

Jesus and the Maya:

**The Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America and
The Indigenous Peoples of Central America and Southern Mexico.**

A Study

by

John B. Lewis

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
Department of Theory and Policy Studies in Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

© Copyright by John B. Lewis 1997.



National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Acquisitions et
services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file *Votre référence*

Our file *Notre référence*

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-28714-9

Canada

Jesus and the Maya:

The Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America and The Indigenous Peoples of Central America and Southern Mexico.

A Study

John B. Lewis
Master of Arts 1997

**Department of Theory and Policy Studies in Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto**

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the work of one ecumenical human rights organization, the Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America, in the area of the Americas traditionally occupied by the indigenous Maya, the mountains and plains of northern Central America and the southern territory of Mexico. The organization's work is studied in relation to the context of the wars, systemic, cultural, and militaristic, being waged against the people, the Maya, by the states of the region.

The further concentration of wealth and power, the outbreak of new civil wars, and the appearance of cultural critiques of inequality rather than purely historical ones over the last decades, have resulted in the astounding growth of peoples' movements for real democracy in the Americas. Nowhere have these trends been more pronounced than Latin America.

This thesis examines these occurrences and their significance for some of the original inhabitants of our lands, the Maya.

Acknowledgments

I wish to thank the people at the Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America, Suzanne Rumsey, Steven Law, Kathy Price, and Bill Fairbairn, for their patience and guidance throughout this and other projects. Their dedication and good humour have helped me to work through the reports of gross human tragedies from Latin America. As well, their devotion to the people of the region has opened my eyes further to the great joys of our southern neighbours.

Also, I thank Dr. Dieter Misgeld for his teaching and his encouragement over the last two years at OISE; he has not only become an excellent guide for my studies, but also a friend.

As well, a special thanks to my small family, little "F" and Zippy.

Table of Contents

The Ancient Maya and Matthew	1
Introduction: Into the Labyrinth	2
Chapter One: Original Sin	7
<i>The Inter-Church Committee on Chile and the Emergency</i>	8
<i>The Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America</i>	10
<i>Conceptions of Human Rights</i>	11
<i>Theological Grounding</i>	13
<i>Social Activism Today</i>	14
Chapter Two: The New Maya War in Mexico	17
<i>“Nunca más un México sin nosotros”</i>	18
<i>Indigenous Identity at the Margin in Mexico</i>	22
<i>The Call of Emiliano Zapata</i>	26
<i>The Maya Rebellion in Chiapas</i>	28
<i>Civil War in Mexico</i>	29
Chapter Three: The Maya at War in Guatemala	34
<i>Maya Realism</i>	35
<i>The Strength of the Mayan Identity</i>	41
<i>Miguel Ángel Asturias: The Agent of a Tropical Dream</i>	44
<i>Maya Recognition</i>	48
<i>The Rest of Central America</i>	50
<i>The Colour of Rhetoric</i>	52
Chapter Four: Jesus and the Maya	54
<i>Urgent Action: Attacks on individuals in Guatemala</i>	55
<i>Urgent Action: Attacks on groups in Mexico</i>	57
<i>Conditional Successes</i>	57
<i>Solving Oedipus: Impunity in Guatemala</i>	59
<i>Mexican Democracy?</i>	69
<i>Identity and Recognition</i>	82
<i>God in all Worlds: Why is ICCHRLA important?</i>	83
Chapter Five: Conversations in the Labyrinth	85
<i>Stamped by Affliction: The Maya as Humans</i>	87
<i>Placing the Maya in Society</i>	92
<i>And then they remembered...</i>	95
References	97

Know all of you that the time has come...
the rulers as well as the people shall suffer.
The symbol of this Katun will be the head of a tiger with broken teeth,
the body of a rabbit or a dog, with a spear piercing his heart...
Vultures will enter the houses in your villages
because of the great numbers of dead Mayas and animals...
The [land] will be sold, and all the people will be moved...
You will be seen bowing your heads to the archbishop...
You will have to follow the True God called Christ...
Heaven and earth will thunder...
Your government will tumble...everything will be razed and destroyed...
You will be brothers-in-law to the Spaniards,
and you will wear their clothing, their hats, and speak their language...
The tiger will roar, and the deer that fell into the trap
will be heard agonizing until he dies.

From the ancient Maya text of Chilam Balam

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels
with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory;
And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them
one from another, as a shepherd divideth *his* sheep from the goats;
And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on his left.
Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand,
Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you
from the foundation of the world:
For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink:
I was a stranger, and ye took me in:
Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison,
and ye came unto me.
Then shall the righteous answer him, saying,
Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed *thee*? or thirsty, and gave *thee* drink?
When saw we thee a stranger, and took *thee* in? or naked, and clothed *thee*?
Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?
And the King shall answer and say unto them,
Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the
least of these, my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me.
Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand,
Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:
For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:
I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not:
sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.
Then shall they also answer him, saying,
Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick,
or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?
Then shall he answer them, saying,
Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did *it* not to one of the least of these, ye did *it* not to me.
And these shall go away into everlasting punishment:
but the righteous into life eternal.

From the Bible, Matthew: 31-46.

Introduction: Into the Labyrinth

I begin my thesis with an apology to social scientists: What began as a sincere attempt at good empirical research (albeit qualitative), with appropriate conjecture, interviews, transcriptions, ethical reviews, and some reasonable analysis, ended as a more existential discussion of identity, pain (real and perceived) and the interaction of peoples, Native and non, Christian and Maya; and of worlds, North and South, old and new.

If becoming involved in the fight for human dignity around the world is about making connections between peoples and their struggles, then a principal task for human rights groups is to help people forge those links. People seem to become involved when they sense another person's pain - not ersatz pain but real pain, felt themselves through a similar situation in their own lives or through witnessing events.

If making these connections is the goal, then this unquantified narration moves us along, however esoterically, in that direction: The ability of people to connect with one another's suffering cannot be made quantifiable and is a study for the fields of psychotherapy and metaphysics, both of which come into effect here, but are not the focuses of this study. Nonetheless, what this paper *does*, I think, is introduce different groups of people to one another, allow them space to learn from each other (on the ground and in the text), and encourage them to become involved in each other's lives (I am speaking here of Native peoples, social activists, *and* academics).

We live our lives in a labyrinth: Occasionally we cross paths in this complicated place, affecting which routes we each take along the way. This is especially important in the struggle for human rights.

Within the twisted maze of human rights violence, the followers of Jesus, like others, have walked down each of the corridors: They have been violator, violated, sponsor, and condemned. But every once in a while, a saviour *still* appears among them.

At the time of the conquest of the Americas, the “Conquista” as it is known in Latin America, a Dominican priest from Seville in Spain, Father Bartolomé de Las Casas, arrived in the “New World”. Las Casas, upon witnessing the abhorrent conditions of Indian slavery in Mexico (New Spain) and Guatemala, returned to Spain, confronted the King, protector of Mexico and Guatemala, and argued that if the conditions of peonage continued it would be as if “...it were decreed that America be made a desert.”¹ After sailing to the Indies several more times, Las Casas returned to Europe with his anti-slavery arguments documented in a new *History of the Indies*; in the book he argued to his Christian ruler that the Indians could not survive the gruelling work in the mines and fields of the Spaniards, and that it was a Christian’s duty to “...protect these miserable people and prevent their perishing.”² Presented with the evidence of Indian destruction, the King relented and passed a law by which the Spanish *encomenderos*, farm and mine owners, could no longer demand the personal services of the Indians.

Because of these exploits, this resolute Dominican priest has come down through history as the “Defender of the Indians”; he was not without great opposition from within

¹ John A. Crow. The Epic of Latin America 4th ed. Berkeley: University of California Press. p. 158

² Las Casas quoted in Gustavo Gutiérrez’ Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993. p. 61.

his own faith, though. The owners of the slaves, too, were Christian, and they also had their defenders. Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, the theologian who most clamorously disagreed with Las Casas, believed that the Indians were an inferior race to the Spaniards, and Biblical pronouncements against the exploitation of any of God's *children*, therefore, did not apply in the New World: Maltreatment of animals, according to the Bible, unlike the mistreatment of humans, is not considered an abuse of Christ himself.

Sepúlveda based his argument less on scripture and more on Aristotle. He wrote that "in prudence, invention, and every manner of virtue and human sentiment, they [the Indians] are as inferior to Spaniards as children to adults, as women to men, the cruel and inhumane to the gentle... as monkeys to human beings..."³ therefore, thought Sepúlveda, in accordance with Aristotle, a war is justified on the inferior beings because natural conditions demand that they obey those who are superior. They are "slaves by nature."⁴

Today, Christians still grapple over Biblical interpretations. For example: How far does Matthew intend the faithful to go in aiding the sick, the hungry, the oppressed? Some will say these lines are simply metaphorical, that we are meant only to love God and to worship his Son and that real life begins in the afterlife. Many people, though, *have* been moved by scripture into great deeds on behalf of the oppressed among us here, feeling that the books are literal, urging us to love and worship *all* God's creations.

Ecumenical organizations that work for social justice and improvements in living conditions for people continue the tradition of Bartolomé de Las Casas, the Apostles, and, of course, Christ himself. The Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America (ICCHRLA), along with their sister organizations, continues the work in the

world of an active Christ. They work throughout Latin America in nations where everyday people are oppressed by violence and discriminatory social and economic practices; they work with the poor of Jesus Christ.

Central America and southern Mexico are just two of the regions where ICCHRLA focuses their effort. These are the lands of the Maya, the people for whom Las Casas sought freedom from Spanish slavery. Today, the Maya are still the victims of human rights violence by their masters, the Guatemalan and Mexican governments. They are the victims, as we shall see, of a complicated cultural and political system which at times even denies the Maya their own identity: The setting in which they live is perversely labyrinthine.

ICCHRLA works in this world because they agree with Father Las Casas in the protection of the oppressed: They work there, as well, because they agree with Father Gustavo Gutiérrez, the founder of Liberation Theology, in the liberation of the gospel; that Christ demands that his children be freed from oppression and that to work toward this freedom keeps God alive in this place.

If someone is damned to hellfire by Christ saying to him or her, "I was naked and you did not clothe me," to what hellfire will they be damned to whom He says, "I was clothed and you stripped me!"⁵

Not only are the naked not clothed, but, perversely, the poor of those lands are violently unclothed: the Indians are despoiled of their legitimate possessions. The poor are robbed and, in them, Christ himself.⁶

⁵ Sepúlveda quoted in *ibid.* p. 293.

⁶ *ibid.* p. 292.

⁷ Las Casas quoted in *ibid.* p. 64.

⁸ Gutiérrez' own words in *ibid.* p. 64.

We turn our attention now to the painful story south of the Rio Grande, the dictators and the violence of Central and South America; to the first time Canadian church members met their southern neighbours, the oppressed of the Latin America; and to the changes in direction of peoples lives.

I - Original Sin

In 1973, Chilean politics produced a leader with a pig's tail.¹ Augusto Pinochet Ugarte, the general who led the successful coup against the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende, became, like the children born in Gabriel Garcia Marquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the monster of a community too comfortable with itself; too complacent to protect itself against its own self-destruction. In the end, Pinochet, born from the élite of Santiago, descended from the finest stock of French and Spanish blood, not a drop of *indígena* (Indian) in him, a general in the army, the pride of society, became both the destroyer and the saviour of Chilean democracy.

Chileans, who enjoyed their democratic politics for so long, lived in the longest uninterrupted democracy in the region, and never imagined the government could fall into the hands of the military. They believed that *their* body politic, unlike those of the countries around them, would keep reproducing itself with democratic governments - instead, it produced the deformed child of repressive military rule.

To *Allende's* Chileans, social activists, union leaders, and members of his Socialist party, Pinochet became their jailer: He arrested them, tortured them, and jailed them. To the rest, particularly the business community and the élite, Pinochet became their liberator, freeing them from congressional democracy including the "Trojan horses" (party politics) used by Marxists to introduce "undemocratic totalitarian practices" into the country.² To these people, businessmen and social élite, Pinochet the liberator offered an "economic

¹ The imagery comes from Tina Rosenberg's *The Children of Cain: Violence and the Violent in Latin America*. New York: Penguin Books, 1991. pp. 320-387.

² Pinochet quoted in *ibid.* p. 345.

miracle.” The sophistication of Chilean society, with its peacefulness, its civilized political debate, and its afternoon tea, had led not only to economic good fortune but also to the grossest violence of undocumented disappearances and mass burials.

The refined country of the Southern Cone of South America, that in 1965 was deemed more democratic than both France and the United States, produced the military government of Pinochet - progressive Chileans’ worst nightmare. On September 11 1973, Chile was knocked from its democratic reverie by the machine-gun fire of the Dictator’s new régime.

The Inter-Church Committee on Chile and the Emergency

Ordinary citizens, both inside the country and out, once complacent, responded swiftly to Chile’s coup d’état: Church groups, labour unions, various student and public groups sent protests to the new government in Chile and called on officials to respond to the situation. Members of the various Christian church communities here in Canada were important among the early protesters.

United, Anglican, and Roman Catholic leaders issued a joint statement protesting the coup and appealing to the Canadian government not to recognize the military junta’s takeover of the country. The statement urged Canadian officials to allow Chileans fleeing the violence into Canada as political refugees. In the ensuing days, the Canadian Council of Churches issued other critical ecumenical statements.

On October 3 1973, Church leaders met with Canadian External Affairs Minister, Mitchell Sharp, and presented him with a brief requesting the government to open Canada’s immigration doors to Chileans whose lives were in danger. Early evidence suggested that the new régime was arresting union, political, and student activists and even executing some political opponents. We know from reports since Pinochet’s stepping down that about 2,500 supporters of Allende were rounded-up and summarily

executed immediately following the coup.³ The Churches' early brief urged the government "to register the strongest protest against those violations of human rights perpetuated by the régime since its bloody seizure of power."⁴ Instead, the Canadian government, the government of Liberal Pierre Elliott Trudeau, insisted that this was just another Latin American coup and assured the Church folk that the situation in Chile was already returning to "normal."⁵

In response to the deepening concern by Church people over the worsening situation in Chile, an ad hoc ecumenical group, the Inter-Church Committee on Chile (ICCC), was formed in late 1973. The committee would meet each Friday to discuss strategies to bring greater pressure on Canadian officials to take an active stand in international gatherings for the restoration of human rights and to suspend all official aid to Chile. The initial attempts by groups like the ICCC had little effect on the government. Like leaders in the US, Canadian officials were not unhappy with a right-wing dictatorship in Chile; nevertheless, with the deterioration of the Chilean situation, with thousands being arrested and held in the National Stadium in Santiago, and with blunders by officials within the Canadian government⁶, *ordinary* Canadians were startled by reports into supporting groups like the ICCC and opposing the violence. Pressure continued to build until the Canadian government decided to accept some 10,000 Chilean refugees.

Today, of course, the situation in Chile has changed. In 1988 the dictatorship held a plebiscite asking Chileans whether or not they wanted the Pinochet government to continue. A majority voted against Pinochet. In 1989 Patricio Aylwin, the candidate of a democratic centre-left coalition won an election in a landslide victory over the general, and democracy returned to Chile. Chileans are returning from exile in droves, and Chile is

³John A. Crow, The Epic of Latin America (4th ed.), Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.

⁴"Chile issue," mimeographed (1974), ICCHRLA archives.

⁵Christopher Lind and John Mihevc (eds.), Coalitions for Justice, Ottawa: Novalis, 1994, p.170.

⁶Leaked cables from Ambassador Andrew Ross to his seniors in Ottawa stating that the prisoners being held were nothing but "the riffraff of the Latin American left" and that the political violence by Pinochet after the coup was "abhorrent but understandable" were picked up by the Canadian media.

flourishing relative to other democracies in the region: exports are up, wages are up, per capita incomes are up (about US\$3000 in 1994), and inflation is down. Average Chileans are ecstatic that the violence seems to have ended and that their country is doing so well; nonetheless, Chileans know, as well, that it was from within themselves, their establishment, that Pinochet was born so that to live within their traditions, of democracy so in love with itself that it forgets to protect itself, they need to be vigilant and walk carefully toward the future with the open wounds of their past.

The Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America

The ICCC, too, has changed. The emergency in Chile helped focus Canadian churches' attention on the Southern part of Latin America. Conditions in Chile were similar to conditions in other countries of the region and politics elsewhere were leading to the same disastrous results as they had in Chile. In 1973 a brutal military took over the government of Uruguay, repressing, terrorizing, and disappearing citizens in the name of a crackdown against the leftist radicals of the Tupamoros. In 1976 the government of Isabel Perón in Argentina fell to the military: martial law was declared - the "dirty war" was just around the corner. In Brazil, where the government had been under a state of siege by the military since 1969, Congress was closed, a tough censorship imposed on the press, and due process and habeas corpus suspended. And finally, during the 70's and 80's, Paraguay lived under the cruel hand of General Alfredo Stroessner, now in exile in Brazil, who purged his country of most of its able leadership and opposition. In the face of these repressive regimes, Canadian churches began a broad response.

On January 1, 1977, the Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America (ICCHRLA) was formed and by 1978, delegations were being sent to Latin America. Initially, the Committee concentrated its attention on conditions in the Southern Cone countries of Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile, however, within a short time, striking reports of deteriorating human rights situations were coming from Central America

demanding a response. By the late 70s and early 80s the Committee was participating in international ecumenical delegations to Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala, while continuing its work further south. At about the same time, news was filtering in of disappearances from the Peruvian highland regions, increasing violence in the countryside of Colombia, and deteriorating human rights situation in Brazil. To each of these areas, ICCHRLA has sent delegations. These delegations have brought back, and continue to bring back, news to Canadians of the worsening conditions for people in many countries of Latin America; and with this, ICCHRLA and its partner organizations, have attempted to bring pressure on our government officials here to look again at Canadian foreign policies of economic development, diplomacy, and human rights.

Today, ICCHRLA members work to monitor and respond to conditions in most of Central America, South America, and Mexico. The task is monumental. The Committee works in close coordination and partnership with solidarity groups, labour unions, and other human rights organizations based in many places south of the Rio Grande, though; ICCHRLA relies on these groups to monitor situations within their own regions in order to keep Canadian church members abreast of conditions throughout Latin America. As well, members of the Canadian Committee frequently travel to the region on fact-finding missions of their own.

Conceptions of Human Rights

The conception of human rights at ICCHRLA has become broader in recent years. During the emergency in Chile in the early 70s, and the subsequent atrocities of Argentina and Uruguay, the ICC and later ICCHRLA worked to stop the worst, most violent abuses against individuals and groups. These two committees with their partners attempted to pressure the Canadian government to open its doors to those South Americans who feared for their lives. The Chilean, Argentinean, and Uruguayan governments were all suspected of abusing their citizens through arbitrary arrests, torture, and disappearances, and it was

against these terrible abuses that the committees struggled in their early years. Canadian churches, like their Latin American counterparts, were taking a stand as Christians against the worst political and civil oppression. The original proposal of ICCHRLA stated that:

The Latin American churches recognize that they live a process of liberation which manifests the presence of God in human history. By participating with Latin American struggles for freedom and justice, Canadian Christians experience the work of the Gospel. [ICCHRLA will have an] active role in the defense of human rights and refugees from political oppression.⁷

From the outset these two coalitions maintained an active role in both defending the victims of civil and political violence and struggling against the root causes of that violence; in recent years, however, a greater emphasis has been placed on these structural problems than before. And while refugees remain a concern for ICCHRLA, the work of aiding political refugees has been taken on by a sister organization, the Inter-Church Committee for Refugees.

Today, the set of rights ICCHRLA works to protect has grown. In 1981, the Committee submitted a comprehensive statement of a new conception of human rights to the Canadian government:

When we speak of the struggle for human rights, we are not only talking of torture, repression of freedom of speech, or arbitrary arrest... but also of the broader struggle for social, economic and political participation by all people... A given nation may have a democratic constitution and may promise periodic elections but, nevertheless, if the Minister of Finance agrees to the implementation of International Monetary Fund requirements regarding food and cooking oil prices which may result in the deaths of half a million children, can we say that human rights are being observed or defended? If a given economic model, like that characteristic of Brazil after 1964, or the current economic model in Chile, requires repression of trade union and civic political organizations... must not

⁷from Mandate of the Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America, 1988-1991, September 1988, ICCHRLA document.

our defense of human rights entail a profound critique of the economic model...'⁸

So, while ICCHRLA maintains a strong emphasis on defending political and civil rights of individuals throughout Latin America, Committee members feel pressed to comment more often on the broader context of the region.

Today, peoples' lives are threatened not simply by repressive political or military governments, but also by unfair socio-cultural and economic structures. Violence, oppression, and poverty, can be caused by cultural traditions which marginalize people of a certain class, gender, and race. And these problems can be exacerbated by economics, both domestic and international. People are poor because of traditions authoritarianism and cultural exclusion which make them so; and they are kept poor by an economic system which exploits their powerlessness and their poverty.

During ICCHRLA's watch in Latin America, dictatorships and military governments have been replaced by civilian ones: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama, have all elected civilians in place of dictators and/or military leaders. A seemingly impressive list. In many respects, though, things have not changed. Power still resides in the hands of oligarchs and generals who have simply learned more subtle means of repressing their people: elections are manipulated with terror that can be just as widespread. Unjust social, political, and economic systems endure in many Latin American nations through sophisticated uses of power by the élite. ICCHRLA's struggle, now widened, continues.

Theological Grounding

At the roots of ICCHRLA's work is a simple belief that to work in solidarity with the oppressed is a condition for communion with God. A 1988 mandate states that:

⁸Lind and Mihevc. Coalitions for Justice. p.174.

To walk with the oppressed in Latin America and the world as a condition for understanding and being in contact with the word of God alive in history. In walking with the oppressed and understanding the summons and empowering of the Gospel, ICCHRLA would aim to bring Canadian churches to support Latin American peoples in their struggle for basic human rights. This, they would do by participating in efforts to resist and transform unjust structures that kill and to promote structures that give life.⁹

This grounding is important in that it is the churches in Canada that give the Committee its support.

And, recognizing the Canadian churches' own need for change, ICCHRLA has set out to "challenge to conversion the thinking and structures of the Canadian churches" and to "ensure that ICCHRLA's work becomes integrated into and central to the work of the Canadian churches."¹⁰ Any work of the Committee would be undermined by lack of commitment to its principles by members of the constituent coalition.

Social Activism Today

With the restoration of democracy to Chile in particular, and the other countries of Latin America in general, ICCHRLA has been able to focus more attention on the needs of poor and marginalized peoples of the region. While the needs of these poor and marginalized people seem basic - food, shelter, security, health and welfare - they are not easily met within the present systems, either political or economic. Governments and businesses alike need to be held accountable for their actions when their actions have adverse affects on people. We demand that our own elected officials, in particular, put pressure on the civilian governments of Latin America to halt abuses against their people; these civilian governments and their leaders must be encouraged to act responsibly to control violations against people by either the military or business.

⁹Mandate, September 1988.

¹⁰ibid.

ICCHRLA pressures elected officials by submitting detailed reports and critiques to the Canadian Department of External Affairs, speaking out at gatherings of multi-lateral institutions like the United Nations or the World Bank, and talking to the press. All of these things help. Governments, at various moments, have been forced to respond to allegations of abuse; they know they are being monitored.

Nevertheless, with the changing location of power in countries throughout the region, the focus of attention might need to shift, again. Power rests in the upper echelons of businesses and multi-lateral lending institutions like the International Monetary Fund, the Inter-American Development Bank. The CEOs and presidents of these organizations seem to pull strings of government officials: Loans and investment are only guaranteed to a nation when social conditions (including labour laws, environmental restrictions, and taxation) are such that corporate profits can be high. This was the case, as we shall see, for Mexico during both the 1982 debt crisis and the recent negotiation over the NAFTA arrangement. The investors and moneylenders are able to dictate to the civil servants the rules for investment and development which affect the lives of the people rather than the other way around. What has led to this shift of power has been in debate for years. Is it globalization? The end of the Cold War with its resultant ideological shift? Or technological advances which concentrate wealth and reduce the need for skilled labour? Or is it something else? What is important for us is that the shift in power, the shift in who controls development, demands a new direction for advocacy. ICCHRLA and many other NGOs are working in a new paradigm: A government like our own may be powerless in encouraging change in the actions of local governments and businesses who violate human rights in their nations; advocates may need to concentrate their efforts at halting abuse by Canadian corporations or Canadian affiliates working in other regions of the world and to work with consumers to use their purchasing power to alter behaviour. How is that done best? For our study, we will look at a region of Latin America which is often in our news today: Southern Mexico and Guatemala, the region of the Maya Indians. We will examine

structures which have led to incredible violence, physical and spiritual, against the people of Chiapas in Mexico and the mountains in Central America: Structures like authoritarianism, elitism, neo-liberalism, and, what amounts to, cultural genocide throughout the region. We will survey the work of ICCHRLA within these regions and communities to see when and where they have had some success, and imagine the usefulness of applying some of these strategies in the new world of Latin America.

This region with these two countries, Mexico and Guatemala, has been chosen because of the extraordinary run of events in both places in recent years. In Mexico, in Chiapas in the south, a purely cultural revolution is underway led by the members of the EZLN against a Mexican state which has left a people, the indigenous, with absolutely nothing, in land and resources, to call their own. In Guatemala, a peace agreement has just recently been signed after decades of civil war: The peace, remarkably, leaves the abused out, on the margins, where they have always been, positioned for further humiliation of these people, the Maya.

As well, these two nations have received considerable attention for achievements of their societies which are interesting to explore: In Mexico, a vibrant literary and intellectual tradition have shaped the Mexican way of conceptualizing their nation: in Guatemala, accomplishments by both the oligarchs and the grassroots have been internationally recognized with wide praise as well as Nobel Prizes. These occurrences, I believe, teach us something valuable about each place to aid us in untangling the mysteries behind the human rights violence.

We now leave Canada to concentrate on the Maya region; first by working our way into the labyrinth Mexican of identity; then, to Guatemala and the maze of civil war.

2 - The New Maya War in Mexico¹

On October the 12th, 1992, the day set to commemorate the 500th anniversary of European contact in the Americas, from the hills of the state of Chiapas in Mexico, sprang thousands of peasants into the narrow streets of the old colonial capital of the region, San Cristóbal de las Casas, to vent their rage against an unfair system by smashing the symbol of white domination: the statue of conquistador Diego de Mazazriegos. With this act, the Maya returned to Mexico.

Two years later, on January 1st, 1994, an uprising in southern Mexico erupted. On the heels of the signing of the NAFTA deal, the rebellion by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) broke out. This peoples' struggle was, and continues to be, a call for recognition of Mayan groups, Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Tojolabal and others, for their rights, and for their autonomy. Recent plenary sessions of the Zapatista leadership, the group leading Native and poor groups, laid out the demands of the Chiapan groups: control over natural resources, judicial administration, internal security, agrarian systems and internal conflict resolution, and a return of Article 27 of the 1917 Mexican Constitution which recognized and protected the *ejido* or communal landholding system.² The government response to the uprising has been overwhelming: They sent in the Mexican army, bombed and burned villages, and killed hundreds of Indian and non-Indian

¹Taken from an article by Luis Hernandez. The New Mayan War in *NACLA: Report on the Americas*. v. 27 n.5 Mar/April 1994. pp. 6-10.

²Kevin D. Batt. The Seventh Rainbow: Hope from the Mountains of Southeast Mexico in *Cultural Survival Quarterly*. Spring 1996. pp. 21-23.

peasants. Brutal reprisals which many observers feel would have been much worse had the international press not been present.³

*"Nunca más un México sin nosotros"*⁴

Since 1992 in Mexico, and since the 1970s and 80s in Guatemala, Mayan identity has been reasserting itself. For much of the twentieth century in Mexico and the Central American republics Indian identities were buried in the historical processes of nation building or "nationalization": this process was either a *criollo* one (by whites born in the Americas as in Costa Rica and Mexico) or a *mestizo* one (by mixed-race people as in Guatemala), but never an *indígena* one (by the indigenous). Accordingly, *indígena* identity has been imposed on populations by states and élite rather than by the Indians themselves; with Indian identification becoming associated with less valued locations in the society.⁵ In Mexico, this has been accomplished through an almost complete promotion by the élite of *indígena* with a negative identity. This means that:

...being *indígena* in twentieth-century Mexico, collectively and individually, is a negative identity that denotes membership in a subaltern class of rural direct producers who are subjected to economic exploitation, ethnic discrimination, and political-cultural domination.⁶

According to Cook and Joo, this association is a lingering aftereffect of the Spanish colonial doctrine of "*raza*" and the odious caste system with "*limpeza de sangre*".⁷

In post-revolutionary Mexico, the national project has been to de-Indianize the population through "Mexicanization"; this is a union of the Mexican identity with Spanish

³Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America's *Alerta* n.1 and 2 March 1994.

⁴*Never again will there be a Mexico without us*. Subcomandante Marcos in *Proceso* October 6, 1996, pp.16-20.

⁵Scott Cook and Jong-Taick Joo. Ethnicity and Economy in Rural Mexico in *Latin American Research Review* v.30 n.2 1995 pp.33-59.

⁶*ibid.*

⁷"Race" and "cleaning the blood" or, if you will, ethnic cleansing.

descent or Spanish language within a mestizo or criollo race. When the Indians do appear - as in Mexican art and bits of Mexican culture - their indianness is often pushed to the background like a Greek chorus only to step into the light "on certain occasions"⁸; or worse, deeply buried in a mestizo or homogenous Mexican collective.

Octavio Paz, Mexico's Nobel Prize winning poet, has written of the Mexican identity in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*:

....the Mexican breaks his ties with the past, renounces his origins, and lives in isolation and solitude. The Mexican condemns all his traditions at once, the whole set of gestures, attitudes and tendencies in which it is now difficult to distinguish the Spanish from the Indian... The Mexican does not want to be either an Indian or a Spaniard. Nor does he want to be descended from them. *He denies them* [italics mine]. And he does not affirm himself as a mixture, but rather as an abstraction: he is a man. He becomes the son of Nothingness. His beginnings are in his own self... the Republic is not composed of criollos, Indians and mestizos but simply of men alone. All alone.⁹

For Paz, the Mexican has no race other than Mexican: he is neither criollo, mestizo, nor Indian, but simply Mexican. In Paz' writing he buries the Indian along with all others in a convenient invention called "the Mexican" - in a way, he loses everybody in the labyrinth of Mexico. It seems that for Octavio Paz no one is worth writing about except himself, and some people just like him. He even says so.

My thoughts are not concerned with the total population of our country, but rather with a specific group made up of those who are conscious of themselves, for one reason or another as Mexicans.¹⁰

⁸Rodolfo Staevenhagen. The Indian Resurgence in Mexico in *Cultural Survival Quarterly*. Summer/fall 1994. pp.77-80.

⁹Octavio Paz. The Labyrinth of Solitude and Other Writings. New York: Grove Press, 1985. p.87.

¹⁰ibid. p.11.

The indigenous peoples of Mexico consider themselves Mexican, as well, but Octavio Paz would deny them that right; because they are also conscious of themselves as Indians. For Paz, Indians, like criollos and mestizos, do not exist in Mexico.

Even Carlos Fuentes, Mexico's preeminent contemporary author, has difficulty locating Native Americans in the cultures of Mexico and Latin America. For his section on Indians in *The Buried Mirror*, he begins:

America was an empty continent. Everyone who has ever set foot on our shores or crossed our borders, physical or imaginary, has come from somewhere else.¹¹

This book, though, is principally his reflection on Spain *and* the New World: Presumably Spain will dominate his discussion of the Americas, however, he, like Paz, buries the Indians in the mestizos of Latin America, losing them behind his "Hispanic" mirror. For Latin Americans, according to Fuentes, the Indians played an important role in the formation of the cultures on the continents, but it is the Hispanic element which unites them all. Of Spain Fuentes says, "Spain embraces us all: she is, in a way, our commonplace, our common ground... Spain is a double-gendered proposition, mother and father rolled into one... La Madre Patria..."¹² What Fuentes is doing, I believe, is levelling the field, clearing the field even, describing an empty America, ready for immigrants from both Asia (the Indians) and Europe, but accepting them as equals in the New World where no one group has a morally superior claim than the other. In Fuentes, Native Americans become nothing more than another group of immigrants; the Spanish, however, provide *La Madre Patria*, the mother-fatherland.

Fuentes has no difficulty in locating Spain in the Mexican identity: She brought the Spanish language, the Mediterranean world, the Catholic religion, and the political system.

¹¹Carlos Fuentes. *The Buried Mirror: Reflections on Spain and the New World*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1992. p.93.

¹²ibid. p.15.

Indian cultural contributions reject such easy classification, though. For Fuentes, it seems, the important legacy of the Native peoples is they were overthrown, the cultures suppressed, only to reappear as part of the Latin American man. The Aztecs, for example, were conquered, the people dispersed, and the culture suppressed by a dominant European one. According to Fuentes, what remains of Native culture are some artifacts, temples and ceramics, and the "dignity... of the Indians' contemporary descendants and in the unceasing production of their artisans."¹³ The soul of Native culture was destroyed, though. On Maundy Thursday, 1519, when Hernán Cortéz landed at Veracruz, the Indian universe was so shaken that Indian culture became, and remains, simply bits of pottery and a handful of hard-working dignified craftspeople living far from the Mexican, or Latin American, identity.

In a way, though, Fuentes is right. Native Americans have been pushed to the margins: and their cultural legacy can seem distant and hidden, even, ephemeral and hard to grasp. But the people are still there. Indigenous culture may have been transformed by contact with the world outside of the Americas, however, cultures remain within Latin America which are not the mainstream but are, rather, uniquely indigenous.

Consider the words of Fuentes and Paz against those of Marcelino Díaz de Jesús, a Nahua Indian from the state of Guerrero:

We Indians respect the flag of Mexico. We feel like Mexicans. But we don't feel like we are represented.¹⁴

And, perhaps more importantly, consider the communiqués of the EZLN. In January 1994, immediately following the uprising in Chiapas, the EZLN's spokesperson, Subcomandante Marcos wrote to the people of Mexico:

¹³ibid. p.107.

¹⁴Anthony DePalma in *The New York Times*, January 13, 1996.

The commanders and the troops of the EZLN are mostly indigenous people of Chiapas, because the indigenous are the poorest and most dispossessed of Mexico... We are thousands of indigenous people up in arms, and behind us are tens of thousands of people in our families. Add it up: we amount to many thousands of indigenous people in struggle. The government says that this is not an indigenous uprising, but we think that if thousands of indigenous people have risen up in struggle, then it must be an indigenous uprising.¹⁵

The peoples of southern Mexico sense they are both Mexican and indigenous. However, they are demanding that the collective understanding of "Mexico" be redefined. Mexico, as it has been defined traditionally, has left the Indians with "...nothing, absolutely nothing. Not a decent roof, nor work, nor land, nor health care, nor education."¹⁶

The "new" Mexico does not reject the Mexican identity but rather demands that that identity be a pluralistic one where all peoples and their histories are respected. The movement seeks autonomy for the indigenous minority and empowerment to redress grievances: an equal footing on which to negotiate with the state. The rebellion in Chiapas has brought these demands to the attention of all Mexicans and the world: It is up to Mexicans and their intelligentsia, like Carlos Fuentes and Octavio Paz, to recognize the diversity of peoples implicit in such a rebellion within the borders of their nation.

Indigenous Identity at the Margin in Mexico

Describing who is Indian and who is not is far more complicated than it seems at first glance in Mexico. The people of Mexico, as we have seen, can be described by several groups and traditions, and at times, Mexicans can belong to more than just one group: An individual can be rural, Tzeltale, Mayan, and Mexican at the same time. And to simply equate indigenous Mexicans with poor Mexicans, as might be tempting, is not only

¹⁵Frank Bardacke and Leslie López (translators). Shadows of Tender Fury: The Letters and Communiqués of Subcomandante Marcos and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1995. p. 57.

¹⁶Subcomandante Marcos quoted by Tim Golden in *The New York Times*. January 1, 1994. p.A4.

missing the fact that many Indians are wealthy and that many poor people are not indigenous, but also it is ascribing the negative characteristic of poverty with indianness - something we are trying to avoid. Yet, people can still be described in Mexico today as Indian or indigenous.

As well as identifying the groups that are indigenous, we must interpret what *indigenous* or *Maya* means to those people today. Contemporary Mexican Mayan groups are not the same as they were at the time of first contact with Europeans. They do not behave the same way or hold the same beliefs now as five hundred years ago. In fact, claims the historian Allan Knight, there is a "great gulf" between the indigenous worlds of then and now.

Empirical evidence points to the great gulf - of historical experience and cultural transformation - which separates twentieth-century Mexican Indians from their supposed sixteenth-century forbearance, and which consigns any notion of a collective psychological inheritance to the realm of metaphysics.¹⁷

From this perspective, it would be easy to be skeptical about any designation of groups as indigenous in Mexico.

The evidence shows, though, that groups continue to call themselves indigenous and Mayan and this is what is important: The Indian persists in feeling and conserving a different identity from the national Mexican one. But that is not the whole story. The definition as indigenous can be a subjective definition by people who feel some links to an Indian past, and, at times, can even be independent of cultural traits, but it also goes a little beyond this.

Maya practices of five hundred years ago have changed into more modern ones and the gods of old Maya books are no longer worshipped as they were, however, people continue to worship as Mayas; a syncretic Christian/Maya worship but Maya nonetheless.

¹⁷Alan Knight, *Racism, Revolution, and Indigenismo: 1910-1940* in Richard Graham (ed.) *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870-1940*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990. p.95.

Religion and its practice are produced individually for the Maya, not by any church; so people take what they like from each tradition, Maya and Christian, and create something new and syncretic. The result is that Maya people have welded together their ancient fiestas with Catholic or other Christian practices.¹⁸

And while people who speak native languages of the Maya and Zapotec can be found throughout Mexico and at all levels of the class system, there is no denying that regions like Chiapas and Guerrero - birthplaces of the Maya and Zapotec cultures in Mexico - are not only overwhelmingly poor but are also overwhelmingly indigenous. People of these regions, it seems, have viewed themselves against the national scene and they have noticed two things: *They are relatively poor and they are mostly indigenous.*

Some of the cultural traits of dress, religion, and even language have disappeared among many of the people of Chiapas, but their situation allows them to speak with the voice of their forefathers and mothers, the Maya. There is no link fused into peoples' DNA which directly attaches sons and daughters to the culture of their parents: Nonetheless, there must be some belief in a common descent.¹⁹ And from this belief, "the template" according to Richard Adams, imprinting and acculturation can be introduced onto a child.²⁰ Culture, after all, is learned, and culture is practiced. The Mexican state, however, like the Spanish throne before it, has set itself up in opposition to this culture through its system of power and privilege; unfair electoral practices and liberal and neo-liberal economic practices have disenfranchised people in the region for many years. June Nash reports:

The rebellion brought to the forefront long-standing complaints that peasants and workers in the southernmost Mexican state have been making... [but] every peaceful demonstration was suppressed with massive military action and arrests... [The revolution] signaled to the

¹⁸ Nancy Wellmeier. Rituals of Resettlement: Identity and resistance among Maya refugees in *Journal of Popular Culture*. v. 29 (Summer '95) pp. 43-60.

¹⁹ Max Weber. Economy and Society. Berkeley: University of California Press. 1978. p. 389.

²⁰ Richard Adams. Guatemalan Ladinization and History in *The Americas Journal*. v. 50 (April 1994) pp. 527-43.

world that indigenous populations intended to make themselves heard at home and abroad as Mexico restructures its economy according to the neoliberal model promoted by President Carlos Salinas de Gortari.²¹

External forces - the policies of the Salinas government including the signing of NAFTA - coupled with peoples' connection (however tenuous) with the narrative of the ancient Maya, have coalesced moving people to describe themselves again as Indian. The revolution itself, through necessity, has become part of an indigenous narrative. In other words, the Maya have returned to Mexico out of a need for people (poor indigenous people) to defend themselves against an unfair, externally imposed, system.

Anthropologists and researchers are starting to believe this. Whereas, until recently, some theorists insisted on defining indigenous movements like the one in Chiapas as purely economic or class struggles, current debates, according to Nash, accept this indigenous argument. She writes:

By looking inward at narrative strategies for resisting terror, evoking dialogue between ancient and present traditions, and assessing the economic opportunities that condition their survival, researchers are constructing a theory that recognizes both the structural imperatives of the colonial and postcolonial systems encapsulating indigenous peoples and their search for a base from which to defend themselves and generate collective action.²²

Groups under attack, according to this, describe themselves in cultural terms since they both feel and are treated differently. More importantly, though, the rebels themselves justify their actions in cultural and economic terms. According to Subcomandante Marcos, "We have always lived amidst a war that, up till now, was against us."²³ The

²¹June Nash, The Reassertion of Indigenous Identity: Mayan Responses to State Intervention in Chiapas in *Latin American Research Review*, v.30 n.3 1995, pp. 7-40.

²²ibid.

²³ibid.

poverty of the people of Chiapas has historically been linked to their indianness - both by themselves and by the state.

Not all communities in the region are up in arms, though. And not all indigenous communities have rejected state structures. Studies of ethnicity among both Maya and Zapotec groups in Mexico show how many individuals who might describe themselves as indigenous have done well in the present corporatist economic organizations. Zapotec and Maya-speakers can be found at all levels of local class systems.²⁴ The point is, though, that Indians have not done well at all in some regions. Mayas in highland communities of Chiapas and in settlements along the border with Guatemala have reacted collectively against economic encroachment, violence, and threats against their lives and their cultures. The movement taking shape there, led by the EZLN, is a reclamation of indigenous rights and autonomy for political, economic, and cultural survival.

The Call of Emiliano Zapata

Many of the issues the EZLN has raised since 1994 recall those fought for by Emiliano Zapata, the hero of the Mexican Revolution, in the early decades of the twentieth century. Zapata, the young *guerrillero* from Morelos province just south of Mexico City, demanded that the new national assembly of 1917 guarantee access to land and just wages for the people of the Mexican *pueblos*. Zapata and his people moved that such guarantees be enshrined in the revolutionary constitution to counteract discrepancies in wealth between rich landowners and the poor disenfranchized *campesinos* by breaking up the large estates to redistribute land among the peasants. As a result of Zapata's agrarianism, the *ejido* system of communal property ownership prevailed in the Mexican Constitution.²⁵ Article 27 of the constitution promised to restore to the villages those lands taken illegally from them, to grant to the *campesinos* lands and waters whenever

²⁴see both, Cook and Joo Ethnicity in Rural Mexico, and *ibid*.

²⁵My principal resource for the early agrarianism of Zapata is John Wornack, Jr.'s Zapata and the Mexican Revolution, New York: Vintage Books, 1968.

they needed them, and to establish new rural population centres endowed with necessary resources for the people.²⁶ By 1927, the system was working so well that over 80% of the farming population of Zapata's home state had fields of their own.²⁷

Communal ownership, while successful in parts of Mexico like Morelos, was never truly successful in Mexico's southern regions. In Chiapas, for example, large landowners succeeded in blocking any reform and access to land while social programs for chiapecos remained minimal. In fact, during the revolution, no Zapatista movement took place in Chiapas; instead, a sort of counterrevolution by the *mapache* (raccoon) army squelched any possibility of a movement for land reform among the regions' peoples.²⁸ The *mapaches* committed terrible atrocities against the Maya of Chiapas while creating huge landholdings - 8,000 to 10,000 hectares - for themselves around the Indian communities. In the village of Cancuc, they summarily hanged 500 men they suspected as rebels before carving out healthy-sized ranches on Cancuc's communal land. Many of these landholdings are still intact.

By 1993, the number of private owners of the best lands in Chiapas, some three million hectares, was 6,000 while the over two million Indians along with about another one million mestizos had to struggle on the rest, less than half. What this means is that in one of Mexico's most resource rich states, the overwhelming majority of its inhabitants live in extreme poverty. Chiapas generates 55% of the Mexico's electrical energy, more than 40% of Mexico's crude oil, is the country's primary producer of corn, yet the state's 3.2 million inhabitants (3.7% of Mexico's total) are the poorest in the nation.²⁹ The Mexican Academy for Human Rights found that, in 1994, 77% of all children in Chiapas

²⁶John Mason Hart, Revolutionary Mexico: The Coming and Process of the Mexican Revolution. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987. p.331.

²⁷By 1927, according to Womack, statistics indicated that Morelos had changed more from agrarian reforms than any other state. Only 4 or 5 haciendas still functioned there and 120 villages had established their ejidos: some 16,800 ejidataros in possession of over 307,000 acres. At least 80% of the state's farming families held fields of their own, covering around 75% of the arable land.

²⁸Ronald Ngh, Zapata Rose in 1994 in *Cultural Survival Quarterly*. Spring 1994 pp.8-13.

²⁹Alejandro Luévano, Rocío Lomberra and Rafael Reygadas, Those Affected and Displaced by the Armed Conflict in Chiapas. Mexico City: Mexican Academy of Human Rights, 1996. p.15.

were totally undernourished. 28.7% of children between six and 14 did not attend school. two of five homes had no running water, three of five homes no drainage system, one of five no electricity, and 19% of adults had no income whatsoever. Tuberculosis, dengue, trachoma, diarrhea, and cholera wreak havoc throughout the state; and since 1992, the year ex-president Salinas modified the constitution to eliminate even the possibility of *ejidal* community ownership, conditions throughout Chiapas have gotten worse.³⁰

The Maya Rebellion in Chiapas

After the Mexican debt crisis of 1982, the federal government of Mexico turned on peasants and began dismantling the system of support for farmers.³¹ During the 1970's and early 1980's, Mexico borrowed heavily to expand its oil producing sector so that, by 1982, the country had accumulated over US\$96 billion in foreign debt. The nation's international creditors became nervous of this heavy load and they began calling for a restructuring of the economy with stark austerity measures. Miguel de la Madrid, president in 1982, started the restructuring by removing subsidies for fertilizers and crop insurance to farmers. As a response to these actions, people in rural regions began to organize themselves into non-governmental credit unions, campesino and worker organizations, and their own political organizations, like the Organización Campesina Emiliano Zapata (OCEZ), in opposition to the government and the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party). The reforms of de la Madrid were just the start.

In 1988, Carlos Salinas de Gotari, in an effort to prepare his country for free trade with the rest of North America, further dissolved programs for farmers. The newly elected president undertook a wholesale revision of the state beginning with dismantling systems of agrarian credit. Prices for coffee, the cast crop on which many chiapecos

³⁰ibid. p.17.

³¹ There are several books dealing with Mexico's response to the debt crisis. Two which I have leaned on heavily are Duncan Green's *The Silent Revolution: The Rise of Market Economics in Latin America*. London: Latin America Bureau, 1995, and John Crow's *The Epic of Latin America*.

depended, plummeted after the government dissolved the coffee union, INMECAFE. Further reforms took place as the government loosened trade and investment restrictions paving the way for NAFTA until finally, the situation for Chiapan peasants became hopeless with the elimination of the guarantees of Article 27 in 1992.

Economic restructuring on the part of the Mexican government left small landholders in the lurch. The reforms, including the revision of Article 27, put peasants at risk of losing the basis of their livelihoods, *their land*, as well as their power as a constituency, their communal ownership. It was against this backdrop that the Zapatistas came on the scene.

Civil War in Mexico

The name of the Chiapan liberation army, the outbreak of violence on January 1st, 1994, and the capture of the beautiful old colonial city of San Cristóbal, are all rapt with symbolism. Drawing on the name and tradition of Emiliano Zapata, the Zapatistas of the EZLN have made their connection to the revolutionary's philosophy clear. Of the Mexican constitution, the EZLN declares:

We want, as is established in our revolutionary agricultural law, the great quantity of land that is currently in the hands of big ranchers and national and foreign landowners to pass into the hands of our peoples, who suffer from a total lack of land... New *ejidos* and communities must be formed. The Salinas revision of Article 27 must be annulled and the right to land must be recognized... Article 27 of the Magna Carta [constitution] must respect the original Spirit of Emiliano Zapata: the land is for indigenous people and campesinos who work it. Not for the *latifundistas* [owners of large agricultural estates].³²

Zapata was a hero then. Zapata is the hero now.

³²Bardacke and López. *Shadows of Tender Fury*. p.158.

January 1st was to be the day of Salinas' neoliberal victory. The NAFTA agreement, signed between Mexico, the US, and Canada, went into effect New Year's Day, 1994; the day the EZLN burst onto the international stage capturing a half dozen towns by force in Chiapas. Restructuring of the economy under NAFTA, the Indians feared, would lead to a further concentration of land into the hands of the *latifundistas*, a greater emphasis on the export sector like petroleum with further reductions in programs for small producers in agricultural regions (typically Indian and rural poor), and greater privatization of national companies that often sustained regional economies like those of Chiapas. Salinas' celebration was spoiled by the Zapatistas, however.

They chose his day to advance from their jungle hideaway in the Lacandón region and take Chiapas. The government's response, as we have seen, was overwhelming. Today, there is a stalemate. The Zapatistas control much of the area of the Lacandón *selva* where their support has always been strong; however, the Mexican military has encircled the "conflict zone" limiting peoples' movements beyond the military outposts. This encirclement has hurt small farmers' ability to get to markets and sell their crops. According to June Nash, cash crops like coffee and fruits have been sold at a tenth the normal retail price.³³ The magnitude of the government response, though, signalled just how serious was the threat.

The taking of San Cristóbal was also rich in symbolism. San Cristóbal had been the home of Bartolomé de las Casas, the Spanish priest who defended the rights of indigenous peoples in the New World during the sixteenth century; it was he who argued with the Spanish authority, including the irascible Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, against the enslavement of the Indians.

Ironically, San Cristóbal is also an important tourist centre in Mexico. The town has over a million visitors each year; this is ironic since many of the travellers are attracted to the region's indigenous Maya population who benefit *least* from the tourism industry.

³³Nash, Reassertion of Indigenous Identity, p.27.

The Maya maintain more of their *indígena* identity than do other native groups in Mexico since they have largely been unacculturated to the "Mexican" one; tourists are attracted by this *indígena* culture. The poverty of the natives is also apparent to tourists. Since the revolution of 1917 had little reach below Oaxaca and Veracruz, the states just north of Chiapas, and the Maya were never included in the national project, the natives have been marginalized as poor but colourful members of an old mesoamerican culture. The revolt has changed all that.

The Zapatista capture of a town with so many visitors has attracted considerable attention. Now, it seems, the revolutionaries' quaint *indígena* identity has become a symbol of solidarity to rally around. Support both within Mexico and abroad is considerable for the goals of the EZLN. The Mayan identity, guarded for so long as a simple icon for the tourist trade in San Cristóbal, has become a symbol of strength for many people around the Americas. Indigenous identity in San Cristóbal and in Chiapas, mostly ignored by the mainstream since the conquest, has drawn the sympathy of many people and given the Zapatista movement its strength. And no other town in Mexico, concludes the anthropologist Duncan Earle, "would have drawn so much media notice (or been so attractive for reporters)" than San Cristóbal.³⁴ With that attention, the miserable economic conditions in which the Maya of the town live can no longer be ignored.

Since the end of January, 1994, there has been a cease-fire (with some federal military incursions into Zapatista regions) throughout Chiapas as both sides, the government and representatives for the Indians, sit at the bargaining table. The state, though, has remained under heavy militarization. There are estimated to be no more than 3,000 Zapatista combatants throughout Chiapas, while there remain about 50,000 Mexican troops there. The army, as mentioned above, has established a *cordon sanitaire*, effectively cutting off the rebels from many communities of support, to just the forest

³⁴Duncan Earle. Indigenous Identity at the Margin: Zapatismo and Nationalism in *Cultural Survival Quarterly* Spring 1994, p.26.

region of the Palenque, a huge jungle in the southeast of the state along the border with Guatemala: The military controls the roads and all major routes into and out of the region. The state has been "militarized" with "long-range, semi-heavy artillery, helicopters for both personnel transport and rapid combat action, armored tanks and light-weight, amphibian tanks, and ...[t]he territorial distribution of temporary military camps [that] is reinforced by continuous detection and reconnaissance flights, as well as air patrols carried out by low-flying helicopters which suddenly appear over the huts of the indigenous communities identified as Zapatista..."³⁵ The population is surrounded. Not only are farmers having difficulty getting produce to market, but people cannot leave to obtain goods like salt and medicines: The sick go without proper medical care since families fear leaving their own community for another where they know there is help but where the army might be present.

The demands of the EZLN are clearly articulated demands for democracy and greater autonomy for indigenous peoples. The insurgents do not recognize the most recent federal or state elections in Mexico and they demand that the incumbent executives of both levels of government resign. The elections, which took place in 1994, have been seriously questioned by the 10,000 members of the *Alianza Civica* observation team: Coercive pressure and vote-buying were proven to have taken place.³⁶ Some regions of Zapatista support reportedly voted 75 to 100 percent for the ruling PRI, the party that ordered in the gunships.

The Zapatistas are demanding that regions, including indigenous' ones, be given more control over their affairs. Accordingly, the Indians would like to tap into some of the profits from oil and some of the power from generating stations located on Chiapan soil. At present, the Indians do not benefit whatsoever from the exports of oil and they

³⁵Mexican Academy for Human Rights. Those Affected and Displaced. pp.30-31.

³⁶ibid. p.23.

would like some of the profits from the sale to be applied to agricultural, commercial, and social programs for their state.

Finally, Zapatismo seeks to guarantee access to land by indigenous and small farmers. For this they demand the return of the original spirit of the Mexican constitution of 1917 and a revision of the North American Free Trade Agreement allowing for *ejidos* and land redistribution to exist.

The problems of Mexico are repeated throughout Latin America. While the dictatorships *have* fallen, conditions for enormous numbers of people remain horrendous as wealth and power become even more concentrated, and hegemonic cultures are promoted pushing people outside the mainstream further into desperation. There is no better example of the dangers of this harmful union of new and old Latin American attitudes than the disparity gripping Guatemala. This situation now demands our attention.

3 - The Maya at War in Guatemala

For over thirty years there has been war in neighbouring Guatemala. The fighting has been a struggle by the élite Ladino (mixed race) society, the "society of 20%" - those living above the line of extreme poverty - to establish control over all of Guatemala: The political culture, including the leftist parties and the guerrilla, and the remaining lands inhabited by the Mam, the Quiché, and other Maya groups and to establish once and for all a hegemonic culture of racism and exploitation. And this effort continues.

In the last 36 years, with the outbreak of war between the government and guerrilla groups including the URNG, the *Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca*, some 440 Indian villages have been destroyed by army helicopter gunships spraying machine-gun fire and napalm on the inhabitants; about a million and a half people have been displaced; and since 1954, when the democratic government was ousted by the CIA, over 100,000 people have been murdered and at least 1,000,000 more forced into exile. All this destruction against a people who are in the majority (60% by some reasonable estimates) yet cannot defend themselves. Still, as recently as 1992, the year marking 500 years of conquest, Guatemalan death squads killed over 2,000 people - the overwhelming majority of them Indians.

The situation in Guatemala is extreme; but not so extreme as to be out of line with experiences of Native groups elsewhere. In Ecuador, Native groups have been caught in border disputes between their country and Peru. Many have died. In the Brazilian Amazon, Native groups have been pushed from their jungle homes to make way for logging industry clearcuts. Entire ways of life have been destroyed by such actions. Still, in many ways, the destruction in Guatemala stands alone.

In October of last year, the army decimated another Mayan village in Guatemala, Xamán. Just part of the determined message of the government for Natives to stop organizing themselves socially or politically.

Maya Realism

One of the enduring features of the civil war that has been raging in Guatemala for the last 36 years is the *Guardia Civil*, or the Civil Patrol. The Civil Patrol is generally made up from a rag-tag group of Indians shuffling through the streets carrying antiquated (sometimes even rusty) rifles protecting their community against infiltration by leftist groups including the guerrilla. These patrols were summoned in the mid-1980s by the Guatemalan Army and forced on communities not simply to halt guerrilla but to nip in its earliest stage the temptation of any Indian of joining the insurgents' movement. The Maya tolerate the patrols from fear of the army *and* from fear of the guerrilla, as well: As a result of the war, points out anthropologist Richard Adams, Indians in Guatemala are now very apprehensive about being too politically visible.¹

Out of this necessity, Mayan politics have been as insecure as they have been unclear. Imported ideologies, although part of the current equation, have not until very recently been present in the Mayan critique of Guatemala. As the revolutionary efforts began in the early 1970s, campaigns were begun to politicize the Indian campesinos. Gradually, what emerged according to Arturo Arias, was a pan-*Mayan* identity; and it was this growing consciousness and promotion of a Mayan ethnicity that convinced the government that the Indians were part of the insurgency.²

¹ Richard Adams, *Strategies for Ethnic Survival in Central America* in Greg Urban and Joel Sherzer (eds.) *Nation-States and Indians in Latin America*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991. p. 189.

² Arturo Arias, *Changing Indian Identity: Guatemala's Violent Transition to Modernity* in Carol Smith (ed.) *Guatemalan Indians and the State: 1540-1988*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990. pp. 258-286.

In defending actions taken against indigenous people during the "scorched earth" period of president Efraín Ríos Montt, though, the army has accused the Maya of all forms of totalitarian politics including, and worst of all, Marxism. José Domingo García Samayoa, Defense Minister of Guatemala in 1992, claimed that without the scorched earth attacks on highland Maya villages, "Guatemalans would be licking the boots of Marxism-Leninism today."³ Even the most Indian of all presidents, Romeo Lucas García, justified the killing and torture of thousands of Mayan peasants as a purging of the fatherland of subversives and of gullible Marxist dupes.⁴ None of this is true, though. While the military and government in Guatemala believe Indian activism to be Marxist, it is not. Marxist and Maoist insurgencies exist in many parts of Latin America; however, Indian groups and their demands have not *necessarily* been ones that fit anywhere along the classic political spectrum.

At the outset of the struggle 36 years ago, Natives in Guatemala did not even appear in political debates; they sought simply the freedom to develop themselves on what they saw as their lands. Even today, Mayan people do not appear in politics and their communities do not turn out to vote in national or regional elections in any significant numbers.⁵ Historically as well, the Maya have not been influenced one way or another by politics and/or political ideologies: Through no fault of their own, though, they have been hurt by politics, both left and right.

³Victor Perera, Unfinished Conquest: The Guatemalan Tragedy, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, p.334.

⁴ibid. p.48.

⁵ During the 1994 congressional elections, voter turnout in rural regions was around 10% of those registered; in the constitutional referendum of January 30, 1994, a mere 16% of all registered Guatemalan voters showed up to cast ballots (ICCHRLA, *Crisis of State - State of Crisis: Human Rights in Guatemala*, 1995). Much of the low turnout can be explained by the lack of confidence people have in their institutions; however, even Rigoberta Menchú insists that indigenous Guatemalans "can no longer simply say no to elections," that they must "gain a foothold in the political system." (Interview with Rigoberta Menchú in *NACLA: Report on the Americas*, v.29 n.6 pp.6-10.)

During the twentieth century, highland Maya had been losing more and more lands in the best growing areas to large *Ladino* coffee growers until their own plots were no longer large enough to feed themselves and their families. The government officials saw an opportunity to put "idle Indian hands", with no lands of their own, to work and to make larger profits for the coffee plantations and themselves; early this century, the government of Guatemala passed legislation forcing small landholders like the Maya to do 100 days of manual labour on the plantations every year. With little or no acreage of their own, along with poor wages when they *did* work, Mayan living conditions worsened. And with deteriorating conditions, the Maya were forced to seek some protection: The Indian farmers began to form farm unions.

But Indian protection was never thought to be at the expense of other groups in Guatemala - they simply wanted access to the means to survive: Guarantees of their lands and fair wages. Today, conditions have not improved for Maya farmers: The *latifundistas*, the large landholders, make up less than two percent of the population yet hold more than 65% of the arable land.⁶

Violence started against the Maya when factions of the army broke away and began experimenting with *guerrilla*-ism and the politics of the Cuban revolution. Revolutionary leader Che Guevara had received part of his political education in Guatemala during the presidency of Jacobo Arbenz, and both Guevara's and Fidel Castro's formative influence on Guatemala's burgeoning guerrilla movement had become substantial.⁷ The Guatemalan groups, led by *Ladino* figures like Mario Payeras and Rolando Morán, began a struggle against the US-backed military governments of Guatemala demanding a return to the social democracy of Arbenz. Since the President's ousting in 1954 at the hands of the CIA, Guatemalans suffered under an increasingly brutal

⁶ibid. p.9.

⁷ This point is brought up by Perera but is more clearly addressed by Piero Gleijeses' Grappling with Guatemala's Horror in *Latin American Research Review*, v. 21 no. 1 1997, pp. 226-235.

series of military dictatorships. In the era of the dictators, Guatemalan democracy was repressed, power concentrated, and political opposition wiped out: It was during this time that the gruesome intransitive verb "to disappear" was first used in association with human rights violations.

To move larger numbers of people, the revolutionaries sought to link their leftist revolution with indigenous issues like those of the farm unions of the Maya-led CUC (*Central Unificada Campesina* or Central Farmers Union). From their jungle hideaway in Mexico, Payeras and others in the *Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres* (EGP, the Guerrilla Army of the Poor) crossed into the Guatemalan highlands to recruit young Maya by appealing to their grievances against plantation owners and labour contractors thus broadening their own base of support - the story goes that the original guerrilla group hadn't enough people to carry their arms.⁸ This is not to say that Natives were not sympathetic with the ideas of the EGP (just one of the precursors to the present URNG); but the initial revolution was not theirs. A young Maya spoke to the activist Jennifer Harbury; she quotes him in her book *Bridge of Courage* thus:

Like many of the *compañeros* [partners in the struggle], I grew up on a plantation. My family is Mayan, so, of course, we were not the owners, only the serfs... My father taught me the only two letters he knew himself, but this was my only education. I had to go to the fields... and labor like a mule for pittance wages. This was harder for me than the hunger, not being able to go to school, not being able to learn... By the time I was sixteen or so, I began to run away [up the trails] to the mountains instead of going to the fields. I just wanted time to think, to be a person instead of a donkey... It was on one of these days that we met [a revolutionary leader] and his small group of *compañeros*... They spoke with us as though we were intelligent people, sharing their ideas, asking for ours... We talked all afternoon, and a few days later I found myself wandering back up the trails.⁹

⁸Mario Payeras. *Days of the Jungle*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983.

⁹ Jennifer Harbury. *Bridge of Courage: Life Stories of the Guatemalan Compañeros and Compañeras*. Monroe, Maine: Common Courage, 1994. pp. 181-83.

Through the harshness of their own lives, the Maya sympathized with the Ladino revolution and many began to join the struggle.

Sadly, the Indians paid the price for their sympathy. The Guatemalan military, under the direction of General Efraín Ríos Montt, destroyed entire Native towns and their populations during the early 1980's using napalm while attempting to destroy what they thought was the guerrillas' base of support. Tens of thousands of people were killed and thousands more driven into exile; almost all of them Indians.

The havoc wrought on Indian society brought about a new level of political and cultural consciousness. Initially, Indians rejected both the military and the revolution¹⁰: But when the guerrilla proved unable protect the Indians (caught completely off-guard by the army's attacks), many Maya were slaughtered pressing others into the insurgents' camp. As a result of revolutionary propaganda *and* military attacks, the Maya of Guatemala *became* politicized, siding with the revolutionaries against the powerful Ladino landholding class, the military, and the government in Guatemala City. At the same time, though, out of fear and for self-preservation, others joined the counterrevolution by siding with the military and civil patrols.¹¹ The indigenous peoples' revolution and politicization did not grow out of local social struggles but rather as a response to indiscriminate military reprisals. As David Stoll writes:

The EGP's success was not the result of [indigenous] peasants pregnant with revolutionary impulses, but of provoking repression on them.¹²

And while it seems true that EGP itself had no choice but armed struggle during the 1970s and 80s, Indian communities were the ones that paid the heaviest price in what was

¹⁰ Richard Adams, *Guatemalan Ladinization and History*, pp. 527-43.

¹¹ Daniel Wilkinson, "Democracy" Comes to Guatemala in *World Policy Journal*, v. 12 n. 4, p. 81.

¹² David Stoll, The Land No Longer Gives in *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, v. 14 n. 4, p. 4.

essentially a class war. The result of the repression was that for perhaps the first time in the guerrilla movements of Latin America, the class struggle was linked with the indigenous struggle; giving the military further reason to attack Natives.

The war in Guatemala was the first time that Marxist revolutionary movements succeeded in allying themselves with Native groups. Payeras states that:

One of our main differences with the past was something that would have unsuspected historical importance in the future, the indispensable relationship established by the EGP with the indigenous peoples of Guatemala... The EGP asserts for the first time that the revolution in Guatemala must have two facets: the class struggle and the ethnic-national struggle. It postulates that the two aspects are unseparately [sic] bound, that one cannot triumph without the other.¹³

The union of the class struggle with Native claims for lands and rights has had potentially devastating effects on Indian populations throughout Latin America. From Chile, through Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, to El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and Mexico, indigenous groups have been maligned, all in the name of protecting democracy from doctrinal movements. Just prior to the elections in Guatemala last year, Héctor Gramajo Morales, former defense minister, published a 500-page account confirming his belief that, after subduing the guerrilla movement (the "international communists") during the 1980s, *he* brought reconciliation and democracy to his country.¹⁴ Unfortunately for Guatemala's Indians, Gramajo's effort included "an indiscriminate campaign of terror against civilians."¹⁵ This terror, committed principally against the indigenous, was to guarantee "the survival of the state" against outside ideological movements like those that had gripped Nicaragua.

¹³Mario Payeras interviewed by Jorge Castañeda, quoted in Castañeda's *Utopia Unarmed*, pp.92-93.

¹⁴Daniel Wilkinson, "Democracy" Comes to Guatemala, pp. 71-81.

¹⁵The US District Court in Boston held the General responsible for the campaign of terror and ordered him to pay US\$ 47 million in damages to its victims. See *ibid.* p. 71.

Whether real *or* simply imagined, the ideological slide of many Maya into Leftist insurgency was hazardous for the communities. Today, the leaders of the people seem more aware of this. Present-day popular leaders in the Americas realize that a move toward Marxist-type equality can be counter-productive and culturally damaging to many communities; and even the language of revolution can provoke brutal reprisals. Today, the thinking of the leaders of the Indian negotiations in Chiapas seems particularly sophisticated: In the multi-ethnic states of the Americas, where cultural norms differ, and where a Cold War mentality continues to linger, the move toward certain forms of equality based solely in class can be destructive to both cultural *and* individual survival.

The Strength of the Mayan Identity

The Popol Vuh, the *Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life*, one of just four Native books to have survived the European conquest, describes how before God created the Maya he created a race of wooden soulless people. In southern Mexico and northern Guatemala, the Indians believe that this is what the governments and militaries of those two countries are trying to reduce them to now - soulless people.¹⁶ This could be used as the metaphor for all of the Americas: Without some recognition of indigenous peoples' plight, Natives will continue to be pushed to the margins, their important narratives destroyed, and their cultures will become meaningless. For this reason alone, the monitoring of situations by international groups like ICCHLRA, Human Rights Watch, and the United Nations is extremely important. There are structural problems within Western forms of organizing, politically and economically, which human rights organizations, social and environmental activist groups, and international forums draw our attention to. People need at the very least the means for their own survival. Native uprisings in the Chiapas region of Mexico, the altiplano of Guatemala, the forests of Ecuador, calls for justice from the Mapuche in

¹⁶Perera. Unfinished Conquest.

Chile, the Nis'qaa in Western Canada and the Iroquois in Québec, have been about indigenous groups' demands for control over the means for their survival.

As far as an indigenous American culture, Mayan, at least, is strong. Not only do the Maya have a book, a Bible so to speak, they have healthy and flourishing languages among huge numbers of people: Mayan has 30 languages in total, 20 in Guatemala alone, with over 6 million speakers throughout Mexico and Central America, and its growing. If language can be used to judge the strength of a culture, Mayan is formidable. Even as the Guatemalan army attacked the Maya during *la violencia* (the period of worst violence between 1978 and 1985) Mayan language made gains and the peoples' identity became stronger. Princeton University professor Kay Warren writes:

Although many observers expected that violence and poverty in Guatemala would drive the Mayans to assimilate - to attempt to pass as non-Indians outside their home communities - quite the opposite occurred.¹⁷

As the government tried to rid the country of these "robots and kamikazes" who are a "deadweight on Guatemalan society"¹⁸, Mayan cultural convictions, including their language, grew stronger.

Language is, according to Richard Adams, *the* basic tool by which cultures (or ethnicities) express themselves.¹⁹ Language represents to the individual the dimensions of the surrounding political and economic worlds: It is an indicator (perhaps the most important indicator) of the relative positions of the Maya to the Ladino.²⁰

¹⁷Kay B. Warren. Language and the Politics of Self-Expression: Mayan Revitalization in Guatemala in *Cultural Survival Quarterly*. Summer/Fall 1994. p.81.

¹⁸These are the phrases used by former president Carlos Arana Osoria to describe the Indians. Perera. Unfinished Conquest. p.48.

¹⁹ Adams. *Strategies for Ethnic Survival*. p. 189.

²⁰Warren. Language and the Politics of Self-Expression. p.81.

Spanish, since the moment of conquest, has been the official language of instruction in Guatemalan schools where about 60% of the students were Maya. During the 1980's, Mayan leaders began to criticize the language practices of the national school system. Today, leaders are struggling to have Mayan languages taught in schools, at least during the primary years, so that Indian children can ease into the national curriculum. Yet, the constitution of Guatemala mandates that Spanish be the official language in education, high culture, official communications and general public administration thus committing all other languages to secondary positions: popular culture and family life, the informal or private sphere only. And the present government seems determined to maintain this situation: While they promise bilingual schools, they do not seem to have the will to follow through on their promise: as a result, this government is thought to be "profoundly non-indigenous."²¹ However, millions of Mayan children arrive from their hamlets to the local school with little or no background in Spanish since their families speak a Mayan language at home. As a result, many of the Indian children never become literate in any language since the institution of an all-Spanish curriculum keeps them continuously in shock, either trying desperately to keep up with the lectures, or, as is overwhelmingly the case, dropping out.

The picture of Mayan literacy is a sad one: from 52-75% illiteracy in departments (states) where Mayans are the majority. Estimates of ethnic Maya in the total population range from 42% to 87%; therefore, the picture for Guatemala as a whole is not encouraging. In fact, in recent censuses, four out of five departments with the highest percentage of Indian population witnessed an increase in the proportion of Indians²²; the

²¹ Rigoberta Menchú in *NACLA*.

²²After decreases in percentages through the 1950s and early 1960s, the department of Chimaltenango increased its proportion of indigenous Guatemalans from 76.1% in 1964 to 79.8% in 1981; other departments had similar increases: Totonicapan, the most Mayan of Guatemala's regions, increased its Indian population from 94.2% to 97.1% during the same period. Figures are from Richard Adams' *Strategies for Ethnic Survival in Central America*. pp.183-84.

result is that about 92% of the total population of Guatemala (Ladino and Maya included) over 15 years old never finished primary school.

And Mayan women are the worst-off. Fewer than one-third of Indian women have received any formal education at all: It is not surprising, then, that Mayan women are three times more likely to be illiterate than Ladina women.²³

Maya speakers in the population range from 36% to 70%: many are bilingual, many are unilingual, most are illiterate. This persistence of Mayan languages can be seen both a symptom of their marginalization and as a form of resistance to the internal colonialism of Guatemala. Like African slaves during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, indigenous Americans have been continuously exploited by the dominant society and have thus held tightly to their own cultural traits for unity and opposition. The continued existence of such a large number of Maya speakers, unilingual and illiterate, in the population is a sign of the strength, as well of the weakness, of their community. With their continuing marginalization from the benefits of their country, the Maya may draw strength from their isolation, and if the conditions of their poverty remain the stagnant, revolutionary impulses will continue to seethe. In this sense, language has become the new politics of the Maya.

Miguel Ángel Asturias: The Agent of a Tropical Dream

If literature can demonstrate the powerlessness of native culture on the mainstream Mexican psyche, than literature will demonstrate the strength of the Maya within the minds of Guatemalans, both native and none: Unlike Mexico, literature in Guatemala has become in some instances a space for genuine opposition to authoritarianism and the abuse of the Indians. Needless to say, there is great irony whenever writing becomes a form of resistance in a place where so many people cannot read; however, this appears as

²³ibid. p.82.

the case in Guatemala. Marc Zimmerman in *Literature and Resistance in Guatemala* states it thus:

...literature even in a country of over twenty-two languages and an illiteracy rate of well over 50% is situated in the last several decades not only as a reflection, expression or even partial manifestation of hegemonic political culture, but as that small legitimized space for non-hegemonic, oppositional culture even among the very social sectors in which hegemony resides or in which its effects are supposed to be most intensely generated, mediated, and guaranteed.

The question is, then, how did literature become so situated as an oppositional cultural mode and even as a repository or vehicle for the most radical tendencies within Guatemalan Ladino and sometimes even indigenous society?²⁴

Nobel laureate Miguel Ángel Asturias, the dominant artist of Guatemala, wrote works, including his most famous *El Señor Presidente* and *The Men of Maize*, in which he searched for an inclusive Guatemalan identity in opposition to the destructive fractured historical one based on race. To Asturias, Guatemala should transform itself from a society which hated its Indian populations to one which reinvented itself using traditional Mayan myth. He felt that dominant artistic problem was to help form this new positive collective conscious for Guatemala because “the people are at stake.”²⁵ In his most ambitious book, *Men of Maize*, Asturias wrote a novel about *Mayan* responses to the conquest and the continuing oppression of Guatemala. By writing about the Maya, in a Mayan voice, Asturias, a Ladino, became the conduit or the medium by which the two cultures tried to communicate: He became, in the words of one critic, the agent of a tropical dream.²⁶

²⁴ Marc Zimmerman. Literature and Resistance in Guatemala: Textual Modes and Cultural Politics from El Señor Presidente to Rigoberta Menchú. v. 1. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1995. p. 4.

²⁵ Asturias quoted in *ibid.* p. 129.

²⁶ The words of Gordon Brotherston as quoted by Ronald Christ the translator of Asturias' Men of Maize. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press/UNESCO Colección Archivos, 1993. p.437.

The book is difficult for the non-native: It is written using principally native imagery (both Maya and Aztec): a recognizably native voice with a great deal of repetition of words and themes; and a Maya timeline where, as in the Popol Vuh, the same events take place over and over throughout history leading to the same single conclusion. In the *Men of Maize*, three Maya men - all leaders in their communities during different periods in the history of Guatemala - lose their women, their connections to their past and community, and destroy themselves with drink (alcohol in two cases and water in one) leaving their people to continue to struggle against outside oppression and foreign influence without them.

In the first section Asturias writes of the historical figure Gaspar Ilóm who loses everything in fighting the intruders, the Spanish, so he takes his own life by drowning himself in a river. This section is entirely written in the writer's carefully developed native speech full of Maya and Aztec references.

Bare earth, wakeful earth, sleepy maize-growing earth, Gaspar falling from where the earth falls, maize-growing earth watered by rivers stagnant with wakefulness, green with the wakefulness of forests sacrificed by the maize made man the sower of maize. The maize planters beat their way in with their fires and their axes, into forests that were grandmothers of shade, two hundred thousand young silk-cotton trees each a thousand years old.²⁷

In the Popul Vuh, the gods' final experiment created man from the fruits of the earth, including corn. In Asturias' work, these men of maize, the Maya, are beaten by the men of fire and axes, the Spaniards, just as it was predicted they would be in the *Chilam Balam*, the book of the Yucatan people, another Maya group. Here, also, the "new" maize planters beat into the forests "that were grandmothers" - grandmother was an important symbol of community for the upland Maya - and felled two thousand symbols of

²⁷ Miguel Ángel Asturias. *Men of Maize*. p.8.

life and fertility, the silk-cotton tree, each a thousand years old presumably with branches leading to the sky and roots leading to the underworld - for the Maya, the silk-cotton, the *ceiba*, holds up the sky like a god; it is today the national tree of Guatemala.

In each part of the book, the Maya are changed in some way from the loss of their leaders and from the effects of the worlds they come in contact with. The book ends ambiguously, with the Maya as ants in the world dominated by other peoples.

The point here is that even in a world dominated by foreign structures the Maya survive - they are changed but still present in Guatemala. Guatemala's Nobel laureate artist, much more than the Mexican Paz, makes a genuine attempt at understanding all the people of his country and feels compelled, the skeptic might say by sheer numbers only, to recognize their cultural survival and condition in contemporary Guatemala.

As well, unlike the Mexican novelist Fuentes, the Guatemalan Asturias acknowledges the value of the Indian narrative and cultural gifts beyond simple pottery and artisanal products. Asturias, for the length of the novel anyway, becomes as best he can an Amerindian.

The sun let down its hair. The summer was received in the domain of the chieftain of Ilóm with comb honey rubbed on the branches of the fruit trees, so the fruit would be sweet; with braids of immortelles on the heads of the women, so the women would be fertile; and with dead raccoons hanging from the doors of the ranchos, so the men would be potent.

The firefly wizards, descendants of the great clashers of flint stones, sowed the sparkling lights in the black air of the night to be sure there would be guiding stars in the winter. The firefly wizards with their obsidian sparks. The firefly wizards, who dwelt in tents of virgin doeskin.²⁸

²⁸ *ibid.* p. 19.

This passage is heavily laden with both Maya and Aztec imagery and myths. To mesoamerican natives, the rays of the sun are like the hair of gods or the leaves of the trees: This imagery leads Asturias to Maya fertility rituals, then to agents of sacrifice, the firefly wizards with their bits of obsidian, from the *Annals of the Cakchiquels*, a highland Maya document. Finally, Asturias leaves us in this passage safely back in the hands of one of the gods from the *Popul Vuh*. The Maya text reads:

This very place has become our mountain, our plain. Now that we are yours, our day and our birth have become great, because all the peoples are yours... And leave the pelts of the deer apart, save them. These are for disguises, for deception. They will become deer costumes, and so they will serve as our surrogates before the tribes. When you are asked, "Where is Tohil?" [the god] then you will display the deer costumes before them, and without revealing yourselves. And there is still more for you to do.²⁹

Maya Recognition

"Guatemala is a multinational society," claim culturalists.³⁰ Guatemalan culture should be a confederation of cultures and languages in which each preserves its originality. Ladinos have attempted to reproduce a hegemonic national culture through their monopoly of Guatemalan schools and public administration; today, though, Mayas are working toward a more inclusive definition of culture and "nation" where their language and traditions will be represented.

In imagining such a state, Demetrio Cojtí suggests:

a new role for Mayan languages, as indicators of regionalized cultural identities, or nationalities, which would serve as the basis for subdivisions and self-administration... Guatemala [should be] a

²⁹ *Popul Vuh*, trans. by Dennis Tedlock. New York: Touchstone Books, 1985. p.185.

³⁰ Guatemalan culturalist Demetrio Cojtí Cuxil quoted in Warren. Language and the Politics of Self-Expression, p.84.

federation of nations, each with its own government, territory, laws, and means for cultural development. Public administration would speak the language of those governed, not the other way around, as is presently the case: state government would routinely translate documents into regional languages. Representatives from national subunits - Mayan and Ladino - would make up the overarching government of the state...

We have to admit that until now the problem of nationalities has not been resolved by any revolution or counterrevolution, by any reform or counterreform, by any independence or annexation, by a coup or countercoup.³¹

Cojtí uses historical comparisons to show viability of his plan:

1. Societies in Europe have incorporated different "nations" within a single state without apocalypse.
2. People in much more dramatic diasporas than the Mayan one have reunified to create viable nations.
3. Suppressed ethnicities do not disappear when the larger society mutes them.

With Mayan identity strengthening, a place needs to be worked out in Guatemala for the people.

Rigoberta Menchú, the Quiché Maya woman from the highlands of Guatemala who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992 for her work on behalf of indigenous peoples and the poor, says that a limited space for indigenous issues within the government of Guatemala is no longer enough for the Maya. Indigenous identity is firm in the country and needs to be recognized in the Constitution: Simply creating a ministry within the federal government would return Guatemala to its "apartheid."³² The Ministry of Defense

³¹ibid. p.85.

³²Rigoberta Menchú in *NACLA*.

and all other ministries would remain in the hands of non-indigenous people, and the Maya would get a tiny bureaucratic office for themselves.

Menchú believes that indigenous peoples and their supporters need to begin organizing at local levels and that the Maya need to *become* political: They can no longer afford to say no to elections, no to government, and no to the system. People are still afraid but they must: "Vote against fear." Along with other groups, her organization is attempting to organize people at the municipal level to vote indigenous members into office and to gain a foothold in the political system. Grassroots organizations, middle class Indians and educated individuals of Maya extraction are of unequivocal importance in leading the emergence of a new national, inclusive consciousness. Indigenous men and women "should be an integral part of the political system"; and Guatemalans, in general, "must have a vision that is more national, less sectoral, less sectarian. We need to begin to erase the boundaries that divide us."³³

The Rest of Central America

The strength of the Mayan identity in Guatemala comes from sheer numbers: Indigenous people have a chance in Guatemala since they form a substantial part of the total population (*lowest* estimates put the Maya at over 50%). In no other country of Central America do indigenous groups approach even 20% of the total; and in Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, and Panama, the proportions of Indians never surpass just ten percent.

The best that Natives can hope for in most of these states is the setting aside of certain lands within the state where indigenous peoples enjoy rights that others do not and

where some limited autonomy exists. Costa Rica, Honduras, and Panama have all set aside lands for indigenous peoples; these lands are encroached upon by non-indigenous settlers from time to time, but greater protection through increased autonomy is not likely in relatively poor nation-states with such small numbers of Indians.³⁴

In Nicaragua, where small populations of Rama, Sumu and Miskitu groups live, indigenous peoples have largely been ignored by the state. Even the Sandinista government, once in power, initially left the Indians out of the first literacy campaigns since many Indians lived in remote and quite isolated regions along the Caribbean coast of the country. In subsequent campaigns, though, the Sandinista government, along with their hordes of literacy *brigadistas*, made admirable attempts to bring literacy in aboriginal languages to the Natives of the coast.

El Salvador has a population of indigenous peoples (mostly Maya) amounting to less than 20 percent, according to most estimates: Government statistics place the Indian population at less than 9%, while indigenous estimates range as high as 36 percent.³⁵ Demographic work in a country like El Salvador is complicated by politics, war, and peoples' self-identity for economic and social reasons. The state in El Salvador, like Guatemala, has been anxious about political opposition from the Indian communities and has responded to their anxieties with violence against Indians to frighten them into quiescence. Indigenous movements have remained weak in El Salvador from fear of government repression.

³³ibid.

³⁴Costa Rica, while not among the poorest states of the Americas, has a tiny and politically weak indigenous population of less than one percent.

³⁵Adams. *Strategies for Ethnic Survival in Central America*. p.185.

Belize is the only state in Central America where the political apparatus is not controlled by Ladino or white élite; Belize is controlled by blacks. Even there, though, where some ethnic balance has been achieved, indigenous groups, Maya and Carib, are shutout from power.

The Colour of Rhetoric

The traditional clothing of the Maya is known in their region as *traje*. One of the most conspicuous and beautiful bits of *traje* is the colourful loom-woven dress worn with the *corte* (skirt) by the highland Maya women: the *huipil*. In making *hiupiles*, each highland community weaves their distinctive and recognizable pattern. In *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, the Nobel laureate describes how Indian women must continue to be Indians, hold to their traditions so they become equal parts of the national identity with Ladino and Garifuna (black) traditions, continue to weave their distinctive patterns.³⁶

In accepting the Nobel Prize, Menchú said:

The people of Guatemala will mobilize and will become conscious of their ability to construct a just society. They are preparing to sow the future, to free themselves from atavism, to rediscover themselves: to build a country with a genuine national identity. To start a new life.

By combining all the shades and hues of the Ladinos, the Garifunas, and the Indians in the Guatemalan ethnic mosaic, we can blend in many different colors without any of them clashing, without ugliness or antagonism. And we must make them bright and of the highest quality, just the way our weavers do: a typical huipil skirt, brilliantly fashioned, a gift to all humanity.³⁷

³⁶Rigoberta Menchú. *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*. New York: Verso, 1984.

³⁷From Rigoberta Menchú's address on the occasion of the award of the Nobel Peace Prize. Stockholm: The Nobel Foundation, 1992.

For the Maya of Guatemala and Southern Mexico, for indigenous peoples throughout the Americas, the *huipiles* of their nations are still being woven.

4 - Jesus and the Maya

Peoples' struggles for life and dignity in Mexico, Guatemala, and throughout Central America, will surely be placed at risk when no outsiders take note: The violators of human rights will simply continue their patterns unless they are given a reason to stop. The involvement - both direct and indirect - of the Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America (ICCHRLA) in the lives of these people, the Maya of Mexico and Central America, is critical: It is critical if simply for the attention it gives and the support this involvement implies for people living and working in extremely difficult situations; it is critical, more importantly though, because their actions may help change harmful behaviour. ICCHRLA monitors human rights situations and attempts to pressure individuals and institutions, of both private and public sectors, to consider some of the implications of their behavior and to alter it when their behavior hurts people.

There are three distinct ways in which ICCHRLA responds to situations in the South; each response is guided by the conditions of abuse. Each response, in turn, becomes important for the number of people who take note and who consider altering behavior which can lead to the destruction of human dignity. First, when the committee learns of human rights violations, evictions, illegal arrests, unfair trials, violence, torture, death threats or death itself, they react immediately with letters, faxes, and phonecalls, to officials bringing to their attention the offense. These are called "Urgent Actions." The idea is to respond quickly, with as much support for the response as possible. Second,

when issues are broader and the offenses constant - as is the ongoing impunity for violators in Latin America - ICCHRLA attempts to build a coalition with its partners and other concerned groups in order that the response be more comprehensive and the pressure on officials and violators be greater. And finally, with briefings, regular publications, and forums, the committee informs others, the member congregations, government officials, and the media, of systemic problems which allow for the continuation of patterns of abuse: Mexico, for example, continues to receive criticism for its arguably undemocratic authoritarian politico-economic system. ICCHRLA reports on this system, and brings news of the problems to officials both here, in Canada, and abroad.

At first glance, many of these responses by the coalition to violence and conditions of abuse do not appear inherently directed toward solutions for the Maya; nevertheless, all of them in some way are. The Maya (like natives in many parts of the Americas) are overwhelmingly the victims of the daily violence in regions where they live.

Urgent Action: Attacks on individuals in Guatemala

When ICCHRLA receives notice of a violation against somebody's person or property in Guatemala, the person is often (perhaps, most often) a person of Maya extraction. The poor and the abused in Guatemala, as we have seen, are most often the indigenous Maya.

The calls for action either come from sister groups in Guatemala like the DEFENSORIA MAYA (a legal defense group) or, as is more often the case, from other international human rights monitoring groups like Amnesty International or the Social Justice Committee of Montreal. ICCHRLA sends its responses to urgent actions to the appropriate officials: At times this will be the Minister of Justice or the President in

Guatemala, and at times this will be the Minister for External Affairs or the Secretary of State responsible for Latin America in Canada; and at other times, this may be the president or representatives of companies doing business in the region and possibly implicated in the abuse. The responses vary but read something like:

Canadian Churches bring to your attention to the situation of *person's name or persons' names*. We have learned that this person has had *the abuse* brought against them and we are concerned for their safety.

The letter will include some details of the events surrounding the problem and a call for action on the part of the recipient. A recent example of this type of urgent action was the case of an attack on a journalist in Guatemala, José Ruben Zamora Marroqin, where the Churches expressed deep concern to the president of the republic, Dr. Alvaro Arzu Irigoyen, in a letter. The letter read:

On May 16, 1996, four armed men attacked Mr. Zamora's vehicle with grenades. [The Churches] request a complete investigation into this matter, that those responsible be brought to justice with severe punishment. As well, we request that all necessary measures be taken to guarantee the physical integrity and security of this man, and that the freedom of the press and speech be respected.¹

The letter is signed by a representative of ICCHRLA itself but includes the tacit support of the member churches, organizations and their constituents. This letter, like a letter from Amnesty International, implies to the recipient considerable numbers of concerned individuals.

¹ ICCHRLA. *Letter to the President of Guatemala*. 24 June, 1996. (Translation mine).

Urgent Action: Attacks on groups in Mexico

In Mexico, the process is similar. Recent calls for urgent action surround kidnappings and threats to life and property of members of CONPAZ (the coordination of organizations for peace), a sister organization of ICCHRLA working in Chiapas. On November 4th of last year, a fire was set in their offices in San Cristóbal, the second in less than a month; also on November 4th, the accountant of CONPAZ and his entire family disappeared, suspected as the victims of kidnapping; and on November 5th, 1996, telephone death threats were received directly to the CONPAZ office. Against all of these events, ICCHRLA sent strong letters of concern to the office of the president of Mexico while urging others to do the same.

Conditional Successes

The importance of responding to these urgent requests is difficult to gauge. Urgent Actions seldom garner any acknowledgment from the recipient of the response. There are, though, updates produced by the two largest human rights groups working in our hemisphere, to which ICCHRLA refers, which inform people of any news of the abused. Both Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch/Americas produce yearly bulletins apprising those concerned of the results of urgent actions and press releases during the year. For example, along with several other cases, the Human Rights Watch report for Guatemala issued in 1995 states:

In May, we publicly called for the release of four peasants who had spent ten months in pre-trial detention, falsely accused of the Carpio [a well-publicized] murder. Within days of our press release, the peasants were freed; weeks later, a group of civil patrollers and

military commissioners who had been implicated in the crime were detained and charged.²

Even a cursory look through the recent reports by these two international monitoring organizations, Amnesty and Human Rights Watch, informs us that these types of successes are the exceptions, unfortunately. They only occur when international public pressure is greatest - in well-publicized cases where the victims have received some international recognition as in the notorious "white van case" in Guatemala³ or the Jorge Carpio murder listed above - or when the government and judiciary has little to lose - in Guatemala, the government risks nothing by accusing the insecure civil patrollers of human rights violations; they are neither the official police nor the powerful military. Dishearteningly, though, most reports conclude like this Amnesty International one that in Mexico:

Very few of those responsible for torture and other human rights violations were brought to justice, despite hundreds of complaints filed with the relevant authorities.⁴

Or, like this Human Rights Watch report:

The human rights situation in Guatemala deteriorated in several important respects during 1994.⁵

Only one political assassin has been put behind bars in the last decade in Guatemala. An army officer was sentenced to prison for killing the social scientist Myrna Mack in 1990.

² Human Rights Watch World Report 1995. New York: Human Rights Watch, 1994. p. 99.

³ The "white van case" involved the abduction, torture, and murder of university students by Treasury Police agents during the late 1980s. The case was submitted to the Inter-American Court for trial. See *ibid*.

⁴ Amnesty International Report 1992. New York: Amnesty International USA, 1992. p. 187.

⁵ HRW World Report 1995. p. 93.

According to many observers *and* human rights activists, this outcome was due largely to the exceptional circumstances of the case.⁶ The Myrna Mack case received considerable attention from both human rights groups and the international media due to the family's connections to the military, their wealth, and the scholar's reputation. Otherwise, people in Guatemala remain cynical about the chances for judicial action against the government and military.

In both Mexico and Guatemala the violence against people continues relentlessly: At times, as we have seen, the illegal arrest or torture of a particular victim ceases when the government and judiciary deems the release politically expedient - to avoid embarrassment and to make public relations gains - or a human rights criminal is arrested when the pressure on officials to act becomes too great - due, often, to extraordinary circumstances. The overall pattern and level of abuse and violence, however, does not diminish.

Solving Oedipus: Impunity in Guatemala

Like Oedipus, the King in Sophocles' play, the culprits of human rights violations have been allowed impunity from punishment for their crimes for too long. In nation after nation throughout Latin America, after wars (civil or otherwise) have ended, blanket amnesties covering both insurgent and state sponsored human rights crimes have been included as part of national reconciliation projects. In El Salvador an amnesty was passed after the Truth Commission instituted by the United Nations named explicitly those

⁶ Daniel Wilkinson, *"Democracy" Comes to Guatemala*, pp. 78-9.

individuals responsible for committing or ordering the worst of the abuses during the more than twelve years of civil war: In the end, after immense pressure from senior officers in the military, no one was tried.⁷ In Argentina at the end of the "dirty war", with the army weakened from its defeat in the Falkland Islands War, the newly elected government was able to try many criminals including several generals from the former ruling junta, but after the army regrouped and staged two insurrections protesting the trials, a blanket amnesty was passed covering all political crimes committed during the war.⁸ Peru, like Uruguay and Brazil as well, has also witnessed a recent amnesty. President Alberto Fujimori of Peru announced in 1995 that all those guilty of murder and lesser acts of brutality in the war against the insurgent Shining Path would be pardoned unconditionally.⁹ And in Chile, although some members of the army were prosecuted for human rights crimes committed during the dictatorship, Pinochet, in handing over power, made sure that most of his officers were given amnesty, and that those who would be convicted receive incredibly light sentences (i.e. six years for murder) and languish in comfortable prisons run by the Chilean army itself.¹⁰ In Guatemala, though, ICCHRLA and sister organizations are endeavoring to put a stop to impunity and to attempt to nip the moves for amnesty in the prefatory stages of the peace negotiations.

In 1994, the government of Guatemala and the leadership of the URNG (the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca - the National Revolutionary Union of

⁷ The Economist. *El Salvador: Still fragile*. May 29th, 1993. pp.44-5.

⁸ Iain Guest. Behind the Disappearances: Argentina's Dirty War Against Human Rights and the United Nations. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1990. The entire chapter on President Alfonsín's compromise. pp.381-91.

⁹ The Economist. *The past raises its ugly head*. July 1st, 1995. pp.31-2.

Guatemala) signed a preliminary agreement in the peace process requiring both parties to work toward measures designed to aid the prosecution of human rights violations. On December 12th of last year, though, the government and the URNG signed an accord in Madrid calling for the passage of the Law of National Reconciliation extinguishing responsibility for many crimes committed during the 35 year civil war.¹¹ Since August 1996, members of various non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including ICCHRLA, have been working toward building a coalition to express their concern over impunity in anticipation of the amnesty of the Madrid Accord.

During the last year or so, the Guatemalan Alliance Against Impunity, an ad hoc coalition of individuals and groups representing many different sectors of civil society (NGOs and individuals who monitor their nations' democratic and judicial processes) was formed. This alliance, made up of Church organizations, human rights groups, legal centres, student associations, families and friends of the disappeared, and indigenous organizations, has attempted to garner support for the movement against impunity. The group is protesting any form of amnesty for those guilty abuse but particularly of "crimes against humanity."¹² The alliance recognizes the Guatemalan government's will to rebuild their society, however, not without due punishment for those who committed atrocities.

The argument against amnesty follows that:

- Human rights organizations consider that impunity is the main obstacle toward respect for human rights;

¹⁰ The Globe and Mail. *Chile's expensive prisoners languish in relative comfort* by Calvin Sims. November 25th, 1995. p.A8.

¹¹ Lawyers Committee for Human Rights. *Amnesty Law in Guatemala...* Advocacy Alert. New York: December 1996.

¹² Social Justice Committee of Montreal. *Alliance Against Impunity Campaign*. Document. Montreal: December 5, 1996.

- Criminals who have committed crimes will go unpunished;
- Victims and their families will no longer depend on the justice system;
- Perpetrators of gross human rights violations will be free in Guatemalan society;
- Amnesty contradicts international agreements to which Guatemala is a signatory;
- Democracy would be undermined, the peace would have no credibility in much of society since it is constructed on fictitious justice.

The ethical case against guaranteeing impunity through an amnesty is powerful; however, political factors can be equally as convincing. As we have witnessed throughout Latin America, after a period of prolonged struggle, even with the leaders of the military willing to negotiate peace, putting insurgents *and* military personnel on trial is next to impossible.

Civil society attempts against the amnesty increase the demand to begin arresting perpetrators of crimes. Negotiations for peace, though, already under considerable pressure from multilateral institutions like the UN for prosecutions against perpetrators, are constrained by several structural and political factors. Organizations of civil society, like ICCHRLA, quickly begin to realize that a total amnesty is almost always an outcome of peace: Constraints exist on the negotiations which usually affect the return of democracy.

One such issue is sealing the peace: Too often negotiators must make a kind of Faustian pact with the military and guerrilla groups in order to assure a return to peace. Real justice in societies returning to democratic ways after a period of intense militarization may not be possible because of the power which continues to be wielded by the military (and, in some cases, by the guerrilla, too). In Chile, for example, the government cannot move against the military since the army is still strong and continues to

be led by Augusto Pinochet, a charismatic man who commands great loyalty. As one cabinet minister noted, the government will not even try to change the constitution (to allow them to prosecute army personnel) because "Chilean society made its pact with the armed forces, and this is a price for our transition to democracy."¹³

Another feature complicating a society's return to its normal democratic practices - as bizarre as it sounds - is restoring peoples' faith in the military. The military should be purged of criminals, especially in the upper ranks, but at some point people need to begin trusting their officials - including military ones - while these officials need to begin truly working with and for the people. In certain cases (maybe most) members of the army and death squads linked to official security forces have been implicated in the overwhelming majority of human rights violations against people¹⁴; the military, though, is a permanent feature in most places and relations between its members and the rest of society should be mutually favorable. "We have to avoid pushing the armed forces towards the most extreme right-wing sectors of the country," espouses the pragmatic thinking commander of the FMLN (a former rebel group) in El Salvador.¹⁵

Guatemalans have seen their army take over the bridle of government on too many occasions - most recently under the guidance of the puppet president Jorge Serrano in 1993. Guatemalans need to build a relationship with their military in order to halt the

¹³ José Joaquín Brunner quoted in *The Economist*. *The past raises its...* p.31.

¹⁴ In the 18,000 cases of human rights abuses that the UN examined in El Salvador, the Truth Commission found that 90% of the accusations were against the army and military and police death squads (*The Economist*. *Truth will out*. March 20th, 1993. pp.47-8.). In Guatemala, the UN Mission for the Verification of Human Rights (MINUGUA) has found that in the cases where the worst violations have taken place - violations of the right to life, integrity of person and individual liberty - the National Police, the military, and the civilian patrols instituted by the army, are responsible for about 3/4 of them (MINUGUA. *MINUGUA Director presents fourth report...* Document: March, 1996. p.27).

¹⁵ Joaquín Villalobos quoted in *The Economist*. *El Salvador: Still fragile*. p.45.

revolving door of coups d'état. Unless they can work together, Guatemalans may inadvertently push the army again into propping up and supporting extremist presidents in order to protect themselves.

Nor can Guatemalans, particularly indigenous ones, allow the military to become the scapegoat for a system which, unless altered, will continue to violate. Indigenous Guatemalans have been the victims of racism, neo-colonialism, and exploitation for decades and unless changes in economic, cultural, *and* military practices occur at the same time, people will continue to be hurt. By no means is this meant to excuse the horrendous practices of the army and state-sponsored groups in Guatemala, but I do not believe that the simple recruit should become the fall guy for his seniors, state politicians, business leaders, Washington and the world community, which have all stood by and either rewarded his work or tried to ignore it.¹⁶ There are deeper processes - including political apathy and authoritarianism - within Guatemala which have allowed the violence of militarism to arise.

What seems possible in these situations is that the truth of the atrocities be known, the culprits named explicitly and be disallowed from holding public office for a stated period of time, the military and insurgents brought under control, and society, through what might seem *utilitarian* democracy, rebuild itself ; urging the best solutions possible for the people in order that at least some workable future be imagined. Because of the complex of political implications, *even* justice it seems can never be sought for these

¹⁶ It has been documented in *Brasil: Nunca Mais*, a document put together by lawyers and church leaders at the end of the military period in Brazil, that both General Motors and Ford were involved in funding the OBAN (or *Operação Bandeirantes*), an extralegal security force staffed by members of the military

crimes: some forgiveness, although difficult, must be attempted for those who followed the orders of their superiors (regardless of how deranged) for society to begin healing itself.

Through commissions or investigations and documentation, the abuses need to be known so that the truth be acknowledged. Societies, though, might be required to give up their right to punish. As in the cases of Brazil and Uruguay, for example, with the return to elected governments, and with the military refusing to testify, it was discovered that the desire for truth was more often urgently felt by the victims than the desire for justice.¹⁷ People do not necessarily need to see their former tormentors go to jail but they would like to see the truth of who did what during conflict established.

Applying the criminal code to human rights violations in Guatemala is particularly difficult. The government negotiating the peace maintains the tacit approval of those who elected them, the society of 20% (those not living in poverty and who bother to vote), and those who bolster them, the army and police, only if they guarantee a peace with amnesty. Across the negotiating table is the URNG, under its own pressures to end the war with an amnesty (not the mildest pressure comes from the URNG's very own tarnished past of violations). In the end, violators of gross human rights will probably run free with the peace: both sides at the table believe that an amnesty is the only means by which to put the past behind them and to guarantee some workable future - and besides, much of Guatemalan society probably does, too.

and police which took part in flushing out "confessions" from "subversives" by applying physical torture during its interrogations.

¹⁷ See Lawrence Weschler's excellent study *A Miracle, A Universe: Settling Accounts with Torturers*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1990.

If the plebiscite over the amnesty in the post-military, newly-redemocratized Uruguay can help predict the situation after the peace in Guatemala, around 53% of Uruguayan voters supported the amnesty for the political crimes of both sides - or, at least, a statute declaring the expiration of the state's punitive authority which due to the restrictions can be interpreted as an amnesty.¹⁸ Given the opportunity of a vote, and faced with a hostile and thoroughly defiant military, more than 80% of the people cast ballots but less than half (41%) of the total voted for prosecutions of the military's leaders, not enough to overturn the amnesty. In the end, Uruguayans agreed with their vice president, Enrique Tarigo, that democracy cannot withstand putting 50% of the officers of the armed forces on trial - which, after all the witnesses have been called, is what prosecuting the military amounts to. "I don't think any state can withstand having its armed forces destroyed in such a fashion," said Tarigo, a lawyer and former journalist, who argued initially against the amnesty.¹⁹

ICCHRLA, in supporting their regional partners, continues to argue against an amnesty in Guatemala. They have sent letters to officials both in Canada and Guatemala urging them to pressure those negotiating the end to the war that the legislation extinguishing penal responsibility be dropped from the part of the peace accords known as the Law of National Reconciliation. The letters state:

ICCHRLA is profoundly concerned that the passage of such legislation will mean that the truth about thousands of human rights violations will never be known; that members of the security forces who perpetrated gross and systematic human rights violations and members of the armed opposition who committed human rights abuses will never be brought to justice.

¹⁸ Weschler, *A Miracle, A Universe*, p.233.

¹⁹ *ibid.* p.185.

ICCHRLA therefore calls on your administration [in this case, the administration of the president of Guatemala] in consultation with Congress to amend the law so that full investigations can be carried out against the perpetrators of gross and systematic human rights violations. Extrajudicial [sic] execution, enforced disappearance and torture, should not be immune from prosecution, in accordance with international treaties to which Guatemala is a signatory.²⁰

For human rights groups like ICCHRLA, justice should be attained *and* the truth be known as warring parties approach reconciliation.

This pressure is important. Even if an amnesty is passed, the negotiators will find it difficult to convince their own public as well as international monitors that the peace is authentic, with any real meaning, unless they allow a chance for some action against themselves. Only the public can really forgive the offenders; therefore, the public demands a place from where to do their forgiving. This place must exist within the *official* truth commissions; if not, then NGOs should be resolute in working toward the truth on their own.²¹

Ultimately, the political implications of a peace with amnesty will win over the ethical desire for justice in Guatemala. The great losers, of course, will continue to be the Maya who have suffered so greatly over the past 35 years. The peace negotiations should continue to be pressured by groups like ICCHRLA and its partners in order that the truth of the atrocities committed against people not be forgotten completely, swept away by the *political* exercise of national reconciliation. Society's minimal obligation to the Maya

²⁰ ICCHRLA. *Letter to Alvaro Arzú Irigoyen* (President of Guatemala). December 18, 1996.

²¹ This, as we have seen, is what happened as a last resort in several Latin American nations, most notably, perhaps, in Brazil with the Herculean efforts of a small sector of the public in producing the document *Brasil: Nunca Mais*.

(and all those who have suffered) will be an acknowledgment of the truth of their suffering, an explicit naming of those most responsible for atrocities against these people. It is not the right of politicians or former combatants to forgive criminals their crimes against the Maya: This can only be done by the grace of the abused themselves. The poison of Guatemalan violence has run through the Maya communities, the police and army inflicted their abuse on the Indians. In the end, it will be the Maya who pierce Guatemalan society and let this poison run out so that healing can begin.

An amnesty will be passed for political expedience: The truth, though, must not be turned over to politicians, but rather, should be resolutely worked for by the families of the victims and their supporters. Some criminals may walk free, this is true, but just how free can they expect to be when the entire world knows they committed a crime.

In the end, ICCHRLA's position on amnesty is simply that of their regional partners. Recently one member of the coalition stated their position as: "We're simply supporting our partners."²² Soon the work of civil society members like ICCHRLA will need to focus on producing the truth of the civil war over continuing to spend time fighting the amnesty. The work pushing against the amnesty is important: people are listening. Our government, Guatemalan officials, and the international press pick up on the message behind the push for amnesty and, with hope, bring pressure onto the negotiations to open a space for the fulfillment of justice in the conscience of the nation.

²² Discussion with Steven Law. January 28, 1997.

Mexican Democracy?

ICCHRLA is just one of several organizations monitoring Mexico's painful "democracy." One of the largest and most effective groups is the *Alianza Civica* (Civic Alliance): A group of Mexican NGOs with differing mandates but which work together in observing their country's electoral practices. *Alianza Civica* has called the Mexican democracy the most sophisticated *authoritarian régime* in the world: By which, they mean that Mexico has, since 1929, been governed by one party, the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party), which has won each election through more and more questionable means while continuously gaining praise as democrats internationally.²³ Even with the greater organizing strength of the opposition, the government, the PRI, has been sly, nefarious even, but ultimately successful in every election for the past 68 years. ICCHRLA works with *Alianza Civica* to increase the pressure on Mexican officials to uphold democracy. The coalition reacts to Mexican authoritarianism in several ways, however, the most effective methods are still those which get the news of Mexico to the largest numbers of people.

One of the ways in which the ICCHRLA gets news to its constituents is through a bimonthly newsletter, *ALERTA*. *ALERTA* is theoretically available to anyone: at present, though, only those familiar with the organization order the publication and circulation is fairly limited. *ALERTA* does keep those interested informed, though.

²³ The quote is from a meeting at York University between *Alianza Civica* members, the members of York's CERLAC program, and interested individuals. It was said that, "The régime is the most sophisticated authoritarian one in the world; and with international acquiescence this is an American [meaning of the Americas] problem and not simply a Mexican one." March 27th, 1996.

After the Chiapas uprising in January, 1994, ICCHRLA published this headline in its March edition of *ALERTA*:

Chiapas crisis signals continuing need for Canadian churches to stand with Latin American partners.²⁴

The subsequent article briefly outlines for readers the events of January and February, speculates on the reasons behind the insurgency, and relays the Canadian churches response:

Within days a church-human rights observer mission was en route to Mexico. [Members of the mission] traveled through Chiapas, collecting testimony of mistreatment, disappearances and summary executions carried out by the army against indigenous civilians. When they returned, mission members presented recommendations to the Canadian government about appropriate ways to respond, and shared their experiences with churches, community groups and the media.²⁵

In what follows, the article narrows its focus somewhat.

The piece proceeds to defend ICCHRLA's response - sending a mission and reporting its findings - on the basis of a Biblical interpretation: The Gospel calls on followers to analyze social, political and economic structures which threaten human dignity, particularly of the poor. To work "in effective solidarity with victims of poverty, injustice and oppression...is a condition for communion with God." Through scripture, members are called to love, "to a way of being in the world that deepens relations, gives voice to the voiceless, and passes on the gift of life and healing."²⁶

²⁴ ICCHRLA, *ALERTA*, no.1 and 2 (double issue) March 1994, p.1.

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ *ibid.*

Obviously there are problems with calling people to act from the same starting point as ICCHRLA does. The call for action, for “standing with those whose rights are violated and bearing witness to their suffering... [and loving] *like Jesus*”, is problematic for those of other faiths, or, and maybe more so, for those with different interpretations of the Gospel. Some people who may want to support the struggle to protect human rights will have trouble with a movement which allies itself with one church or another or with churches generally, several of which have questionable histories protecting peoples’ rights themselves. There are more universal notions, regardless how abstract, of calling people to act out for the abused for reasons of humanity; to work to protect others’ dignity simply because they are human rather than as a condition for communion with God. Such is the nature of human rights work, though, which, like anything, operates within a host of constraints, not the least of which is funding. ICCHRLA is funded by religious groups and, on occasion, pays tribute to their supporters.

The Biblical movement for liberation, the “preferential option for the poor”²⁷, calling Christians to action is an important leaping off point in this article and can be an important aspect in some of ICCHRLA’s work. In some cases, their church affiliations allow them some space which others might be denied while working in Latin America. Many communities throughout Latin America are deeply religious, albeit engaged in various forms of Christian worship but engaged nonetheless; and many feel more

²⁷ The preferential option for the poor, that to walk with God is to walk with the poor and most oppressed in society, is one of the central tenets adopted by “Liberation Theology”, the movement started by some Christian theologians, in Latin America just prior to and during a conference at Medellín, Colombia, in 1968. My knowledge of the theology comes from many sources including Leonardo and Clodovis Boff’s Introducing Liberation Theology. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1987.

comfortable working with people of similar faith, even if the similarities are of word only.

Bill Fairbairn says:

[O]ften when we go to the countryside, we are dealing with people who might be illiterate, that haven't travelled out of the region, but they do know the church. They don't know what Amnesty International is, they don't know who Americas Watch is, but they know "church" because there is some reference point. So, when someone introduces you as someone coming from the church - even if they don't know where Canada is - they automatically have some reference point. Even if within their area the church does not play a positive role, they know what the church should be doing. They feel that this is a legitimate role of the church: that the church should be standing together with people who are suffering. I feel that they are very open and that our presence there is sort of a pastoral presence... Christian to Christian... there is a role there that I think other groups don't have.²⁸

The members of ICCHRLA are caught in a difficult spot, though. While their relationship with churches allows them space to work in Mexico and Latin America in general, the space for some of this work seems to be closing at home.

The Canadian churches which actively support the work are becoming fewer, weakening the strength of the coalition's voice. ICCHRLA is not well-known by its shrinking constituency, parishioners within the churches of Canada. ICCHRLA needs to broaden its base of support. Suzanne Rumsey states:

[T]he government knows the mainline churches are on the wane in Canada and do not have the same social force they did five, ten or fifteen years ago. They know our constituency... is becoming increasingly limited. We need to work at ensuring we have a strong (vocal) constituency of supporters both church-based and within other social movements (labour, solidarity, etc.).²⁹

²⁸ Interview with Bill Fairbairn. September 1996.

²⁹ Suzanne Rumsey. Notes on questions for ICCHRLA staff. September 1996.

The coalitions strengths, it seems, lie abroad while their weaknesses are here, in Canada: While an affiliation with certain churches and church-groups allows coalition members to connect on a personal level with people in communities of Latin America, this same affiliation, coupled with interpretations of the Gospel for action and dwindling church attendance, weakens the coalitions voice at home. ICCHRLA members seem aware of this, though, and are trying to broaden their response. Still, there are points where their work seems exclusive, setting up hurdles to more peoples' involvement (as in the article in *ALERTA*): nonetheless, the reporting of events and the call to action in the work of the coalition have become far more important than some of the narrow, single issue, renderings of the past.

One of the areas of indisputable success in ICCHRLA's work is their work with the media. Recently, when Ernesto Zedillo, the president of Mexico, came to Canada to discuss trade issues with the present government here, ICCHRLA collaborated in presenting a letter to Zedillo and to Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien detailing how the NAFTA was deepening conditions of poverty in Mexico and causing the deaths of "thousands of people on a daily basis."³⁰ The government of Mexico took the unusual step of drafting a letter in response directly to ICCHRLA, claiming their information was erroneous. Through their connections in the press and their reputation for integrity in reporting, the coalition members gathered many representatives from both the Canadian and Mexican media for a press conference to respond to the Mexicans' allegations. ICCHRLA affirmed that Mexico's economic policies were squeezing poor people,

³⁰ Bishop Samuel Ruiz quoted in ICCHRLA's Letter to President Ernesto Zedillo and Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, June 11, 1996.

“creating increased suffering, poverty [and] diseases.”³¹ The result was that rather than being forgotten, comments by Zedillo who admitted that “underdevelopment, poverty and injustice do prevail in some less modern areas of Mexico and are the origins of conflicts, such as the one in Chiapas”³² and that “I [Zedillo] am one to admit, human rights abuses occur in Mexico”³³ were highlighted so that, according to several journalists, ICCHRLA “changed the story of the day from one of polite diplomacy to a strong challenge of Mexico’s human rights record and Canada’s official silence.”³⁴

ICCHRLA’s success during the Zedillo visit was underlined when criticisms of Mexico’s record on protecting peoples’ rights made their way into the Canadian House of Commons. One representative from Winnipeg said:

Canadians who were suspicious about the NAFTA during the last election still ask who really benefits from the NAFTA. Ordinary Canadians? No...

Have ordinary Mexicans benefited? No, their standard of living was decimated after the peso crisis and, as reported today by the Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America, human rights abuses continue to plague the political system, and not just in Chiapas...

At the very least the Canadian government needs to press the Zedillo government to respect human rights.³⁵

Condemnations of Canada’s largest trading partners are almost never heard in the Commons: International trade, it seems, is far too important.

³¹ The Ottawa Citizen. *Mexico rejects allegations about human rights abuses* by Juliet O’Neill. June 12, 1996.

³² *ibid.*

³³ The Toronto Star. *Zedillo agrees with critics human rights are violated by Mexican authorities* by Allan Thompson. June 12, 1996.

³⁴ Suzanne Rumsey. Notes...

³⁵ *NDP Action Report - International Affairs*. December 1996. Bill Blaikie. p. 5.

One final means by which ICCHRLA monitors profound and systemic areas of difficulty is through its detailed theme and country reports for its constituents, the media, and, perhaps most importantly, the Canadian government - particularly the Department of Foreign Affairs. In the months following the Zapatista revolt, the coalition produced a document on Mexico entitled, *A "Democracy" Unmasked: Systematic Human Rights Violations in Mexico*.³⁶ This 30-page report describes the situation in Mexico including: the roots of the Chiapas rebellion; human rights violations throughout the country; the struggles of indigenous peoples in Mexico; the struggle for democracy at the grassroots; the areas of greatest concern in the record of the government (in this case, the former government of Carlos Salinas); and recommendations for the Canadian government and the United Nations in their respective dealings with the government of Mexico.

The report begins with a criticism of the entire political and economic system in Mexico, agreeing with Bishop Samuel Ruiz, the Bishop of San Cristóbal, when he writes to Pope John Paul II of the Indigenous people of our continent:

Faced with a lack of land and with unemployment, the government has developed political control [of indigenous regions], because the poverty produced by the plunder of the social system endangers the political system. This way of acting violates human rights. And so we see this system under which we live as a violator of human rights.³⁷

³⁶ ICCHRLA, October 1994.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p.1.

ICCHRLA asserts that Mexico is a place where “the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights of its citizens are systematically violated.”³⁸ This is not an insignificant claim, to be sure; but for all this, ICCHRLA and its partners have considerable proof.

In Chiapas, the landlessness of the indigenous poor excludes them from the means of their subsistence. This is a violation of the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of the United Nations to which both Canada and Mexico are signatories. Part I, Article 1.2, of this covenant states:

All peoples may, for their own ends, freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources... [and i]n no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence.³⁹

ICCHRLA and its partners believe that Mexico’s compliance with NAFTA which includes measures maintaining the changes to Article 27 of the Mexican constitution (the privatization of communal lands) will further encourage the violation of peoples’ rights to their survival: More of the lands which were at one time controlled by the Indians will be sold to the *latifundistas* and other private interests.

With the outbreak of war in Chiapas have come all kinds of other human rights concerns. In the document *A “Democracy” Unmasked* the coalition recounts the testimonies gathered by Canadian church delegates from chiapecos and the violations perpetrated against them by the Mexican army including intimidation, inhuman treatment, restriction of movement, disappearances, and assassinations. The report stresses that

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ *see this and other UN and ILO covenants in Ian Brownlie (ed.), Basic Documents on Human Rights (3rd ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 114.*

“apparently all of the victims of serious violations of their rights... were indigenous.”⁴⁰

The Mexican democracy does not deal fairly with indigenous populations: the Mexican democracy is in clear violation of several international agreements.

Even with mounting evidence of violations, though, abuses against indigenous people *can* still go unreported: At times the indigenous people themselves do not speak languages other than their own and more often the loss of indigenous life simply passes with no notice by mainstream society. The lives of the Mayan people of Mexico are probably far worse than already imagined. In the words of one Mexican priest, “If they are brown they are killed. If they are *indigenous* they are lost.”⁴¹ Indigenous people, and the crimes committed against them, vanish without notice from the Mexican landscape.

With the continued violence against Indian communities, ICCHRLA is calling on the Mexican government to abide by its ratification in 1991 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Article 169 which states:

Governments shall have the responsibility for developing, with the participation of the peoples concerned [indigenous and/or tribal peoples], co-ordinated and systematic action to protect the rights of these peoples and to guarantee respect for their integrity.

*Indigenous and tribal peoples shall enjoy the full measure of human rights and fundamental freedoms without hindrance or discrimination.*⁴²

Violations of the rights of indigenous people are historic and systemic in Mexico: and these violations, including an attack on Indians’ land base, are increasing in both severity

⁴⁰ ICCHRLA, A “*Democracy*” *Unmasked*, p. 6.

⁴¹ Father Gonzalo Ituarte, Vicar General of the Diocese of San Cristóbal quoted in ICCHRLA’s A “*Democracy*” *Unmasked*, p. 13. Italics mine.

and numbers with the advent of NAFTA and the pretext of war. ICCHRLA draws our attention to this while assuring that governments, ours and the Mexican one, know the facts as well.

Finally, ICCHRLA turns to the persistent questions around Mexico's unfair electoral practices. There are, according to the coalition and its partners, some great causes for concern. Of the election for president in 1988, *A "Democracy" Unmasked* states:

It is common knowledge in Mexico that the 1988 Mexican elections were fraudulent and common opinion that, as a result, the PRI presidential candidate, Carlos Salinas took the presidency from Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas of the PRD.⁴³

And during the most recent election for president which was won *again* by the PRI candidate, ICCHRLA *again* criticized the process claiming that the result "has been strongly challenged by many Mexicans."⁴⁴

In the state of Morelos, ICCHRLA's election observers, invited by *Alianza Civica* to monitor the process, witnessed acts of intimidation by PRI officials and militants at various polling stations. As well, they noticed "carousel" voting, a term used when people go from poll to poll to vote several times; while others were unable to vote since their names had been "shaved" from the voters' lists, or the poll had run out of ballots.⁴⁵ In Oaxaca, election observers noted that the secrecy of the ballot was consistently violated

⁴² Articles 2 and 3 from the ILO Convention Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries (no. 169). Again, see Brownlie (ed.), *Basic Documents*, pp. 304-5. Italics mine.

⁴³ ICCHRLA. *A "Democracy" Unmasked*, p.15.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.16.

including instances when ballots were opened and the votes recorded by members of the PRI.

In a press release, *Alianza Civica* also noted their serious concerns over the electoral process and the intimidation of voters:

Mexican voters were pressured by government functionaries and the threat to withhold benefits from government programs. The number of people affected certainly runs into the millions. The quality of the election is in question and we as citizens have the right to know what happened.⁴⁶

Irregularities seemed to be widespread and well-organized.

The uprising in Chiapas highlighted much that is wrong with Mexican democracy. The benefits of the revolutionary constitution have never reached far below Mexico City⁴⁷: And with the years of abuse of the political system, the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, and other movements in Guerrero and elsewhere, have arisen partly out of a desire for political change.⁴⁸ It is notable that within the zone of conflict in Chiapas, the PRI had won from 90% to 100% of the vote in the municipal elections just prior to the uprising signaling the gap between democracies, formal and real, in Mexico.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Alianza Civica. *The Quality of the Elections is in Question*. Mexico City: 1994. quoted in *ibid*.

⁴⁷ see John Womack, Jr.'s Zapata and the Mexican Revolution. Womack demonstrates that Article 27, the article with the greatest potential to improve the lives of rural Mexicans, had its greatest impact where the agrarian movement was strongest, in Morelos, Emiliano Zapata's home state, and in the states of the north; and that it was weakest in other provinces of the south where landholdings were tiny and the people disparate. See also 'Nunca Mas Un México sin Nosotros' in *Proceso*.

⁴⁸ It might be important to note that the uprisings in other parts of Mexico like Guerrero are not linked in any way to the uprising in Chiapas. Several of these are far more radical politically and less culturally-based than the revolt in the south.

⁴⁹ Remember, as well, Prime Minister Chrétien's comment that Mexico has "a democracy that is not our type of democracy..." from The Toronto Star. *Mexico's misleading claim*. August 24, 1994.

The Mexican Academy of Human Rights has also criticized election practices in their country. The PRI, for example, has made abundant use of the television media for influencing public opinion. Fully 85% of Mexico's television market is owned by a strong PRI financial and political supporter, Emilio Azcarraga: His television network, *Televisa* gave the PRI candidate, Ernesto Zedillo, six times as much air time as the rival PRD candidate. According to the head of the Human Rights Academy, "Televisa is an empire... It is perhaps the most powerful Mexican institution after the government."⁵⁰

Elections in Mexico have also been marked by horrible violence. According to the Human Rights Commission of the PRD, 246 of their members were assassinated between 1988 and 1994. Sixty killings took place in 1993 alone.⁵¹ Sadly, the 1994 elections were also plagued with political violence.

What can ICCHRLA's reporting of these events achieve? The greatest effect is informing people, including government officials, of the violence. While the problems of a place like Mexico are structural, stemming from both domestic and international political relationships and trading practices, the system is made up of people. ICCHRLA's monitoring increases the pressure on people - in government or not - to consider their actions more carefully.

The moment when the Mexican government responded to the coalition's work during the Zedillo visit to Canada, must be considered a success in this regard. ICCHRLA and its partners mounted enough pressure on Mexican officials that the Mexicans felt

⁵⁰ ICCHRLA. A "Democracy" Unmasked. pp. 17-8.

⁵¹ 1994 PRD Human Rights Commission report cited in *ibid.* p.17.

urged to raise a defense. And while the Mexican letter of response (to allegations that poverty was worsening in Mexico with free trade) attempted to discredit the group's findings, the Mexicans persisted in drawing attention to their country's problems.

Mexican officials went so far as to publish their letter in the mainstream Mexican press, in newspapers and magazines including the weekly *Proceso*, naming explicitly the ICCHRLA member who works most closely with Mexican partners, and claiming of ICCHRLA that:

...perhaps due to the natural difficulties encountered by a Committee that is operating from a distance and to its limited access to various and reliable information sources, your letter [the letter of ICCHRLA and partners] has imprecisions and inaccurate information...⁵²

The Mexican letter alleged that ICCHRLA and its *Mexican* partners were "operating from a distance" with "limited access to various and reliable information"; never once, though, did it deal with the thrust of the coalition's concerns that individuals' economic and political rights were being violated with impunity throughout the country. The author of the Mexican letter accuses ICCHRLA of using "incomplete information...to support predetermined concepts which result in a distorted image of my country..."⁵³ while using *erroneous* information to distort Mexicans' image of ICCHRLA and Suzanne Rumsey (the coalition's coordinator of monitoring in Mexico). The strategy by the Mexican government seems bizarre based on their firm hold of power in Mexico: We can only assume that they felt some obligation to respond to international pressure building against their handling of the Chiapas situation, even if their response was a smoke screen of words only.

To the people in both governments, the letter to Zedillo and A "*Democracy*" *Unmasked* make concrete recommendations for linking international trade and respect for human rights. Some officials, including those that negotiated the NAFTA agreement, believe that trade agreements and human rights conditions have nothing to do with one another.⁵⁴ ICCHRLA, though, argues that "trade agreements are about economic relationships between citizens and as such will have an impact on their human rights."⁵⁵ The coalition, therefore, urges the Canadian government to ensure that human rights concerns take a central place in the negotiation of all trade relations.

Identity and Recognition

ICCHRLA calls on Canadian officials to recognize the systemic nature of both Guatemala's and Mexico's problems and to bring pressure to bear within meetings at the United Nations and the Organization of American States, two multilateral forums, to encourage productive change for the people. Canada has done this in the past with recent comments on the deteriorating situations in Peru and Colombia.⁵⁶ ICCHRLA, and other NGOs, have specific requests for Guatemala and Mexico.

The Canadian government itself should at the very least revisit the negotiations over the trilateral NAFTA to ensure that human rights considerations become central to

⁵² From the unofficial translation of a letter published by José Angel Gurría, Secretary of Foreign Relations, in *Proceso*, June 11, 1996.

⁵³ *ibid.*

⁵⁴ *see* remarks by then Minister of Foreign Affairs André Ouellet that Canada will "...pursue a series of [trade] initiatives in a number of countries irrespective of their human rights records." *The Toronto Star*, November 6, 1995.

⁵⁵ ICCHRLA, A "*Democracy*" *Unmasked*, p. 27.

the agreement. As with all multilateral trade agreements, our government must demand that other peoples' rights be respected at least as they are in Canada itself. With respect to Guatemala, the condition of the indigenous populations, their poverty and their lack of representation, need to be recognized in international forums. And Canada, through its *bilateral* negotiations with Mexico, should demand a return to revolutionary spirit of Article 27 of the Mexican constitution which guaranteed land to communities. Latin America's indigenous and poor populations need the basic tools for their survival; they need land and representation, without which levels community poverty cannot be reduced.⁵⁷

God in all Worlds: Why is ICCHRLA important?

Why is ICCHRLA's monitoring human rights situations important? Is anyone really listening? Two important questions. Bill Fairbairn of the coalition responds:

I think that having a church organization that is questioning the way things are and asking fundamental questions about how policies are developed and who's benefitting from them... is the most important thing that ICCHRLA can do.

[As well] accompaniment is a very important aspect of the work... we are a physical presence in Latin America... when we travel to a country we just don't go to the capital city, often we will go into the countryside and meet with organizations. Sometimes they are organizations, human rights groups, that are trying to get started but they feel very vulnerable and they don't have much clout with the local authorities or with the military... [at times] the only way local people are able to meet with their own authorities is because they are accompanied by an international delegation, and it gives them a legitimacy or a credibility or at least the military starts looking at

⁵⁶ Canadian UN Commission Document prepared for the 51st meeting of UNCHR.

⁵⁷ ICCHRLA. A "*Democracy*" *Unmasked*. pp. 29-30.

these people and saying, "Okay, we better be careful because they have these international contacts that could cause problems for us."

So, we have doors opening to allow people to do some of the work that needs to be done. I think [we are] trying to encourage people who are living in very difficult situations, particularly some of the groups working on human rights issues, especially outside the capital cities, who are feeling quite isolated. So, the fact that we are there, with them - not always - ...they feel that they are part of a bigger [movement] and that they have some degree of international protection.⁵⁸

ICCHRLA's work is important for the support it lends to the people working in the midst of gross human rights violations, and for the national and international attention and pressure that this monitoring brings to situations. As people in a church-based organization, through their belief in the social/activist gospel of Jesus, and by their commitment to change through sound first-hand reporting, ICCHRLA members are able to make basic connections with people living in Latin American situations of suffering, to hear peoples' stories, and to have a place to recount peoples' pain back home in Canada.

⁵⁸ Interview, September 9th, 1996.

5 - Conversations in the Labyrinth

Human rights organizations, social justice groups, help people forge important links between themselves and their own situations and the lives and struggles of others often living in harsh, destructive conditions in other parts of the world. It is difficult, if not impossible, to know when an organization has done this best: How many people are affected by a certain report? How are those that are reached affected? Are people affected in such a way that they get involved in promoting change in behaviour, even if only their own? But genuine attempts at improving peoples' lives must be applauded.

Surely, some people are moved to become involved by hearing of others' pain but gauging whether or not peoples' involvement has helped bring about improvements for those living in extremely oppressive environments is very difficult. For example: Does a particular request for urgent action lead to the release from captivity or the halting of torture against an individual? As we have seen, occasionally a prisoner is released, or conditions do improve, but is it public pressure which has brought about the change? Or, are there other considerations, political or not, which lead to change?

What can be observed, to some degree, is why people become involved in change: Or, why people allow *themselves* to change? What moves people to change?

[I]t has to be human contact. I think that you are moved by it.¹

¹ Bill Fairbairn. Interview. September, 1996.

So, claims Bill Fairbairn, member of the ICCHRLA coalition. People need a personal reference point, a personal and very human reason to become involved. In the field of Latin America, where the level of violence is sometimes numbing, and where events mean nothing because of their distance, this human context becomes increasingly important.² Bill Fairbairn continues:

I remember seeing a film about Victor Jara, the Chilean singer who was imprisoned in the stadium after the coup [in Chile]... and he just kept singing. The military, they cut off his hands. It was a documentary, it might have been produced by Amnesty International. I was very moved by the personal story of the courage of this man. This, along with the people [Latin Americans] that I met... was the first step for me becoming involved in work around Latin America.³

It was also human contact which helped people forge the links that led to the Inter-Church Committee on Chile (ICCC, the embryonic group out of which ICCHRLA grew).

Members of the first coalition, ICCC, intrigued by the Allende government, were drawn to look at Chile more closely, travelling to Santiago and making contacts in Chilean churches and labour groups. After the coup, Canadian church members had this direct contact with people who were being affected by the violence, "...they knew people who were imprisoned, people who were dragged off to the concentration camps or the National Stadium, people who were tortured."⁴ Working with this contact, the original group came together to pressure our government into change. And although the work was difficult, and often viewed as too political by people in the pews, it was the original

² Tina Rosenberg, *Children of Cain*, p. 8.

³ Bill Fairbairn, Interview.

⁴ *ibid.*

person-to-person relationships and community-to-community contacts that spurred people on to struggle for change.

Stamped by Affliction: The Maya as Humans

There are problems, though, when one community, the one committing the violence generally, does not respect the other or worse views them as somehow not like them, not human, even. How do you encourage respect for *human* rights, that someone deserves to be treated in a dignified manner because they are human, because they are like you *and*, like you, they should expect nothing less? There is evidence that during periods of crisis, when one identifiable group is combatting another for control of a region, its resources, and power: one group may deny the humanity of the other and use this to abuse the other. According to the philosopher Richard Rorty, there was a human-animal, or human-pseudohuman, distinction made by Bosnian Serbs when killing and torturing “animal” Bosnian Muslims.⁵ To the Serbs, therefore, they were not violating *human* rights. The same distinction was made by Hitler’s Nazis when they killed the Jews; and by American holders of slaves. This appears to have happened in Mexico, as well.

The only mainstream work of Mexican fiction I have found in which the Maya of Chiapas appear in the book in some profound way labels the Indians snakes or “vipers”. “I’d a thousand times rather never have been born, than be born among such a race of vipers!” screams a character in Rosario Castellanos’ novel *The Nine Guardians*.⁶ In this autobiographical work by the Mexican author, she illustrates her family’s life (in the

⁵ Richard Rorty, *Human Rights, Rationality & Sentimentality* in On Human Rights: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures 1993, New York: Basic Books, 1993, pp. 111-134.

⁶ Rosario Castellanos, The Nine Guardians, Columbia, Louisiana: Readers International, 1992 pp. 46-7.. (Originally published as Balún-Canán, Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1957.)

book, the *finca* (farm) owning Argüellos) among the Indians in the region around Comitán in southern Chiapas. To the Argüellos, the Maya of Mexico are animals, or at best the same simple “dupes” and “deadweight” that they became to the heartless presidents of Guatemala.⁷ In the book, when the new president of Mexico, Lázaro Cárdenas, introduces a law whereby all farms with more than 500 Indian families working on them are obliged to provide teaching for the people, Señora Argüello cries:

And to give them - to whom? The Indians. He doesn't know them; he's never been near them and found out how they stink of filth and drink. He's never done them a favour and been rewarded with their ingratitude. He's never given them a job to do and taken the measure of their laziness. And they're so hypocritical, so underhand, so deceitful!

These comments echo the those of the petulant Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda made 400 years prior:

You will scarcely find traces of humanity [in Indians]... so cowardly and timid... fleeing like women before a very few Spaniards.”

In Castellanos' book, being an Indian is something that you do not want to become: Drink coffee, for instance, and “You'll turn into an Indian.”¹⁰

Castellanos, unlike Sepúlveda though, eventually found humanism, and the humanity of the Indians, but not in Mexico among her family and people: She located the humanity of the *Maya* in Europe, of all places. As a young woman she travelled to France to study and was introduced to the humanist and existential writing of Simone Weil and Simone de Beauvoir. But while there might have been elements in de

⁷ Former presidents Arana Osorio and Lucas García of Guatemala quoted in Perera's Unfinished Conquest, p. 48.

⁸ Castellanos, Nine Guardians, p. 46.

¹⁰ quoted in Ronald Wright's Stolen Continents, Toronto: Penguin Books, 1992, p. 36.

Beauvoir's work that intrigued the young Mexican, it was certainly the writing of Weil that affected her most.

Simone Weil felt that all people could be united through suffering: Suffering endowed life with meaning and, what is more, "suffering expressed identification with the poor."¹¹ For Weil, healing between peoples, fortunate and unfortunate in her language, was possible; healing was possible among classes in her day as it is among peoples in ours through very personal relationships, through intimate knowledge of the oppressed by the oppressor and by others. Weil writes:

...The capacity to give one's attention to a sufferer is a very rare and difficult thing; it is almost a miracle; it *is* a miracle. Nearly all those who think they have this capacity do not possess it. Warmth of heart, impulsiveness, pity are not enough...

The love of our neighbor in all its fullness simply means being able to say to him: "What are you going through?" It is a recognition that the sufferer exists, not only as a unit in a collection, or a specimen from the social category labeled "unfortunate", *but as a man, exactly like us, who was one day stamped with a special mark by affliction.* For this reason it is enough, but it is indispensable, to know how to look at him in a certain way.¹²

To understand the Maya, to know how to look at them, Castellanos, and others like her, had to know them as people, with trials and pain, exactly like her.

In Mexico, the Maya *and* their supporters must not be treated as some group of pseudo-Mexicans, *the other*, outside the identity of Mexico, something which can be ignored, assimilated, or destroyed. The Maya have social and cultural needs just like the mainstream. But their economic misery stems from racial and cultural hatred towards them: The mainstream, the military, as we have seen, have *even* begun to attack members

¹¹ *ibid.* p.14.

¹¹ Heinz Abosch. *Simone Weil: An Introduction*. New York: Pennbridge Books, 1994. p. 35.

¹² Simone Weil. *Waiting for God*. New York: Harper & Row, 1986. p. 115. Italics mine.

of civil society who support the Maya by rallying to their cause. The government would like to see the EZLN and their supporters weakened to the point of extinction, or at the very least removed as a thorn in their side.

The issues of Chiapas are national issues and not simply regional issues: The Maya belong to Mexico, distinct from the mestizo or criollo, but equally important nonetheless. Other armed groups have appeared throughout the country demonstrating that the Indians of Chiapas are *not* alone in their grievances against the mainstream; it seems that other groups have been shut out from Mexico, as well.

The Executive Power, the President, has enacted a law "to provide the legal framework for the dialogue and negotiations with the EZLN"¹⁵; however, the negotiations for peace in Chiapas are into their 41st stage, constantly broken off by the government. At present, there are 5 armed conflicts in Mexico. Attention has been withdrawn from the negotiations with the EZLN as people in government and society begin to focus on the violence elsewhere. There is still widespread support among the Mexican people for indigenous demands, but the focus has shifted slightly to regions other than Chiapas. The government has responded to this decreased fascination with increased support for the Whiteguards, the paramilitary group committing the worst violence against Native communities. Today, non-indigenous civil actors have also become targets.

There is no end in sight for the war in Chiapas since the government and the indigenous communities are poles apart in their demands. According to Miguel Alvarez, ex-secretary of CONAI, one of the civil groups involved in overseeing the process for

¹⁵ The Secretary of Foreign Relations' letter to Suzanne Rumsey in *Proceso*.

peace, the government of Mexico refuses to admit the wide support for the Mayas' part in the debate and continues to react to the situation with increasing harshness.¹⁴

Contact should be made between Mexican actors and ones from outside. If the government of Mexico is unwilling to recognize new attitudes among their *own* people, the growing support for the indigenous people *within* Mexican society, then maybe outside supporters and government officials will persuade officials in Mexico to respect indigenous peoples' rights. The Mexican government, as we have seen, will take extraordinary measures to fend off international criticism; maybe they will accept the extraordinary measure of peaceful and constructive negotiation with their indigenous partners.

There has been some movement on the Canadian government's part with respect to Mexico in recent months. Whereas previously, our officials, including present ones, were unwilling to approach the subject of human rights with an important trading partner like Mexico, recent comments and acts by ministers within the governing party and by other parliamentarians have indicated that a long silence on rights might be ending. The recent trip to Cuba by the Minister for External Affairs, Lloyd Axworthy, his comments about engaging and supporting partners like Mexico in constructive dialogue over peoples' rights¹⁵, and the latest comments in the House of Commons by Brian Blakely over Mexico are very early signs of the potential end of Canada's official quiescence on issues of human rights.

The problem remains, though, that our officials are very reluctant to push our important trading partners, like Mexico, much beyond these occasional bits of rhetoric.

¹⁴ Miguel Alvarez. Speech in Toronto. February 21, 1997.

Suzanne Rumsey of ICCHRLA says, "Disturbingly, when trade dollars are at stake, human rights, it seems, take a back seat."¹⁶

Placing the Maya in Society

With peace in Central America comes the real work for the peoples of nations like Guatemala. The social realities which served to precipitate the wars are still in place: The indigenous are still the poorest, most marginalized and least represented communities in every nation of Central America. In fact, post-war periods of peace have brought little in the way of improvements in the daily lives of Central Americans, both indigenous and non. Again, Rumsey of ICCHRLA writes:

While the official shooting wars may be over or nearly over, violence - both common and organized - has increased dramatically in the 1990s. For example, more people die violently in El Salvador annually now than the average annual death toll during the civil war. The logic of war, therefore, has not disappeared with the end of war.¹⁷

Promises to bring the Maya into a renewed democracy in Guatemala are still some distance from being kept: Land reform, human rights, bilingual education, roads and health clinics are all just words on paper, at the moment. Both sides are some distance apart on agreeing just how a more equitable society will be created. Worse still, for the Maya, in forging a new type of country, while the present government of Alvaro Arzu sorely lacks political will, it seems his government definitely lacks the resources.¹⁸

¹⁶ Suzanne Rumsey. *Notes...*

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ The President is now saying that it will cost at least \$3.4 billion to implement the peace proposal in Guatemala, and that he does not have the funds (*The Economist. Peace, maybe.* January 4th, 1997. p. 46).

Regardless, on December 29th the Final Peace Accord *was* signed in Guatemala ending 36 years of civil war. This final accord brings into effect the accords agreed to by both sides, the government and URNG, over the last four years of negotiations. Just days before the Final Peace Accord was signed, the Guatemalan Congress passed the Law of National Reconciliation granting amnesty to human rights violators on both sides of the armed conflict. The Congress did make space for prosecutions against those people who committed crimes against humanity such as genocide, torture, and forced disappearances; nonetheless, ICCHRLA believes that, given the present state of the justice system in Guatemala with high levels of corruption and military influence, even cases involving these types of crimes will not proceed.¹⁹ The peace accords have ordered the formation of a Truth Commission to investigate human rights violations committed during the war, however, the accord establishing the Commission commands that, while the truth may be sought, individuals who committed crimes *cannot* be named. ICCHRLA, in its document to the Canadian Ambassador to the UN, has strongly supported their Guatemalan partners' calls for a special protocol within the UN which would allow the Truth Commission to identify the individuals responsible for violations.²⁰

It is interesting (and distressing) to note that not a single indigenous Guatemalan was involved directly in the negotiations or in the signing of the Final Peace Accord.²¹ One might ask how a peace can be authentic when it shuts out 60% of the population - those who have been most adversely affected by the war, the Indians - from the negotiation process? It is a testament to how tenuous are the links between the Indians

¹⁹ ICCHRLA. *Submission to the Canadian Ambassador to the 53rd Session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights*. February 1997. p. 10.

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ *ibid.* p. 11.

on the one hand and both the government and URNG on the other that the indigenous communities were kept from the bargaining table. Here is a place, Guatemala, where ICCHRLA, its partners, and the "anti-hegemonic" intelligentsia of the country - including, presumably, members of the URNG - need to speak out on behalf of the Maya for the government seems unwilling to listen to the Indians themselves. It is a moment for these groups to work together: for uniting intellectuals, who are generally influential in Latin America, with grassroots movements, which are themselves gaining strength, in working within their nations for creative solutions to the problems.²² The Indians, according to Rigoberta Menchú, are absolutely opposed to the amnesty and the sheltering of the guilty: If need be, they are willing to carry out an alternative investigation to uncover the truth of the war.²³ The Maya of Guatemala and the government of Guatemala need help making human contact, it would seem.

A Mayan professor from the National University has been named as one of three members of the official Truth Commission, though. This, it appears to me, is a small but important initial step in recognizing the need for the abused to be involved in the peace and reconciliation of Guatemalan democracy. It is also indicative of the tiny incremental, but very concrete, gains that civil actors like ICCHRLA force in improving the lives of desperate people.

²² Jorge Castañeda illustrates the moral persuasion historically yielded by intellectuals like Borges in Argentina, García Márquez in Colombia, Vargas Llosa in Peru, Galeano throughout South and Central America, Victor Jara in Chile, and Paz and Fuentes in Mexico, but how this influence is declining next to the groundswell of support for democratic civil society movements like the human rights NGOs. *Utopia Unarmed*, pp. 175-202.

²³ Rigoberta Menchú in *NACLA*, p. 10.

*And then they remembered...*²⁴

The objectives for ICCHRLA, and for any NGO working in an international context, can be enumerated as three. These are:

1. To work for appropriate policies of organizations, governmental and non-governmental, within their own country;
2. To help other organizations, their NGO partners, work toward improving policies and conditions of private and public sectors of countries in which *they* work;
3. To work for appropriate formulations in the agreements of inter-governmental forums like the UN or NAFTA.²⁵

In all these areas, given their limited resources, ICCHRLA has been extremely successful: Members of organizations, both private and public, which cause harm have been made aware of their destructive actions and policies. ICCHRLA has also tried to bring about conditions such that governments and organizations alter any harmful behavior: in this, as we have seen, although the pressure to change can be great, success is much more difficult to judge.

The one domain where NGOs in general, including ICCHRLA, have been weakest is in elucidating the alternatives to the status quo: Why should the authoritarian régimes of our world halt their abuses and allow people to fulfill their lives? Officials in those régimes continue to enrich themselves and their supporters using violent means: Why change *themselves*? Those who work in social justice need to detail a new régime where rights are respected and to make the authorities realize that their own goals can be reached by law's rule rather than its abuse.

²⁴ The start of the final section of the Mayan Popul Vuh. Translated by Dennis Tedlock. p. 203.

²⁵ This is adapted from the objectives for all types of international organizations laid out in Werner Feld and Robert Jordan's International Organizations: A Comparative Approach. New York: Praeger, 1988.

Through NGO monitoring and reporting, the people of the Americas - Canadians, Guatemalans, and Mexicans alike - are now aware that poverty and repression are *not* immutable facts of nature: there *are* alternatives. And while those alternatives might need some clarification, NGOs, with their limited resources, have managed to get their valuable voices and points of view into the mainstream: Their reports are heard on the news, read in the papers, and, as we have seen, delivered to our government officials. Civil actors like ICCHRLA have helped change many discussions between peoples from polite rhetoric to include painful issues of human rights and real progressive development for people.

People are still dying, this is true, however, social justice activists are helping us in the North make important connections to the peoples' struggles in the South. With the help of ICCHRLA, our minds and our hearts are being opened up to the desperate struggles for justice and human dignity by the people of Latin America: We are beginning to make the crucial human contact and truly understand others' humanity. And with hope and increased effort to help those who hunger, who thirst, who are naked, who are sick, who are less fortunate than we, those final words of the ancient text might one day become truly prophetic for the Maya:

"We're not dying. We're coming back."²¹

²¹ Some of the final lines uttered by the Quiché Maya in the Popul Vuh, p. 203.

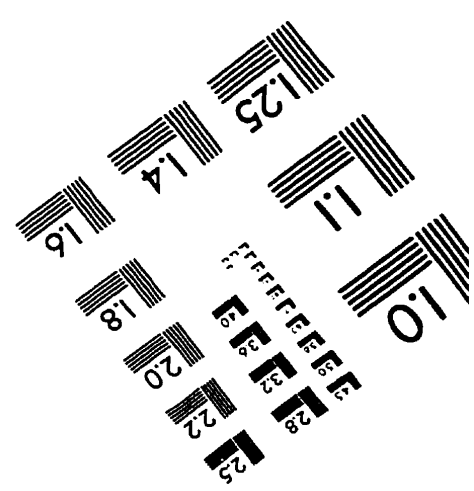
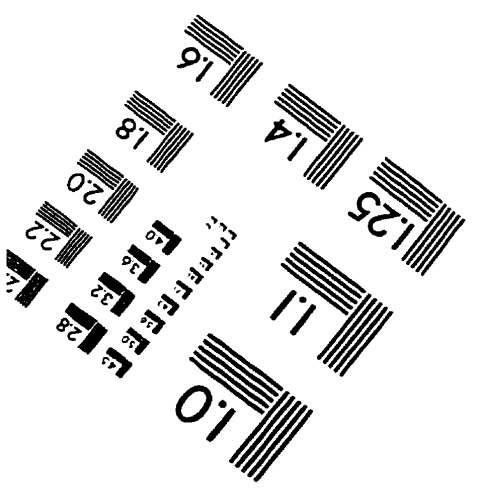
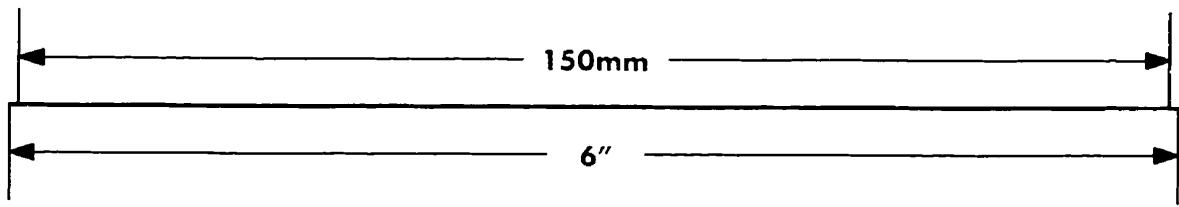
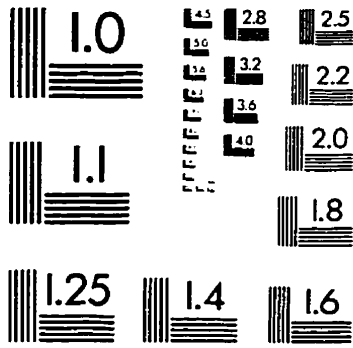
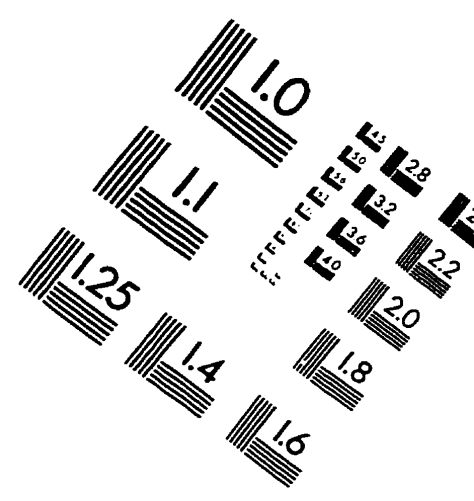
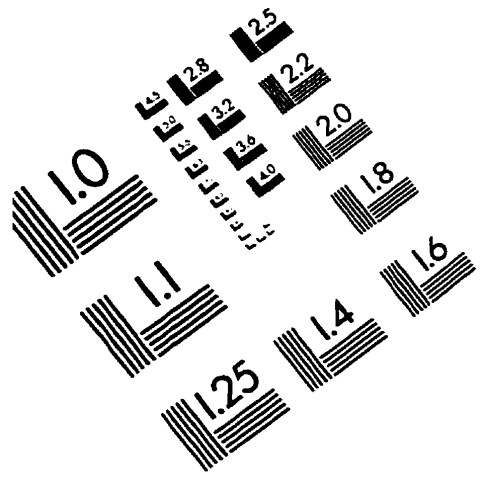
References

- Abosch, Heinz. Simone Weil: An Introduction. New York: Pennbridge Books, 1994.
- Adams, Richard. Guatemalan Ladinization and History in *Americas Journal*. v. 50 (April 1994) pp. 527-43.
- Adams, Richard. *Strategies for Ethnic Survival in Central America* in Greg Urban and Joel Sherzer (eds.) Nation-States and Indians in Latin America. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991. pp. 181-206.
- Amnesty International Reports 1990-1995. New York: Amnesty International USA.
- Arias, Arturo. *Changing Indian Identity: Guatemala's Violent Transition to Modernity* in Carol Smith (ed.) Guatemalan Indians and the State: 1540-1988. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990. pp. 258-286.
- Asturias, Miguel Ángel. Men of Maize. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press/UNESCO Colección Archivos, 1993.
- Bardacke, Frank and López, Leslie (translators). Shadows of Tender Fury: The Letters and Communiqués of Subcomandante Marcos and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1995.
- Batt, Kevin D. The Seventh Rainbow: Hope from the Mountains of Southeast Mexico in *Cultural Survival Quarterly*. Spring 1996. pp. 21-23.
- Boff, Leonardo and Boff, Clodovis. Introducing Liberation Theology. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1987.
- Brownlie, Ian (ed.). Basic Documents on Human Rights (3rd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Canadian Government. *UN Commission Document prepared for the 51st meeting of UNCHR*. December, 1994.
- Castañeda, Jorge. Utopia Unarmed: The Latin American Left After the Cold War. New York: Random House, 1993.
- Cook, Scott, and Joo, Jong-Taick. Ethnicity and Economy in Rural Mexico in *Latin American Research Review* v.30 n.2 1995 pp. 33-59.
- Crow, John A.. The Epic of Latin America (4th ed.). Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.
- DePalma, Anthony. *The New York Times*. January 13, 1996.
- Diebel, Linda. *The Toronto Star*. *Mexico's misleading claim*. August 24, 1994.
- Diebel, Linda. *The Toronto Star*. November 6, 1995.
- Earle, Duncan. Indigenous Identity at the Margin: Zapatismo and Nationalism in *Cultural Survival Quarterly* Spring 1994. pp. 26-30.
- Feld, Werner and Jordan, Robert. International Organizations: A Comparative Approach. New York: Praeger, 1988.
- Fuentes, Carlos. The Buried Mirror: Reflections on Spain and the New World. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1992.
- Gleijeses, Piero. Grappling with Guatemala's Horror in *Latin American Research Review*. v. 21 no. 1 1997. pp. 226-235.
- Golden, Tim. *The New York Times*. January 1, 1994.

- Green, Duncan. The Silent Revolution: The Rise of Market Economics in Latin America. London: Latin America Bureau, 1995.
- Guest, Iain. Behind the Disappearances: Argentina's Dirty War Against Human Rights and the United Nations. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1990.
- Gutiérrez, Gustavo. Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993.
- Harbury, Jennifer. Bridge of Courage: Life Stories of the Guatemalan Compañeros and Compañeras. Monroe, Maine: Common Courage, 1994.
- Hart, John Mason. Revolutionary Mexico: The Coming and Process of the Mexican Revolution. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.
- Hernandez, Luis. The New Mayan War in *NACLA: Report on the Americas*. v.27 n.5 1994. pp. 6-10.
- Human Rights Watch World Reports 1993-1996. New York: Human Rights Watch.
- ICCHRLA. *ALERTA*. no.1 and 2 (double issue) March 1994.
- ICCHRLA. *Chile issue*. mimeographed (1974). ICCHRLA archives.
- ICCHRLA. *Crisis of State - State of Crisis: Human Rights in Guatemala*. 1995.
- ICCHRLA. A "Democracy" Unmasked: Systematic Human Rights Violations in Mexico. October 1994.
- ICCHRLA. *Letter to Alvaro Arzú Irigoyen* (President of Guatemala). December 18, 1996.
- ICCHRLA. *Letter to President Ernesto Zedillo and Prime Minister Jean Chrétien*. June 11, 1996.
- ICCHRLA. *Letter to the President of Guatemala*. 24 June, 1996.
- ICCHRLA. *Mandate*. September 1988.
- ICCHRLA. *Submission to the Canadian Ambassador to the 53rd Session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights*. February 1997.
- Knight, Alan. *Racism, Revolution, and Indigenismo: 1910-1940* in Richard Graham (ed.) The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870-1940. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990. pp. 71-113.
- Lawyers Committee for Human Rights. *Amnesty Law in Guatemala...* Advocacy Alert. New York: December 1996.
- Lind, Christopher and Mihevc, John (eds.). Coalitions for Justice. Ottawa: Novalis, 1994.
- Luévano, Alejandro, Lombera, Rocío and Reygadas, Rafael. Those Affected and Displaced by the Armed Conflict in Chiapas. Mexico City: Mexican Academy of Human Rights, 1996.
- Menchú, Rigoberta. *Address on the occasion of the award of the Nobel Peace Prize*. Stockholm: The Nobel Foundation, 1992.
- Menchú, Rigoberta. I. Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala. New York: Verso, 1984.
- Menchú, Rigoberta. Interview in *NACLA: Report on the Americas*. v.29 n.6 pp. 6-10.
- MINUGUA. MINUGUA Director presents fourth report... Document: March, 1996.
- Nash, June. The Reassertion of Indigenous Identity: Mayan Responses to State Intervention in Chiapas in *Latin American Research Review*. v.30 n.3 1995. pp. 7-40.
- NDP Action Report - International Affairs. December 1996. Office of Bill Blaikie.
- Ngh, Ronald. Zapata Rose in 1994 in *Cultural Survival Quarterly*. Spring 1994 pp. 8-13.
- O'Neill, Juliet. The Ottawa Citizen. *Mexico rejects allegations about human rights abuses* June 12, 1996.
- Payeras, Mario. Days of the Jungle. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983.

- Paz, Octavio. The Labyrinth of Solitude and Other Writings. New York: Grove Press, 1985.
- Perera, Victor. Unfinished Conquest: The Guatemalan Tragedy. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- Popol Vuh. trans. by Dennis Tedlock. New York: Touchstone Books, 1985.
- Proceso*. Mexico City: June 11, 1996.
- Proceso*. Mexico City: October 6, 1996.
- Rorty, Richard. *Human Rights, Rationality & Sentimentality* in On Human Rights: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures 1993. New York: Basic Books, 1993. pp. 111-134.
- Castellanos, Rosario. The Nine Guardians. Columbia, Louisiana: Readers International, 1992
- Rosenberg, Tina. The Children of Cain: Violence and the Violent in Latin America. New York: Penguin Books, 1991.
- Sims, Calvin. The Globe and Mail. *Chile's expensive prisoners languish in relative comfort* November 25th, 1995.
- Social Justice Committee of Montreal. *Alliance Against Impunity Campaign*. Document. Montreal: December 5, 1996.
- Staevenhagen, Rodolfo. The Indian Resurgence in Mexico in *Cultural Survival Quarterly*. Summer/fall 1994. pp. 77-80.
- Stoll, David. The Land No Longer Gives in *Cultural Survival Quarterly*. v. 14 n. 4. pp. 4-9.
- The Economist. *El Salvador: Still fragile*. May 29th, 1993. pp. 44-5.
- The Economist. *Peace, maybe*. January 4th, 1997. p. 46.
- The Economist. *The past raises its ugly head*. July 1st, 1995. pp. 31-2.
- The Economist. *Truth will out*. March 20th, 1993. pp. 47-8.
- Thompson, Allan. The Toronto Star. *Zedillo agrees with critics human rights are violated by Mexican authorities* June 12, 1996.
- Warren, Kay B.. Language and the Politics of Self-Expression: Mavan Revitalization in Guatemala in *Cultural Survival Quarterly*. Summer/Fall 1994. pp. 81-84.
- Weber, Max. Economy and Society. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.
- Weil, Simone. Waiting for God. New York: Harper & Row, 1986.
- Wellmeier, Nancy. Rituals of Resettlement: Identity and resistance among Mava refugees in *Journal of Popular Culture*. v. 29 (Summer '95) pp. 43-60.
- Weschler, Lawrence. A Miracle, A Universe: Settling Accounts with Torturers. New York: Pantheon Books, 1990.
- Wilkinson, Daniel. "Democracy" Comes to Guatemala in *World Policy Journal*. v. 12 n. 4. pp. 71-81.
- Womack, John Jr. Zapata and the Mexican Revolution. New York: Vintage Books, 1968.
- Wright, Ronald. Stoien Continents. Toronto: Penguin Books, 1992.
- Zimmerman, Marc. Literature and Resistance in Guatemala: Textual Modes and Cultural Politics from El Señor Presidente to Rigoberta Menchú. v. 1. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1995.

TEST TARGET (QA-3)



APPLIED IMAGE . Inc
1653 East Main Street
Rochester, NY 14609 USA
Phone: 716/482-0300
Fax: 716/288-5989

© 1993, Applied Image, Inc., All Rights Reserved