

Ensayos de Reseña/Review Essays

Post-War Central America

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- *Terror in the Countryside. Campesino Responses to Political Violence in Guatemala, 1954-1985*, by Rachel A. May. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Center for International Studies/Research in International Studies/Latin America Series #35, 2001.
- *La guerrilla fue mi camino. Epitafio para César Montes*, by Julio César Macías. Guatemala: Piedra Santa/Colección Afluentes de Modernidad, 1999.
- *Testigo de conciencia (Periodismo de Opinión Documentado)*, by Marco A. Mérida. Guatemala: ARCASAVI, 2000.
- *Centroamérica 2002. Un nuevo modelo de desarrollo regional*, edited by Klaus Bodemer and Eduardo Gamarra. Caracas: Nueva Sociedad, 2002.
- *Who Governs? Guatemala Five years After the Peace Accords*, by Rachel Sieder, Megan Thomas, George Vickers and Jack Spence. Cambridge, Mass.: Hemispheric Initiatives/Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), January 2002.
- *Pasos hacia una nueva convivencia: Democracia y participación en Centroamérica*, edited by Ricardo Córdova Macías, Günther Maihold and Sabina Kurtenbach. San Salvador: FUNDAUNGO, Instituto de Estudios Iberoamericanos de Hamburgo and Instituto Iberoamericano de Berlin, 2001.
- *Los desafíos de la democracia en Centroamérica*, by René Poitevin and Alexander Sequén-Mónchez. Guatemala: FLACSO, 2002.
- *Más allá de las elecciones: Diez años después de los acuerdos de paz*, edited by Hector Dada Hirezi. San Salvador: FLACSO, 2002.
- *Guatemala, un proyecto inconcluso: La multiculturalidad, un paso hacia la democracia*, by Hugo Cayzac. Guatemala: FLACSO, 2001.
- *La violencia en el contexto del posconflicto, según la percepción de comunidades urbanas pobres de Guatemala*, by Caroline Moser and Cathy McIlwaine. Washington/Bogotá: Banco Mundial-Región de Latinoamérica y el Caribe/Tercer Mundo Editores, 2001.
- *El lado oscuro de la eterna primavera. Violencia, criminalidad y delincuencia en la postguerra*, by Manolo Vela, Alexander Sequén-Mónchez and Hugo Antonio Solares. Guatemala: FLACSO, 2001.

Five years after the peace treaties in Guatemala, ten years after the peace agreements in El Salvador, and a decade or so after the start of a reconstruction and reconciliation process in war-torn Central America, a new generation of authors, analysts and scholars are paying attention to post-war research themes. During the 1970s, 1980s, and most of the 1990s the basic issue on Central America was the terrifying consequences of the civil war, generally analyzed in the context of the Cold War. Actually, in the second post-Cold War decade, the attention shifted to-

wards the long-term reconciliation process, the possibility of sustainable democracy, new forms of local participation and improved conditions for local development, ethnic relations in post-war societies, new forms of non-war violence, etc. By and large, it is a stimulating idea to realize that the analysis of war and terror in Central America is now a subject of the past. Little by little a new research agenda is developing for the coming years.

The first books to be discussed refer to the consequences of armed conflict in Guatemala. Two of the authors were direct participants: Marco Mérida, a key observer of the planning and implementation of the counterinsurgency campaigns and the peace negotiations in the 1980s and early 1990s in Guatemala, and Julio César Macías (César Montes), guerrilla leader in Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador. In the second group of books, the studies by Klaus Bodemer and Eduardo Gamarra deal with the actual and future problems and possibilities of Central America, and Rachel Sieder et al. present a comprehensive and attractive review of Guatemala's post-war problems. The third cluster, the three volumes of Ricardo Córdova et al., René Poitevin and Alexander Sequén-Mónchez, and Hector Dada et al. refer to the electoral democracy in Central America, respectively in El Salvador. The final book cluster to be reviewed comprises a study about Guatemala's multicultural society, which was a central issue during the peace negotiations, followed by two other studies written by Caroline Moser et al. and Manolo Vela et al. on the post-war violence situation: 'new violence' and delinquency, again in Guatemala.

The first study reviewed, *Terror in the Countryside. Campesino Responses to Political Violence in Guatemala, 1954-1985* by Raquel May, is about a somewhat forgotten area of concern: the transformation of what we now would describe as the 'civil society' during the long years of military dominance, repression and conflict in Guatemala from the mid-fifties to the mid-eighties. The principal objective is to study the interaction between political violence and popular movements, i.e. mainly rural, *campesino*-based organizations. The book is based upon a theoretical model and on a review of secondary sources such as reports and academic studies. Fieldwork and interpretative interviews are not the backbone of the study. The theoretical model is more or less the result of a 'natural history approach' and 'thick description' of historical data. Most authors are quoted in the 'according-to-X-and' style and that sometimes results in the summary-like revision of arguments made by Adams, Camacho, Gleijeses, Jonas, Landsberger, Torres-Rivas, Wiarda, Wickham-Crowly, Wolf etc. I always prefer a good, factual, descriptive and interpretative way of reasoning in anthropology, history and social sciences instead of a typological analysis. Leaving the first three somewhat tedious typology chapters aside, one might conclude that the study begins on page 51 and ends on page 163. These 112 pages provide a clear and relevant account of popular organizations, popular protest, strikes, marches, meetings and demonstrations, and, in general, the process of resistance and radicalization of Guatemala's popular sectors during the years of fear and repression. It is a serious and well-written study of the labour organizations and cooperative movements, its resistance and repression from the decade of Castillo Armas and Ydígoras Fuentes to the governments of Ríos Montt and Mejía Víctores. The guerrilla movements, their internal structure, even flow charts of their organizational pathways are presented in the central chapters of the book. The author thus provides an easily readable textbook of ethnic and class contradictions in war-torn Guatemala, despite the more obligatory theoretical reflections.

César Macías (César Montes), a renowned guerrilla leader of Central American stature (he was involved in the armed conflicts of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua), was the co-founder of the Guatemalan FAR in 1963 and, after the death of Turcios Lima, its principal commander. Returning from Mexico to Guatemala, he became one of the founders of ERP in 1972. In the eighties he shared the guerrilla forces of FMLN in El Salvador, to become, finally, a military adviser to the Sandinista government in Nicaragua in the counter-guerrilla campaigns against the *contras*. His book, *La guerrilla fue mi camino. Epitafio para César Montes*, is a compilation of field impressions during the guerrilla years and is presented as his war memoirs. The first, second and third editions were launched in 1999 by Piedra Santa, the editorial house that published the complete works of Miguel Angel Asturias as well. In a certain sense, the book is a mixture of war memories, journalism, and reflections. Two thirds of the book refers to the early guerrilla years in Guatemala (the 1960s and 1970s) when the author was a member and later the commander of the FAR and the EGP, living in the Lacandona jungle in Chiapas and in the Ixcán jungle of the northern Maya departments of Guatemala. At the end of the last chapter on Guatemala, a useful flow chart of the evolution, splintering, and re-unification of the guerrilla groups from 1962 to 1982 (when the URNG was created) is presented. The chapters on El Salvador and Nicaragua are much shorter and less interesting. The book as such is mostly a collection of war anecdotes and nostalgic reflections. In this sense it leaves the reader with the uneasy feeling that he is reading about *frisch-fröhliche* guerrilla adventures. The portraits of Guatemala's first generation of guerrilla commanders and the sketches of the competing commanders of the second guerrilla generation are benevolent. The trips to Cuba (where he talked often with Fidel Castro, and received the old Rolex watch of Che Guevara and a pistol with an engraved inscription), Vietnam (where he interviewed Ho Chi Min), and Panama (where he met Omar Torrijos) were described as great successes. However, what makes the book absolutely interesting is the presentation of the way guerrilla commanders in those times thought and acted. It is and remains the first narrative vision from within.

The author of *Testigo de conciencia (Periodismo de Opinión Documentado)*, Marco Mérida, is a person whom most readers would most likely not wish to meet after eight o'clock in a dark alley. This sinister-looking ex-colonel is a military hard liner turned political analyst after a long career in counterinsurgency and intelligence operations. The former deputy director of intelligence participated in the initial peace negotiations under president Cereso in the late 1980s and defended the establishment of democratic order during the days of the self-coup of president Serrano in 1993. His memoirs are dedicated to the memory of the 'oficiales del Ejército, especialistas, soldados, patrulleros de autodefensa civil y comisionados militares que valientemente ofrendaron su vida en defensa de Guatemala'. He represents the army's right wing and presents his memoirs, in his preface to the second edition, as the '...antithesis of the REMHI [reports] and the reports of the Truth Commission'. The 400 or more pages of the book, written in military prose and full of capitalized text and bold and underlined sentences, are interspersed with flow charts, graphics and sketches that illustrate the communist danger from which Guatemala escaped thanks to the intervention of the Armed Forces in defence of democracy. The book, nevertheless, is well worth reading. Mérida is the 'military intellectual' of the silent majority of hard-liners within Guatemala's officers' corps and writes down what other senior officers think and discuss. The book, written in

December 2000 in the language and codes of Cold War prose, consists of four parts (chapters). Chapter 1 deals with the communist movement in and outside Guatemala. After careful reading, the only viable conclusion is that, until the very last days of Arbenz, the Communist movement in Guatemala never represented a serious threat to the country's stability. Of course Cuba is mentioned as a menacing regional power. Explicit references about military assistance and the shipments of equipment, however, are lacking. The second chapter is a rather bleak history of the guerrilla warfare and the counterinsurgency campaigns. Pages 96 and 97 offer a concise version of all the counterinsurgency plans between 1982 and 1995. The third chapter is a heterogeneous collection of references, annexes etc., dealing with the influence of Régis Debray on the Latin American left, the veracity of Rigoberta Manchu's testimonials, extracts from military orders of the most important guerrilla forces, ORPA and EGP, comments on the publication of the reports of the Truth Commission and the REHMI report, etc. The last chapter is a short epilogue glorifying yet again Guatemala's armed forces and inflating the popular support of the insurgent forces to astronomic proportions: Mérida tries to convince the reader that the small EGP alone counted for an amazing number of 250,000 guerrilla fighters and sympathizers in the early 1980s (p. 367). As is known, however, official government and OAS documents refer to a very modest number, not more than several thousand men, women and children of all the URNG members at the moment of demobilization after the peace agreements.

Reputed scholars on Central America's economy, society and political order contributed to *Centroamérica 2002. Un nuevo modelo de desarrollo regional*, Bodemer and Gamorra's edited volume. The study is an overview of problems and possibilities on topics such as Central America's integration, its development pattern, the migration streams and the significance of the remittances, the sector of education, the problems of violence and justice, the possibilities of sustainable development, etc. The first three articles (by Bulmer-Thomas and Kincaid, Martini, and Zuvecas) form the section of the book on economics. The opening article of Bulmer-Thomas and Kincaid is the most accessible and refers to the long-term development model based upon political long-term stability as a necessity of regional integration. While including the arguments of most of the other authors, it nevertheless constitutes a fine introduction to Central America's general economic issues. Zuvecas' chapter is complementary and provides a good overview of the regional economy between 1980 and 2000, as well as a sectoral analysis. Solís' chapter is the political analysis of the problems of regional integration. The next two chapters of Mahler on transnational migration and Pérez Saínz on employment and poverty present the demographic and social problems and challenges. The demographic panorama of Central America has not been frequently studied, and the article of Mahler provides an essential introduction to one of the region's hidden problems: the intra-regional migration pattern (the displacement process of war refugees fleeing violence – 150,000 Nicaraguan migrants to Costa Rica and 25,000 to 60,000 migrants to Belice), and the extra-regional migration, in fact a population exodus to the US and Mexico. Around 1,130,000 Central American-born citizens (of which around 465,000 are Salvadorians) now live permanently in the US, and an additional 700,000 live there as well as 'indocumentados'. Mahler uses a series of ECLAC studies to demonstrate the importance of the remittances that keep the poor in El Salvador and Guatemala afloat. Pérez Saínz, an author with a striking

record of studies on Central America's poverty and informality, complements the former study with fresh data and a refreshing conceptualization on employment and self-employment, inclusion and exclusion, and the poverty problem. A must for readers who want to be briefed on what is probably the region's most ominous problem. Like the former contributions, most other chapters provide broad introductory analysis: Sojo on the modernization of the state and Call on violence and justice (another key issue). The article by Maihold and Córdova on democracy and citizenship is also highly recommended – in the next section of this essay I will review their arguments more deeply. In general, the volume edited by Bodemer and Gamarra is of high quality and provides a good and accurate introduction of Central America's problems and prospects for an interested public.

The same can be said about the study by Sieder et al. on present day Guatemala with the intriguing title *Who Governs? Guatemala Five years After the Peace Accords*. Sieder is one of Europe's leading scholars on Guatemala. Thomas, Vickers, and Spence are veteran US analysts of the country. This study is, like the former, written for both a scholarly audience and the interested reader. It satisfies these two objectives very well; in addition, it reads easily due in part because the four authors have reached a unity in style. This book is highly recommended to anyone interested in Guatemala's post war society and political system. The authors do emphasize a series of problems such as the weakness of the political actors, the political drift and fragmentation, the growing influence of the 'fuerzas ocultas', the ease with which criminal and drug related elements enter the political arena, etc. Also interesting is the analysis of the civilian actors, and of the post-war Maya movement. Electoral data and a review of the political parties complement the study of civil society. The fine section on the justice system and the police, followed by a condensed paragraph on poverty, inclusion/exclusion and human development deserve special mention. The study, unfortunately, will leave the reader pessimistic.

Whatever the problems of the region, after reading the following two studies one may be more optimistic about the future of democracy in comparison with the scenario for Guatemala. The volume *Pasos hacia una nueva convivencia: Democracia y participación en Centroamérica* edited by Córdova, Maihold and Kurtenbach is a well-written study on citizenship, civilian participation and electoral democracy in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama, and dedicated to the memory of Mario Solórzano, who was the author of the chapter on Guatemala. This chapter is basically (one could not expect another analysis) a study of Guatemala's civil-military legacy and the tidy prospects for the rule of law without interference of authoritarian governments. Zamora is the author of the study on El Salvador, emphasizing the country's transition from war to peace, presenting a balance of this transition and discussing a 'tentative hypothesis' where he characterizes the Salvadorian peace process and the post-war situation as 'a pragmatic negotiation and accommodation'. Zamora's analysis is rather optimistic, and in his sketch of the future of El Salvador's democracy he also incorporates the 'logic of ten years of democratic consolidation'. The chapter on Honduras is (of course) written by Leticia Salomon. The chapter on Nicaragua is a detailed analysis of the process of electoral democracy and the system of bi-partisan agreements. Manuel Rojas, renowned political analyst, signs for the chapter of Costa Rica. The book's publication was in 2001 so that the recent rupture of the Costa Rican two-

party system could not be reviewed in his chapter. Another interesting chapter is the analysis of Panama's democratic evolution, written by Leis. The second part of this voluminous edition is thematic and has the following contributions: on gender and citizenship (by Ana Isabel García and Enrique Gomáriz), on ethnic participation, on the process of nation formation and democracy in Central America (by Jorge Solares, prolific author on this theme), on the role of the mass media in Central America's democracies (by Carlos Chamorro), and on citizen's participation (by María Virginia Casafranco and Fernando Patiño). The last two chapters (Ricardo Córdova's analysis of Central America's civil-military relations, and the concluding chapter of Günther Maihold and Ricardo Córdova) belong to the best of the book. The civil-military chapter is precise and up-to-date, especially on issues such as legislation, budget, reform of the officers' corps, and training. Maihold and Córdova's last chapter on citizenship and democracy is, as far as I am concerned, the best part of this edited volume. It is a comprehensive analysis of the possibilities and scenarios of national and local democracy and the functioning of the key democratic institutions in post-war Central America. In general, this book can be recommended to whoever wants to be updated about the functioning and future of Central America's democracy.

Another interesting study on the same subject as the subjects discussed in the last chapter of the Córdova, Maihold and Kurtenbach publication is the more essayistic book *Los desafíos de la democracia en Centroamérica* published by Poitevin and Sequén-Mónchez. Poitevin, the founding ex-director of post-war FLACSO de Guatemala, and Sequén-Mónchez are the authors of a reflective report based on a large series of interviews with (former) politicians and cabinet members, retired generals, intellectuals and journalists, university rectors and supreme court magistrates of the five Central American countries during the year 2000. It is divided in two sections. The first part reflects the period of the last three decades and the mixture of optimism and pessimism, contemplative nostalgia and assertive reform plans of modernity that is so typical for the intellectual debate of the isthmus that was plagued by revolutions and counterrevolutions, dictatorship of the right and the left, migration and remittances, civil war and the absence of law and order. The second part is oriented to the future of Central America's democracy, the tensions among the central governments of weak states and the necessity of local democracy and the development of the civil society. The study ends with a short analysis of what is one of Central America's challenges: the integration of social classes and ethnicities in nation-states. With the eternal exception of Costa Rica, Central America does not have a kind of 'national conscience' expressed in the concept of 'mexicanidad' or 'brasilidade', to mention the most successful states of Latin America.

Héctor Dada, editor of *Más allá de las elecciones: Diez años después de los acuerdos de paz*, is, like Poitevin in Guatemala, the founding ex-director of post-war FLACSO de El Salvador. Of the three contributions, the one by Artiga-González is the longest and the most interesting. It is a fine overview of the peace process, the peace accords of 1992 and 1994, and the establishment of (electoral) democracy in the decade thereafter. As in Guatemala, the Salvadorian peace negotiations were the result of an elite pact between the leaders of the military establishment, the guerrilla forces, and the civilian political order. The redemocratization of the country, however, was far more successful, and most of the

author's analysis refers to the widening of the public debate, the establishment of the rules of the game by El Salvador's political parties, and the procurement of electoral representation by minority parties, and the interaction and slow rapprochement between the post-war political right and left. Like Zamora's analysis of the peace process, the study by Artiga-González is rather optimistic.

The most convoluted Central American country is, without doubt, Guatemala. It is the country of eternal spring, eternal problems and eternal violence. The complicated ethnic composition of the country is another source of latent conflicts. The following three studies each have a different viewpoint. The first one is the well-written and elaborate analysis of the ethnic and indigenous integration dilemma, *Guatemala, un proyecto inconcluso: La multiculturalidad, un paso hacia la democracia*, whose solution here is presented as the making of a multicultural society. The first chapter of the book is a historical interpretation of the deep racism, the long-term exclusion of ethnic 'minorities', the absence of integration and integration policies, the various insurgencies, the militarization of the state, the repression, the destruction of indigenous communities, etc. The second chapter is a review of the peace agreements with respect to the emergence of a 'national multicultural project'. It is a typical review chapter, mostly a condensation of secondary sources. The most interesting and, in my opinion, the best chapter is the third one, a study of the Maya movement in wartime and post-war Guatemala. This chapter is a must for everyone who is interested in the appearance, the diversification, the various political positions, and the institutional structures of the Maya organizations between ca. 1975 and the end of the Arzú government (ca. 2000). The final section deals with the political representation. It presents, sadly, the weakness and splintering of the Maya movement and the fragmented presence of the Maya representatives in politics, society and the cultural ambience. Cayzac finishes his study with a fourth chapter on national policies.

The thin book, *La violencia en el contexto del posconflicto, según la percepción de comunidades urbanas pobres de Guatemala*, is a World Bank report by Moser and McIlwaine. It is an analysis of Guatemala's post-war 'everyday violence' as experienced in the poor urban communities. What I like in this study, a kind of popular edition, is the combination of the simplicity of presentation and the detailed contents. The authors touch upon a variety of related subjects such as racial discrimination, fear and distrust at the personal level, the generalized culture of silence, distrust vis-à-vis national politics and the protection by lawgiving in general, alcoholism in the communities, drug use at home, the presence of the *maras* (juvenile bands) and their belligerence at school and in the communities, the widespread interpersonal aggression and the violence within the family circle, 'normal' delinquency, the practices of lynching and 'social cleansing', etc. The authors do not offer solutions in the form of strong policy recommendation. The book, however, is a fine study of violence, seen from 'within'.

The last volume to be reviewed here is a book about the post-war violence in Guatemala, *El lado oscuro de la eterna primavera. Violencia, criminalidad y delincuencia en la postguerra*. The first empirical contribution by Vela about Guatemala's long-standing tradition of violence provides the most important explanation of the weak state and weak state institutions, which was due to decades of military rule and military law. This is, of course, true. It is, however, a truism as well, the kind of reasoning followed by many analysts that is, ultimately, the logic of a vicious circle: militarism is the source of weak democratic states that tend to rely on

military strongmen, etc. The better part of Vela's article is the second half: the consequences in the form of a 'culture of violence', reinforced by a *pax autoritaria*, by racism, and by poverty. Sequén-Mónchez's analyzes the problem of civil security and insecurity, in combination with the long-lasting effects of the formerly militarized and semi-reformed justice system, the public sector, and the mediocre and somewhat corrupt government bureaucracy as such. His empirical contribution refers to the reforms of the police and the creation and constitution of the New *Policía Nacional Civil*, followed by the transformation of the *Ministerio Público* and the *Organismo Judicial*, three essential institutions of law and order (Guatemala does not count a Ministry of Justice). This interesting and promising essay ends with the sad conclusion that typifies Guatemala's law and justice system as 'a conflict incorporated in the state'. The last section of the book, by Vela and Solares, describes the country's post-war 'boom of crime and delinquency' and the 'new faces of violence'. It provides a general overview of a grim reality: assault, murder, abduction, lynching, robbery, the aggressiveness of the *maras*, and (as in the study by Moser and McIlwaine), the 'everyday violence and the violence in the family circle'. This fine chapter ends with a typology of Guatemala's organized crime.

It is not a hopeful story, and, to quote the moving last sentence of the book *Who Governs?*, '...the likelihood is growing that Guatemala's future may be more like its past – that is a gloomy prospect indeed'.

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