Pivaral. Interviewed in his Mexico City residence, the aristocratic Pivaral denied knowing José and even the city of Tapachula; the ex-presidential candidate claimed to have nothing do with business or politics. Talks with a couple of Pivaral's fellow Guatemalan exiles, such as noted historian and translator

[396] In 1933 Pivaral had the eighth largest coffee farm in Guatemala in terms of production. Robert G. Williams, *States and Social Evolution: Coffee and the Rise of National Governments in Central America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 371.

[397] Jaime Torres Bedot to Héctor Pérez Martínez, México, February 15, 1947, *AGN-ADGIPS* Caja 750 Expediente 52304.

-- and like Pivaral, loser of a recent presidential election -- Adrián Recinos, also painted the coffee magnate as a man disinterested in politics. Recinos claimed Pivaral was resting in exile, living off the money gained from the land left in Guatemala and from children who lived in New York City.[398]

The DIPS official that visited Tapachula found a much different situation with Tobías José, who appeared to exemplify the possibilities available to a borderlander willing to traffic in contraband. Living in a rented house that contained his store, "Estrella del Oriente," the notorious José had come into town from Huixtla, a small town approximately 40 miles north, with a reputation for swindling business partners. Once settled in the port city, he began to threaten his elderly landlady to force her to sell him her residence at a below-market price. A neighbor reported how the "pernicious foreigner" under the cover of trading vegetables made frequent trips to the border to sell guns, a trip of only thirty minutes, with one of the two cars he kept on the premises.[399] When questioned, the governor of the state, César Augusto Lara Ramos, merely commented that José was an "international businessmen," which the DIPS agent took to mean he engaged in contraband. Though he did not find any connection to Pivaral, he heard stories of José and his supposed connections with important Mexican officials. For instance, José often showed off two form letters from officials in the Secretariat of the Interior thanking the merchant for gifts sent, as evidence of his friendship with people in high places. The merchant did seem to have a degree of official protection; the DIPS agent noted the widspread

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[398] Inspector I.P.S. 37 to Lamberto Ortega Peregrina, México, March 19, 1947, AGN-ADGIPS Caja 750 (No Expediente listed). Recinos ran against and was soundly defeated by Arévalo —260,000 votes to 20,000-- in the 1944 election, a defeat the aristocratic historian refused to recognize. See Handy, *Revolution in the Countryside,* 35, 145-146. Instead of his conservative politics, Recinos is mostly remembered for his groundbreaking translation of the sacred Mayan text, Popul Vuh, from a copy found in the Newberry Library in Chicago in 1941. Indeed, it was in México in the year 1947 that Recinos published the first Spanish translation, to great acclaim. Adrián Recinos, *Popul Vuh; las antiguas historias del Quiche* (Mexico City: Fondo del Cultura Económica, 1947).

[399] The neighbor helpfully suggested to expel the "Arab"—Jose's exact country of origin is never specified—under article 33 of the Mexican Constitution detailing the authority to expel foreigners from the country.

rumor that José's activities fell under the protection of the ex-commander of Mexico's 31st Military Region, General Lorenzo Muñoz Merino. The rumors appeared to be validated by the fact that José had obtained a one year permission from the Defense Department to sell ammunition rounds within Mexico. Clearly the Tapachulan merchant, despite the stories painting him as some low-rent hood — intimidating old ladies, unable to read or write — obtained some degree of political accommodation for contraband activities. In other words, if Pivaral, or any other exile, was looking for a partner on the border to smuggle in guns, then Tobias José seemed to be a good fit.[400]

Despite having little success in finding any link between the Arab merchant and Pivaral, the DIPS agent did find bullets, 24,000 of them, in a truck on the road from Tapachula to Talismán. Though officials were able to name a guilty party, a Honduran named Jorge Hasbun Hasil, the suspect walked away from custody due to efforts made at "the edge of the law." The investigation into the source of those bullets as well as their ultimate purpose came up against stone-walling by a federal official. The agent blamed the frequency of contraband passing through Tapachula on the ex-military commander, Muñoz, who had already been accused of providing protection for Tobias José. The current chief of the 31st military zone, General Roberto Calvo Ramírez, told the DIPS agent that his predecessor continued to use official vehicles in his nefarious dealings. Before returning to Mexico City, the stalwart Calvo Ramírez assured the DIPS investigator he would end the "pistolerismo" of the region, perhaps alluding to the corruption explored in chapter two, and would work to add morals to the Customs Office in

[400] Inspector I.P.S. 36 to Lamberto Ortega Peregrina, México, March 25 1947, AGN-ADGIPS Caja 750 (No Expediente listed)

Tapachula and continue to follow up clues to track the true culprits behind the intercepted contraband.[401]

After Hasbun Hasil disappeared and the thousands of bullets were confiscated and ultimately returned to a company in Tuxtla Gutiérrez — to the consternation of the DIPS agent — the reported plots originating from the border subsided. [402] The concentration of prominent exiles in Mexico City no doubt significantly helped. Safely in their hotels or residences, they could be easily followed, and their actions were mostly limited to printing propaganda against the October Revolution regime as discussed below.

It is also possible that the naming to the military command of Calvo Ramírez contributed to the decline of plots, due to his politics rather than scrupulous morals. The opening of the Soviet Intelligence Archives revealed that he was a key agent in Mexico for the burgeoning NKVD, predecessor of the KGB. The committed Mexican communist found that being stationed on borders served up opportunities to help the cause. Previously stationed on the northern border in Ensenada, Baja California, Ramírez had been instrumental in assisting Soviet agents in clandestinely crossing into Mexico from the United States. [403] Clearly being posted to the southern border offered an opportunity for "Zapata," his code-name in recognition of his revolutionary experience, to safe-guard a Guatemalan regime he must have felt affinity with due to his political leanings. He certainly would not have found much in common with Pivaral or Recinos. [404]

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[401] Inspector I.P.S. 36 to Lamberto Ortega Peregrina, México, March 25 1947, AGN-ADGIPS Caja 750 (No Expediente listed).

[402] Jaime Torres Bodet to Secretario de Gobernación, Mexico, June 9, 1947, AGN-ADGIPS Caja 750 Expediente 51971.

[403] Stephen Schwartz, "La Venona Mexicana" *VUELTA* 21 (1997): 19-25; México, un tablero de un Ajedrez de Espias, *El Proceso,* August 12, 2013, 64-65.

[404] Calvo Ramirez also distinguished himself in 1939 by suppressing Catholic and Sinarquista dissidence in Guanajuato, notably refusing to be bought off by wealthy landowners. Ben Fallaw, *Religion and State Formation in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 201.

Indeed, the border became secure enough for the current Guatemalan regime that it utilized the large population of Guatemalans nationalized as Mexican citizens to manufacture votes for Jacobo Árbenz in the 1950 presidential election by transporting borderlanders to nearby Guatemalan precincts to vote. Mexican military officials reported on Guatemalan civilians and officials connected to the government visiting the Mexican border towns of Talismán and Suchiate, where they attempted to hire seventy-five trucks to bring 1200 persons over the border, offering four pesos for each vote delivered. They noted that once back on their native soil the large number of nationalized Guatemalans living in the region "recovered automatically" their citizenship. Members of the opposition took pictures of the passing trucks to use as evidence of fraud, as well as to register complaints with the federal Mexican government of their citizens influencing foreign elections.[405]

1950-1954: Árbenz, the United States, and the Coup

The November 1950 election of Jacobo Árbenz was a pivotal moment, the first democratic transition in Guatemalan history. His victory also put the revolutionary regime into the crosshairs of an aggressive United States anti-Communist foreign policy, while also alienating one-time domestic allies. The death of the more moderate and presumed first-choice of outgoing president Arévalo , Coronel Francisco Arana, cleared a path for the much more progressive Árbenz, who enacted controversial agrarian reform laws and further restrictions on previously unfettered U.S. capital.[406] As the Árbenz government gained important support from

[405] Arturo Gutiérrez H. to Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, July 11, 1950 AGN-ADGIPS Caja 750 (No expediente listed)

[406] Piero Gleijeses, "The Death of Francisco Arana: A Turning Point in the Guatemalan Revolution," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 22 (1990): 527-552

often indigenous rural Guatemalans and the growing industrial labor force through measures such as recognizing union organizing, it in turn lost the backing of previous middle-class allies that looked with fear on the mobilization of these historically marginalized groups. Indeed, the fall of Árbenz was more than the work of U.S. intelligence agencies or the machinations of the United Fruit Company. A variety of factors, economic, political, social, and individual, led to the coup of 1954.[407]

However, due to the efforts of the Mexican government the removal of the October Revolution government did not come from the Chiapan borderlands. Though the increasingly conservative governments of Miguel Alemán Valdés and Aldofo Ruiz Cortines found the reformist land policies of the Arévalo and Árbenz governments to be potentially troublesome examples for a Mexican populace they hoped to channel through recently organized PRI corporate structures, they certainly did not want the American intervention that it increasingly seemed the incoming Eisenhower administration might undertake.[408] Indeed, by 1952 the U.S. government had decided on the need for covert action against Guatemala.[409] Already the "case" against Guatemala's supposedly devious communist connections was being laid by the powerful United Fruit Company's propaganda team, which included, for example, the public relations innovator Edward Bernays, a member of Joseph McCarthy's staff, who successfully promoted lurid stories of the horrors of "red" Guatemala in the U.S. media.[410]

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[407] Susanne Jonas, *The Battle for Guatemala: Rebels, Death Squads, and U.S. Power* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 34-38.

[408] Buchenau, *In The Shadow of The Giant* , 194-197; Stephen R. Niblo describes the conservative policies of the Alemán regime of 1946 as evidence that the "Mexican Thermidor had arrived." Stephen R. Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940's: Modernity, Politics, and Corruption* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1999), 183.

[409] Nick Cullather, *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2006), 27.

[410] Manolo E. Vela Castañeda, "Guatemala, 1954: las ideas de la contrarrevolución," *Foro Internacional* 179 (2005): 96; Larry Tye, *The Father of Spin: Edward L. Bernays and the Birth of Public Relations* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1998), 171-180.

In addition to Mexico's opposition to an overt U.S. intervention in their backyard, government officials had other motives to try and protect the October Revolution: Mexican diplomats had finally found a friendly Guatemalan government after years of hostility. Often this newfound friendship utilized the imagery of their shared border. For example, in 1951, upon visiting the Chiapan border, Alemán and Árbenz exchanged public notes of friendship; Alemán noted that "the border between our countries is not a line that divides but on the contrary, stimulates friendship."[411] Following the diplomacy of Alemán, in 1953 President Ruiz Cortines bestowed the Great Necklace of the Aztec Eagle upon Árbenz.[412] At least publicly, Mexican diplomatic efforts began to thaw some of the ice that had built up during the tense Ubico years. It is interesting to wonder how far the rapprochement might have progressed if the events of 1954 had not occurred.

Though the border became a site, at least rhetorically, of friendship between the two neighbors, the government of Ruiz Cortines allowed the Guatemalan exiles and opponents of the regime safely installed in Mexico City to ratchet up their propaganda efforts through groups such as the Pro-Liberation Committee of Guatemala (Comité Pro-Liberación de Guatemala, CPLG), which formed in 1952. Tied to Mexican politicians such Jorge Prieto Laurens of the Popular Anti-Communist Front of Mexico (Frente Popular Anti-Comunista de México) the broadsides of this group served to help the PRI regime discredit the left, and the still active ex-President Lázaro Cárdenas, as much as it aided their battle against the "communist" Árbenz.[413] The latitude given to the group to produce inflammatory propaganda stands in sharp contrast to just a

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[411]Miguel Alemán Valdés to Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán, (No date given) AGN-APMAV Caja 1341 Expediente 41772.

[412] Cullather, *Secret History* 49.

[413] Jürgen Buchenau, "Por una guerra fría más templada: México entre el cambio revolucionario y la reacción estadounidense en Guatemala y Cuba," in Daniela Spenser, ed., *Espejos de la guerra fría: México, América Central y el Caribe* (México: Porrua/CIESAS, 2004), 119-49.

few years earlier, when a 1946 pamphlet produced by exile M. Antonio Archila Obregón reproducing a purported letter from then President Arévalo to the U.S.S.R expressing the subjugation of the Guatemalan regime, prompted a presidential memorandum kicking him out of the country for violating the terms of his exile.[414]

It is difficult to establish if the Mexican government, which had DIPS investigate, knew about the CPLG's connection with the CIA.[415] Given the code name Lionizer, and run through an exiled Guatemalan with the handle Libethene-4, the CPLG and the hundreds or so pamphlets they printed and mailed to newspapers under the group's name was simply another tool of psychological warfare in the larger assault on the October Revolution government.[416] There was a possibility that the Mexican politician Prieto was involved in anti-Árbenz activities beyond simple propagandizing. A DIPS investigation into the activities of exiles suggested by the Guatemalan embassy in 1952 uncovered links between a hitman for the Dominican Regime of Rafael Trujillo, Felix Bernardino, Prieto Laurens, and activities on the Chiapan border.[417] The DIPS followed the Dominican to a meeting of Guatemalan exiles in Chiapas. Not mincing words, the report stated that Bernardino, Prieto, and the CPLG were working to attack the prestige of the Guatemalan government to affect a "golpe de estado." They also noted, though,

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[414] Memorándum para un Acuerdo Presidencial, México, July 17, 1946 AGN-ADGIPS Caja 750 (No Expediente listed).

[415]The group responded with a letter addressed to the head of the DGIPS, Felipe Flores Fagoaga, on Frente Popular Anti-Comunista de México letterhead, and signed by Jorge Prieto Laurens. It listed a handful of military and civilian exiles and a brief explanation of the circumstances behind their flight to Mexico. Jorge Prieto Laurens to Felipe Flores Fagoaga, México, July 28, 1952, 1946 AGN-ADGIPS Caja 750 (No Expediente listed).

[416] Memorandum From the Deputy Director for Plans of the Central Intelligence Agency (Wisner) to Director of Central Intelligence Dulles, Washington April 24, 1954, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Retrospective Volume, Guatemala Document 133*.

[417] Among other accusations, Bernardino had been linked to the murder of Dominican exile and publisher of an anti-Trujillo newspaper, Andres Requena, in New York. *El Popular,* "Denuncia la presencia en México de un asesino, agente del dictador dominicano." October 7, 1952. For the almost boogeyman-type presence Bernardino exerted, see Junot Díaz. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2007), 120.

that the exiles lacked the financial means or political power to pose a threat to the neighbor to the south.[418]

For those like Castillo Armas and other prominent exiles auditioning for the role of future caudillo of the counter-revolution, the setting to impress the United States intelligence community was in Guatemala's antagonistic neighbors to the south, such as Nicaragua and Honduras. There, in Guatemala's southern borderlands, Castillo Armas had free rein to organize, and he eventually led his invasion from northern Honduras.[419] The first day of the "liberation," June 15, 1954, the CIA reported no activity on the Mexican-Guatemalan border. Bucking a tradition dating back to its independence, Guatemala's latest violent change in government did not come from exiles plotting from the Chiapan borderlands: the Mexican national security apparatus had managed to specifically control for a brief period one aspect that contributed to the fugitive nature of the borderlands, Guatemalan exile activity.[420] This management of movement by the DIPS, though, was specific to the circumstances that emerged after 1944, and the type of persons, prominent right wing figures, that sought exile in the region. As we will discover in the next chapter, as the nature of exile changed, this control was not possible to maintain.

A Mexican public followed the lead up and the aftermath of the Castillo Armas invasion through a press sympathetic to the October Revolution. Many Mexicans expressed their support for the embattled Árbenz government through established pro-Guatemalan groups such as the

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[418]Alejandro Ortega Romero to Secretario de Gobernación, México, July 26, 1952 AGN-ADGIPS Caja 750 (No Expediente Listed).

[419] The United States helped Somoza's support for Castillo Armas through aid and a security treaty. Castillo Armas competed with other prominent exiles for CIA support, eventually winning out over others, in part because he had the largest para-military support and did not, for example, come with the baggage of someone like Miguel Ygídoras, a former Ubico enforcer and hence public-relations problem. See Cullather, *Secret History,* 48-52.

[420] Kugown Operations- Coverage of Guatemalan Activities from Mexico, Washington, June 15, 1954, Central Intelligence Agency Guatemala FOIA

Sociedad de Amigos de Guatemala. Formed in 1953 under the initiative of former Ambassador to Chile Robert Alvarado Fuentes, the Sociedad organized diverse sectors of the Mexican political, labor, and creative class to channel public support for the October Revolution government, concentrating on defending its achievements in promoting economic justice while attempting to rally support in the face of increasing U.S. attacks in the international arena.[421]

When Castillo Armas began his march to power by leading a small five-hundred man force into Guatemala from the border of Honduras, local chapters of the Sociedad, individuals, labor organizations, and other pro-Guatemala groups sent telegrams to President Adolfo Ruiz Cortines imploring that the Mexican nation defend the Árbenz government. Typical were telegrams such as that sent from the Electric Union of Oaxaca, which noted, "we have faith the government will support the cessation of the invasion of the sister republic of Guatemala."[422] Pro-Guatemalan support also took place in the form of public demonstrations as thousands of students, labor leaders, and intellectuals stepped into the public void left by a Mexican government afraid of being labeled communist by a belligerent United States.[423] Notable public

[421] Central Intelligence Agency, Report #535, Jan, 6, 1954, Accessed November 1, 2013, http://216.12.139.91/docs/DOC_0000914527/DOC_0000914527.pdf.):The CIA documented the Sociedad's extensive list of supporters which included such prominent political figures as Vicente Lombardo Toledano and artists such as Carlos Pellicer since its founding in 1953. See Central Intelligence Agency, Report #CS-30357, December 21, 1953, Accessed November 1,2013, http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0000913489.pdf accessed November 1,2013.

[422] Encarnación Rojas to Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, Oaxaca, June 29, 1954, Archivo General de la Nación, Archivo de Adolfo Ruiz Cortines Caja 1080 Expediente 18895 (Here forth AGN-ARC).

[423] Buchenau, *In The Shadow of The Giant,*197; Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944-1954* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 328-239. An April 23, 1954 report from Mexican ambassador Primo Villa Michel notes the extensive, positive press coverage in Guatemala concerning the Sociedad. It especially noted the participation of Cárdenas, as well as a government sponsored group traveling to Mexico to lend support to the Sociedad's efforts. See Embajada de México en Guatemala, Informe Mensual Reglamentario Correspondiente a Enero de 1954, Guatemala, April 12, 1954 AH-SRE Legajo 1572-2 Expediente 6.

figures such as David Alfaro Siquerios, Frida Kahlo, and Diego Rivera marched through Mexico City shouting slogans like, "Estados Unidos, ¡Asesinos!"[424]

As the October Revolution regime fell, expressions of outrage turned to pleas that the Mexican government grant exile to the hundreds of regime supporters that were certain to be caught up in the right-wing sweep. For example, at a large July 19 rally in Mexico City, attended by prominent Spanish and Dominican exiles there as reminder of the country's history of sanctuary, the speakers promised to send a letter to both President Ruiz Cortines and the United Nations to intervene with the Guatemalan military to grant the right of asylum.[425] It is not certain how many Guatemalans eventually sought exile in the wake of the CIA backed coup. In her exhaustive work exploring the issue of exile, Guadalupe Rodríguez de Ita cites estimates ranging from 50,000 to as low 2,000 individuals leaving the country, many heading towards Mexico. The most celebrated example of the flight towards a safe-haven from counter-revolutionary terror took place blocks from the presidential palace in Guatemala City, in the Mexican embassy. In the ensuing hours and days after the resignation of Árbenz, officials from the embassy sheltered countless officials of the ousted government, including the ex-president himself. Journalists, labor officials, leftist politicians, and even a large number of Spanish exiles who had sought safety in Guatemala only years before fled with their families into the soon crowded Mexican compound. Throughout the following months, Mexico negotiated safe conduct passes with a Guatemalan government hesitant to allow potential future dissidents to

[424] Memorándum, July 2, 1954 AGN-ARC Caja 1080 (No Expediente listed). Foreshadowing the detailed DFS reports of the sixties and seventies, the reports regarding pro-Guatemalan rallies meticulously detailed the participants. See, for example, the July 19, 1954 rally at the Teatro Iris. Memorándum, July 19, 1954 AGN-ARC Caja 1080 (No Expediente listed). Kahlo's death at the end of July was marked by a moment of silence at a rally. She had spent the last days of her life protesting the U.S. led invasion.

[425] Memorándum, July 19, 1954 AGN-ARC Caja 1080 (No Expediente listed). The meeting in Teatro Iris, attended by both Spanish and Dominican exiles, directed a telegram to both President Ruiz Cortines and the United Nations to intervene with the Guatemalan military to grant the right of asylum.

escape. The nearly 800 future exiles trapped in the embassy endured the harassment of groups organized by the archbishop and right-wing gangs, who banged on the gates and threatened to storm the embassy.[426] Eventually, private flights were arranged, principally to Tapachula and Mexico City, no doubt saving the lives of many, and marking the beginning of a four decades long saga of forced exile for thousands of Guatemalans during that country's long civil war.[427]

As Rodríguez de Ita notes, those who along with their families sought safety behind the walls of the embassy fit a classic profile of Latin American exiles: prominent, politically active individuals.[428] However, in addition to the numerous officials that flew to safety out of Guatemala City, the Chiapan borderlands sheltered those who could only escape by foot. Many of the Guatemalans requesting asylum in the borderlands did not figure prominently in the old regime. Laborers and campesinos escaped to Chiapas depending on sympathetic Mexicans to petition for asylum on their behalf. For example, on July 10, 1954, the Agrarian Committee of Soconusco wrote President Ruiz Cortines requesting political exile be granted to Guatemalans in the frontier region of Tapachula.[429] A year later, in July 1955, the committee wrote again to the president, this time complaining about the attempt of a Ciudad Hidalgo immigration officer, C. Hector Larazo Martínez, to force out nearly 38 exiles and their families, or 128 people altogether. The letter noted that Larazo had earlier expelled some 34 Guatemalan campesinos that had fled the "terror and persecution" of their country. Basing their request on Mexican law,

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[426] In his first official address to the Guatemalan National Assembly in October 1954, Castillo Armas challenged the Mexican embassy to expel the individuals in its compound. It accused them of a litany of crimes, among them genocide, and demanded that they face Guatemalan justice. Mensaje del Ciudano Presidente de la República, Teniente Coronel Carlos Castillo Armas, Guatemala, October, 29, 1954 AH-SRE, Legajo 1572-3 Expedientes 180-181.

[427] Guadalupe Rodríguez de Ita *La política mexicana de asilo diplomático a la luz del caso Guatemalteco, 1944-1954* (México: Instituto Mora, 2003), 67-80.

[428] Ibid. 80.

[429] Comité Defensa Agraria of Soconusco to Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, Tapachula, July 10, 1954AGN-ARC Caja 1080 (No Expediente listed). The letter lists a series of communities all within the general area of Tapachula: Suchiate, Tapachula, Ciudad Hidalgo, Tuxtla Chico, Oacahoatán, Unión Juárez.

citing article 15 of the Constitution, the group claimed that if ejected from Mexico the Guatemalans, like their fellow workers and "campesino leaders," would be massacred.[430] A telegram sent that same month by the employees of a Mexico City clinic of the Mexican Social Security Institute denounced the extradition of Guatemalans in Chiapas, suggesting that the plight of these first refugees of the Civil War elicited the sympathy of some sectors of the Mexican public.[431] Above all, these Guatemalans elicited the compassion of the Mexican public that could identify better with the farmers and laborers running across the border than with a wealthy coffee magnate like Pivaral and other right-wing exiles.

It is likely that much of the local effort to expel Guatemalans that had fled to borderland communities such as those listed in the letter of the committee had to do with the already existing animus toward Guatemalans in the borderlands explored in previous chapters. During the same time as Ruiz Cortines's staff handled requests for asylum, they also received letters from residents exhorting the government to expel pernicious Guatemalans taking resources from Mexicans. For example, a letter sent in 1956 from five residents of Tapachula detailed a list of complaints against local employers and politicians it accused of catering to Guatemalans — including a gas station attendant accused of only serving Guatemalans — leading the petitioners to ask if Chiapas still belonged to Mexico.[432] In addition, the normal corruption of border officials also might have played a part. It is reasonable to assume that those that suddenly fled into the borderlands did not easily adapt to the intricacies of the transnational movement that

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[430]"Article 15. No treaty shall be authorized for the extradition of political offenders or of offenders of the common order who have been slaves in the country where the offense was committed…" Constitution of Mexico, Accessed March 28, 2015, http://www.oas.org/juridico/mla/en/mex/en_mex-int-text-const.pdf. Comité Defensa Agraria of Soconusco to Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, Tapachula, July 13, 1955 AGN-ARC Caja 0886 (No Expediente listed).

[431] Grupo Trabajadores Clínica 6 del I.M.S.S. to Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, México, July 14, 1955 AGN-ARC Caja 0886 Expediente 18088.

[432] Camilio Flamarión et al., to Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, Tapachula, August 26, 1956, AGN-ARC Caja 0886 Expediente 21019.

other Guatemalans had learned, such as bribes. They would often not have contracts to work in the coffee fields and thus a finquero who might encourage border officials to look the other way. In addition, their presence might have been seen by corrupt immigration officials as an opportunity to extract money from a vulnerable source. For example, in August 1956, a Mexican resident of Ciudad Hidalgo wrote to the president's office to complain about local authorities demanding thirty six pesos from Guatemalan political exiles to stay in Mexico.[433]

Finally, these messages from Mexicans protesting the removal of these exiles must be seen in the context of the more official accounts of activity in the borderlands, and the beginning of attempts by the Mexican federal and state governments to project the region as free from the strife plaguing the neighbor to the south For example, the August 1 edition of *La Voz del Sureste* reported absolute "tranquility" on the border and complete ignorance among the populace of the conflict raging miles away. [434] The article attacked the "capital papers" that always seek to "disorient" the public. Instead, the regional paper claimed that borderlanders were more interested in a bribery scandal concerning local officials than Castillo Armas and Guatemala.[435] The newspaper's tone echoed the sentiment of Chiapan Governor Efraín Aranda Osorio, who in an update to the president after a recent tour of the region following the Castillo Armas coup reported a sense of calm.[436]

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[433]Antonio Cardona Obregón to Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, Ciudad Hidalgo, August 13, 1956 AGN-ARC Caja 0990 Expediente 20463.

[434] The paper took a generally positive tone toward the Castillo Armas counter-revolution. For example, a May 31, 1954 headline read, "Crítica Situación en Guatemala. País que Quiere Libertad Económica sin Doctrinas Comunistas." *La Voz del Sureste,* May 31, 1954.

[435] *La Voz del Sureste*, August 1, 1954.

[436] Memorándum, México, June 23, 1954 AGN-ARC Caja 1080 (No Expediente Listed).

Conclusion

The US supported overthrow of the October Revolution in 1954 prompted a new beginning of exile activity in the borderlands, shaped by over four decades of military coups, revolution, and counter-revolution in Guatemala. This political chaos continued with the overthrow of Castillo Armas in 1957. From the beginning his hold on power was shaky as he contended with challenges from both the left, in the form of student and labor protests, and from ambitious politicians on the right, such as the old Ubico stalwart, Miguel Ygídoras. The downfall of the self-styled "Liberator" came from those closest to him, as his government faced a variety of internal threats he seemed unable to squash from right-wing leaders that were not in exile, but rather were in Guatemala City.[437]

As before, the borderlands managed to fit themselves into narratives of conspiracy. For example, nearly a year after Castillo Armas took power, the Guatemalan police captured supposed members of the Caribbean Legion, the multi-national group of Latin American exiles that conspired to overthrow the authoritarian regimes of the region. The Guatemalan government reported that the men in custody were attempting to cross into Mexico to join fellow conspirators in a communist plot to take power. The captured revolutionaries turned out to be Mexican government employees who were visiting the Guatemalan border town of Ayutla for its annual fair. Like many borderlanders, the men had crossed over the Suchiate to enjoy the festivities.[438]

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[437] Streeter, *Managing the Counterrevolution, 54*-57; Cullather, *Secret History,* 114-116.

[438] *El Imparcial*, September 22, 1955; *El Espectador*, Sept 23, 1955; *El Espectador*, September 19, 1955. . Following his assumption of power, Arevalo's government sheltered and welcomed exiles from all over Central America, including individuals who would be known as the Caribbean Legion. Charles D. Ameringer, *The Caribbean Legion: Patriots, Politicians, Soldiers of Fortune, 1946-1950* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 61-63.

Unlike in 1944 and 1945, the Mexican government did not attempt to track exiles in the borderlands to protect Castillo Armas. This can be attributed to who went into exile there, such as campesinos and local political organizers, individuals who relied on Mexican borderlanders to write on their behalf, and unlike the past right wing exiles, did not seem likely to launch a revolution. In addition, it could also be attributed to the general antipathy of the government to the new Guatemalan regime. For instance, in late June 1956 after violent protests in Guatemala City, in what would become the first of many states of siege declared by the Guatemalan government, parts of the border were closed and only those with government passports were allowed to cross.[439] The Guatemalan press launched accusations about conspirators in Mexico plotting revolution. The Mexican ambassador in Guatemala was instructed to tell the Guatemalan government that the DIPS had "called" leading exiles to remind them of "their obligations." There was none of the large-scale round up of individuals in the borderlands that occurred after Ubico's ouster.[440]

Three years later a nearly successful rebellion by junior army officers in 1960 birthed Guatemala's first guerrilla movement and irrevocably changed the nature of exile. As we will examine in the next chapter, unlike the right-wing exiles of 1944, these exiles clandestinely utilized the Chiapan borderlands for a revolution armed with an ideology that threatened not just the Guatemalan state, but also that of Mexico.

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[439]Richer to Relaciones, Guatemala, June 30, 1956, SRE 111-1750-1 Expediente 1152.

[440] Memorándum: Para la Dirección General de Servicio Diplomático, México, July 2, 1956, SRE 111-1750-1 (No Expediente listed).

Chapter Five:
Students, Guerrillas, and the First Wave of Revolution:
1960-1972

In 1964 the Mexican journalist, historian, and Trotskyist, Adolfo Gilly, visited the Guatemalan bush to interview guerrillas. Gilly spent weeks traveling with and interviewing leaders such as Yon Sosa, providing insight into the gradual radicalization of the movement that emerged from the failed uprising of army officers on November 13, 1960.[441] The members of the Revolutionary Movement of November (Movimiento Revolucionario 13 Noviembre. MR-13) as well as the many rural sympathizers Gilly met along the way, traced the genesis of their struggle to the overthrow of Árbenz. Villagers harkened back to the famed land distribution of 1952, complaining of how the so-called Liberation of 1954 had brought nothing but economic reversals. Guerrilla leaders like Sosa and Luis Turcios Lima, both former junior military officers, reflected optimistically on a future triumph of the revolution. They sketched for Gilly a few broad policies they'd enact if they managed to dislodge the military controlled government from power, like nation-wide land distribution and the dissolution of the counter-revolutionary national security apparatus -- military, extra-official militias, secret police -- that ensured through violence the continuation of Guatemala's unequal political and economic structure. The struggle Gilly encountered, the grievances fueling the long treks through the countryside were particular

[441] Led primarily by junior officers, many trained in the United States, the abortive coup was initially nationalist in scope and aimed at removing the corrupt Ydígoras government. Gilly notes that the nearly four year from 1960 to around 1964, of the MR-13 leaders from nationalist, anti-imperialist military rebels to Marxist guerrillas developed gradually. Personal experiences with villagers that sheltered them and encouraged them in their struggle, frustration with traditional leftist labor and political groups who advocated an electoral path to victory, as well the example of Cuba, finally led to an acceptance of a much more radical strategy for those former officers who had undergone ranger training at Fort Benning, Georgia only years before. Sosa's succinct response to the question, how did you become socialist, was "while we were dodging bullets. It's impossible to fight for very long, side by side with peasants, and not become a socialist." Adolfo Gilly, "The Guerrilla Movement in Guatemala, Part I" *Monthly Review* 17 (1965): 32.

to Guatemala, though these rebels clearly articulated the placement of their Guatemalan struggle within the wider struggle of Latin America and the world.[442]

Like other Marxist guerrillas of the period, MR-13 envisioned their fight as part of the wider struggle against capitalism and imperialism in Latin America. In an interview over a dinner of roasted monkey, Sosa and the Mexican Trotskyist talked about MR-13's struggle against the Guatemalan latifundistas in the context of the struggle of Latin America, "We ask for support from our Cuban, Venezuelan, and Colombian *compañeros.* We also ask it of the Socialist and Communist *compañeros* in Chile; the nationalist *compañeros* in Brazil; the Uruguayans; the Argentine *Peronista compañeros;* the miners' unions and the peasants of Bolivia; the revolutionaries of Peru, Ecuador, Mexico, all Central America; all the workers, peasants, revolutionaries of our continent." Sosa and the Guatemalan guerrillas that followed argued an intellectual, operational, and even spiritual connection to a regional and global struggle.[443]

This chapter examines how the nature of Guatemalan exile in the borderlands changed, from the politicians described in chapter four, to guerrillas like Sosa. That transformation, in concert with national challenges to the PRI regime, transformed how key elements of the Mexican national security apparatus viewed and operated in the borderlands. By the 1960's the Mexican state had fully developed the institutions to better control the region, consisting of the Mexican military, the Federal Security Directorate (Dirección Federal de Seguridad, DFS), and the newly reconstituted Department General of Political and Social Investigations (Dirección

[442] Adolfo Gilly, "The Guerrilla Movement in Guatemala, Part II" *Monthly Review* 17 (1965): 33, 37. Upon his return to Mexico in 1966 Mexican security forces arrested Gilly. He would spend six years in Lecumberri Prison, a political prisoner caught in a round-up of "dissidents." See Adolfo Gilly, "What Exists Can't be True," *New Left Review* 64 (2010): 37-40.

[443] Gilly, "The Guerrilla Movement in Guatemala, Part II," 33-34.

General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, DGIPS) formed from the DIPS, with an additional mandate to monitor the social issues –student groups – in the country.[444] Starting in the 1960's and the beginning of the insurgent movement in Guatemala, these bureaus worriedly observed how the borderlands were utilized by the leftist guerrillas of Guatemala to rest, escape counter-insurgency operations, and gather supplies. They were also used as an entrance point into Mexico, as Guatemalans traveled to meet with sympathetic leftist students in Chiapas and Mexico City. This chapter focuses on these border crossings between 1960 and 1972. In the latter year it seemed the insurgency which produced insurgents like Sosa had been defeated. That same year, however, the second wave of the Guatemalan insurgency emerged from the borderlands and crossed into Guatemala. That second wave of insurgency, discussed in chapter six, would culminate in the bloody counter-insurgency of the 1980's, and the arrival of thousands of refugees to the borderlands.

Examining the Mexican the actions of the DFS, the military, and the DGIPS, towards these waves of insurgency demands that we look through the lens of national security at the history of political activity and state intervention in the region. The Mexican national security apparatus's attempts to manage the borderlands reflected their estimation that Guatemalan insurgents had the potential to threaten the state by encouraging or facilitating Mexican dissidents, or by bringing their revolution to Mexico. These exiles, in contrast to previous periods, no longer only presented a danger to Guatemala, but to the political and economic structure of Mexico.

[444] Alejandro Martínez Serrano, "Tres momentos para entender la seguridad nacional de México," *Revista de El Colegio de San Luis* 7 (2014): 245.

As social scientists such as Sergio Aguayo Quezada and Agustin Maciel Padilla have commented, the study of national security in a Mexican context has long been ignored. The term became — and to many still is -- associated with the horrific justification utilized by the PRI regime, as well as other Latin America regimes, to stifle dissent during the Cold War. It became a euphemism for repression, the study of it ignored in order to avoid giving justification to the terror of the past.[445] Also discouraging analysis of national security, perhaps, were the discredited machinations of a global United States security apparatus whose Cold War-era rhetoric of liberty was drowned in the hypocrisy of CIA trained torturers.[446] Beyond the violence, however, committed in what became known as the Dirty War in Mexico, the state had the simple goal of promoting domestic tranquility through the stifling of dissent.

Members of the Mexican national security apparatus had reason to be concerned with organized revolutionaries operating and possibly inspiring insurrection in Chiapas, as the social and economic conditions prevailing in the state had fueled rebellion elsewhere in Mexico. The 2006 report published by the Office of Special Prosecutor Ignacio Carrillo Prieto regarding the Mexican government's role in the Dirty War describes a domestic intelligence system that worked, above all, to ensure elite control of the economic and political levers of the state through official and extra-official means including torture, espionage, and corruption.[447] For example,

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[445] See the presidential directives of the Echeverría and López Portillo administrations concerning the insurgency in Guerrero, "Se inicia, a partir de entonces y durante toda la administración de Luis Echeverría y de José López Portillo una década en la que se intentará el aniquilamiento del grupo nacional rebelde. Puesto que en las acciones del Estado se sigue la doctrina del seguridad nacional y el principio de que 'hay que quitarle el agua al pez' en referencia a la población-el agua—que sirve el medio en que se mueve el guerrilla-el pez." Procuraduría General de la Republica, *Informe Histórico a la Sociedad Mexicana,* 506. Accessed March 28 2015, http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB209/informe/tema08.pdf

[446] Sergio Aguayo Quezada, "La seguridad nacional en México" in *La seguridad nacional: concepto y evolución en México,* ed., Agustín Maciel Padilla (San Luis Potosí: El Colegio de San Luis, 2002) ,7.

[447] Informe Histórico a la Sociedad Mexicana. 43, 285; *New York Times*, November 23, 2006. Mexicans were not alone in calls for greater inclusion. Greg Grandin notes that throughout post-World War II Latin America a coalition of middle-class, labor, and rural groups focused on political and economic modernization that meant a broader participation by non-elites. However, much as happened dramatically in Guatemala in 1954, as well as in Mexico, domestic security forces, oftentimes supported or guided by the United States, squashed these efforts under

O'Neill Blacker Hanson's examination of Genaro Vázquez, Lucio Cabañas, and the rural guerrilla movement of Guerrero touches upon the crushing of labor movements, and the continuing plague of *cacicazgo* which exacerbated the issue of land distribution.[448]

In many ways the Chiapan borderlands were similar to Guerrero: a small, powerful group, the so-called "familia chiapaneca," utilized official and extra official means to dominate the resources of the state. This group of powerful families, which traced its economic weight to extensive landowning during the Porfiriato, dominated the political and economic landscape, choking off access to the rich resources of the borderlands from the majority indigenous population.[449] Concentrated in the center of the state in Tuxtla Gutiérrez and nearby Chiapa de Corzo, they deftly managed the mechanisms of control that the mass politics of post-revolutionary Mexico offered: top-down social, political, and labor groups that ultimately served elite interests. Even powerful revolutionary momentum towards change, such as Cárdenas-era agrarian reform, was rendered mostly ineffective. As Thomas Benjamin notes regarding the history of Soconusco, after the surveying and parceling of land for new ejidos in the coffee-rich borderlands, large private farms held on to the best land, and for years afterward welcomed the cheap labor provided by ejidatarios that could not live off the poor soil given to them.[450]

Only a few miles to the south, across a border that the recently established CILA had only just begun to measure and know, a pulsing leftist guerrilla movement fought against a political and economic reality that resembled that of Chiapas. In their pronouncements, and

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the guise of anti-Communism. See Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 10-12.

[448] O'Neill Blacker-Hanson, "Cold War in the Countryside: Conflict in Guerrero, Mexico," *The Americas* 66 (2009): 181-210.

[449] Hubert Tejera Gaona, "Las Causas del Conflicto en Chiapas," in *La sociedad rural mexicana frente al nuevo milenio*, eds. Hubert Carton Grammont and Héctor Tejera Gaona, (México.: Plaza y Valdes, 1996), 300-302; Diana Guillen, "Atisbos de una clase política?" in *Chiapas: sociedad, economía, interculturalidad y política*, ed. Olivia Gall (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2001), 118-138

[450] Benjamin, *A Rich Land, a Poor People*, 170, 222, 204-209.

serving as a foundation for their ideology, was the goal of spreading the revolution over borders. It was a time of worldwide change, at least as envisioned by men and women in fatigues who carried copies of Ernesto "Che" Guevara's *Guerrilla Warfare*. As Daniel Castro notes, the success of the Cuban Revolution, as well as the articulation and popularity of the *foco* theory expounded first by Guevara and later by Régis Debray, led to the sprouting of Marxist insurgent movements throughout Latin America. These groups believed that dramatic military action could topple the right-wing governments throughout the region and each national guerrilla group could celebrate its own ride into Havana. Though, like the Guatemalans, these groups focused on national struggles, their struggles went beyond the local; they made up what Greg Grandin's has succinctly labeled "Revolutionary Time" in Latin America, a shared experience and struggle.[451] It was an experience that the Mexican government was trying to avoid, and they saw the Chiapan borderlands as possibly sucking them in.

Student Problems and Border Contraband

On October 1, 1968, a day before the tragic massacre at Tlatelolco's Plaza de Las Tres Culturas, a lengthy DFS report entitled "Student Problems" detailed the pulse and activities of Mexico's vibrant student movement at UNAM. Reported were the plans for the fateful rally the following day, the inability of UNAM officials to reach any type of agreement to stop the

[451] Régis Debray, "To Free the Present From the Past," *Revolution and Revolutionaries: Guerrilla Movements in Latin America*, ed., Daniel Castro (Wilmington: SR Books, 1999); 87-92; Luis de la Puente, "The Revolutionary Path," in *Revolution and Revolutionaries,* 113-122. A speech given by de la Puente in 1962, before he headed underground, echoes Sosa's international rhetoric, "the revolution in Peru is not an isolated revolution. The revolution in Peru is the revolution of America, and the revolution of America is the world's revolution…"; Greg Grandin, "Living in Revolutionary Time: Coming to Terms with Latin America's Long Cold War," in *A Century of Revolution: Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence During Latin America's Long Cold War*, eds. Greg Grandin and Gilbert Joseph (Durham: University Press 2010): 1-44.

general strike, and the summary of speeches given by student leaders and even a mother of a student killed by security forces Around two o'clock in the afternoon in the main walkway of the Ciudad Universitaria, Rosario Lerida Ida de Ríos told an estimated crowd of three thousand that "her son, [Lorenzo Ríos Ojeda] was the proof that the President has substituted force for reason….[and] that his spilled blood should serve as a stimulus for all those that have the privilege to be alive and free."[452] One student, Leopoldo Ernesto Zepeda Camarena, missed the dramatic speech. The DFS, along with the city's police, picked up the second-year law student earlier that day at his apartment in the Multifamiliar Alemán, along with two Guatemalans, Carlos Rolando Segura Medína and Mario Rene Solórzano Aldana, and a German, Otto Hans Zoeller. There, in a second floor apartment, the police found an R-2 rifle, fifteen rounds of ammunition, and two grenades.[453]

Under interrogation the group ostensibly told a story of transnational revolution and murder linking Yon Sosa and the Guatemalan guerrillas with the tumultuous activities and dreams of the radical-left organizations driving the Mexican student movement of 1968. The two Guatemalans had arrived in Mexico as "political exiles" the previous April, fleeing a government crackdown for forming part of an urban cell of MR-13. In Mexico they connected with Mario Suárez Jiménez, an economics student and member of the Trotskyist organization, Revolutionary Workers Party (Partido Obrero Revolucionario, POR). Suárez connected the exiles with other Trotskyists, including Gildardo Islas Carranza. Islas had recently been released

[452] Problema Estudiantil, México, October 1, 1968, AGN-ADFS, Expediente: 11-4-68 Legajo 124 Hojas 44.

[453] Problema Estudiantil, México, October 1, 1968, AGN-ADFS, Expediente: 11-4-68 Legajo 124 Hojas 44.

from prison, having been arrested two years previously with seven others, including Adolfo Gilly, and accused of planning to use student unrest to try to overthrow the government.[454]

Once across the border, the Guatemalan revolutionaries ostensibly joined their new Mexican companions in a violent campaign to gather resources for the revolution to the south. First, according to the DFS report, they murdered and stole a weapon from an army private serving as a night watchman at the Palacio de Deportes in early July. They then borrowed a Volkswagen from their German friend to go to Puebla. (The DFS emphasized that Zoeller, a manager at the Volkswagen plant, seemed clueless as to the extent of his involvement. He met the Guatemalans on an earlier trip to Guatemala, he was not a Trostkyist, and did not know about any of the revolutionary activity. As if to explain his involvement with this odd crew, the DFS speculated he most likely was a homosexual.) In Puebla, they robbed a car to later use to rob a bank in Mexico City, though they also managed — without explanation by the DFS of the motive — to gravely assault a daughter of former President Avila Camacho in Puebla, placing her in the hospital. The report ends by noting that members of the group knew noted student leader Socrates Amado Campos Lemus. Mario Rene Solórzano Aldana had talked with the prominent Mexican activist about the cause of the MR-13 and discussed urban guerrilla tactics.[455]

Mexican intelligence services had managed to infiltrate many of the student groups formed during the tumultuous 1960's, and no doubt this is how they discovered the Guatemalan exiles' activities. They were privy to the rumors, boasts, and plans of the various groups formed before and after the watershed year of 1968. That year, Mexican students were part of a global

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[454] Problema Estudiantil, México, October 1, 1968, AGN-ADFS, Expediente: 11-4-68 Legajo 124 Hojas 44; *The Telegraph* April 29, 1966.

[455]Problema Estudiantil, October 1, 1968, AGN-ADFS, Expediente: 11-4-68, Legajo: 124 Hojas 123-124.

wave of dissent, as they protested government corruption and rigged elections among other issues. In the lead up to the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, a harsh government crackdown culminated in the massacre on October 2. In part, the violent response by the government was fueled by reports from the DIGPS, which enhanced the paranoia of politicians such as President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz. The DGIPS failed to put into context, or analyze, the real possibility of the student groups they infiltrated actually carrying to fruition their ambitious plans, such as obtaining arms, scouting the Mexican military and police, and incorporating peasants from throughout the republic into a revolutionary force.[456]

The Mexican students who formed the POR and gathered arms in piecemeal fashion for the Guatemalan Revolution by attacking lone soldiers, formed part of the leftist tumult surging in 1960's Mexico. Established following the IV International in 1959, the perpetually small POR traversed the ideological battles that wracked Marxist groups of the time period. Though the POR enjoyed a short period of recruiting success after the Cuban Revolution, its numbers fell in 1961 when it broke with Castro over his alignment with the Soviet Union. It would regain some organizational strength in the years leading up to 1968, as its members, mostly students, recruited and organized on campus.[457]

Inspired by the wave of rebelliousness sweeping through Mexico, the POR's small numbers did not dissuade them from formulating grandiose plans, such as supporting Guatemalan guerrillas. Though it is unclear how much contact the group had with its fellow Trotskyists in Guatemala, their talk certainly must have alarmed those government officials reading intelligence reports. In April 1966 the group's "Political Executive Committee"

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[456] Aguayo, "La seguridad nacional en México," 132-134.

[457] Octavio Rodríguez Araujo, *La reforma política y los partidos en México* (México: Siglo Veintiuno, 1997), 205-206.

organized a weekend retreat to discuss their national and transnational revolutionary plans at a house in southern Mexico City, close to the UNAM. As an indication of the breadth of penetration by the DFS, this small group of Trotskyists included one undercover DFS agent. During the meeting they talked about working with and agitating among the nation's unions and students until they achieved their "final goal, which was to overthrow Díaz Ordaz." They also, according to the DFS report, focused on the fortunes of the MR-13 movement, noting that "...they would continue to send help [elementos] to reinforce" the guerrilla group.[458] Unlike later boasts in the meeting, such as that they had penetrated the Armed Forces, contact with the MR-13 seemed possible according to DFS reports. For example, only a year later three Guatemalans approached the DFS in Mexico City, one an incoming professor at the UNAM, another a student, offering to reveal Guatemalan guerrilla contacts in Mexico City to "avoid problems" during their stay.[459]

Any support for Guatemalan revolutionaries, such as a transfer of arms, would no doubt pass through the Chiapan borderlands. The DFS frequently followed up on intelligence passed to them from their Guatemalan counterparts, investigating Mexican borderlanders' complicity in supplying the insurgency across the border. For example, based on a tip from a police official from the northern Guatemalan city of Quetzaltenango, the DFS investigated an individual in the Ejido Santo Domingo in the municipality of Cacahoatán, located on the Suchiate River. There a nationalized Guatemalan, Victor Manuel López Pinto, had supposedly provided arms to three Guatemalans later arrested after they passed over the border. The DFS did not find any conclusive evidence of contraband activity; instead, all they learned was that Manuel had held

[458] See "Informe de la DFS sobre las actividades del Partido Obrero Revolucionario (Trotskista) (PORT). El documento está fechado el 12 de abril de 1966" in *Nexos* 243 (1998): 13-18.

[459] Se encuentran en México el Ing. Quim. Julio Rodríguez Aldama, México, October 16, 1967 AGN-DGIPS Caja 1656-b Expediente 6 Hoja 5.

local government positions with the city government and that he was a nurse with Social Security, and also a teacher. Though they concluded that "at the moment" no arms were passing over their border, they also noted that due to the terrain and the lack of a permanent national government presence on the border, "it's probable that at any moment these activities could start again."[460]

Closing off the border would have been a key concern for Guatemalan security forces during this period as they were in the midst of a United States trained and funded counter-insurgency campaign. Beginning in 1966, future president Coronel Manuel Arana Osorio led a nearly 8,000 man army to eradicate the remnants of the MR-13, as well as those of a group that had splintered off from it a couple of year earlier, the Rebel Armed Forces (Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes, FAR).[461] With the help of right-wing paramilitary groups like the Mano Blanco composed of off-duty police, the army murdered, in secret or openly, labor leaders, students, and anyone else suspected of sympathy with an increasingly decimated insurgency. A favorite of the ruling oligarchy, Arana was elected president in 1970, returning the military to power, and ensuring the continuation of the counter-insurgency campaign.[462]

To the consternation, however, of Guatemalan officials, Mexico could not seem to close the Chiapan borderlands to contraband traffic. At times this frustration, plus the heightened

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[460] Investigaciones efectuada en Tapachula, Chis.y la zona del Soconucso, México, August 9, 1965 AGN-ADFS Expediente 6-1 Legajo 1 Hojas 69-70.

Occasionally, Mexican officials caught contrabandists, such as the case of group of eight Mexicans and Guatemalans caught and processed on September 29, 1966. They were accused of sending guns to guerrilla groups in Guatemala that they obtained, according to the charges, from a source at the Department of Military Industry. See *El Día,* September 29, 1966.

[461] In 1964 soon after Gilly's interview, the Trotskyist-line espoused by Sosa caused a break with the Soviet/Cuba aligned Turcios, fragmenting the Guatemalan struggle and leading to the establishment of the Turcios-led Rebel Armed Forces. See Marco Antonio Yon Sosa, México, May 19, 1970, AGN-ADFS Expediente 76-5-67. Hoja 290 Legajo 1

[462] Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (New York: Norton, 1983), 170-171; Kate Doyle and Carlos Osorio, "U.S. Policy in Guatemala, 1966-1996," *National Security Archive Electronic Briefing* Book No. 11, Accessed January 15, 2015, http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB11/docs/.

vigilance by the Guatemalan military at the border, led to violence. Such was the case on February 28, 1966, when five Mexican borderlanders were shot at, and two were killed, by the Guatemalan National Guard as they were swimming across the Suchiate River. The incident, only a few years after Guatemalan fighter planes strafed a Mexican fishing fleet, caused widespread condemnation in Mexico. The national press reported the Mexicans were simply swimming innocently in the Suchiate River, while Guatemala claimed they were smugglers.[463] On March 2, Mexico presented the Guatemalan government with a formal note of protest. In reaction, Guatemala temporarily closed the border.[464]

The Guatemalan government defended its actions as protecting against guerrillas receiving supplies, while investigating Mexican security forces discovered it to be a simple case of smuggling. Early in the morning on the second, Secretary of Interior Luis Echeverría phoned the Mayor of Ciudad Hidalgo to personally hear about the details behind the incident. He, and the DFS, found out that the two dead Mexicans were known smugglers, bringing over cigarettes, chilies, and cookies to Guatemala in exchange for cheap clothes and toys from Japan. That day, as evidenced by a large bag found on the Mexican riverbank, the men were transporting tequila, aguardiente, chilies, and beer instead of innocently swimming in the Suchiate. They drew attention from the military police only because one had tried to rob a Tecún Unám merchant, who alerted the authorities regarding the fleeing men. As further proof of just how pervasive smuggling was, as DFS investigators were visiting Ciudad Hidalgo they caught two men from Tuxtla Gutiérrez in the middle of the Suchiate River, floating a bag of goods across to Guatemala. Unaware of the heightened vigilance on the border, the would be smugglers were

[463] *Novedades* March 1, 1966
[464] *La Prensa,* March 2, 1966.

caught with dice, cards, and other material for games of chance to sell in Tecún Unám in anticipation of an upcoming fair.[465]

By the early evening of March 2, as the Mexican investigators finished their investigation, the border reopened. As reported by local Mexican officials, the Guatemalan Consul crossed the border to meet with them, declaring that "some Mexican smugglers…were not motive enough to close the border."[466] The incident gave some Mexican editorialists motivation to drag up the tense and often violent history of the Chiapan borderlands. On March 2, *El Universal* highlighted the nineteenth century territorial dispute over Soconusco, the attack on La Fama in 1939, and the recent episode regarding the Guatemalan fishing fleet.[467] Other editorials did point out, however, the recent successes in binational cooperation, as evidenced by the work of the International Boundary and Water Commission between Guatemala and Mexico.[468]

As tensions died down, in part helped by the Chiapan governor sending an extra force of Judicial Police to the border, rumors and accusations of guerrilla contraband continued.[469] For example, in July 1965 the DFS reported that Guatemalan authorities had informed them that a yacht with a United States flag was carrying arms down the Mexican coast, from Ensenada to the Guatemalan town of Sipacate, a few miles south of the border.[470] On, November 3, 1966, Coronel Manuel J. Alfaro, the recently appointed head of the Guatemalan Ambulatory Police, announced that Mexico was a major source of contraband arms for the country's guerrilla movements.[471]

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[465] Tapachula, Chiapas, México, March 3, 1965, AGN-ADFS Expediente 6-1 Legajo 1 Hoja 36-38
[466] Ciudad Cuauhtémoc, Chiapas, México, March 3, 1965, AGN-ADFS Expediente 6-1 Legajo 1 Hoja 39.
[467] *El Universal, March 2, 1965.*
[468] *Novedades, March 3, 1965.*
[469] Ciudad Cuauhtémoc, Chiapas, México, July 29, 1965 AGN-ADFS Expediente 6-1 Legajo 1 Hoja 63.
[470] Estado de Chiapas, México, July 23, 1965 AGN-ADFS Expediente 6-1 Legajo 1 Hoja 67.
[471] "Estado de Chiapas, México, November, 3 1966 AGN-ADFS Expediente 6-1 Legajo 1 Hoja 76.

Though it is possible that Mexican arms smugglers were motivated by profit as much as by ideology, there is evidence that Guatemalan guerrillas also found Chiapan borderlanders sympathetic to their cause. Guatemalan intelligence services continued to provide the DFS with information about the Mexicans aiding the guerrilla movement. For example, in December 1966 the DFS investigated the finca of Carlos Avendaño outside of Huixtla, a few dozen miles north of Tapachula, after Guatemalan intelligence services reported that the Chiapaneco was using a radio transmitter in his house to broadcast anti-government propaganda to northern Guatemala.[472] A similar investigation a few years later focused on Felipe Roberto López, Commissioner of Ejido Santo Domingo in Unión Juárez, which as the report noted, was only a kilometer away from the border. There, according to the rumors, in the home of a local campesino, López often met with an executive member of the Mexican Communist Party from Mexico City and Guatemalan guerrillas, who often sought refuge in the Mexican community.[473]

One of those guerrillas seeking refuge in Mexico was Yon Sosa, a fact made clear to the public on the morning of May 20, 1970, when the Mexican government announced the successful pursuit and killing of the Guatemalan guerrilla leader in the Lacandon Jungle, southeast of Comitán, by Mexican military personnel. The revolutionary Mario Payeras, who only a few years after Sosa's death became intimately acquainted with the Chiapan borderlands as his point of refuge in the next phase of the Guatemalan Civil War, described the site of his predecessor's death: "all the water in southeast Mexico and the Guatemalan Sierra Madres seems to seems to converge here, forming the vast basin of the Usumacinta. It's a water world, with cities of stone and parasitic flora…Above, a universe of parrots and other noisy species confer a

[472] "Estado de Chiapas, December 21, 1966 AGN-ADFS Expediente 6-1 Legajo 1 Hoja 83.

[473] Felipe Roberlo López Commissiaro Ejidal,"February 15, 1968, AGN-DGIPS Caja 1656-b Expediente 6 Hoja 20.

sense of invisible paths. Here was the site of death."[474] A less poetic version of the revolutionary's demise appeared in the weekly regional paper *La Voz del Sureste.* Its coverage followed the official government line of denigrating the revolutionaries as bandits and its headline sounded like a warning to future adventurers: "Mexico is not, and will not be a Refuge for Foreign Criminals."[475]

A few days after his death, the DFS issued a twenty nine page history of Sosa's life based on testimony from four former members of MR-13 who currently lived in exile in Mexico City. They included Armando Solis, who grew up with Sosa and fought with him, and a Dr. Jorge Flesh, a Mexican national and acquaintance of the dead revolutionary, who claimed he did not belong to MR-13. At times the details about Sosa's life as a revolutionary had nuances of sympathy and admiration, describing, for example, his sense of humor in camp, his habit of snoring loudly at night, and his "cold blood" in the face of danger. They also revealed Sosa's confidence in his contacts in Mexico and the possible reasons behind his death. The four former companions of Sosa revealed that fifteen days before the ambush by the Mexican military, Sosa had obtained a large amount of money from a kidnapping. He and two companions took the payoff north to Chiapas, traversing well-traveled and known routes to buy arms from contacts, whom the four claimed not to know. They said that Sosa knew the jungles and paths of the Chiapan borderlands well enough not to be ambushed. The only explanation behind his demise, claimed the four to the DFS, must have been a betrayal by his former communist comrades to both the Mexican and Guatemalan armies.[476]

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[474] Mario Payeras, "La Tumba de Yon Sosa," *La Otra Guatemala* 11 (1990): 50.

[475] *La Voz del Sureste* May 25, 1970

[476] Antecedentes: Marco Antonio Yon Sosa. México, May, 22, 1970, AGN-ADFS Expediente 6-1 Legajo 1 Hoja 136, 147-148. May, 22, 1970.

Beginning in April 1970, in part in response to the state of siege called for by President Arana, the Mexican military worked with their Guatemalan counterparts to help close the vise on the insurgents, redoubling their border patrols.[477] The 29th Infantry Battalion based in Tapachula worked in concert with the Guatemalan military to prevent any insurgents from escaping north into the Chiapan borderlands. Mexican military personnel traveled on Guatemalan helicopters down the Suchiate River, scouting out crossing points and arranging maximum coverage of the borderlands for both nations' patrols. In Tapachula, security forces concentrated on hotels as well as railroad and bus stations.[478] So intense was the Guatemalan effort to patrol the border that a military helicopter surprised employees of the Mexican Federal Electric Commission at a remote hydrometric station near the Lacandon Jungle. Upon landing, a Guatemalan patrol asked if they were in Mexico, apologized, explained they were looking for guerrillas and flew back south.[479]

The heightened vigilance did not round up any significant number of subversives escaping into Mexico, in part due to the inability of the Mexican security forces to control a relatively unpopulated and, until recently, undeveloped border long ignored by the state. At times the DFS acknowledged this in their reporting. For example, a patrol by officials from the Military and Immigration Services outside of Ciudad Juárez around the Tacaná Volcano, approximately twenty miles northeast of Tapachula, found an isolated coffee estate straddling the border. There only border monuments every two kilometers demonstrated where the international boundary lay, and with "no natural or constructed boundaries… with total liberty, anyone can enter either country." In interviews these officials conducted with the majority

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[477] Estado de Chiapas. México, April 8, 1970. AGN-ADFS Expediente 6-1 Legajo 1 Hoja 87.

[478] Estado de Chiapas. México, July 14, 1970 AGN-ADFS Expediente 6-1 Legajo 1 Hoja 148; AGN-ADFS "Estado de Chiapas." July 15, 1970. Expediente 6-1 Legajo 1 Hoja 149.

[479] Estado de Chiapas, México, May 12, 1970 AGN-ADFS Expediente 6-1 Legajo 1 Hoja 110.

Guatemalan workforce, no one claimed to have seen any guerrillas, but they claimed to have seen a number of Guatemalan military patrols.[480]

Finally it must have been difficult to distinguish between suspected guerrillas and the normal flow of transnational workers, travelers, and smugglers that, like members of FAR, sought to avoid representatives of the Guatemalan and Mexican states. For example, In April 1970 members of the Mexican military investigated the claims of a number of articles written in the Guatemalan press indicating that a large number of FAR guerrillas had slipped through to Mexico. Articles like these, insinuating that the Mexican government offered safe-haven to "terrorists," often prompted the security forces to react. However, through a source in the Guatemalan military they learned that the revolutionaries mentioned in the articles were more likely smugglers and robbers than revolutionaries. Utilizing caves as hideouts and wearing the uniforms of the Guatemalan police and military, they had been traveling and committing crimes up and down the border around Malcatan, Ocos, and El Tumbador. Regardless of who they were, General Luis Casillas, commander of Mexico's 31st military zone, order a "meticulous search" of the border.[481] It might have been these patrols that, a few weeks later, arrested a group of luckless Guatemalan laborers at the border and brought them to Comitán for questioning. They determined they were not guerrillas and instead were contracted by a Tenosique businessman to cut trees.[482]

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[480] Estado de Chiapas, México, April 24, 1970, AGN-ADFS Expediente 6-1 Legajo 1 Hoja 104.
[481] Estado de Chiapas, México, July 27, 1970 AGN-ADFS Expediente 6-1 Legajo 1 Hoja 154-157.
[482] Estado de Chiapas, México, August 8, 1970. AGN-ADFS Expediente 6-1 Legajo 1 Hoja 171.

Gaspar Ilom and the End of the First Wave

By the time the Mexican army caught the contract laborers passing through the Chiapan borderlands, the armed revolutionary movement in Guatemala was a shell of its former self. The death of Sosa effectively ended the MR-13. The remaining group, the FAR, in addition to suffering tactical defeats under the Arana-led counterinsurgency, also suffered from schisms within the Guatemalan left. In 1968, for example, the FAR broke with the PGT over the latter's lack of commitment to armed struggle, thus losing some of its support in urban centers.[483]

An August 1971 police raid on an apartment in the Condesa neighborhood of Mexico City, the reported FAR propaganda center in the country, seemed to indicate the declining fortune of the group as well as the importance that Mexican borderland communities still played in the revolutionaries' contact with Guatemala. There a mimeograph produced pamphlets, stamped with "printed in Guatemala," with titles like, "Third World," which provided details on guerrilla tactics, and "New Politics in Culture, Science, and Education," which provided instructions on bomb making. In addition, the police found a pair of guns and a small amount of plastic for bomb making. Most significantly, the search uncovered the organizational chart of the FAR, including their plans for propaganda in Mexico.[484]

Interrogation of the occupants revealed an operation attempting to continue its work in the face of increased pressure. One occupant of the apartment, Manuel Barrios, had recently arrived from Guatemala. Weeks earlier, wounded with a bullet in the stomach, he had managed

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[483] Susanne Jonas,*The Battle for Guatemala: Rebels, Death Squads, and U.S. Power* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 136; Luis Gutiérrez and Esteban Ríos, "El movimiento armado en Guatemala," *Cuadernos Políticos* (1981); 98.

[484] "Elementos de las Fuerza Armadas Rebeldes de Guatemala que Operan en México, México, August, 9, 1971 AGN-ADFS Expediente 12-20 Legajo 71. Hoja 3

to slip by army patrols monitoring the Suchiate to rest at a safe house in Ciudad Hidalgo. From there, a contact in Tapachula transported him and the guns found in the apartment to a Mexico City doctor, who removed the bullet from an alleged "hunting accident."

The other three occupants, the Guatemalans Alvaro Carpio, Rodrigo Asturias Amado, and his wife, the Bolivian exile María del Rosario Valenzuela Sotomayor, claimed they had begun producing propaganda only three months earlier. The DFS certainly had reason to doubt the claim of at least one of them, Rodrigo Asturias. Son of the Guatemalan Nobel Prize winning author, Miguel Ángel Asturias, in 1962 the younger Asturias joined a short-lived attempt by the PGT to lead an insurgent action. Led by a rebellious colonel, Paz Tejada, the movement barely managed to start as a tipped-off Guatemalan military unit ambushed the two dozen man would-be guerrilla force as it headed into the Sierra. The action killed most of the men, while Paz Tejada escaped north, swimming across the Suchiate. He eventually ended up working with a sympathetic Lázaro Cárdenas on the Balsas River Commission in central Mexico, part of the massive public works projects begun by Miguel Alemán and explored in chapter three.[485] Asturias, meanwhile, was captured and held in jail for months until President Ydígoras sent him into exile in Mexico out of respect for his father. Later in life, while campaigning for president of Guatemala in 2003, Asturias sardonically remembered his entrance into Mexico, saying "I was thrown in the Suchiate River."[486] Both he and Paz Tejada found refuge in Mexico through the Chiapan borderlands. In Mexico, the young Asturias quickly dried himself off and became

[485] Carlos Figueroa Ibarra, "Rebeldes en el ejército guatemalteco, el insólito Coronel Paz Tejada," in Enrique Camacho Navarro, *El rebelde contemporáneo en el Circuncaribe: imágenes y representaciones.* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Centro Coordinador Difusor de Estudios Latinoamericanos, 2006), 151-155.

[486] "Interview with Rodrigo Asturias, September 6, 2003," Accessed January 20, 2015, http://www.mansurjohnson.com/content/interview-rodrigo-asturias.

one of the many Guatemalan exiles living in Mexico City, some dating from the Árbenz years.[487] He taught courses at the National University, and worked as an editor for the Fondo de Cultura Económica, and later at Siglo XXI.[488]

One month after being caught by the DFS, Asturias was free. It is likely that his famous father, as he had before, pulled some strings to arrange his release. At least we know that he did for his son's wife. According to the couple's son, Sandino Asturias Valenzuela, the DFS only released his mother, and did not follow through on its plan to turn her over to the Guatemalan military because of the intervention of his grandfather. Asturias explained that the Nobel-prize winning author called President Echeverría, saying simply, "they kidnapped my daughter."[489]

Soon after being let go, Asturias was back into Guatemala. He broke with FAR, and adopted the nom de guerre, Gaspar Ilom, borrowed from the indigenous leader in his father's novel, *Men of Maize*. He lived in the Sierra leading the new rebel group, Organization of the People in Arms (Organización del Pueblo en Armas, OPRA). The OPRA was critical of FAR's *foco* approach and failure to incorporate indigenous Guatemalans.[490] Asturias and the OPRA's approach marked a dramatic change in organization from the first wave, as they sought to learn from the defeat of previous groups by including whole communities in the struggle against the Guatemalan regime. For the next eight years, the OPRA and Asturias were quiet as they concentrated on organizing indigenous laborers and communities in the western Pacific coffee

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[487] Guadalupe Rodríguez de Ita, "Exiliados guatemaltecos en México: una experiencias recurrente," *Pacarina del Sur. Revista del pensamiento crítico latinoamericano* 9 (2011) http://www.pacarinadelsur.com/29-misc/indices/356-numero-9-octubre-diciembre-2011.

[488] Interview with Rodrigo Asturias, September 6, 2003.

[489] Francisco Mauricio Martínez, "Martin hijo de Gaspar, nieto del Gran Moyas," *Revista D* 118 (2008) http://servicios.prensalibre.com/pl/domingo/archivo/revistad/2008/febrero/10/frente.shtml

[490] Marta Harnecker, *Pueblos en armas* (México: Ediciones Era 1984), 141.

zone of Guatemala. In 1979, they announced their presence in a dramatic fashion by attacking a finca in Quetzaltenango, and later the border town of San Marcos.[491]

The Kidnapped Hunters

Soon after Asturias left Mexico to continue the armed struggle, another group did the same, but in a spectacular fashion that captured the attention of the whole of Mexico and put in doubt the Mexican government's claims that no guerrillas operated in the Chiapan borderlands. On January 19, 1972, in the Lacandon Jungle, a little more than a dozen of the incipient members of the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres, EGP**)** briefly kidnapped a group of hunters from Mexico City, burned a pair of planes, and robbed a remote hydrometric station of the CILA. They then crossed the border, pursued by both the Mexican and Guatemalan armies.

In his 1982 memoir, *Days of the Jungle,* EGP co-founder Mario Payeras explained how the group established itself in the Chiapan borderlands. A small handful of Guatemalans, many having broken off from FAR, others student activists like Payeras, arrived in early 1971, on the banks of the Río Ixcán, close to where Sosa had camped and died. Like other Guatemalans living in the borderlands they posed as Mexicans, or at least claimed to be Mexican if anybody asked. They cleared out some of the jungle, built housing, and planted a few crops. To all appearances they appeared to be just another group of borderlanders that frequently utilized the

[491] Charles D Brockett, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 122-123. *Political Movements and Violence in Central America*

resources of the region regardless of nationality. Like exiles before them, they constituted a base, a rear guard, for a Guatemalan revolution.[492]

For months they adapted to the jungle – when needed they bought many of their supplies in Comitán -- utilizing their house as a base from which to strike out into the heavy undergrowth and establish camps just across the border in Guatemala, where they hid supplies and arms. These frequent incursions demonstrated the large gaps in the Mexican military's vigilance of the border, which was explained in part by the focus on the more heavily populated areas of Soconusco and in part by the simple fact that any vigilance of the region was hampered by a dense forest that boundary surveyors from CILA had found to be almost unpassable.[493]

This clandestine existence was threatened at the beginning of 1972 as the group began to receive occasional visits by hunters. Payeras's group, alone and without external support, recalled "Che's defeat in Bolivia" as well as Sosa's death and became afraid the hunters would tell the Mexican authorities. Upon the next visit by a group on January 19 they decided to act, accelerating the schedule of their planned entrance into Guatemala. They kidnapped the hunters, attacked an isolated CILA landing field on the border, took provisions, and set two planes on fire, whose owners Payeras claimed to have collaborated with the Mexican military in Sosa's death. They then stole motor boats and set off down the Lacantun River to Guatemala. Avoiding the Mexican and Guatemalan armies who were searching for them, they managed to make their way south to the Xaclbal River, floating into the bush with medicine, arms, and food stolen from the Mexican camp. They then started a guerrilla war which would last over twenty years.[494]

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[492] Mario Payeras, *Days of the Jungle: The Testimony of a Guatemalan Guerrillero, 1972-1976* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 21.
[493] Ibid., 22-23.
[494] Ibid., 24-25.

Payeras and his companions left behind a sensational story for the Mexican press about guerrillas living in the borderlands and kidnapping hapless hunters. A typical headline appeared in *El Sol de México,"*Guatemalan Guerrillas Kidnap 6 Mexicans: Threatened to Kill Them to Avenge Yon Sosa." Readers could learn about the anguished wives of the hunters, or how one of their brothers had left from Mexico City to find and rescue his sibling by himself.[495] Speculation ran rampant that the guerrillas had already killed the men, or took them across the border to Guatemala.[496] In a hastily conceived press conference, President Echeverría declared that the defense department had taken charge of the investigation. A reported three squadrons of troops, along with the Chiapan State Judicial Police, were headed to the region, though one article warned that the area, "is swampy and full of undergrowth. The search will be difficult."[497]

But even as the papers seemed to be ready to fill their pages with stories of grieving widows, the hunters were released and in Mexico City. According to the men, they had been dropped off by guides on January 10 close to the Ixcán River, a new spot to hunt on what constituted their third trip to the region. After setting up camp they noticed a "ranchito" close by, with pigs, chicken, and various plantings. Soon, a man identifying himself as Paco (Julio César Macias) arrived at the hunter's camp, inviting them to stay at his ranch with himself and a couple of men identified as his workers. For eight days, claimed the hunters, they slept with the guerrillas. They ate, shared stories, and even in one case went on a jaguar hunt with Paco. Finally, one morning a man arrived to talk with Paco and suddenly, according to the startled hunters, they were surrounded by guerrillas that appeared from the jungle pointing machine guns at them. Their erstwhile host Paco informed them they were his prisoners.[498] For a day and a

[495] *El Sol de Mexico,* January 20, 1972.
[496] *Novedades,* January 22nd, 1972.
[497] *El Sol de Mexico*, January 22nd, 1972.
[498] *El Universal,* January 25, 1972.

half the guerrillas marched them through the jungle, as Paco took pains to ensure that they would tell the press that they were treated well once they were released. He even told his prisoners to make sure to emphasize the guerrilla's solidarity with the Mexican people.[499]

Upon their return to Mexico City, instead of being greeted with open arms, the Mexican security apparatus attempted to cast doubts on the hunters' story of Guatemalan guerrillas in the borderlands. A press release by the Secretariat of Defense qualified the kidnappers as simple bandits.[500] The Secretary of Defense, General Hermenegildo Cuenca Díaz, came up with the dubious defense that if the kidnappers did not have any insignia, uniforms, or carry a flag they were not guerrillas.[501] Cuenca also cast doubt on the hunters themselves. In a press conference he asked, "isn't it odd that such a large group was wandering through the jungle?" He added that these men who called themselves hunters did not request permission to travel to the area, and besides, the so-called guerrillas did not even take their guns or money. "We are going to be investigating," noted Cuenca.[502]

Cuenca Díaz needed to assure both the Mexican public and the Guatemalan government that the Chiapan borderlands were not a place of refuge for guerrillas. Reporters revealed an important motivation for this denial and the denigration of the Guatemalans as "bandits" in the press conference: the guerrillas of Lucio Cabañas and Genaro Vásquez.[503] Asked about the army's search for these Guerrero revolutionaries, Cuenca responded, "How are we going to send troops for two men? It is a police matter." In fact, the year before the army had launched

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[499] *Excelsior,* January 25, 1972.
[500] *El Día,* January 25, 1972.
[501] *El Sol,* January 27, 1972.
[502] *El Nacional,* January 27, 1972.
[503] The general referring to both the Guatemalans and the Mexicans in the two states of the southeast noted, "those that say they are [guerrillas] run and live like any other delinquent…Where is the help they say they bring with the money they obtain from kidnapping, assaults, and other crimes for some noble cause? "*El Sol,* January 27, 1972.

Operation *Telaraña*, a large-scale campaign that failed to crush the guerrilla movement in that state. The birth of similar rural, as well as new urban guerrilla movements that year, along with attention grabbing actions such as kidnappings, frustrated and worried the Mexican government. Cabañas and Vásquez symbolized the government's impotence to crush a revolutionary movement. This new story of the kidnapped hunters seemed to be another instance of growing insecurity.[504]

The DFS investigation into the hunters' story uncovered the extent of the Guatemalan guerrillas' penetration in the borderlands as well as the potential for an insurgency to develop in the region. The investigators determined that a pair of Mexicans living in Comitán, posing as family members of Paco, helped to establish of the camp. The location, noted the report, was carefully chosen close to the Guatemalan-Mexican border to serve as a "place of refuge for subversives from both Guatemala and Mexico."[505] General Casillas, commander of the 31st military region, who personally directed the search for the guerrillas, reluctantly praised the chosen strategic location. The jungle growth and numerous navigable rivers made the Lacandon an ideal place for "delinquent groups." Citing the case of Guerrero, the general recommended a campaign to beat the guerrillas in the borderlands once and for all or risk future costly campaigns in the regions against a future larger insurgency. To that end he requested additional motor boats and planes to track guerrillas in the vast region.[506] Of course, Casillas never caught the guerrillas, who were already across the border in Guatemala.

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[504] Kate Doyle, "The Dawn of Mexico's Dirty War: Lucio Cabañas and the Party of the Poor," National Security Archive, December 5, 2003 http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB105/.

[505] Estado de Chiapas, Mexico, January 27, 1972, AGN-ADFS Expediente 6-1 Legajo 1 Hoja 254.

[506] Estado de Chiapas, Mexico, January 28, 1972, AGN-ADFS Expediente 6-1 Legajo 1 Hoja 256.

Conclusion

Less than a few months earlier all seemed calm in the borderlands. The May 1971 Echeverría and Arana border summit, during which they posed for photographs alongside the Suchiate and discussed joint infrastructure development, also reinforced Mexico's support of the Guatemalan executive's strategy of handling internal dissent by patrolling the Chiapan borderlands. A compliant Mexican press allowed Arana to present a sympathetic portrait of himself to the Mexican public. For example, he explained his personal connection with Guatemala's numerous campesinos: "I come from a humble background, because of that I understand, maybe, the problem of our people, of our campesinos, of our middle class. I have identified with them, and my government is fighting to bring to them, to the rural areas, to the marginal areas, order, progress, help, education, health, and wellbeing.[507] At a press conference a day after Arana left, a reporter quizzed Echeverría about whether the two had talked about Guatemalan concerns regarding the incursion of guerrillas into Mexico. They did not, explained Echeverría. Instead they only concentrated on the themes outlined in their joint press release: cooperation, friendship, and exploiting the natural resources of the borderland.[508]

Though it is possible the two never discussed one of the pressing issues occupying their respective militaries, it is also likely that Echeverría, along with the country's intelligence sources, thought that the Guatemalan insurgency no longer posed a threat. The first wave of the Guatemalan civil war had crested, insurgent groups like the FAR had lost their leadership, declined in membership, and no longer posed a threat to the state. The DFS raid that prompted Asturias to return to Guatemala, and the kidnapped hunters, laid the foundations of the second

[507] Estado de Chiapas, AGN-ADGIPS Caja 1128 B Expedientes 458.
[508] Estado de Chiapas, AGN-ADGIPS Caja 1128 B Expedientes 468.

wave of the Guatemalan insurgency that became active towards the end of the 1970's. Then, a broader movement composed of trade unions, students, and the Catholic Church filled in the gap left by groups like FAR and MR-13, and took up the struggle against the oppressive governments of Arana and later General Kjell Eugenio Laugerud (1974-1978).[509] As before the Chiapan borderlands became a main stage of activity, as well as a gateway for this second wave of insurgency to operate in Mexico.

[509] Gabriel Aguilera Peralta and John Beverly. "Terror and Violence as Weapons of Counterinsurgency in Guatemala" *Latin American Perspectives.* 7 (1980): 98-101; Luis Gutiérrez and Esteban Ríos, "El movimiento armado en Guatemala," *Cuadernos Políticos* (1981); 98.

Chapter Six:
Guerrillas, Refugees, and the Church

Sometime in 1983, a short time after thousands of Guatemalan Refugees had settled in dozens of makeshift camps and in Mexican communities in the Chiapan borderlands, the Mexican Secretariat of Defense (Secretaria de Defensa, SDN) compiled a presentation entitled, "The Situation of the Guatemalan Refugees and National Security." The outline of the information in bullet points, the accompanying maps, and the recommendation that a "national security group" further analyze a potentially volatile situation in depth give the impression that the presentation was intended to portray the gravity of the situation to a Mexican civilian leadership already worried about internal stability in the nation's poorest state. The talking points painted a grim picture of the political and economic consequences of the refugees' arrival: incursions by the Guatemalan military; infiltration of Guatemalan guerrillas "proselytizing" with their revolutionary propaganda; Mexican workers displaced by cheap Guatemalan labor; a scarcity of basic foodstuffs; health and sanitary problems; and "land tenure challenges" due to the expanding Guatemalan camps that exacerbated the decades long struggle of poor Chiapanecos for land.[510]

The maps of the Chiapan borderlands illustrated the paths taken by the estimated 39,798 refugees that had moved from Guatemala into Mexico during the previous three years. Forty-two blue dots marked the locations of refugee camps, while another map illustrated the deployment of the forces of the 36th Military Division. A color-coded map broke down the composition of the thousands of Guatemalans; nearly two-thirds of the refugees were women and children.

[510] La Situación de los Refugiados Guatemaltecos y la Seguridad Nacional, AH-SDN, Caja 19 Expediente 62 Hojas 586-602. Though no precise date is listed, based on the numbers of refugees listed, 39,798, and the location of the refugee's camps close to the border, before they were moved to Campeche and Quintana Roo, the time frame of 1983 is a good estimate

Many of the maps explained a rudimentary version of the Guatemalan Civil War and the role played by the borderlands in supporting the guerrilla movement. One showed a centrally located "Guatemalan Army" pushing "Rebels" north towards Mexico. Another highlighted the Chiapan borderlands, where the refugees settled, and an arrow with "logistical support" pointed south to the "Rebels." [511]

The rebels located by the SDN map were the EGP, whose founding members were introduced in chapter five, capturing national attention in Mexico after kidnapping a small group of hunters in the borderlands. By late 1979 the EGP had become the largest and most active resistance movement in Guatemala, leading the second wave of insurgency in the Guatemalan Civil War, which coincided with a broader regional resurgence of guerrilla movements in Central America dating from the beginning of the 1970's.[512] This second wave, like the first, operated in the borderlands and also crossed the porous border to travel into the interior of Mexico. As in the sixties, the Mexican national security apparatus, vigilant against possible connections formed between Guatemalan guerrillas and Mexican dissidents, led patrols in the borderlands and raids in Mexico City. In the estimation, however, of the Mexican national security apparatus, this second wave presented a more potent challenge to domestic tranquility for two reasons: the activity of dissident groups in the borderlands connected to the charismatic Bishop Samuel Ruiz, and the arrival of the refugees. The region seemed to possess a perfect storm of conditions to encourage insurgency that could pull Mexico into the Central American conflicts of the 1980's,

[511]La Situación de los Refugiados Guatemaltecos y la Seguridad Nacional, Archivo General de la Nación-Secretaria de Defensa Nacional Caja 19 Expediente 62 Hojas 589-590, 593, 598, 599. (Here forth AGN-SDN)

[512] For the origins of this second wave that arose after the death of "Che" Guevara in Bolivia in 1967, symbolically ending the first wave of insurgent movements , see Timothy P Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes Since 1956* (Princeton.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 209-230.

with the refugees being the factor that could push the borderlands out of the control of the Mexican state.

The arrival of the refugees constituted a new dimension of Guatemalan exile that greatly complicated the Mexican national security apparatus's ability to manage the borderlands. The sheer numbers of refugees meant that their exile experience was mostly anonymous. The key piece of information crucial to domestic intelligence networks in determining an exile's threat to the Mexican state, identity, was impossible to obtain amongst the thousands of hungry Guatemalans that sought safety in the borderlands, and which looked suspiciously on a Mexican state that treated them as potential insurgents. (In contrast, domestic security agents had refined techniques of targeting guerrillas during the Dirty War). In this void of information, Mexican national security officials tied the refugees' supposed goals and identity to the guerrillas that utilized the borderlands, to the activist church of Samuel Ruiz and, in a wider sense, to the Central American insurgencies that had plunged countries such as El Salvador and Nicaragua into bloody civil wars.

Luis Ortíz Monasterio, who led the Mexican Commission for Refugee Aid (Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados, COMAR) from 1981-1983, summed up the heightened fears of the leadership of the Mexican state upon facing the arrival of the refugees:

> "Of course, with the issue of the Central American civil war, of the possible Central American guerrilla, and the fact that it included Chiapas, the most vulnerable, the most remote [region made us afraid that what happened to us in Texas could repeat, we could lose it [Chiapas].We could have lost territory, lost energy, Chiapas has the majority of the dam, it [the fear] was logical.[513]

[513] Interview by author with Luis Ortíz Monasterio, December 19, 2012, San Cristóbal de las Casas. Before assuming the position of director of COMAR Ortíz had been a consul in the Mexican embassy in Dallas,

The Guerrilla Army of the Poor and the Second Wave of Insurgency

The rapid growth of the EGP, from a few dozen men escaping into Guatemala in 1972, to a massive insurgent operation by 1979 was due to its rejection of the foquista strategy popularized by the Cuban Revolution and Che Guevara, which groups like FAR adhered to in the 1960's. The EGP, instead, sought to build a mass movement by addressing the political and economic realities of Guatemala, which meant focusing on the exploitation of the indigenous majority. This approach worked so well that by 1979, in addition to an approximately 2,500 person strong guerrilla movement operating primarily in the Guatemalan borderlands, the group also could claim an estimated 270,000 adherents throughout the country in its various urban and rural organizations.[514] This organizing success reflected the deep economic, political, and cultural divisions prevalent in Guatemala.[515]

In addition to the EGP, scores of other opposition groups were active in this second wave. The OPRA, a reconstituted FAR, and the PGT had all taken to heart the destructiveness of the internecine divisions of the 1960's, which, for example, led Sosa and Turcios to break from each other. In January 1982 these groups, along with EGP, came together in the national insurgency organization, the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union (Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca, UNRG). Their shared goals reflected a Guatemala suffering from deep economic and racial divisions in both the city and the countryside. They advocated for land

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Havana, and Santo Domingo. After leaving COMAR he enjoyed a long and distinguished career in Mexico's Secretariat of Foreign Relations serving as ambassador to Colombia, Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.

[514]United States Defense Intelligence Agency, "Military Intelligence Summary, Volume VIII (U)," September 1981, found at National Security Archive, http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB100/Doc9.pdf ; Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico, *Tomo 1: Guatemala: Memoria del Silencio* (Guatemala, CEH 1999), 193.

[515] Roy Krøvel, "From Indios to Indígenas: Guerrilla Perspectives on Indigenous Peoples and Repression in Mexico, Guatemala and Nicaragua" *Interface* 3 (2013); 152; Harnecker, *Pueblos en armas*, 132-133.

reform, gender equality, free and fair democratic elections, an end to discrimination against indigenous people and, finally, the dismantling of the political-military-economic oligarchy that dominated the country's resources and government. Inspired by the recent Sandinista victory in Nicaragua and the revolutionary movement in El Salvador, the UNRG believed a military and political victory possible. And given the approximately 6,000 to 8,000 rebel fighters spread throughout their member groups, the government of Guatemala feared the same.[516]

The EGP operated close to the border, in the majority indigenous zones of Quiche, Huehuetenango, and the Verapaces. There, in Mayan communities ravaged by the Guatemalan state's modernization efforts and land grabs by a military elite that built large fincas on expropriated community property, the EGP had patiently preached revolution and prepared for war. Though the group's first revolutionary act occurred in 1975, when they killed a notorious ladino landowner in the Ixil region, they spent most of the 1970's organizing.[517]

The kidnapping of the hunters in 1972 alerted the Mexican national security apparatus that resistance to the Guatemalan regime had survived the cruel counter insurgency launched by Arana. The Mexican military and the DFS undertook similar actions as in the decades before: increased vigilance of the border, intelligence sharing with the Guatemalan military, which continued to blame Mexico for the transfer of arms and men; and the uncovering of external networks operating in Mexico City with the cooperation of sympathetic Mexicans.

By late 1976 the DFS had compiled a substantial amount of data on the EGP's operations in Mexico and Guatemala and its connections with the outside world. A thirty-five page DFS report written late in the year contained the group's organizational history, structure, operations,

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[516] Jonas, *The Battle for Guatemala,* 138-139.

[517] Carlota McAllister, "A Headlong Rush into the Future: Violence and Revolution in a Guatemalan Indigenous Village," in *A Century of Revolution: Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence during Latin America's Long Cold War*, eds., Greg Grandin and Gilbert M Joseph (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 281-290.

and contacts within Mexico. It offers a revealing snapshot of how the Mexican security forces believed the EGP, and the broader Guatemalan guerrilla movement, organized themselves in relation to Mexico in the crucial years of the mid-1970's. According to the report, from the beginning Mexico served as a strategic space of rest, recruitment, and propaganda for the revolutionary movement. The EGP, like Guatemalan exiles before them, utilized the porous Chiapan borderlands to traffic in arms and as an entrance into the rest of the Mexico. In addition, the report indicated that Guatemalan guerrillas were actively trying to recruit Mexicans to join them in revolution in the state of Chiapas. Finally, the DFS uncovered the possibility that Cuban operatives utilized that country's embassy in Mexico City to provide support for the EGP.[518]

The DFS stumbled upon a treasure trove of information on the EGP after a routine immigration inspection outside of Tapachula. On September 14, 1976, Immigration agents boarded a bus headed to the borderland city in a search of illegal immigrants. The report claims that they began to question Carlos Romeo Augusto Zetina Baldizón after observing that he had postcards labeled from both Mexico and Guatemala, though why that was cause for concern is not stated. Upon further inspection they found a handful of microfilms and upon questioning why he had so many of these in his possession, his reported answers were "illogical." The unfortunate Guatemalan was handed to DFS for interrogation.[519] It is likely that Mexican security officials tortured or, at minimum, severely questioned Zetina, as was common practice during the period.[520] Though such horrific actions often produced false confessions, the

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[518] Ejército Guerrillero de Los Pobres, Guerrilleros Guatemaltecos, México, December 20, 1976, AGN-*ADFS* Legajo 4

[519] Ejército Guerrillero de Los Pobres, Guerrilleros Guatemaltecos, México, December 20, 1976, AGN-*ADFS* Legajo 4 Hoja 15.

[520] See for example Amnesty International's report of the utilization of torture by Mexican police and security officials to produce confessions, Amnesty International, *The Amnesty International Report* (London: Amnesty International Publications, 1976), 104-105.

information Zetina gave DFS officials led to the discovery of safe houses and other sensitive information verified, in part, by secondary sources, meaning at least some of the information he told the DFS was true.

Zetina's history in the movement reveals the EGP's priorities and strategies during its crucial years of organizing. According to the DFS report, the Guatemalan joined the EGP in 1972, recruited by a friend in the PGT to become part of the group's nascent urban front in Guatemala City. In 1972, as Mario Payeras and the bulk of the EGP trekked through the jungle, it is hard to imagine that the organization commanded a lot of resources in a Guatemala City wracked by a violent counter insurgency. Regardless, Zetina told DFS interrogators that he participated with others in an armed robbery, stealing a cache of weapons and ammunition before arriving for the first time in Mexico City through Tapachula in 1974.[521]

Zetina had been tasked with replacing the head of the EGP organizational headquarters in Mexico City (the headquarters were code-named "Bethina"). Zetina told the DFS he also served as a go between for his comrades in Guatemala, which might explain why he carried so much information with him. The DFS believed that Bethina's primary role was to serve as a "link between the EGP and countries such as Mexico, the United States, Cuba France, and Italy." According to their interrogation, they learned that EGP leadership was concerned that the struggle for Guatemalan democracy and economic equality no longer attracted worldwide attention or material support. Isolated armed actions only brought "momentary hope" and interest outside the country. They feared that "militants and revolutionary countries" interpreted these as acts of desperation, and not as an organized resistance capable of affecting change.[522]

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[521] Ejército Guerrillero de Los Pobres, Guerrilleros Guatemaltecos, México, December 20, 1976, AGN-*ADFS* Legajo 4 Hoja 16.

[522] Ejército Guerrillero de Los Pobres, Guerrilleros Guatemaltecos, México, December 20, 1976, AGN-*ADFS* Legajo 4 Hojas 14, 18.

The EGP tasked Bethina members to combat this skepticism and to "attract attention regarding the class contradictions of Guatemalan society." Like the FAR safe house raided only a few years earlier, the Bethina section produced propaganda highlighting the struggle for Guatemala and all of Central America. [523]

Attracting and working with sympathetic supporters in Mexico became a key part of operations for Bethina, according to the DFS report. They noted that it was their understanding that though members of Bethina operated according to the directions of the EGP leadership in Guatemala, while operating in Mexico they had wide latitude to develop personal contacts with individuals and groups that might assist the Guatemalan cause. This was due to the clandestine nature of the struggle waged by the EGP leadership in Guatemala; they were unable to cultivate relationships with the outside world, so Bethina became their link.[524]

A Guatemala Supported Revolution in the Chiapan Borderlands

One of the relationships the DFS reported was with the Mexican reporter and recently released Lecumberri inmate, Isaias Rojas Delgado. The way in which Rojas came to establish a relationship with the EGP indicated the transnational links developed on the left during this time period: it was a small world as revolutionary ideals and the appeal of armed resurrection forged commitments across national boundaries. His story alarmingly illustrated for the DFS the strategic importance of Chiapas for the EGP.

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[523] Ejército Guerrillero de Los Pobres, Guerrilleros Guatemaltecos, México, December 20, 1976, AGN-*ADFS* Legajo 4 Hoja 15

[524] Ejército Guerrillero de Los Pobres, Guerrilleros Guatemaltecos, México, December 20, 1976, AGN-*ADFS* Legajo 4 Hoja 37.

Code-named Claudio by the EGP, the 41 year old Guanajuato born Rojas spent much of his adult life in leftist causes, having joined the Mexican Communist Party in 1956. He told the DFS he broke with the group in 1960 after having become convinced that political change could only come from armed struggle. In 1963, Rojas, along with the Spanish exile and noted leftist journalist Victor Rico Galán and a score of others, formed the Revolutionary Movement of the People (Movimiento Revolucionaro del Pueblo, MRP).[525] From the beginning the MRP was infiltrated by the DFS, which lead to the decimation of the organization as the bulk of its members were arrested in 1966.[526]

When Rojas left Lecumberri in 1974, he found work at the UNAM radio station, taught an occasional class, and reacquainted himself with friends on the left, finally joining the leftist journal, *¿Por Que*? as an editor.[527] The magazine had a fiercely independent reputation in its willingness to criticize a Mexican regime upon which many journalists relied for a salary. It also attracted the attention of various Latin American revolutionary groups as its founder, Mario Menéndez Rodríguez, had conducted sympathetic interviews during the sixties and early seventies with the leadership of organizations ranging from the FAR to the Venezuelan Army of National Liberation [528]

Rojas thus joined a particularly pivotal journal on the left that attracted the attention of the EGP and served their goal of making sure the world did not forget Guatemala's struggle. Rojas explained to the DFS that after he became editor revolutionary groups constantly contacted him to arrange an article in *¿Por Que?* and that is how he came into communication with the

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[525] Ejército Guerrillero de Los Pobres, Guerrilleros Guatemaltecos, México, December 20, 1976, AGN-*ADFS* Legajo 4 Hojas 43,44.

[526] Laura Castellanos, *México armado, 1943-1981* (México, Ediciones Era, 2007), 83-85.

[527] Ejército Guerrillero de Los Pobres, Guerrilleros Guatemaltecos, México, December 20, 1976, AGN-*ADFS* Legajo 4 Hoja 44. .

[528] Adella Cedillo, *El Fuego y el Silencio: Historia de las Fuerzas de Liberación Nacional Mexicanas (1969-1974)* (Mexico: Universdiad Autonoma de Mexico, 2008), 191-192

EGP. Rojas claimed he spent six months in Guatemala in 1974-1975, where he received theoretical and practical training in guerrilla warfare. Crucially, in Guatemala the EGP leadership suggested to Rojas the prospect of beginning an armed struggle in Chiapas "in virtue of the great discontent against the government because of the poverty that exists among the people of the region."[529] Though the objective of this unnamed revolutionary organization was to "destroy the present system of government" in Mexico, both Rojas and Zetina indicated that the Mexican's group would also help funnel arms and money to the EGP across the border. The EGP clearly directed Rojas, as the DFS found in Zetina's possession instructions for the UNAM radio announcer. [530]

By the time of his arrest Rojas had not developed a solid enough organization in the borderlands to survive the raid. Rojas gave just fifteen pseudonyms to the DFS, with safe houses in Mexico City, Coatzacoalcos, and Tuxtla Gutiérrez. He also claimed one ex-member of the group the 23rd of September had inquired about joining his nascent guerrilla group after his contact had died in a raid and he no longer knew how to reconnect with his organization. The most dramatic action Rojas's guerrillas had accomplished consisted of a weekend camping trip to Toluca, in which members had to pay for their own supplies. Also among the instructions found on Zetina was a directive from the EGP leadership telling Zetina not to actively participate in any armed actions, and that Rojas should do so on his own.[531]

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[529] Ejército Guerrillero de Los Pobres, Guerrilleros Guatemaltecos, México, December 20, 1976, AGN-*ADFS* Legajo 4 Hojas 44, 46

[530] Ejército Guerrillero de Los Pobres, Guerrilleros Guatemaltecos, México, December 20, 1976, AGN-*ADFS* Legajo 4 Hojas 16, 43. In addition, they found Rojas in the safe-house with the other members of Bethina, including Cesar Montes's sister-in-law, and Ricardo Ramirez Leon, alias Rolando Moran, one of the leaders of the EGP. The DFS report barely mentions Ricardo Ramirez Leon, except to mention that the "militant" claimed to have just arrived in the country weeks ago to seek treatment for an incurable disease from which he would soon die, high cholesterol. Ramirez died in 1998.

[531] Ejército Guerrillero de Los Pobres, Guerrilleros Guatemaltecos, México, December 20, 1976, AGN-*ADFS* Legajo 4 Hojas 19, 45.

This failure of the EGP to create a parallel organization in the Chiapan borderlands indicated the difficulty of an external organization starting a clandestine revolutionary movement in Mexico. Other national and local revolutionary groups competed for members and could better articulate a home-grown message and recruit through local networks. In addition, anybody recruited by the EGP presumably would discover that a primary purpose of the group would be to supply support for the Guatemalan conflict. The EGP also appeared to realize the operational and political complications of directing a guerrilla group in Mexico. An unsigned note found on Zetina seemed to indicate this dilemma, stating "we cannot direct the Mexico Revolution from A.G. [?]."[532] In addition, though the DFS had success in disrupting EGP operations, armed actions by Guatemalans in Mexico would have no doubt increased the repressive measures of the Mexican security forces, which until that time had consisted of raids and prison sentences.

The 1976 DFS raid did not destroy Bethina, or the EGP's interest and activity in the Chiapan borderlands. As the group intensified its armed activity towards the end of the decade, the DFS uncovered and chased down rumors regarding additional activity in Mexico City and on the border. Based on the transnational nature of the information, it is clear that the Mexican security apparatus received and shared information with its Guatemalan counterparts. As before, the Mexican government was concerned about EGP activity in the country and its potential to disrupt domestic security. For example, two years later in October 1978, the DFS received a tip that a group of EGP guerrillas had established an area of rest and training in the Chiapan borderlands and were planning a confrontation with a Mexican military detachment, or "hacienda police" to steal weapons. The 31st Military Zone commander denied the possibility of

[532] Ejército Guerrillero de Los Pobres, Guerrilleros Guatemaltecos, México, December 20, 1976, AGN-*ADFS* Legajo 4 Hojas 16.

any type of attack by a large group of EGP guerrillas, or the establishment of a camp. He assured the DFS investigator that he personally led both aerial and ground inspections of the border to deny any large-scale intrusions by the "terrorist group EGP." [533]

But the border was not an impenetrable wall. The commander admitted that members of EGP often crossed back and forth across the border in groups of two or three. After committing actions in Guatemala, they hid their weapons and crossed into Mexico, blending in with Chiapan borderlanders. Continuing the lament of the Demographic Commission of decades earlier, the commander complained that nobody on the border carried any form of identification, making it hard for security forces to identify who did not belong in the communities straddling the border.[534]

Late 1978 was the last period of relative calm in border crossings; a year later the Commander of the 31st Military Zone no longer could claim Guatemalans crossed into Chiapas in isolated numbers of two or three. Indeed, in the next couple of years the borderlands began to become a site of refuge, as thousands rushed into the region to escape genocide, bringing the Guatemalan conflict into Mexico.

Scorched Earth and Refugees

During the early 1980's genocide committed by the Guatemalan government against the majority indigenous population in the north of the country compelled thousands to flee across the

[533]Información ha sido recibida…, México, October 19, 1978, 12-20-77 AGN-ADFS Legajo 6 Hoja 202.
[534]Información ha sido recibida…, México, October 19, 1978, 12-20-77 AGN-ADFS Legajo 6 Hoja 202.

border. The military-controlled government was battling against a revitalized opposition movement that demanded an end to economic and political oppression. This reconstituted movement of laborers, students, and guerrillas, in both the city and the countryside, gained strength and openly struck out against the government. For example, in February 1980, the Committee for Peasant Unity (Comité de Unidad Campesina, CUC) a political umbrella organization connected to the EGP, organized a strike of 75,000 plantation workers, demonstrating the deep frustration felt across various sectors of society. [535]

At the same time the guerrilla movements across Guatemala stepped up the intensity and frequency of their attacks against the military and police forces, with the EGP being the most active. The increasing international isolation of the Guatemalan administration due to human rights violations, as well as the increasing adherence of both the rural and urban population to the growing local and national opposition, led the guerrilla leadership to believe that a political and military victory was close at hand. Close to the border in the northern departments of the country, the guerrilla leadership believed their control of the territory to be complete after years of on the ground organizing in the mostly indigenous communities. Some in the EGP even contemplated calling for a sort of free political zone and petitioning for international recognition, which would have meant a "guerrilla state."[536]

In early 1982 a group of young Guatemalan military officers led a military coup promising a more effective counter insurgency. The former presidential candidate Efraín Ríos Montt emerged as the leader of the regime, which proceeded to quickly militarize all aspects of society through a continuous state of siege. A born again Christian, Ríos Montt endeared himself to the military hawks of the Reagan Administration, who viewed the strongman as a

[535] CEH, *Tomo I*: *Memoria del Silencio,* 190.
[536] Ibid., 192-193.

effective bulwark against the spread of communism in Central America. (After meeting the Guatemalan President in Honduras, Reagan called him, "a man of great integrity"). Renewed U.S. military assistance, despite the awareness of gross human rights violations, added fuel to the bloody counter insurgency campaign.[537]

The Rios Montt administration's National Security Plan contextualized the indigenous population as the fuel for the insurgency and hence a key target in the counterinsurgency campaign. In the plan's estimation indigenous Guatemalans supported the guerrillas either because they were forced to, or they lacked proper political consciousness. As a consequence, the military expanded into countless indigenous communities, for the most part in the northern departments that served as EGP strongholds. There they organized Civilian Autodefense Patrols, arming peasants to hunt their neighbors, the "guerrillas" in the bush, or suspected collaborators within the community. Rios Montt claimed that, "for the first time in the history of Guatemala, the indigenous feels useful, necessarily utilized by the Army, the Government, the President, and the economic sector."[538]

As documented by groups such as Human Rights Watch, the government's counter insurgency program destroyed communities. In order to deny the insurgents their base of operations, the military destroyed the infrastructure and livelihood of countless villages: churches, schools, hospitals, and stores were destroyed and cattle were killed. Survivors who fled to the borderlands recounted how the army "saved bullets" when dealing with women and children, often locking them in buildings and setting them on fire, or bashing small children

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[537] National Security Archive, "Electronic Briefing Book No. 32: The Guatemalan Military: What the U.S. Files Reveal," National Security Archive, Accessed January 21, 2015, http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB32/vol2.html; Robert Parry, "Ronald Reagan: Accessory to Genocide," May 11, 2013, Accessed January 21, 2015,https://consortiumnews.com/2013/05/11/ronaldreagan-accessory-to-genocide/ .

[538] CEH, *Tomo I*: *Memoria del Silencio,* 199-201.

against rocks. Those who fled to nearby jungles, living off wild herbs and fruit, were forced to dodge their neighbors in the civilian patrols, and the passing helicopters that dropped bombs on suspected areas of guerrilla concentrations.[539]

The Guatemalan Truth Commission (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico, CEH) later determined that the military committed 595 massacres (defined as more than five people) during the years 1978-1982. Of those, 90% occurred in the northern borderlands departments of Guatemala: Huehuetenango, Quiché, Chimaltenango, Alta Verapaz, and Baja Verapaz. The vast majority of the victims, 97 percent, were indigenous Mayans.[540] Between 1978 and the peace treaty of 1996, an estimated 132,000 men and women and children died.

The immense violence of this counterinsurgency campaign led to the mass exodus of indigenous Guatemalans into the Chiapan borderlands. A steady trickle in 1980 of individuals and families crossing into Mexico became a flood by 1982, as whole communities escaped the genocide. By the end of 1982 an average of 400 refugees arrived each week, with a total of 3,000 by the beginning of 1983, and 15,000 by the middle of year. By the end of 1984, an estimated 46,000 men, women, and children had arrived in Mexico.[541]

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[539] Americas Watch Committee, *Creating a Desolation and Calling It Peace: May 1983 Supplement to the Report on Human Rights in Guatemala* (New York: Americas Watch, 1983), 1-15.

[540] CEH, *Tomo III*: *Memoria del Silencio,* 256-258.

[541] Graciela Freyermuth Enciso and Nancy Godfrey, *Refugiados guatemaltecos en México: la vida en un continuo estado de emergencia* (México: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, 1993), 23.

The Church and Chiapas

These refugees arrived in a conflictive borderlands. Beginning in the early seventies the Diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas and numerous statewide indigenous campesino-led organizations had begun to challenge the oligarchical state structure that repressed political participation with violence and appropriated land. In many ways the social, political, and economic reality of Chiapas resembled that of Guatemala; a poor indigenous majority received little benefit from the state and, as in Guatemala, many Chiapanecos began to look for organizations outside the state for solutions.

The diocese, under the leadership of the dynamic Bishop Samuel Ruiz Garcia, served as a foundation for this effort against the local and national governments. In order to understand the borderlands, Chiapas, and the reaction by the state to the Guatemalan refugees, it is necessary to understand the vision and work of Ruiz. The defining moment for Ruiz's approach to the socio-economic problems prevalent in his diocese came in 1968, when he attended the Conference of Latin American Bishops in Medellin, Colombia. The discussions and conclusions drawn from the Medellin Conference regarding the Latin American experience would partially and temporarily change the relationship between church and state in the region. The bishops' analysis of the poverty of Latin America led them to incorporate a Marxist viewpoint in their criticism of the international, national, and local political and economic structures of power. They rejected the capitalist development model promoted by the United States, which had led to increasing inequality among the bishops' parishioners. This Liberation Theology and its "preferential option for the poor" meant a fundamental change in the church's practical and theological outreach. As the conference ended, bishops like Ruiz returned to their parishioners

ready to lead them in their struggle against oppressive forces — wherever they might be found — that had long dominated the people of Latin America.[542]

In addition to theological inspiration, Ruiz also embarked on understanding the indigenous reality of his diocese. This intellectual journey began at Medellin, prompted by his nomination as the president of the working group, Department of Missions, which evaluated the church's evangelization work among indigenous communities. While presiding he had a fateful discussion with the Colombian anthropologist Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff, an expert on and advocate for indigenous communities. The encounter, and subsequent dialogue Ruiz maintained with Mexican academics, led him to the conclusion that the traditional practice of evangelization often meant a destruction of indigenous culture. Ruiz concluded that in order to spread the word of the church, instead of preaching to the indigenous people, the missionary had to become an anthropologist: the Church had to understand the values, history, and language of the varied indigenous cultures in Chiapas in order to fully integrate them into the faith.[543]

In this new approach, the diocese encouraged and supported indigenous community members to take an active role in interpreting their relationship with the church in the context of their culture. The diocese-appointed catechists no longer led the community in their relationship to the word of God, but instead facilitated their neighbors' interpretation of the faith.[544] Out of this effort came the Indigenous Church (Iglesia Autóctona), formed by the indigenous communities that inhabited the large territory of the diocese from the borderlands to the highlands. The church became a middle ground, a meeting point for indigenous and Western

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[542]Enrique Krauze, "El profeta de los indios,"*Letras Libres* 1 (1999): 16. See the fundamental text of Liberation Theology by the Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001): 81-105.

[543] Jean A Meyer, *Samuel Ruiz en San Cristóbal, 1960-2000* (México: Tusquets Editores, 2000), 119-131.

[544] Jan de Vos, "El encuentro de los mayas de Chiapas con la teología de la liberación: "¿Vino nuevo en cueros nuevos? (Marcos 2:22)," (paper presented at CEDLA Workshop on Rebellion in Chiapas and the Andean Highlands, Amsterdam, 1996)

theological values. The deployment of the diocese's catechists in the Lacandon sparked within the communities a social and political revitalization that, most importantly, began to value an indigenous identity that for years many associated with poverty, immorality, and ignorance.[545]

The strength and impact of this activism was displayed on the five hundredth birthday celebration of Bartolomé de las Casas celebrated in 1974. Both the state and national governments conceived of the three-day event as appropriating the historical memory of las Casas to demonstrate an official commitment to Mexico's indigenous communities. They intended the festivities to be a folkloric exhibition for the assembled press: dances, indigenous foods, a commercial for Chiapan tourism and Mexican progress. The governor tasked Ruiz to help organize an Indigenous Congress, which was intended to be in the feel good spirit organizers had envisioned for the celebration. Instead, Ruiz spent nearly a year organizing 1,200 delegates from the state's four major indigenous linguistic groups, Tzeltales, Tzotziles, Tojolabales, and Choles, to discuss the economic and political realities affecting their communities. For three days the congress discussed the lack of infrastructure in their communities, high illiteracy rates, non-existent healthcare, the scourge of alcoholism, and the strong-handed violent tactics of the local power brokers. The congress ended with a commitment to continue organizing for indigenous rights.[546]

This activism in the Lacandon continued, as indigenous groups such as the Organización Campesina Emiliano Zapata (OCEZ) and Unión de Uniones Ejidales y Grupos Campesinos Solidarios de Chiapas (UU), began to organize communities in the region to demand land, services such as schools, and an end to the political and economic domination of corrupt state

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[545] María del Carmen Legorreta Díaz, *Religión, política y guerrilla en Las Cañadas de la Selva Lacandona* (México.: Cal y Arena, 1998), 61-62.

[546] Thomas Benjamin,"A Time of Reconquest: History, the Maya Revival, and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas," *The American Historical Review* (105) 2000: 425-426.

and federal bureaucracies and their allied large landowners and caciques. Many of the leaders of these organizations were diocese catechists, while many members had joined the Indigenous Church. Their struggles were often met by official and extra-official violence.[547]

In the face of this growing political tumult the diocese was faced with a decision: attempt to stop the political momentum of their parishioners' organizing, adopt a stance and assume a leadership role, or allow the communities they helped awaken to choose their own paths. They chose the third option.[548] This decision also became the diocese's policy towards the Guatemalan refugees: advocate for the refugees to make their own decisions about their future.[549]

Both the state and federal governments looked on with suspicion at the deep involvement of the diocese as revitalized indigenous communities organized and protested the economic and political inequities prevalent in the borderlands. This reflected a belief by authorities that the burgeoning indigenous activism had to be led directly by a non-indigenous leader. For example, the government blamed Ruiz for inciting a deadly shootout between members of the Ejido Nueva Providencia and the state police, in the borderland municipality of Las Margaritas, in September 1977. In reality, the deadly incident was sparked by the kidnapping of an ejidatario by a local landowner in response to political organizing in the community led by catechists.[550] For the DFS, Ruiz, who had been in the community a short time before, clearly carried the blame. As they noted, "the posture of Ruiz is well known in this area as he has a lot of influence among the indigenous of the region and in his sermons he is always inciting them against the small property owners and the authorities."[551]

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[547] Neil Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion: The Struggle for Land and Democracy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); Thomas Benjamin, *A Rich Land, a Poor People: Politics and Society in Modern Chiapas*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 223-245.

[548] Meyer, *Samuel Ruiz en San Cristóbal,* 83-84.

[549] de Vos, "El encuentro de los mayas de Chiapas," 10-11.

[550] Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion,* 81-82.

[551] El Estado de Chiapas, México September 8, 1977, AGN-ADFS, Caja 138 Hojas 328-329.

In addition, at various levels Mexican officials worried about their dependence on Ruiz, upon whom they often relied as an intermediary in their interactions with indigenous communities. The absence of the state in the form of providing services or infrastructure meant a political and economic void.[552] This would be key when thousands of Guatemalans arrived and looked for support. A 1978 DFS report, for instance, noted the potential problems caused by the lack of infrastructure for the 15,000 indigenous families in the Lacandon (they entirely lacked water, electricity, schools, health care). The DFS worryingly noted that the church was "channeling economic opportunities and personnel."[553] The influence of the diocese among the borderlanders reflected the historic absence of the state in the borderlands and the fact that, to the degree that it was present in the lives of borderlanders, that presence often meant dealing with corrupt local and federal officials. Though the diocese did not fulfill all functions that the state might be expected to offer, the church represented to many people in the region an institution that held the moral high ground, that could be trusted and that, in practical terms, was an effective advocate for, and even sometimes a supplier of the basic needs and services that the state failed to provide. In many ways, the refugees would come to feel the same way.

As we will examine in the next section, these formative years of the diocese's organizing experience shaped its interactions with the Guatemalan refugees. Ruiz fashioned his diocese's outreach to reflect the currents of Liberation Theology and to encourage his indigenous parishioners to advocate for their political and economic rights, a position which brought opposition from local and federal governments. And the diocese would adopt the same approach towards the Guatemalans that came into the borderlands as it did to local Chiapans, generating

[552] Meyer, *Samuel Ruiz en San Cristóbal*, 72-73.
[553]Chiapas, México, March 18, 1978, AGN-ADFS 1a parte Caja 138, Hojas 148-149.

conflict with a Mexican national security apparatus that feared the borderlands would become mired in a guerrilla war.

The Church, Refugees, and National Security

Sometime in October 1982 Sister Lucy Jiménez, member of the Christian Committee of Solidarity (Comité Cristiano de Solidarid, hereforth Comité) the organization formed by the Diocese in 1979 to assist Central American refugees, spent a tense night in Chajul watching a small contingent of Guatemalan soldiers sleep. She and two other members of the Comité had arrived a few days earlier bringing food and medicine to Antonio Sánchez's *finca*, the largest in the small twenty family Lacandon borderland community only a couple of miles from Guatemala. For nearly a week these Mexican families had fed and cared for approximately one thousand Guatemalan refugees who suddenly arrived, fleeing from the counter insurgency. When the families' supplies began to run low, they contacted the institution they trusted most to help, the diocese. Soon after arriving, however, the Sister and her hosts had to contend with a new problem, Guatemalan soldiers.

In uniform and carrying rifles, a small patrol of twelve soldiers arrived one afternoon at the edges of the community, demanding to know the nationality of the members of the Sánchez family and the sister. They explained they were following a large group of men, women, and children to bring them back to Guatemala. With a mix of daring and bluster that masked her fear, the sister, along with the elder Sánchez, told the soldiers that they were in Mexican territory and should turn around and go back the way they came. It worked, sort of. As night approached the soldiers, wary of traveling through the jungle in the dark, asked if they could stay on the

grounds and leave in the morning. The sister and the Sánchez family passed a tense night as they vigilantly watched the soldiers from the house, praying that the coughs and moans from the sick refugees hidden only a few hundred yards away would not cause alarm. As dawn rose the members of the bloody counter insurgency drifted back across the porous border. The sister and the rest of the Comité members gathered the sickest refugees and began the perilous journey through jungle trails to the town of Comitán and the nearest hospital, which was several days travel away.[554]

The incident in Chajul encapsulates the initial actions of the diocese, the Guatemalan military and, because of its absence in the story, the Mexican state, to the approximately forty thousand Guatemalan Refugees that arrived in 1979-1984. Upon the first arrival of the refugees the diocese, as it did at Chajul, quickly mobilized its resources — including successfully soliciting funding from around the world — much more quickly than the slow moving and culturally insensitive Mexican state bureaus. For Mexican officials, especially the DFS, the Guatemalan refugees represented a security concern as much as a humanitarian crisis. Now added to their long concern over the incursion of Guatemalan guerrillas was the worry about the impact of thousands of hungry and poor indigenous families arriving in the poorest region of the country, which was already teeming with discontent because, in their view, of an activist church. An additional problem was that the Guatemalan military frequently ignored Mexican sovereignty, crossing the border to continue their counterinsurgency. Groups of soldiers tracked and followed refugees as had happened at Chajul, often killing them on Mexican soil, or dragging the desperate individuals back to Guatemala, where they faced certain death. Guatemalan military planes and helicopters even flew over Chiapan territory, occasionally

[554] Interview by author with Sister Lucia Jiménez, January, 16, 2013, San Cristóbal de las Casas, México.

landing on isolated runways forged by the CILA, carrying the bloody counterinsurgency into Mexico.

Arrival

Even before the arrival of the thousands of refugees, Samuel Ruiz and the diocese had long looked south to Guatemala, in part because the church there had become a target of the government's counterinsurgency campaign. In July 1980, in an unprecedented action, the Bishop of the Guatemalan diocese of Quiché, *José Gerardi,* told a group of assembled priests, "we are going." A few days later the outspoken bishop, who used his position to protest the military's gross human rights violations, led all the clergy of the diocese into exile. The bishop himself had been targeted for assassination, narrowly avoiding becoming the seventh church member murdered by the government since 1978.[555]

Jorge Martínez was one of the many priests that fled into exile with Gerardi. Originally from Spain, he came to Guatemala in the early 1970's inspired, in part, after hearing a lecture given by Gustavo Gutiérrez. After leaving Guatemala, he and a few other priests traveled to Nicaragua, where he stayed for a few months working with the triumphant Sandinistas and also helped form the Guatemalan Church in exile. (During the early 1980's the Church in Exile, with their contacts in their former diocese of Quiché became a key source of information for journalists, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and the broader church itself, regarding

[555]"Dioceses del Quiche: martirio y éxodo," *El Caminante,* August 1980 (26): 41; 72-74. Upon his return to Guatemala in 1984, the bishop continued his human rights advocacy. He was murdered in 1998 before the release of a key report implicating high-ranking government officials with right-wing death squads; his assassins have never been caught. See Francisco Goldman, *The Art of Political Murder: Who Killed the Bishop?* (New York: Grove Press, 2007).

horrific events of the counterinsurgency.[556]) He arrived in Chiapas a few months later, drawn by the increasing number of refugees arriving in the borderlands, many from his former diocese.[557]

Martínez joined the Comité sometime in 1981 and worked for ten years in the Lacandon Jungle, in other Mexican communities, and in the makeshift camps in the Lagos de Montebello region, which was also close to the border.[558] The Comité never employed more than a few dozen full time workers, though at its organizational height in the mid 1980's it served as the focal point for many charities and foundations, coordinating millions of dollars in donations and countless projects begun by NGOs from around the world.

At the beginning the main priority for the Comité was to keep the refugees alive. They did this in part by enlisting the assistance of the Mexican borderland communities with which they already had formed relationships during the 1970's. Martínez, for example, related that his job consisted of being a mediator during the early 1980's, when the pace of refugees crossing the border was high. He and two Comité companions traveled on barely passable roads from community to community in the Lacandon, meeting with the leaders of the refugees as well as the Mexican borderlanders. Comité members like Martínez negotiated the placement of refugees with Mexican families. To the Mexican community leaders they promised food deliveries to supplement their own resources, and appealed to their sense of Christian generosity. Some, admitted Martínez, took advantage of the Guatemalans, utilizing the newcomers for free or cheap labor.[559]

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[556] David Stoll, *Between Two Armies in the Ixil Towns of Guatemala* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 171-172.

[557] Interview by author with Jorge Martinez, November 5, 2012, Comitán de Dominguez, Mexico.

[558] Ibid.

[559] Ibid.

Martínez believed, however, that the acceptance of the refugees by the Mexican communities was also rooted in the history of transnational exchanges in the borderlands and a shared indigenous identity. Martínez observed that the Guatemalan refugees and Mexican communities were connected by a shared Mayan identity that linked them to a familiar history of oppression. Mexican borderlanders were willing to help because, in the words of Martínez, "today for you, tomorrow for me. Or, today the Mexicans take in the Guatemalans, but maybe tomorrow the Guatemalans are going to have to take in the Mexicans."[560]

The Comité's assistance went beyond simply saving lives, as Martínez and others led efforts to create an educational program for the many children among the Guatemalans: approximately 20% of the 40,000 refugees were children under four.[561] The program reflected the previous experience of the diocese working with indigenous Mexican borderlanders. As such, the efforts became a vital way to ensure that children maintained their identities, while also serving as a forum to explain the traumatic experiences they were forced to endure. In 1983 the communities in the Lacandon held the first meeting of promoters of education. Not one of the approximately thirty-five in attendance had been a teacher in Guatemala, and many who attended had only a few years of elementary school. Martínez, who led that first gathering, asked skeptically to the assembled refugees, "do you all really think you will be able to do it? [Become teachers]. I remember they answered me with firmness and conviction, if you help us." For the next nine years Martínez gave one class a month to the promoters and they in turn taught three times a week in their communities. Together, they collected the oral histories of the elders in the various camps, creating a book, "We Know Our History" (Nostros Conocemos Nuestra Historia)

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[560] Ibid.

[561] Eliecer Valencia, *Guatemalan Refugees in Mexico, 1980-1984* (New York: Americas Watch Committee, 1984), 19; Isabel María Martínez Portilla, "La Diócesis de San Cristóbal de las Casas y Los Refugiados Guatemaltecos. Resultados de un Estrecho y Prolongada Convivencia," *Pueblos y Fronteras* 1 (2001):74-77.

that reflected the story of the many indigenous communities that were forced to call Mexico home.[562]

In addition, utilizing their experience with the Lacandon indigenous communities, members of the Comité developed catechists among the refugees. The religious instruction reflected the Liberation Theology outlook of the diocese, relating stories from the Bible to the economic and political situation that the refugees fled. For example, a lesson plan for children related the Israeli Exodus from Egypt to that of the Guatemalans. Children learned how, "God helps his people open their eyes, and escape the land of slavery." Catechists were then instructed to divide the children into groups of two, where they were asked to make a list of what was the "same" or "different" between their situation and the Israelites. In addition they were to mark down the, "Signs of Liberation. (Facts that arise or that lift up our hope)." The catechist encouraged the children to look for these signs of a future freedom, of leadership, among the refugees, asking them, "will it be like Moses, will He send someone to take every one of us, to take our people [indigenous Guatemalans] out of slavery?"[563]

The Comité also situated its lessons clearly within the class-based viewpoint that lay at the foundation of Liberation Theology, and which also served as a political and economic critique of both Guatemala and Chiapas. For example, the pamphlet "Courses for Catechists. The First Part: Situation of Palestine in the Times of Jesus," was typical of the religious material taught by Comité trained catechists. The booklet began by first describing the upper class in the time of Jesus, dividing the people into the rulers, large landowners, high priests, and the secular rich. The description given of the large landowners, emphasizing that they lived in the city

[562] Interview with Jorge Martínez.

[563] Mirar en la Vida de Hoy, El Archivo Histórico Diocesano de San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Fondo de Refugiados Legajo 1042 pg.4 Undated (Here forth AHDSC-FR*)*

where they counted the riches gained from the exploited labor on their fincas, could have described the agrarian situation in Guatemala.[564]

As it had accomplished with the indigenous communities in Chiapas, the diocese, through the Comité, fulfilled certain functions of the state. Initially, it provided or coordinated basic services such as food, medicine and lodging. Once the refugees were settled, the Comité then provided for them beyond mere survival, such as in the key area of education, as well assisting in organizing their new communities in the areas of work and health.[565] Because of its quick response and its sensitivity, the Comité, and not the Mexican state, became the refugees' link to a future where they could make their own decisions.

National Security and State Control

Far from providing the social welfare services that the church offered, from the moment the first refugees arrived, the Mexican government tried to make them leave. In 1981, as increasing numbers of refugees crossed the border, an estimated two thousand Guatemalans were deported by the Mexican military and immigration officials. Federal immigration officials refused to grant those who were allowed to stay permanent status. Many were issued temporary visas of 60 days, with the threat of deportation and death hanging over their heads.[566] Officials took advantage of the fact that the Mexican immigration system did not recognize refugee status. The Mexican government had refused to adopt, as had many countries after World War II, a less

[564] Curso de Catequistas, Primera Parte: Situación de Palestina en Tiempos de Jesús, AHDSC-FR Legajo 972 undated.

[565] Interview with Jorge Martínez.

[566] Freyermuth Enciso and Nancy Godfrey, *Refugiados guatemaltecos en México*, 23; Grupo de Apoyo a Refugiados Guatemaltecos, *La Contrainsurgencia y los Refugiados Guatemaltecos* (Mexico: Grupo de Apoyo a Refugiados Guatemaltecos, 1983), 10.

stringent threshold for political asylum, which crucially required granting refuge in cases in which an individual could reasonably fear persecution. As thousands of Guatemalans entered the borderlands, Mexican immigration officials still acted under Article 35 of the Constitution, which if carried out to the letter of law meant each Guatemalan had to individually prove his or her case for political asylum as an exile. Guatemalans that had fled their communities with nothing were expected to produce evidence that they would be persecuted for their political beliefs if they were to return home.[567] Those Guatemalans that attempt to stay in Mexico under Article 35 were likely were likely to be rejected by Mexican officials -- of the estimated 2,000 refugees that petitioned for asylum in June and July of 1981, only fifty were granted it -- as refugees did not fit into the state's definition of political exile.[568] Many refugees, if they were able to, resorted to the more traditional route in the borderlands, bribing Mexican immigration officials to stop deportation proceedings. These officials, however, capitalized on the circumstances, and the average bribe skyrocketed, from $500 pesos at the beginning of 1982, to approximately $1,500 by the end of the year.[569]

At the national level, politicians claimed the refugees were economic immigrants and that the region could not absorb more workers. Salvador Neme Castillo, President of the Senate Commission on Immigration, summed up the government's position when he told an interviewer in early 1982, "we have limits. We are a country with economic and unemployment problems, which will make it necessary to control the flow of Guatemalan immigrants."[570]

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[567] Fernando M Olguin, "Guatemalan Refugees in Mexico: International Legal Standards," *Columbia Journal of World Business.* 132 (1989): 342-344.

[568] Valencia, *Guatemalan Refugees in Mexico*, 45-49.

[569] María Eugenia del Valle Prieto et al., "La Política de la Seguridad Nacional y las Fronteras de México," *Nueva Antropología* 26 (1985); 146.

[570] *Notimex,* January 10th, 1982.

Similar comments were made by the Secretary of the Interior, Enrique Olivares, who commented to the press that most of the Guatemalans had come to Chiapas in search of land.[571]

The continued arrival of refugees, along with the protestations of the diocese, international human rights groups, and national and worldwide press attention, pressured the Mexican government to reexamine its policy of deportations.[572] The diocese in particular took an active role in swaying public opinion as members of the Comité, having directly assisted refugees, could tell their heartbreaking stories to a national press increasingly covering the growing crisis in the borderlands. In addition, the recently formed organization of the Bishops of the Pacific South became a powerful voice in denouncing government inaction. Since 1977 this ad-hoc group of bishops from Oaxaca and Chiapas, united by a shared commitment to the tenets and actions of Liberation Theology, had come together in unprecedented calls for political and economic rights for their indigenous parishioners.[573] In March 1982 they released an impactful letter addressed to the Mexican federal government, simply entitled, "Guatemalan refugees in Chiapas. A message from some bishops from the Pacific South Pastoral Region," which asked officials to guarantee the security of the refugees by allowing them to remain in Mexico.[574] The letter, coupled with published reports of Guatemalan army intrusions into refugee communities, finally slowed and eventually halted the deportations in February of 1983.[575]

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[571] Valencia, *Guatemalan Refugees in Mexico,* 49.

[572] *El Caminante,* March 1982; *New York Times,* August 14, 1981; *Uno más Uno,* November 1982.

[573] Claude Pomerleau, "The Changing Church in Mexico and Its Challenge to the State," *The Review of Politics* 43 (1981); 555; Miguel Concha Malo, *La Participación de los cristianos en el proceso popular de liberación en México, 1968-1983* (México, Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1986), 193-197.

[574] Miguel Ángel Velázquez, "1981-1984 Una Cronología," *Nexos,* July 1, 1984, Accessed March 30, 2015 http://www.nexos.com.mx/?p=4372

[575] Maria Eugenia del Valle Prieto et al., "La Política de la Seguridad Nacional y las Fronteras de México," 147.

Ortíz Monasterio believed in part that pressure from the church and the press, along with the celebrated Mexican history of offering refuge, propelled some in the federal government to change the deportation policy. He reflected on his efforts and others to convince recalcitrant officials to contextualize the Guatemalans as:

> We had to create a whole narrative. The first argument was that we have to receive the refugees because this is the old Mexican tradition that has existed since we were born as an independent country. I think that is the heart of the matter, that is what happened to a sector of the Mexican bureaucracy, especially those in public relations: they saw the value to Mexico in receiving refugees.[576]

Finally, Ortíz Monasterio believed that Mexican leaders decided to focus on forming some type of response to the refugees other than deportation because it was simply impossible for the national security apparatus to control the borderlands. Along with others, he argued that it was better to let the refugees enter and then adopt some type of control over them:

> It was very simple, there is no way physically or militarily to close the border. First because there is no budget, there is no way. Somebody said, we have to close the border. That was the idea….The counterargument was, it is impossible, therefore we have to welcome them in order to know how many there are, where they are from, and who they are.[577]

Even though the refugees were allowed to stay, the federal Mexican government initially lacked the means and infrastructure to support them, despite the creation of the COMAR in 1980. The COMAR was initially formed in reaction to the increasing number of Salvadoran refugees and its budget, only $800,000 in 1981, and ability to conduct large-scale operations,

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[576] Interview with Luis Ortíz Monasterio.
[577] Ibid.

were limited. The Guatemalan refugee crisis, however, thrust the group into the forefront of Mexico's response to the humanitarian crisis in the borderlands. By 1982, with the assistance of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), COMAR's budget had expanded to $7,000,000.[578]

In addition to funneling UNHCR funding to migrants for food, housing and medicine, COMAR officials became the Mexican government's mechanism of control and vigilance over the Guatemalan refugees. Living in, or close by, the refugee communities and camps, they became the eyes and ears of the DFS, reporting on movements of Comité members, volunteers, foreign visitors, and of suspected guerrillas posing as refugees. The director of the hospital of Comitán, Roberto Antonio Gómez, who worked closely with the diocese in treating the refugees, said "[the hospital] had an absolute close relationship with Don Samuel" and was particularly critical of COMAR officials. He remembers COMAR as "a form of control from the Mexican state, I do not believe they had the minimum intention of humanitarian aid. I never saw COMAR officials that had any sensibility. To me, the majority [of COMAR officials] were security officials (*judiciales*) the doctors were security officials (*judiciales*)"[579]

COMAR was just one of the many state institutions that arrived in the borderlands during this period. Along with them came doctors, including many that specialized in communicable diseases common in the camps, from bureaus such as the Mexican Institute of Social Security (Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social, IMSS) who, along with personnel from the national security apparatus such as the military and the DFS, represented the greatest concentration of employees of the Mexican federal government in the borderlands in the twentieth century.

[578] Valencia, *Guatemalan Refugees in Mexico*, 24.
[579] Interview by author with Roberto Antonio Gómez, Comitan de Dominguez, January, 11, 2013.

Though many of these individuals came to aid refugees, scores of security officials posed as COMAR officials in order to better to observe the refugees and report back to the DFS.

The national security apparatus was concerned about two issues: infiltration into Mexico by the EGP, and the potential radicalizing implications of the work of Samuel Ruiz and the Comité for thousands of poor indigenous people of both nationalities. The DFS agents embedded with the refugees reported on rumors about guerrillas hiding among groups fleeing the counterinsurgency as well as their contacts with borderlanders. Though many of these rumors were never verified, they added to the paranoia of the federal government. For example, an April 3, 1983 report -- based on an interview with two refugees – claimed a Guatemala guerrilla leader named Bernardio Vilatorio was living in a small town in the borderland municipality of Frontera Comalapa with 100 EGP guerrillas. From there, claimed the DFS report, Vilatorio led his group back and forth across the border through the Lacandon, living among the refugees and collecting supplies from contacts in the town of Comitán.[580] Another refugee informant in Comitán claimed that a small group of seven EGP members met regularly with a priest of the diocese, as well as Roberto Antonio Gómez. The Comitán hospital director was a militant in the Unified Socialist Party of Mexico (El Partido Socialista Unificado de México, PSUM) and had already been in the sights of Mexican intelligence for supposedly "proselytizing" his leftist ideology among the refugees.[581] According to the informant, this small group of EGP members was intimidating the refugees to prevent them from returning to Guatemala, while also openly contemplating, for reasons not listed, triggering a confrontation with Mexican security forces.[582]

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[580] Guerrilleros Guatemaltecos en Territorio Mexicano, México, April 3, 1983, AGN-ADFS Caja 009-011-011 (no pg.listed)

[581] Problema de los Refugiado Guatemaltecos en Chiapas, Orígenes y Consecuencias, México, November 19, 1982, AGN-ADFS Caja 009-011-011 (no pg.listed)

[582] Guerrilleros Guatemaltecos, México, April 3, 1983, *AGN*-ADFS Caja 009-011-011(no pg.listed)

One particular case of how this intelligence gathering worked is illustrated by the story of Javier Pulido Solís. Pulido, a member of a politically connected large landholding family from the borderland community of La Trinitaria, had previously served in local government positions. Upon the arrival of the refugees he became a spy for the DFS, under the guise of being a representative of the Chiapan government in charge of monitoring the humanitarian situation of the refugees. Reporting directly to Governor Absalón Castellanos, he toured the refugee camps, spying on the representatives of COMAR, the Comité, and above all the Guatemalans.[583]

For Pulido all the refugees were connected to the guerrillas, though he admitted that the Mexican government had the responsibility to keep them alive. Therefore Pulido saw his and the DFS's job as to ensure that they did not support the guerrillas by keeping them from having contact with the insurgency. Complicating this job, according to Pulido, were the "Marxist priests and nuns," who aided guerrillas that snuck into camps for food and medical attention. There, Pulido claimed, they hid their guns and supplies, utilizing the chaos of the refugee situation as a sort of rearguard. Pulido claimed that this was why opposition to the Mexican government's proposal to move refugees to Campeche and Quintana Roo was so strong: the guerrillas would lose their support in the borderlands. [584]

[583] Interview with author, Comitán de Dominguez, January 13, 2013.
[584] Interview with author, Comitán de Dominguez, January 13, 2013.

Campeche and Quintana Roo

By 1984 the Mexican national security apparatus in general came to share Pulido's belief that the refugees and the guerrillas were almost one and the same. In their estimation this represented a potential threat to domestic political peace, as the EGP could partner with the Mexican indigenous groups that had arisen thanks to the advocacy of Samuel Ruiz. Another difficulty was the fact that the presence of the refugees on the border provoked frequent incursions by the Guatemalan army, claiming to be in pursuit of guerrillas, into Mexican territory. Ultimately, the decision by the Mexican government to move the refugees to Campeche and Quintana Roo provoked a clash between them, the diocese, and the refugees.

Since the arrival of the refugees small groups of Guatemalan soldiers, such as those that Sister Jiménez confronted in Chajul, had crossed the border to attack or kidnap refugees. It is unclear to what extent the Mexican national security organizations cooperated in these incidents. The arrival of the refugees and the chaos of the counterinsurgency seemed to have broken down the previous partnership between the two countries' national security agencies as thousands of Guatemalans entered Mexican territory in a short time frame, and all were suspects according to the logic of the Guatemalan government. However, the frequent incursions by sometimes up to two hundred soldiers never led to any major conflict with the increasingly present Mexican military. Often these groups of Guatemalan soldiers targeted specific individuals in a crowd of thousands. This precision suggests that at some level these attacks on Mexican soil were assisted by individuals like Pulido, who perhaps pointed out suspicious individuals or allowed undercover Guatemalan intelligence officers to operate in the camps.[585] These incursions

[585] Ortíz Monasterio recounted discovering two Guatemalan soldiers in a refugee camp. One morning the COMAR director followed up on a rumor that two brothers staying in the camp were really soldiers. He found two

suggested the Mexican military refused to harden the border, either because they feared finding themselves in a fight with the Guatemalan military, or they wanted to assist in the counterinsurgency.

Between 1981 and 1984 the Guatemalan military made an estimated 70 incursions into Mexican territory, varying from snatch type jobs to terrorizing entire groups of refugees. For example, on September 21, 1982, a squad of a dozen Guatemalan soldiers tried twice to kidnap refugees or, as the DFS report tellingly calls them, "subversives," from the Rancho Dolores camp. Failure at the first attempt of the day led to a second one in which they killed one individual and wounded another, who managed to escape back to Guatemala.[586] Larger groups of soldiers also made incursions, as was the case on January 23, 1983, when approximately 80 to 100 men dressed as civilians but wielding high-caliber machine guns burst into the La Hamaca camp one early afternoon. After exchanging words with three refugees, they gunned down the men and later escaped back to Guatemala.[587] Though the Mexican Army had stationed the 24th Mechanized Infantry in nearby Comitán, they rarely intervened or prevented these incursions. It is true, however, that when Mexican soldiers were actually stationed at a camp they could serve as a deterrent, as was the unique case of the La Cila Camp on August 23, 1982. There, a group of Guatemalan soldiers approached the camp, firing in the air, while Guatemalan military planes and helicopters flew above it. The Mexican detachment of soldiers fired in the air in response, dispersing what would have been another attack.[588]

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well dressed, refugees with crew cuts, shining their boots. Not wanting to disrupt the camp, he asked them to discreetly leave. Interview with Luis Ortíz Monasterio.

[586] Incursiones del Ejército Guatemalteco en Territorio Nacional y Comentarios en General, México, January 30, 1983, AGN-ADFS, Caja 009-011-011 pg 6.

[587] Incursiones del Ejército Guatemalteco en Territorio Nacional y Comentarios en General, México, January 30, 1983, AGN-ADFS, Caja 009-011-011 *pg 8.*

[588] Incursiones del Ejército Guatemalteco en Territorio Nacional y Comentarios en General, México, January 30, 1983, AGN-ADFS, Caja 009-011-011 *pg 7.*

On April 30, 1984, a large contingent of the Guatemalan army attacked the El Chupadero camp, home to close to two thousand refugees, killing six. Though the attack did not differ from previous incursions as far as numbers, the brutality of the attack, one of whose victims included a mutilated small child, demonstrated the inhumanity of the Guatemalan regime. The Mexican government utilized the incident as an excuse to accelerate its recently announced plan to move the refugees from the border to isolated areas of Campeche and Quintana Roo. Unlike past incursions in this period by Guatemalan soldiers inside Mexico, which were met with little protest, Mexico sent Guatemala a formal note of protest regarding the Chupadero incident. Guatemala blamed the guerrillas, claiming they committed the massacre while dressed in Guatemalan army uniforms.[589]

The Mexican government's reasons for moving the refugees went beyond fears of Guatemalan incursions. They were motivated by other concerns regarding political and national security. For example, a detailed report outlining the benefits and disadvantages of moving the refugees declared that the presence of the Guatemalans on the border benefited the Soviet Union, "progressive clerics," Mexican opposition parties such as PSUM, and the guerrillas. The refugees were contextualized as political and logistical ammunition, ready to be utilized by critics of the PRI regime or as a rearguard for the EGP. In addition, stated the report, the relocation would benefit and speed up Guatemala's counter insurgency, and for that reason would be looked on favorably by the United States. [590]

Under the logic of national security the government did not consider the refugees as autonomous actors; their wishes and plans for their future were buried in calculations of who

[589] Freyermuth Enciso and Nancy Godfrey, *Refugiados guatemaltecos en México*, 46; Valencia, *Guatemalan Refugees in Mexico,* 37-38.

[590] Movimiento de los Refugiados Guatemaltecos, AGN-SDN Caja 19 No:62. Pgs, 695-697.

could utilize their presence against the Mexican state. Only one sentence of the report mentioned the possibility that the refugees would resist relocating, and even then the report projected that it was more likely that the guerrillas, presumably hiding among the refugees, would cause conflict, or that it would be an opportunity for the "progressive clergy" to cause agitation.[591]

The government did face resistance from the refugees and the Comité, which utilized its network of organizers, media contacts, and an increasing international profile to assist the refugees in their opposition to the move. In one instance, the Comité helped refugees flee from the heavy-handed tactics utilized by the Mexican military. Ultimately, the diocese's approach clashed with the government due to the organizing philosophy developed by Ruiz in the 1970's: support the decisions of the indigenous communities the diocese served and assist in the preservation of their identity.

Samuel Ruiz summed up the Comité's approach in December 1982 in an internal memo:

> Having moved to Mexico, they [refugees] keep hold of a social group where they know they can find a certain security and understanding. It is not only about saving individual lives, but communities, people…the refugees are asking for guarantees against ethnocide, they do not want to disappear as a people. Their dispersion and internment into Mexican territory equal assimilation, deculturalization, the practical Mexicanization of the refugees that will come to increase the number of dispossessed in our country. The refugee is Guatemalan, Chuj, Canjobal, etc, and wants to continue being it….Ethnocide is a crime against humanity.[592]

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[591] Movimiento de los Refugiados Guatemaltecos, AGN-SDN Caja 19 No:62. Pgs, 698.

[592] Comité Cristiano de Solidaridad de la Diócesis de San Cristóbal de Las Casas: Testimonios, Informes, December 1982, AHDSC-FR, Folder 423 Pg 1

For the refugees, staying together in the borderlands meant retaining their identity as well as the hope of returning home. Upon hearing of the plans to move the camps, the Comité assisted the refugees in protesting, coordinating an expansive letter writing campaign to the president of Mexico, UNHCR, and COMAR, to be passed on to the press. Combining heartbreaking tales of oppression and escape from the Guatemalan counterinsurgency, written in broken Spanish and often "signed" with inked thumbprints, the letters claimed that the relocation would put them at risk after surviving so much. They were forceful and moving denunciations of a policy taken by the Mexican government without consulting the people it claimed it was trying to help.

One such letter, from the Santa Rosa camp and addressed to President Miguel de la Madrid, COMAR, and UNHCR, "begged that you allow us to stay here in Santa Rosa, the elderly say that with the change of climate they will die, the children, the same."[593] The members of the Joaquín Miguel Gutiérrez Camp wrote to the president of COMAR that, "in no moment will we make ourselves Mexican citizens, we are indigenous Guatemalans, profoundly tied to the history of our country, to its present and future. We are anxious to witness the future events of our country, to return when conditions are more favorable."[594]

Though officially COMAR and others in the Mexican government claimed the move to Campeche and Quintana Roo was voluntary, Secretary of the Interior Manuel Bartlett revealed the true rigidity of the relocation policy when he stated a week after the El Chupadero incident that the refugees had two choices: return to Guatemala or go to Campeche and Quintana Roo.[595] Echoing the state of communications before the arrival of the refugees, when the diocese served

[593] Los representantes to Miguel de la Madrid et al., May 19, 1984, AHDSC-FR Folder 78.

[594] Los refugiados to Señor Presidente de la Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados, Frontera Comalapa, July 14, 1984, AHDSC-FR Folder 78.

[595] Miguel Ángel Velázquez, 1981-1984 Una Cronología," July 1, 1984.

as interlocutor with the indigenous Mexican communities, the government attempted with no success to persuade the Comité to convince the refugees to go with the plan.

In the face of active resistance by many refugees -- which included running away from COMAR and migration officials and blocking the paths into the camps -- the Mexican military formulated a relocation plan that seemed more like a counterinsurgency operation. In mid-July 1984 they deployed a large contingent of men and equipment to the borderlands: three marine infantry divisions, two marine parachute divisions, two airplanes with a capacity to hold fifty people each, six helicopters equipped with rockets and machine guns, and six zodiac motor boats to navigate the borderland rivers.[596] In addition, they began a propaganda campaign designed to convince the refugees that the relocation was for their own benefit, that it would in fact "reaffirm their nationalism." The government also promised jobs, state and federal services, and an overall better quality of life in Campeche and Quintana Roo. Above all, the propaganda was aimed at neutralizing the "progressive clerics" and leftist opposition parties.[597]

The most illustrative and dramatic example of the Comité and government's clash over efforts to relocate the refugees occurred at the Chupadero camp. There, without previous consultation, officials from UNHCR and COMAR accompanied by police and military units, informed the thousands of refugees that they would soon start the move to Campeche. The refugees refused, and a tense standoff developed. As military units formed a loose circle around the encampment, officials from COMAR threatened to repatriate the recalcitrant refugees to

[596]Personal Pertenece Armada Mexicano Continuando Desarrollando Actividades, México. July 16, 1984. AGN-SDN Caja 19 No:62 Pg. 463.

[597]Determine el Problemática Existente en el sureste del país., México, July 10, 1984, AGN-SDN Caja 19. No:62 Pg. 526.

Guatemala if they did not agree to the relocation. To increase the pressure, COMAR began to withhold food and supplies: the Mexican government declared a siege on the refugees. [598]

The siege of Chupadero ended in dramatic fashion with the help of the Comité. Sometime between April and June, utilizing Comité funds, Samuel Ruiz bought a large ranch nearby, La Gloria, which was home to a handful of Mexican families. In the besieged camp Comité members and the refugees planned an escape to the new church property. During the night of June 7, approximately two thousand Guatemalan men, women, and children once again fled their homes. Outracing military and COMAR officials in pursuit, they arrived in La Gloria to find pre-built shacks, food, and medical supplies.[599]

Soon after this dramatic escape from the authorities to the safety of the La Gloria camp, the Comité issued a press release stating that all of the refugees, not just those from Chupadero, opposed the move to Campeche and Quintana Roo. The Comité strongly condemned the Mexican government's refusal to dialog with the refugees, to respond, for example, to the overwhelming number of letters, 1975, written by refugees spread across the borderlands asking to remain where they were. The collective message in those letters to the Mexican state, stated the Comité, was the reasons why the refugees opposed their removal from the borderlands. To accept relocation, stated the Comité's letter, would mean for the refugees the "sacrifice of their most important values, the lives of the weakest among them, their existence as a people, and the conservation [mantenimiento] of their ethnicity, culture and nationality."[600]

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[598] "A Quienes que Lo Han Olvidado: La Masacre de El Chupadero," *El Caminante,* April 1985: 3-5.
[599] Interview by author with Alejandro Pascual, Comitán de Dominguez, January 15, 2013.
[600] Estado de Chiapas, México, June 15, 1984, AGN-ADFS, Caja 009-011-011,

Conclusion

Despite this resistance, between 1984 and 1985 approximately 16,000 Guatemalan refugees, out of an estimated 40,000, were relocated to Campeche and Quintana Roo. As feared by the Comité, COMAR, working with IMSS, was inadequately prepared for relocating so many people and the refugees faced a lack of food and medical supplies. Many were forced to walk miles without rest through the jungle, echoing their harsh entrance into Mexico. In stations along the way, thousands of Guatemalans were forced into small hastily built bodegas, with little room and lacking sanitary conditions. Pregnant women, children, and the elderly suffered the most. Approximately 7 percent of the refugees died during the trip.[601]

During the same period in Guatemala the fury of the counterinsurgency lessened and the pace of arrival of new refugees slowed. An uneasy and often bloody stalemate emerged, as the military controlled government was unable to completely eradicate the EGP and other guerrilla groups. Human rights violations against the indigenous population continued as the communities the refugees left behind were forced into "development poles." In these jailed communities thousands lived under gunpoint and the watchful eye of a military responsible for genocide.[602]

After the relocation of the refugees and the pause in the mass exodus to the borderlands in 1984, the Mexican government and the refugees still in the borderlands developed a workable, though tense, relationship. Dependent on food and medical supplies from COMAR, the Comité, and other NGOs, the refugees lived in a state of poverty and relative isolation. Their contact with outside groups was limited, as their official ability to travel was curtailed by a constant

[601] Freyermuth Enciso and Nancy Godfrey, *Refugiados guatemaltecos en México*, 46-48.
[602] Jonas,*The Battle for Guatemala,* 150-152.

presence of federal immigration officials as well as COMAR, from whom refugees needed to solicit permission to travel. However, the Mexican government no longer threated relocation. [603]

The federal Mexican government continued to worry about insurrection in the borderlands, and attempted to curtail that possibility through funding infrastructure development in the long neglected region. The 1982 Plan Chiapas pumped millions of dollars into programs designed to improve living standards by improving communications through road building. Crucially, in the area of national security, construction started on a border highway. In the same area traversed by Trueba decades earlier, it allowed the Mexican military to patrol the border from the eastern edge of the Lacandon jungle to the plains south of Comitán.[604]

Ultimately the government's goals failed, as the funding allocated in Plan Chiapas was often misused or taken at the local level by powerful caciques.[605] Further attempts at solving the tension in the borderlands, such as through a program of land-reform in the 1980's, also failed to fulfill the demands of the indigenous groups that arose in the 1970's. Corrupt officials parceled out land to allies, or failed to meet the demands in terms of size and quality of land given to indigenous campesino groups. At times, in the Lacandon, this struggle for land became violent as large landowners violently evicted peasants that had "invaded" their property. The church continued to be blamed by the state for increasing violence between indigenous protesters and local and federal officials. The pressure was so great on Samuel Ruiz that rumors pointed to his removal by Rome in 1993, a move that was only stopped by the outbreak of the Zapatista

[603] Freyermuth Enciso and Nancy Godfrey, *Refugiados guatemaltecos en México*, 62-63.
[604] Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion,* 147-151.
[605] Ibid., 152-153.

rebellion in 1994. Then, as before, the diocese played a necessary role as an interlocutor between the state and the leadership of the indigenous rebellion.[606]

[606] Neil Harvey, "Rural Reforms and the Zapatista Rebellion: Chiapas, 1988-1995," *Third World Quarterly* 16 (1995)

Conclusion

After the removal of the Guatemalan refugees to Campeche and Quintana Roo, the Comité continued assisting the thirty thousand refugees left in the Chiapan borderlands, helping the communities organize in areas of education, health, and economics. By the end of the 1980's the Comité also began to help with a crucial aspect of the refugee's story, to return home. In 1988 the refugees formed the Permanent Commission to negotiate that return. The Commission became an active participant in the long peace process between the Guatemalan government and UNRG. With the support of the Comité, along with other international aid associations, the Commission became a sophisticated and forceful negotiator, ensuring that the refugees were not forgotten in the complicated peace process that only concluded in 1996.[607]

In their magazine *Reencuentro*, the Commission reminded their communities, and the international community, of the history of their exodus and their hopes for return. For example, in the article, "Why We Left," individuals such as Marcos, from a small village in Huehuetenango, remembered how the military rounded up dozens of men, women, and children and locked them in a house, setting it afire for suspected collaboration with the guerrillas.[608] There were also articles about the first groups of returnees who, in 1993, with the assistance of the UNCHR and the Comité, negotiated land and assistance from the Guatemalan government. The Commission ensured a dialogue among the disparate populations in Mexico and Guatemala,

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[607] Arafat Jamal, *Refugee repatriation and reintegration in Guatemala: lessons learned from UNHCR's experience. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit & Regional Bureau for the Americas and the Caribbean* (Switzerland: Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2000), 11

[608] "Por Que Salimos," *Reencuentro,* July-August 1992 (2): 3-6.

and that the refugees were informed of problems of the returnees regarding too little land and the presence of the Guatemalan military, issues that could be brought to the negotiating table.[609]

By 1996 nearly 80 percent of the refugees had returned home. Many of the returnees reflected that their time in the borderlands, especially the organizing experience, assisted in their negotiations to establish acceptable conditions for their return. In particular, the negotiations called for special assistance for women, as well as equal access to repatriation resources for both heads of the household. Finally, many refugees commented on the experience in Comité projects in Chiapas, such as education and cooperatives, as serving as models for initiatives in Guatemala.[610]

The Mexican government played a leading role in negotiating the peace process that formally ended the civil war in Guatemala. This long and complicated process was marked by false starts, outside interventions, and lack of trust on both the Guatemalan government's part as well as that of the UNRG. In 1983 Mexico, along with Panama, Colombia, and Venezuela, formed the Contadora Group, with the ambitious aim of solving the Central American conflicts. Mexico, like other Latin American governments, was motivated by a search for peace and a desire to avoid outside intervention from the United States. Initial progress, such as getting the five countries of the Isthmus to agree on the general parameters of negotiations, was waylaid by the maneuvering of the United States, which was fearful of formal recognition of the revolutionary Nicaraguan government.[611]

The final peace proposal was not signed until 1996, after the international political context had dramatically changed. The Cold War over, the Guatemalan government no longer

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[609] "Resumen Cronológico," *Reencuentro,* February, 1993 (7): 8-10.

[610] Jamal, *Refugee repatriation,* 8.

[611] Rodrigo Páez Montalbán, "El Proceso de Negociación del Grupo de Contadora," *Revista Mexicana de la Política Exterior* (2013): 63-74.

had the boogeyman of communism to justify its continued resistance to political openings. Similarly, the fall of the Soviet Union and the ouster of the revolutionary Nicaraguan regime by free elections weakened the UNRG position, which seemed to be a relic in the new post-Cold War world. Mexico continued its active involvement in the process, and Mexico City, home to many exiles, served as the site of negotiations.[612]

After the peace agreement was signed, those refugees that had stayed in the borderlands sought to normalize their legal relationship to the Mexican state. Beginning in 1997, the Comité began to receive letters from communities asking for their intervention with the Mexican authorities to become Mexican citizens.[613] The reasons for staying were much like the reasons for leaving: family and the hope for a stable future. As one letter from the community of Amparo Agua stated, "our children, born here in Mexico, have begun their lives as any other Mexican….our young people have married Mexicans and we do not want to break up families, leaving orphans to suffer in Mexico."[614]

Thirty years after his leadership of COMAR, Luiz Ortiz Monasterio reflected on the impact the refugees had on the awareness of Mexicans regarding their southern border:

> "The refugees taught us that in Mexico there is a southern border. When we used to talk about the border, we only talked about the northern border, nobody talked about the southern border. They showed us the size of our country, where we extended to: this is a reason to thank the refugees.[615]

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[612] Luis Alberto Padilla, "Peacemaking and Conflict: Transformation in Guatemala," in *Journeys through Conflict: Narratives and Lessons*, eds., Hayward Alker, Ted Robert Gurr, and Kumar Rupesinghe (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 56-78.

[613] Campamento San Lorenzo a Dr, Hector Arciniega, January 13, 1997, AHDSC-FR Folder 475.

[614]Campamento Amparo Aguas, September 22, 1998, AHDSC-FR Folder 178.

[615]Interview with Luis Ortíz Monasterio.

Not all Mexicans, of course, throughout the period this dissertation examines, forgot there were two borders, and especially not the refugees who asked to stay in Mexico. At times, though, it seemed to some, especially borderlanders faced with a lack of federal government supported infrastructure, that officials in Mexico City had forgotten, because the federal government's priorities-- territorial integrity, immigration, energy, and national security—were distinct from those of many locals. There was a gap in those investments that impacted the everyday life of borderlanders. This lead, for example, residents of 1960's Comitán to occasionally do without lights, even as the rivers of the region supplied millions of kilowatts of energy to the rest of Mexico The actions and programs of the numerous bureaus concerned with the region, meanwhile, reflected a federal government approach to the borderlands as fugitive landscape, outside of, and at times threatening, Mexico's changing political, economic, and cultural milieu.

From independence in 1821 the borderlands did not seem to fit into the story Mexico told itself about its history, but rather seemed more connected to Guatemala or adrift in a nebulous neutrality. The region needed patriotic writers like Manuel Larráinzar and Matías Romero to try and demonstrate to Mexicans with no connection to the region that it was part of their country, that Chiapanecos had chosen to become Mexicans, and that the potential loss of the region would be yet another blow to Mexican territorial integrity. But even as they developed these arguments the wider Mexican public also read another story, one of a region plagued by invasions and depredations, of a chaotic fugitive landscape: this was an image that would endure long after Guatemala gave up its claims to Chiapas in 1882.

The image of a borderlands outside of the purview of the federal government was in some respects reflective of reality, leading, for instance, the head of the 1936 border study

commission to note the region was "almost forgotten." The post-revolutionary programs that sent a variety of federal officials to the borderlands, from engineers to immigration agents, reflected an effort to establish a state presence as well as to – reflecting the observation from Ortiz Monasterio above --- to find out literally how far the nation extended. This process of both discovery and management produced two conclusions that had consequences for the borderlands in the latter half of the twentieth century: the region had a wealth of resources and it served as an entrance point to potentially subversive transnational migrants.

In terms of managing its resources on the southern border, Mexico looked north, to its history of transnational border management with the United States. For nearly three decades, from the 1930's to the establishment of CILA in 1962, officials in the president's office, the Secretariat of Foreign Affairs, and the embassy in Guatemala, repeated to themselves, and to successive Guatemalan governments, a story of cooperation with the colossus to the north. This story ignored a history fraught with instances of the US pointedly refusing to commit to a shared management of the border. For these diplomats and engineers, however, in search of sources of electricity to provide for a growing Mexican economy and population that complicated history lost importance. For them, the borderlands remained fugitive as long as they were untapped, unmanaged by the powerful new bureaus such as the Secretariat of Hydraulic Resources, whose technocratics possessed the budget and technology to bring the fruits of the the struggle for Chiapas, and the Mexican Revolution, to the nation.

These engineers worked parallel to those federal officials concerned about the danger to national security posed by the movement of Guatemalans into the borderlands. At first this worry focused on the demographics of the region. This fugitive landscape contained "foreigners" that could claim the rights of Mexicans, and even potentially dislodge Chiapas from the nation.

As it became clear that it was impossible to stop this transboundary movement, that Guatemalans would not reclaim Chiapas, and that this immigration offered a needed source of labor, the federal government retreated from the large scale efforts that produced programs like the Demographic Commissions of 1935 and 1941.

The federal government's management of the borderlands became more concerned with the changing nature of exile in the region, especially after the fall of Árbenz in 1954. The removal of the traditional-type exiles that fled Ubico's Guatemala in 1944 demonstrated that the new national security bureaus could effectively control a specific aspect of the borderlands. However, that institutional effectiveness failed to contain the arrival and operations of a new type of exile, the guerrilla. The borderlands became the entrance point to insurgency. The guerrillas' goals and ideology transcended borders -- unlike those of earlier generals and politicians who were only interested in obtaining the president's chair in Guatemala City. And this meant that they threatened the stability of a Mexican state already challenged by domestic actors, such as an activist church and leftist dissidents, who were in part indignant about the absence of the state in the form of schools, roads, and hospitals.

The arrival of thousands of refugees reminded federal officials that their borderlands were fugitive. Despite a boundary treaty and efforts such as the Demographic Commission and demarcation of the boundary, not much had changed in terms of managing the border. If a Mexico City newspaper reader from the 1850's glanced at stories regarding the borderlands in the later twentieth century, he or she would find them very familiar: occasional violence, worries over "invasion" by Guatemalans, commerce outside the state's control and, finally, Guatemalan political strife that spilled over into the region. The most substantial changes would be that they

might be reading by light supplied, in part, by a borderland dam, and when listing the weather of major cities, Tapachula would definitely be on the map of Mexico.

However, it is important to situate the arrival of the refugees in this decades-long examination of the creation of the Chiapan borderlands by recognizing their arrival as introducing an important new period in the region's history. Reading Ortíz Monasterio's statement above, in conjunction with the letter of the refugees asking to stay in Mexico reveals a border that acquired a significance that it never so clearly had for so many people. The refugees and the violence of the Guatemalan counterinsurgency served the same role as capital described by Katz on Mexico's northern border. If before the border was ignored or its placement on the ground was unknown, the arrival of the refugees gave a new significance to the border, one side meant death, the other life.

To harden the border, Mexico City did what governments do, they sent bureaucrats, and national security personnel, who in turn reported back to the center. Those interactions, explored from 1821 on, are in large part what this dissertation adds to the historiography: an examination of what the border meant to the center, and how representatives of the state shaped the impact of the federal government through the narratives they crafted regarding the borderlands. The first story that needed to be told was how this peripheral region was part of the national history of Mexico. The emotion that fueled the patriotic historical interpretation of Chiapas's inclusion had as much to do with Mexico's sense of loss in its northern borderlands and political rivalry with Guatemala; Mexicans might not know where Chiapas was but they were not going to lose it.

From that period on Mexicans officials (and to an extent the Mexican public) from the center began a series of rediscoveries of the region that emphasized the fugitive nature of the landscape: Matias Romero wrote about the destruction of Cafetal Juarez, Mexicans read about

the attack on La Fama, Armando Trueba became alarmed over Guatemalan cultivation in Mexico, and reports by DFS officials warned about Guatemalan guerrillas. For many engineers and diplomats, the periodic rediscovery of the borderlands meant a reinterpretation of the history of how Mexico had managed its northern borderlands, and what that story meant for the future of the Chiapan borderlands. It was a story of the relationship between the center and the borderlands, of how the peripheries of the nation are understood and eventually incorporated.

Ultimately these interactions with the borderlands shaped a pattern of similar, but impactful policies focused on the issues of national security, mapping, and energy production. Broader programs such as the short-lived Demographic Commission, which occurred after the rediscovery of the borderlands in 1935, demonstrated to officials that it was impossible to fully manage the region. Instead, temporary, concentrated efforts by the modern Mexican state, such as control over the post-Ubico exiles, remained possible for the national security apparatus; control over the rivers seemed possible, and fruitful, on the part of the CILA.

Any temporary control the Mexican government managed over the borderlands was fleeting due to its very geography and the presence of the political border. From the state's viewpoint labor became unregulated and trade became contraband when it passed without its say-so over the line on the map. Further impeding control was the landscape of the vast Lacandon, which the state did not even try to manage, leaving it to loggers, and later, those dispossessed of their land.

Finally the region's position on the post-independence map made it a natural place of refuge for exiles, which as the nature of that experience changed after 1954, also meant the borderlands became a threat in the eyes of the state. Specifying the borderlands as a site of refuge introduces an important analytical point of view in the examination of regional and

international history. Political conflict in Guatemala, and more broadly in Central America in general, arrived in the borderlands through individuals and groups fleeing violence at home. Exiles, like commerce, culture, and religion, represented powerful transboundary connections. These were often, though, connections made outside the view or against the wishes of the state.

Examining the movement of exiles through the eyes of the state means also broadening the definition of exile to include people more often identified as refugees. The indigenous Guatemalans that fled into the borderlands were political actors; they had become targets of a counterinsurgency because their very ethnicity was deemed subversive. This charge of subversiveness followed them to Mexico. There they became a cause of concern for the Mexican national security apparatus because of their politics, and the possible domestic disruption their presence might cause in the borderlands, especially due to their connection with the San Cristóbal de las Casas diocese.

There are many questions that still need to be explored regarding the region's history. It is important to examine the history of how borderlanders conceptualized the border. In contrast to the state's conception of the region as fugitive, how did they see their home? How did they understand the border? What narratives did they tell? How did they view their relationship with Guatemala or with the rest of Mexico? And finally, how did they fit themselves into the narrative of Mexican history? In addition, better understanding of the Guatemalan point of view would round out a history that has been dominated by conflict. What did the "loss" of Chiapas mean to Guatemalans, to their sense of nationhood? What are the histories of the Guatemalans that crossed into Mexico as cheap labor? How did they view the border, Mexico, and the Mexicans that employed them?

The Chiapan borderlands offer rich possibilities for historical research, and in a practical sense demand to be better understood as the region continues to be an entrance point for thousands of Central American immigrants traveling to Mexico and, often, to the United States. In many instances, the reasons these individuals are passing through the region are similar to those motivating earlier refugees, connected to political and economic violence in their home countries. In addition, they face similar circumstances, including a particular manifestation of the lack of a Mexican government presence that I have traced throughout this dissertation, as non-governmental organizations, including the Catholic Church, are the backbone of assistance. However, the majority of these individuals are not staying in the borderlands, but traveling north to Mexico's other border, connecting the country's two borders in a long and hazardous journey. This is yet another story of transboundary movement from the Chiapan borderlands.[616]

[616] Amnesty International, *Invisible Victims: Migrants on the Move in Mexico* (London, 2010)

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Vita

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Margolis has presented his research at numerous conferences throughout his graduate career including the XIV Reunión Internacional de Historiadores de México, the Newberry Library, and the American Historical Association. He also has received a number of honors and awards including the Frank. B. Cotton Trust Graduate Scholarship, the Dr. W. Turrentine Jackson History Scholarship, the Harper Dissertation Research Award, the Dr. Ellergy S. Schalk Memorial Student Excellence Award, and the Trennert-Iverson Award.

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