

**Violent Memories:
Quiché War Widows in Northwest
Highland Guatemala**

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Ph.D Thesis in Social Anthropology
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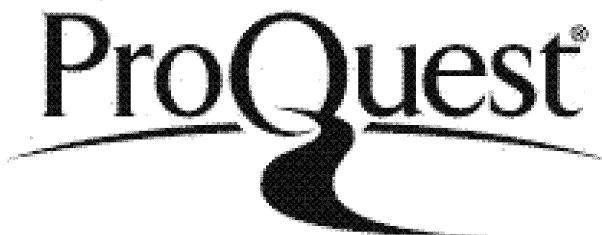


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For Myrna Mack Chang

Abstract

This local study of the impact of political violence on a Maya Indian village is based on twenty months intensive fieldwork. It examines the processes of fragmentation and realignment in a community undergoing rapid and violent change. The thesis relates local, social, cultural and psychological phenomena to the impact of the contemporary "dirty war" on widows' lives. Victims are mostly civilians caught between guerrilla and government forces. Violence is treated not as a socio-culturally fragmented phenomenon occurring "outside" everyday life, but as part and parcel of victims' lives.

The thesis combines a narrative, life-history approach with anthropological analysis, emphasizing the ways locals talk about and explain the violence. The cultural articulation of conflict and the expression of anxiety in cultural performance are examined. I explore the mechanisms and effects of continuing terror and repression, silenced and disguised at the local level. The survival strategies of widows and their attempts to reconstruct their lives on a physical level and in terms of meaning are examined. I privilege the unofficial oral testimony of Indian women. Memories are presented in narratives which not only reflect the narrator's perception but actively reconstitute their reality. "Re-membering" is not simply the automatic engagement of the past within the present but a process of self empowerment. Widows discover new possibilities in terms of potential for action and their position in society, though attempts at resistant actions are limited by the risks of further danger.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	9
Chapter 1 : Introduction	13
Process of entering the field	
Theoretical Orientation	
Methodological and Ethical issues	
The problem of memory	
Thesis Outline	
 Chapter 2 : The Setting	 41
EL QUICHE PROVINCE AND THE VILLAGE OF EMOL	41
-The <i>municipio</i>	
-Ethnic diversity	
RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES	46
-Costumbre	
-Catholics	
-Protestantism	
- <i>Sin religión</i>	
-Religious identification	
THE SOCIAL MARGINALIZATION OF THE QUICHE	56
-Poverty and health	
-Education	
-The rural economy	
-Wage labour	
-Other sources of income	
CONCLUSION	61
 Chapter 3: Gender Relations Among the Quiché	 73
RELIGION AND SECULAR POLITICS	73
MARITAL RELATIONS AND REMARRIAGE	75
RESIDENCE PATTERNS	78
SEXUAL DIVISION OF LABOUR	80
LOCAL MARKETS	84
CONCLUSION	85
 Chapter 4: <i>La Violencia</i>	 89
THE COURSE OF <i>LA VIOLENCIA</i>	90
CHARACTERISTICS OF <i>LA VIOLENCIA</i>	95
THE GUERRILLA	98
-Supporters and Sympathizers	
-Current Views of the Guerrilla	
-Gradations of guerrillaness	
MEANING AND REPRESENTATION OF <i>LA VIOLENCIA</i>	105
-Quiché defence mechanisms and recourses to justice	
-The Cleavage of Time and Space	
-Language	

Chapter 5: The <i>Jefe</i> of the Village Patrols and their Violence	123
THE PATROLS	125
-Representation and reality	
-State Terror	
-The Patrol system and how it functions	
THE JEFES	133
-Who became <i>jefe</i> and why	
-The "training" and position of <i>jefes</i>	
-Autonomy of <i>jefes</i> and patrollers	
-Mario: profile of a mean <i>jefe</i>	
THE JEFE'S PRACTICES	149
-Public Village Massacres	
-Violent invasion of private space	
THE CLIMATE OF FEAR	155
-Women's fear	
-More subtle forms of intimidation	
-The <i>jefe</i> 's fear	
CONCLUSION	160
 Chapter 6: Women's Lives as Widows (<i>Malca' nib</i>)	173
WIDOWS' RESIDENCE PATTERNS	175
-During <i>La Violencia</i>	
-Widows' long term residence	
FEMALE HEADED HOUSEHOLDS	178
INCOME GENERATION	182
-Subsistence	
-exchange	
-Paid work (rural)	
-Paid work (urban)	
-Seasonal migration	
CHILDREN	186
-Labour and income	
-Mature male roles	
REMARRIAGE	190
-Childlessness and Age	
-Destitution: loss of nurturance	
-Protection and companionship	
-Rejection of marriage	
SOLIDARITY AND CONFLICT AMONG WIDOWS	199
WIDOWS' AUTONOMY	202
PERCEPTIONS OF WIDOWS	204
-Married women's attitudes to widows	
-Men's attitudes	
-Widow's self-perception	
CONCLUSION	208
 Chapter 7: Popular Memories of <i>La Violencia</i>	221
THE SILENCING OF WOMEN	223
THE SITES OF REMEMBERING	227

THE TRIGGERS OF MEMORIES OF <i>LA VIOLENCIA</i>	228
THE OPTION TO FORGET AND THE INABILITY TO REMEMBER	231
REWORKING MEMORIES - THE CONSTRUCTION OF NARRATIVES OF THE PAST	236
MEMORIES OF THE MASSACRE	240
-The Massacre	
-Women's memories of the Massacre	
THE STRUGGLE AGAINST A DIMINISHED SELF	244
THE RE-ELABORATION OF MEMORIES AND THE CREATION OF FICTITIOUS IDENTITIES	249
THE COINCIDENCE OF CONTINUITY WITH OTHER WOMEN IN THE HISTORICAL PAST	255
CONCLUSION	258
 Chapter 8: The Dead, "The Disappeared Ones" and Clandestine Graves	
	271
- THE COSTUMBRISTA DEATH	272
-The "good" and "bad" death	
-The rituals of death	
-All Saints Day (<i>pac q'i'</i>)	
-The fate of the soul and the afterlife	
<i>LA VIOLENCIA</i>	283
-Burials during <i>La Violencia</i>	
- <i>La Violencia</i> and the Day of the Dead	
THE DISAPPEARED	291
-The psychological repercussions of the buried or missing ones	
-Uncertainty about the "disappeared ones"	
RECLAIMING THE DEAD	298
-Symbolic burials	
-Clandestine cemeteries	
CONCLUSION	306
 Chapter 9: Quiché theories of causation and the reconstruction of meaning of <i>La Violencia</i>	
	315
MAKING SENSE OF <i>LA VIOLENCIA</i>	316
<i>COSTUMBRE</i>	319
- <i>Suerte</i> (malignant fate)	
- <i>Castigo</i> (ancestral punishment)	
- <i>Envidia</i> (malicious envy)	
CHRISTIANITY	331
THE ORGANIZATION	334
INTERPRETING <i>LA VIOLENCIA</i>	339
THE RECONSTRUCTION OF MEANING	342

Chapter 10: The cultural construction and reconstruction of meaning	351
SOCIALIZATION AND THE PREPARATION FOR THE RECOGNITION OF DANGER	352
THE THINGS MOST FEARED...	353
-Strange people, places and things; neighbours	
-Drunkenness and verbal abuse	
-Spirits, spooks and demons	
-Witchcraft and <i>el bin</i>	
THE MANIPULATION OF CONCEPTS OF DANGER	363
-Guerrilla devils	
-Soldier saints	
RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF DANGER	369
REPERCUSSIONS OF THE PROLIFERATION OF DANGER	374
THE BLACK MAN	375
CONCLUSION	377
Chapter 11: Conclusion	391
Acronyms	405
Appendices	407
Appendix I : The Widows	
Appendix II : Examples of Residence	
Appendix III: CONAVIGUA	
Appendix IV : <i>Nahuales</i>	
Bibliography	423
Map: The natural regions of Guatemala with details of El Quiché	11
Figures	
-Figure 1: Fliers distributed in El Quiché	122
-Figure 2: Fliers distributed in El Quiché	390
Plates	
-Plate 1: An area of southern Quiché	39
-Plate 2: Woman weaving	72
-Plate 3: Woman in a town of southern Quiché	88
-Plate 4: Civil patrols at a mobile outpost	121
-Plate 5: Woman working	173
-Plate 6: Women with photos of dead/missing relatives	219
-Plate 7: Women at clandestine burial site	269
-Plate 8: <i>Cofradía</i> and icon	314
-Plate 9: <i>Reservistas</i> (army reserves)	349
-Plate 10: Demonstration in Santa Cruz del Quiché	389

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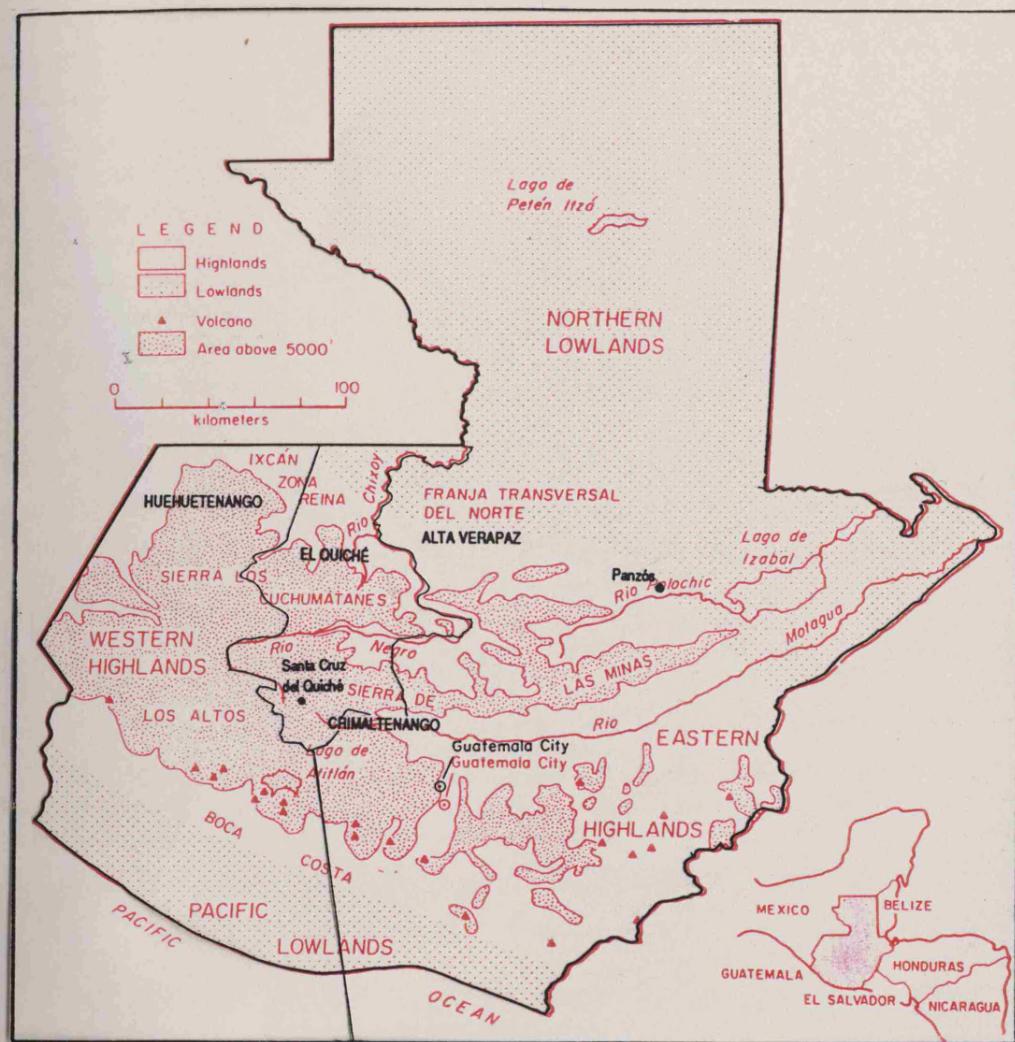
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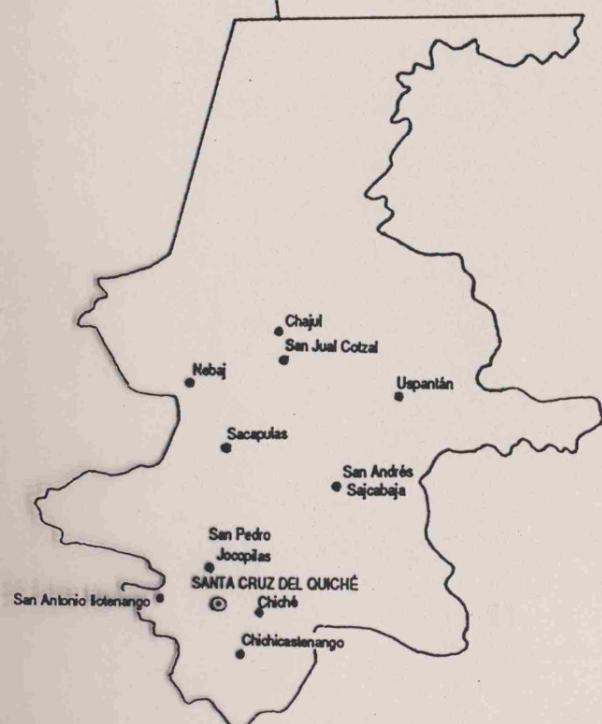
Lamentably, the situation prevailing in Guatemala means that the people who are most important in my work cannot be named anywhere in this thesis. For the same reason, people living in the area where I studied appear in the following account under pseudonyms. They include various Quichés, other Guatemalan Indians, *Ladinos* and foreign religious who gave me their time and hospitality. The exception I make is for indigenous priest and anthropologist, Ventura Lux who was killed last year; he gave me many hours of his time explaining aspects of Quiché life. Various people working in various NGOs, (non-governmental organizations) especially the one which made my research possible, helped me throughout and deserve special thanks; again most of them also cannot be named. I would like to thank Agop Kayayan, then director of UNICEF Guatemala, for his support and friendship. Finally, I would like to reserve my deepest gratitude and feelings to the widows, their families and to the family with whom I lived in Guatemala. They taught me much more than I have written about in this thesis which remains ineffable.

This dissertation is dedicated to them and also to my friend Guatemalan anthropologist Myrna Mack who was brutally killed shortly after my return from Guatemala. She provided

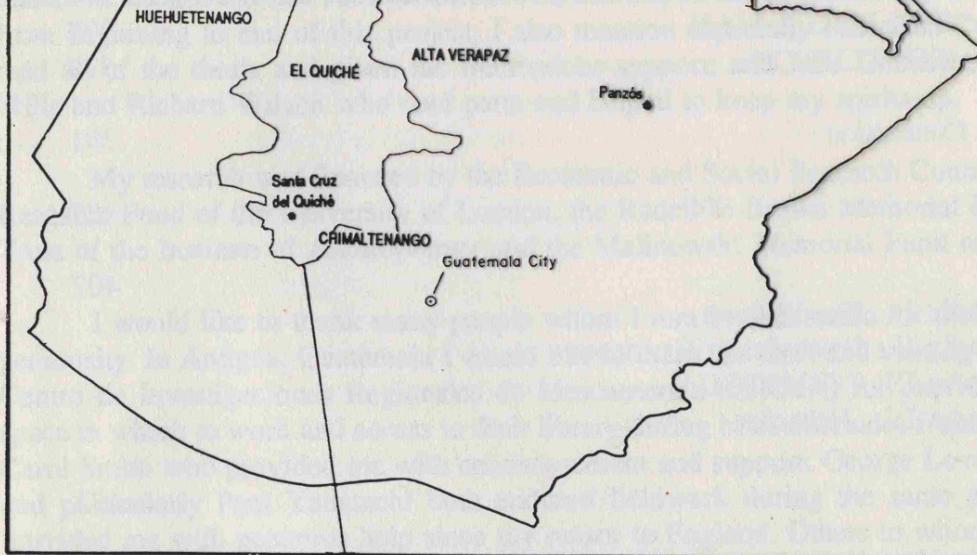
me with both intellectual and moral support with inimitable grace and generosity throughout the time I was in Guatemala.



The Natural Regions of Guatemala with details of El Quiché

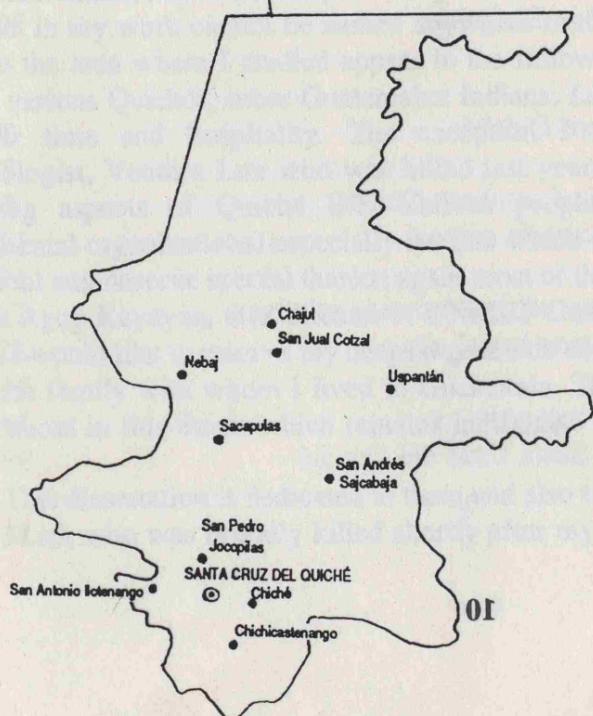


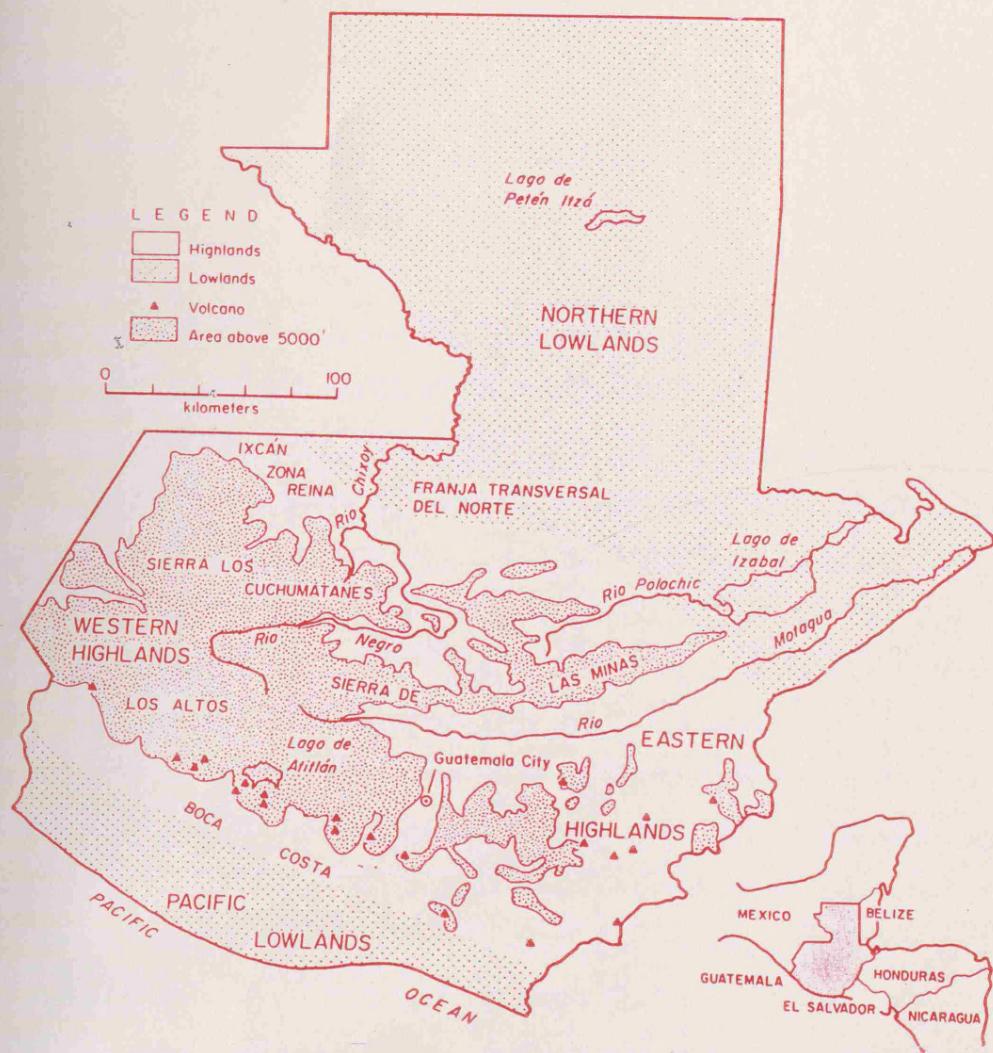
the time I was in Guatemala



Map

**The Natural Regions of Guatemala
with details of El Quiché**





Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis is about Indian war widows of Mayan descent whose homeland occupies the waist of one of the poorest departments, El Quiché, in the remote northwest highlands (the *altiplano*)¹ of Guatemala. It is based on women's accounts of experiences which created an excess of widows in this and other counterinsurgency zones of the country. These experiences include extreme violence and terror¹ which they have lived with for at least a decade and which they have been forced to forget. The women, like their murdered male kin, are civilians caught up in the conflict between left wing guerrilla forces and the right wing military government. The thesis attempts to detail the subjective perception of actors in the process of everyday life in the aftermath of this intense conflict. It describes some of the practices of physical and psychological violence suffered by women who originate from a village (*aldea*) which I shall call Emol. It will examine the effects of these practices and some of the ways in which women have attempted to recuperate from them whilst continuing to live in the midst of persistent, low intensity conflict. The thesis remains sensitive to "structural violence" including violence in the metaphorical sense as a denial of civil, social and human rights or, in Weber's terms, "life chances"² (which have been systematically denied since the Conquest). It views culture as "a lived system of meanings and values" which is forged in a context in which not all actors are equally powerful, nor are those in power responsive to their own immediate economic interests (Williams 1977:110). It also explores the less tangible ideational manifestation of violence which indicates that violence continues long after atrocious actions stop.

The main anthropological data presented here come from women's oral testimonies of violence, their narratives and my own observations carried out during participant observation. Much of the material was collected during interactions with the families of a

¹ Please note that throughout the thesis, Spanish words (and a few Latin words) appear in *italics* and Quiché words are underlined.

handful of widows from Emol.³ I spoke to many other widows and a few people from other villages in El Quiché over the fifteen months I remained in the province. I also tracked down a few Emolian families in the national capital, Guatemala City, where they had fled during *La Violencia*.

Although 85 percent of all war-related death now occurs among civilian populations (Renner 1989:133), little attention has been given to how unarmed victims of aggression express their social reality. Much has been written on the anthropology of war⁴ but until recently anthropologists have been interested in conflict primarily as an aspect of "stable" societies, particularly in terms of how various forms of institutionalized conflict operated or "functioned" to help maintain the existing sociopolitical order (for example, Coser 1956, Gluckman 1963). This is not surprising given that traditionally anthropology has been about communities which are in a steady state or at least perceived to be so. Thus if studies are about a community undergoing change, the emphasis tends nevertheless to be on the maintenance of community and about rituals and other social actions which are repetitive and relatively unchanging. For example, Manning Nash (1967) wrote about the continuance of beliefs and institutions of Folk Catholicism in an indigenous Guatemalan community despite social change resulting from the establishment of a factory there. In the 1950s and 1960s, as a result of world historical changes, anthropological interest shifted its focus from conflict in stable societies to conflict in rapidly changing ones (for example, Beals 1966). This study, however, is quite different because it is about the fragmentation of community and re-definition of some of its elements.

The thesis addresses the question of how a community copes with fear and everyday life when traditional forms of solidarity and the usual restraint mechanisms of social life collapse. Here I talk of the Hobbesian threat not as a hypothetical condition but one which is perceived as having been realized owing to random violence and widespread terror. This is a theme that has been in many ways central to social anthropology. However, the prevailing concern with order at an abstract level of structure, where everything can ultimately be seen as self-regulating, has led to little emphasis on the experiential reality of order let alone that of disorder, the mechanism of which has no theory to explain it. While there is a long history in anthropology of interest in social conflict, theoretical attention to it is new within this field (Le Vine 1961). This is still the case today.

The psychological dimensions of the individual motivations of people within "steady states" have also had *little* attention. There has been little psychological delving within social theory into why people react the way they do in situations of chaotic violence. Although a hermeneutical approach would be relevant to the understanding of what it means to possess a mind in a disorganized, uncomprehending state, it is difficult to expand this onto a social level. Substantial historical and descriptive literature exists on several situations of genocide (a term used to describe the violence in Guatemala) but surprisingly little analysis of psychological, cultural and social origins, except in the case of the Holocaust which I draw upon.⁵ Even here, no in-depth psycho-cultural analysis exists.

Anthropology's analysis of sociopolitical violence was initially shaped by sociological theoreticians such as Durkheim, Weber, Simmel and Marx, but approaches in recent years have still not diverged much from that of sociologists (Scott 1976) or political scientists (Skocpol 1979). The problem within all these fields has been how to portray war without remaining distant and rationalizing it. Since the pioneering anthropological work of Wolf (1969) and Popkin (1979) which was influenced by the sociological approach much attention has been focused on the "structural" variables which influence armed conflicts. Generally, anthropologists, if they comment at all on intense political conflict, "usually prefer to keep their distance using a language of structural analysis" (Wilson 1990:297). Violence is often treated as a socio-culturally fragmented phenomenon that occurs "outside" the arena of everyday life; the focus has tended to be on "objective" economic and political conditions which lead to revolt. There has been little documentation of how conflict is "lived" by the people caught in its midst or of how they themselves represent it.⁶

More specifically, there is surprisingly little critical work on the terror systems that have engulfed Latin America in recent decades. The important work by human rights groups such as Amnesty International and America's Watch tends to be of an applied nature. Such groups are generally not concerned with problematizing the political, social and psychological meanings of the terror systems they combat. Some Latin Americans who write about terror tend to be reluctant to scrutinize the material beyond its testimonial value (see, for example, the critical literary essays in Balderston et al. [1987] and Jara and Vidal [1986]). They let the testimonials speak for themselves. Yet others offer their testimony in the hope that

anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists, political scientists and others will use the materials to help make sense of what has happened in Latin America (Buda 1988).

The research I undertook shifted the emphasis towards one of anthropology's historical strengths, that of detailing the subjective perception of actors in the process of everyday life; in this case in the aftermath of an intense conflict and in the midst of a continuing low intensity war. Combining in-depth cultural and psychological analyses, the research related local social, cultural and psychological phenomena to the impact of contemporary war in El Quiché. In taking this approach I have encountered the dilemma which Taussig (1987) recognizes any anthropologist confronts when attempting to study this subject closer at hand, that of finding a position from which we can speak and write against repression. He observes that it is a case of finding a safe distance where "it will not turn on you [...] and yet not putting it so far away in a clinical reality that we end up substituting one form of terror for another" (1990:3). I empathize with the claim of some Latin Americans working on the sequelae of terror who claim that the nature of the materials they deal with is so unnerving that no distancing from the material can ever be truly achieved (see Jara and Vidal [1986] and Balderston et al. [1987]).

The embeddedness of Guatemalan Indians in a "culture of terror" differs in degree rather than kind from that described by Taussig (1984) with reference to Indians in Columbia. The "compliance" of victim and violator in the production of public truths, texts and selves is evident in both cases. This is a harsh diagnosis, one that many would reject as exaggeration. I argue, however, that the terror of direct physical violence produces the chaos which the army sees as justification for the constant supervision and the withholding of basic human rights from Guatemalan Indians. Within national ideology, Indians are seen as subversives and exemplars of chaos; they provide the disorderly "other" against which Guatemalan mestizos (called *Ladinos*)⁷ define themselves as civilized, rational, orderly and *Ladino*. Here, as in the Columbian case described by Taussig, "the victimizer needs the victim to create objectifying fantasy in the discourse of the other" (1987:8).

There is a need to get away from language which sanitizes both the horror of the practice of war and the social and economic forms of violence (racism, poverty and avoidable diseases). These practices need to be recognized and labelled within anthropological

discourse and this thesis attempts to work towards this goal. Nevertheless, its main focus is on enacted violence which is only a minute proportion of the violence lived by Guatemalan Indians. It focuses on the last ten years or so of the most recent phase of Guatemala's violent history, explaining briefly its recent historical antecedents which began approximately thirty years ago.

There have been social tensions in agrarian, multi-ethnic Guatemala for decades. A full-scale civil war, commonly known as *La Violencia*, was triggered in the late 1970s because of the severe disruption of subsistence agriculture caused by expanded agro-export estates (Dunkerley 1988). Following the election of a civilian president, Vinicio Cerezo Arévalo, in 1985, the violence subsided to the apparent endemic levels representative of the region's low-intensity warfare. This consists of sporadic attacks and assassinations carried out by hired killers. Unpredictable violence and impunity have persisted under the subsequent civilian president, Jorge Serrano Elias (1992-). The specific characteristic of the impunity is that the military, who dominate the Guatemalan government to this day, systematically hides and denies the crimes it commits⁸ not only to the families and the citizens of the country but to the international community.

This thesis focuses on the period called *La Violencia* (1978-1985) because it has had a devastating effect on the population. Violence began to escalate in the early 1970s when 15,000 people were murdered by right-wing terrorist groups. It continued behind the scenes during the eruption of the earthquake in Guatemala which left 25,000 dead and 1.25 million homeless in February 1976 (Jonas 1991:95). Painter writes that "as their only escape from being trapped between the pincers of economic strangulation and political suffocation", many peasants, trade unionists, religious workers, students and intellectuals turned to armed opposition (1987:xiii). By the beginning of the 1980s, the insurgents presented a serious threat to the state. The military government's response was to unleash a campaign of terror which "has been rarely paralleled for its savagery (and lack of publicity) in the history of Latin America" (ibid:xiv). Between 1981 and 1983 tens of thousands were killed and kidnapped (see chapter 3) and 440 Indian villages were razed to the ground.⁹ During this time an estimated one million people fled their homes (Manz 1988:7) - about one eighth of the total population at that time. Hundreds of thousands became internal refugees, many of whom were reconcentrated into new villages controlled by the army (Jonas 1991:183). By

1991, 200,000 unarmed civilians had been killed or "disappeared" by government security forces and semi-official death squads (*ibid*:2).

The creation of an enormous number of widows since the military dictatorship of Lucas García (1978-1982) attests to the scale of violence in Guatemala. There are at least 136,000 of them¹⁰; between 100,000 and 200,000 children have lost at least one parent. It has been estimated that by 1986 in several southern *municipios* some 25% of the population had lost either husband or father (America's Watch 1986);¹¹ for example, in Chichicastenango, roughly 15,000 out of 60,000 inhabitants. Each of its villages was estimated to have an average of 80 widows and 150 orphans (*ibid*). Some have kin buried in the 125 clandestine cemeteries located in the interior of the country.¹² They were dumped there by government killers; at least 45,000 bodies are said to have been disposed of in this way after having been "disappeared" (abducted).

The widows portrayed in this thesis experienced repetitive violent acts which are representative of the experiences of a large segment of Guatemala's female Indian population. The acts included abductions of relatives, sometimes en masse, gang rapes and the witnessing of public massacres of their male kin. Violence continues to be very much a feature of everyday life as women perpetually live in the face of the overwhelming power of the military state and the attitudes it sustains. They have been subjected to repeated violence, not only by a distant and somewhat abstract enemy but by their own hostile neighbours who act on behalf of the army or who have learnt to settle scores by denouncing their enemies to the military forces in place of traditional means such as witchcraft. Women live under constant threat of further attack by their assailants who have ordered their silence. They are also stigmatized as "wives of the guerrilla" to discredit their reports of the atrocities they have suffered. In addition, soldiers, policemen, the security forces (*judiciales*) and local perpetrators of violence are never arrested.¹³ One of the consequences of this is that women live in a climate of terror stemming from the impunity of officially protected killers. Their disappeared relatives are still missing meaning that terror is part of the everydayness of life.

I should make it clear that while I call the women widows throughout the thesis, most women also lost other kin (see Appendix I for a brief life history of the main characters who appear throughout the thesis). For almost every man lost, a dependent woman - a wife, sister,

mother or daughter - has been left without male protection. Women lost tangible aspects of their environment, such as their houses and corn fields; they also lost less palpable ones, including social structure, cultural values and personhood. The widows are also deprived of the concrete marking of their liminal status of widows. Before *La Violencia*, during the mourning period, a black ribbon would be tied around the end of a widow's long plaited hair replacing the brightly coloured one worn at all other times. However, widows were forced to give up this practice during *La Violencia* for fear of being labelled subversive and the threat of death that this carried.

I should also mention that while I intended to study the average person "that constitutes the heartbeat of society" (de Certeau 1980:3), the widows I present are not necessarily representative of all women, nor of all widows. It was my impression that the women with whom I worked most closely were exceptionally courageous and tenacious people. They were also among the village's religious minority.

Many villagers converted to Protestantism at the height of *La Violencia* because of its apparent neutralism (see chapter 2). Many widows have converted since *La Violencia* because of the refuge that this religion continued to offer. The women who appear in the thesis resisted conversion, remaining either Catholics or *Costumbristas* (Maya traditionalist) and endured the threats which went hand-in-hand with belonging to these religions.

All the women also withstood the fear of retaliation resulting from their membership in widows' groups. Many of them had positions of leadership in the community although any position of leadership, other than that assigned by the military, was dangerous. Many had been able to gain inner strength, in turn, from their intimate relations with other women and from their collective ability to withstand the dangers of the outside world.

It was clear to me from the start that the widows were not a homogeneous group, for even within this select group there was more than one type. Several aspects differentiated them but two consistent features were their recent exposure to, and assimilation of, knowledge of the national political scene and their courage. There were some who were careful not to openly oppose the civil patrol *jefes* (commanders), while others were more defiant.

The women were also different in the way they responded to their losses. This was determined by cultural effects which determined their 'habitus'.¹⁴ It was also influenced by more individual and personal factors, including their own particular family history, the ambivalence of their relationship with their murdered and kidnapped kin and their ability to mourn.

The women I am describing here are not only Guatemalan Indians or even Quiché Indians but women from the village of Emol. However, I believe that the experiences of women appearing in this thesis represent the broader realities of many who survive political violence not only in Guatemala but in other areas of the world. In the case of Guatemalan Indians, each woman's losses are reinforced by financial hardship, lack of knowledge about the fate of the dead and the disappeared, and continuing harassment by the perpetrators of violence.

Process of entering the field

The study of sociopolitical violence is marked by a peculiar collection of difficulties above and beyond those associated with any field research. The journey I made in search of a suitable field site reveals the constraints under which this particular research was conducted. It also throws up both theoretical and methodological questions which confronts any anthropologist who attempts to conduct field work in circumstances of political violence. I will therefore give a brief description of this process and discuss some of the limitations of this study.

It was my initial intention to conduct the study in north El Quiché. I found the opportunity to travel to Chajul in the northern "Ixil triangle"¹⁵ with the film producer, Brian Moser, who I met in the office of CERJ,¹⁶ a human rights organization. On the way up, a civil patroller at an army checkpoint advised us not to continue for there had been "trouble" on the road. Being unaccustomed to such threats we were not deterred and continued on our way, eventually arriving safely in the remote and beautiful Chajul in the heart of the Cuchumatanes mountains. I immediately thought that I would do my study there, for it had been severely hit by the violence; additionally, ethnographies about the area had been written shortly before *La Violencia*, which would have provided a base for comparison.

However, on the way through Ixil country (the army's showplace for its pacification efforts), we were greeted by the first violent scene I was to witness during my fieldwork. Four women were being carried across the road on stretchers. Only their blood-spattered bare feet could be seen sticking out from under their traditional skirts (*cortes*); the rest of their bodies were covered with blankets. No one said who the women were, where they were being taken or who had thrown grenades into their *adobe* (mud brick) bungalows. The G2 or S2 (the army's intelligence unit concerned with public relations) turned up and started taking names, so we left swiftly.

I also considered working in association with the French medical team *Medicos Del Mundo* in the Ixcán Jungle further north in El Quiché. Fighting was heavy in the area, with the army trying to cut off the EGP's (Guerrilla Army of the Poor) supply routes to the Mexican border. I decided that the north was not a place for field work and headed south, where I thought the situation was more tranquil.

In the south I was confronted with other problems. The first was finding some sort of cover while I was doing my fieldwork. I had tried to obtain support from the Bishop of El Quiché but to no avail, despite the nuns' wish to have a psychologist in their midst to help with the war traumatized children. I eventually obtained support from a non governmental organization (NGO) which worked with war widows.

I was introduced to the villages by one of the NGO group leaders, Carlos, who had worked in one *municipio* for over five years. He was an Indian from another province who was able to communicate with the villagers in their own language and he had gained considerable trust from them. It was agreed that I should be introduced as someone with affiliations to the NGO and that the real topic of my study should not be mentioned. Carlos helped me to gain permission to work independently in one village but he then suffered a nervous breakdown from which he has yet to recover. Like most people, he had lost relatives during *La Violencia*. His only two brothers had been kidnapped one night when the police had come looking for him.

The loss of Carlos' support meant that I was not able to work in the villages he had frequented because, without his accompaniment, the villagers were wary of me and my

intentions. The village authorities, the civil patrol *jefe* and the military commissioners (*comisionados*)¹⁷ were worried about what people might tell me out of their earshot. Most foreigners who come to stay in the area for any period of time are suspected of being guerrillas or human rights workers, which in the army's eyes amounts to almost the same thing. I was jokingly called *canche* (blondie) by some, an allusion to army claims that the guerrillas were led by foreigners. Some men thought that I was an army spy or that I worked for the CIA.¹⁸ In one village where I had planned to carry out comparative work (it had been little affected by direct violence), I was suspected of being an evangelical missionary who wanted to convert the village population which was entirely Catholic and *Costumbrista*.¹⁹

Eventually another NGO worker introduced me to Emol. I was introduced to the community authorities as being associated with the NGO's work, which seemed acceptable to them at the time. However, on my first independent visit to the village, I was held up at gun point by one *jefe* with whom I had not spoken. This *jefe*, called Mario, who I was later to learn was the most violent of all the authorities, came running towards me with some patrollers under his command. They were brandishing their decrepit rifles and shouting, "*gringa de España*" (foreigner from Spain). It transpired that they thought I was with some so-called guerrillas who were said to have held up a police station in a nearby *municipio* and stolen their guns. The letter I produced from army headquarters in El Quiché was of little help because the *jefe*, like the majority of villagers, was illiterate. It took some months and much help from the NGO and my interpreter and guide, *doña* Flora, to allay the fears and suspicions of the village *jefes* and those with whom I was in regular contact. I suspect that many people retained their doubts about me which they concealed behind a screen of politeness. These would surface anonymously in the occasional rumours about me which seemed to spread through the village like wild-fire.

Doña Flora introduced me to other women in the widows' group and to her family and friends to whom she could "sell" me as someone who could be trusted. Even then they did not necessarily expose the real conflicts and the exact events that occurred in the village during *La Violencia*. Later on, in other interviews and other circumstances, I would learn what happened during this period and perhaps hear some opinion about it. However, I never learnt very much about their relatives or their own involvement in the conflict. The apparent

unwavering neutrality of some villagers raises question about these people: whether they never trusted me enough to keep their secret, whether they had always been neutral, or whether they were so confused and war-weary that they no longer held any convictions.

The south of the province of El Quiché was tense²⁰ throughout the time of my fieldwork. In 1988 a major struggle erupted when thousands of men began to insist on their constitutional rights and refused to continue serving in the "voluntary self-defence patrol system" (see chapter 5). They sought support in the human rights group CERJ, which was based in the provincial capital (*cabecera*). This organization was officially recognized in December 1988 and its membership increased steadily, as did the membership of the widows' organization, CONAVIGUA.²¹ As the international profile of these organizations increased, so did state repression.

Contemporaneously, widows, with the help of another human rights group (GAM),²² pressured civil authorities to exhume their kin's remains from clandestine cemeteries and to protest abuses by civil patrol *jefes*. The army retaliated in the usual way by threatening women and taking their relatives from their houses at night for interrogation at the army base. There was an intensification of village conflict between patrollers and non-patrollers and their families, as the human rights campaign attempted to enforce constitutional rights.

Doing fieldwork in such a sensitive area meant that I had to tread with the utmost caution throughout the time I was in Guatemala. The protection I received on account of being a foreigner (*gringa*) cannot be overemphasized. A British trained Guatemalan anthropologist, Myrna Mack Chang, who had become a good friend during the course of our respective research in El Quiché, was murdered outside her office six weeks after my return to England.²³ Moreover, not all foreigners were protected if they were openly involved in human rights organizations. The office of Peace Brigades International was bombed in Guatemala City in August 1989 and sporadic attacks were made on other foreign human rights workers.

Although I spent most of my time with the widows, I did not live with any of them as I feared they might be targeted for further trouble. Finding an Indian family who would accept me as a paying guest was not easy for the same reasons. I was told that "before [*La*

Violencia] families in the town were pleasant and friendly and they would invite people to stay in their houses but now after all the mistreatment and violence they suffered they no longer accommodated anyone". I was finally introduced to villagers who had moved to the town during *La Violencia*. They accepted me because one of their children had worked with the NGO with which I was affiliated. This family had been directly affected by *La Violencia*: a son had been kidnapped in 1984, causing them to flee their village.

Both my worries about the family's well being and theirs about mine grew in the last stages of my fieldwork when the political climate deteriorated.²⁴ Some men began to refuse to patrol as they learnt that they were not obliged to do so according to the 1985 Guatemalan constitution.²⁵ Those who continued were armed by the military with more and better rifles.²⁶ In 1990 the number of rifles doubled in some Quiché villages and CERJ members began to be harassed and "disappeared". More frequent, thorough searches were made on buses: all passengers were made to alight while the army or civil patrol checked their documents; sometimes men were not allowed back on.

At the same time the guerrillas appeared to be making a come back in the south of El Quiché. Flyers appeared in abandoned buses which warned of guerrilla attacks. An army truck was blown up near Emol and there were other incidents. Banners were strung from the bridge in a nearby town which read "EGP Viva" (the Guerrilla Army of the Poor lives).

A few months before my departure, the family changed their front door so that the bolt would be more secure. They told me that I had to return before dark so that no one would suspect me of "organizing" at night. Only foreign friends were allowed to continue to visit the house.

I had little preparation for many harrowing incidents which I encountered, despite acquainting myself with accounts by sociologists and anthropologists of managing dangers while conducting fieldwork in politically sensitive environments (Nash 1976, Glazer 1970, 1972). However, luck, good advice and a certain amount of skill in, for example, placating potential sources of danger, meant that I encountered no serious problems. I was confronted with considerable intimidation at times throughout the time of my fieldwork, particularly towards the end. Perhaps denial rather than rational preparation saw me through such incidents. Regular incidents of minor intimidation included the sudden appearance of the

army with their guns slung over their shoulders, merely standing listening in the doorway, a stance which patrollers also adopted.

The difficulties of conducting fieldwork in this situation also meant that it was difficult to get information because public speech about the events which interested me was still politically dangerous. I suspected it was perceived to be even more dangerous than it was in reality but this was not a question I wished to push.

Theoretical Orientation

During both the fieldwork and the construction of the thesis, I have drawn both on my background in undergraduate psychology and my subsequent training as a clinical psychologist, family therapist and anthropologist. That is, my theoretical orientation is eclectic and there are times in this thesis when I draw wholly on one field or the other and other times when I try to combine the disciplines with perhaps variable success.

With the cross-cultural perspective of the anthropologist I brought to my fieldwork material questions about, for example, the variation in the way in which atrocity and war is conceptualized and managed. In particular I wanted to find out how conflict is culturally articulated, how anxieties and the horrors of political violence are variously expressed in cultural performances or disguised in representations of the self at the local level; what were local concepts of, for example, witches, spirits; whether everyday conversations or their repressive silencing provided arenas in which power struggles and aggression are given cultural voice. I hoped to explore concepts of death, and how their associated ritual or institutional forms actually work to produce a particular quality of experience for people who have been unable to bury and, I assume, grieve for those lost during *La Violencia*. Finally, I was interested in finding out how people survived and which cultural practices became meaningful in opposition to authorities who deny history.

Drawing on a more psychological perspective, I believe that I have identified among Guatemalan women some of the psychic processes that Bettelheim (1980), Lifton (1967, 1973, 1983) and others have identified for other disasters. Common psychological concepts such as denial have been employed to explain how people cope with tremendous suffering.

However, it may be a fallacy to believe that one can get inside the mind of any real person. The processes that I have identified may, in part, be a product of my training in western psychology. However, I am reluctant to ascribe the findings of this study entirely to western psychological constructs for I feel a certain, perhaps grandiose, responsibility to truth.

My underlying assumption is that many aspects of human cognition are founded on universals, particularly with respect to extreme adversity. That is, all human beings have the same psychodynamic blueprint and logically, these dynamics follow predictable patterns vis-a-vis some external stimuli (i.e., extreme violence) to which the people have been subject. To assume such a blueprint is necessary in order to constitute the subject matter. More specifically, it was necessary to hold this assumption in order, firstly, to interpret what people said to me and how I saw them act and, secondly, to make use of comparative data.

I presume that in extreme experiences of war, culture becomes "thinner" than with less drastic experiences because when violence reaches unprecedented levels, the webs of significance that inform a cultural system collapse or at least become severely shaken. However, various studies show that there are important differences in the manner in which the world and self are formulated in different kinds of disasters. In the case of Hiroshima, the violence was sudden and total and it also constantly infects the survivors due to the recurring fear of "A Bomb disease". In contrast, the victims of concentration camps were subject to prolonged assaults on the body and psyche, and the generalized nature of this violence led to diffuse and severe psychic impairment (Lifton 1983; 1986, Bettelheim 1980). In southern El Quiché, muted violence with selected disappearances and killings by *desconocidos* (unidentifiable people) was followed by massive, prolonged and random violence. After that, village massacres were carried out by local men. Subsequently there were prolonged periods of assault on the minds and bodies of the survivors. In these cases, death was meaningless and atrocious; yet there were subtle differences in the form of what Lifton, in his various investigations, calls the "death imprint" or "impression" (1967:27).

Even if the physical forms of violence are similar across cultures, the anxieties and strain are expressed according to cultural idioms. Descriptions of the self are culture-bound so, firstly, the same experience will be comprehended differently by people of different

cultures and, secondly, people will relate differently to the same experience even if they come from the same culture.

Methodological and Ethical issues

Many methodological and ethical issues arise when studying violence. The restriction of space only allows me to deal with those which I believe to be most crucial. First I shall just briefly reiterate the method used and then I shall go on to examine the issues, some of which are common to, or contrast with, anthropological studies in less violent contexts.

The method of participant observation was used in an attempt to glean an understanding of war widows' experience of violence. I used silence as much as speech as a source of information. Here I offer a descriptive interpretation of the material collected. The verbal utterances which comprise some of the data include women's narratives, which have been repeated here with little editing apart from that which is inevitable when translating from one language to another. Quiché women did not have the cultural means of producing themselves, for they could neither write their own documents nor publicly construct their own versions of history. This makes it all the more important to represent their testimonies as closely as possible to how they were related to me.²⁷ In this way I have attempted to write women's voices back into history and to deconstruct their apparent eccentricity with the hope that their voices are more likely to be heard. The obliteration of voice, however, is only one aspect of the problem; the other is with listening and how anthropologists deal with the problems of voicing and of listening when the gaze of the state is so pervasive (Marcus 1992:104). I cannot claim to have done either of these without considerable selection and distortion. A question which has not been entirely answered here is what ethnographic voice does a responsible researcher attempt to give to victims (and indeed, perpetrators) of the sociopolitical violence?

Despite close involvement with individuals, the possibility of accurate description of their largely unprecedented experiences is perhaps more problematic than with other anthropological studies. If the subjects themselves are lost for ways of finding cultural codes and interpreting experiences, where does this leave the anthropologist?

There also remains the question of interpretation, of drawing out sets of hidden, culturally-specific metaphors, and showing their role as frames or mediators of human experience which, again, are largely unprecedented. Discussing the nature of anthropological understanding, Geertz (1977) asserts that even in "ordinary" situations, immersing oneself in the experience of others, becoming a "walking miracle of empathy, tact, patience and cosmopolitanism" may not, of itself, allow insights into the metaphoric system through which the experience of others is being produced. Geertz asserts that "the ethnographer does not, and, largely cannot, perceive what his informants perceive. What he perceives - and that uncertainly enough - is what they perceive 'with', or 'by means of', or 'through', or whatever word one might choose. In the country of the blind, who are not as unobservant as they appear, the one-eyed is not king but spectator" (1977:482).

The difficulties posed by a study about fragmentation are that the conditions of *La Violencia* and its aftermath created a situation which was dangerous to the population under study. This raises serious ethical questions to which I have no answers. Although I think it is important to give testimony to individuals' experience of violence, especially when their voices have been otherwise muted, I do not think it is worth jeopardizing further lives. The risk was minimized by the advice I received from the NGO with which I was affiliated. Because of my continuing concern, I have disguised the identity of the main characters and the NGO as well as specifics of the village of Emol and the town where I lived. However, the threat of further punishment of the widows remains.

It is hard for me to distinguish how much my continuing fear of this has to do with my own internalization of the fear or something which is real. I suspect that it is a mixture of the two. Either way I feel that it has been necessary for me to go through the difficult process of self-censorship on deciding what I should mention and what I should leave out of this ethnography.

Another central issue is that of neutrality. The nature of the fieldwork site and topic, as well as the process of my own politicization, did not allow me to take a neutral stance as an anthropologist. From the commencement of my work, I was in a position where it was difficult for me not to make alignments. This is not unusual for anthropologists working in areas of conflict. As Nash and others have found "no neutrals are allowed" in communities

involved in political conflicts (ibid.:150). I never made my sympathies explicit but they became more apparent as I became closely associated with some groups and remained distant from others. What I have produced here is therefore an impartial account of one party of the whole scenario of violence extant in Quiché village life.

The virtues of distance which ethnographers claim to acquire for the sake of objective knowledge of other cultures could obviously not be celebrated in this context.²⁸ Indeed, in my case, it was an asset not to be ^{distant} (see Rosaldo 1984). I could never claim neutral objectivity and transparency, but extreme engagement *with* their past rather than to the ethnographic past as Fabian (1983) suggested in his critique of ethnographic production of other cultures. The urgency of the Quiché people's memory of a violent past history has disturbed my perception of disengaged ethnographic endeavour, not that I think this is ever really possible or altogether desirable in any context.

I cannot, however, claim that I ever found "the right distance" from the subject, despite having different tools available to me. Nor can I maintain, despite my intentions, that I have not sanitized the women's experiences of war through my attempts to make them less disturbing to myself or at least more comprehensible. The position I took enabled me to develop a better rapport, based on mutual recognition of shared interests with some and antagonistic interests with others.

The alignments I made were not without their problems. They made me susceptible to the suspicion of villagers on "the other side". But even if I had tried to speak to everyone equally, I too would have been suspected of betrayal which possibly would have endangered my life. There was widespread mistrust that people were murdered because former *compañeros* had betrayed others for reasons of personal gain.

My relations with the widows, which commenced with a reception which conveyed deep mistrust, underwent constant re-negotiation. Eventually I developed intense relations with the main characters of this thesis; they turned to me, usually to little avail, for protection, help and advice. I was probably more useful as someone with whom to share their sadness. The relations I developed with the widows also meant that, like them, I had the potential to become a resource-person to be used for information extraction and, of course, every fragment

of information could potentially cost the widows and myself much in personal terms. I also had to try to abandon what I perceived to be the hinderance of my own cultural constructions and race capitalism to leave myself devoid of a world view with which to comprehend a disconcertingly chaotic and violent situation. Feminist critiques of ethnographic writing have been concerned about the place of selves in the construction of texts about dominated "others".

My choice has been to write about violence rather than about Guatemalan Indian society and culture *per se*. Nevertheless similar sorts of issues arise in both cases. Because interpretations of the data cannot be controlled by the writer, the anthropologist retains the position of intermediary and structurer and represents racial dominance. The question is how that position is to be used. It is not only the ethnographer in the text that is of political importance, but the ethnographer as producer of text and as analyst of the conditions of textual production that requires exposition.

These problems have been taken up recently within anthropology by the critical stances proposed by versions of postmodernism. But they do not address the scale of the problem of racism for Guatemalan anthropology, and the radicalizing and silencing of possibilities within that encounter. Nor do they examine the specific ways in which a state produces both the texts of a dominated other and the listening positions from which they can be heard or read.

My possession of technology and my access to a readership to whom I could publish my findings emphasized the unequal relationship between me and the people of Quiché, including the army. That such a power relation should exist is itself problematic for anthropology and a topic for much discussion and reexamination within the profession (see Asad 1973). The relationship to "power" of both researcher and researched is extremely complex and needs more thorough investigation.

Another question is the value of conducting a study of a subject when the experience is, by its very nature, one which is not entirely narratable. Like death, the phenomenon under study here can be characterized by its non narratability. People who had undergone a situation with little precedence indicated that they were unable to comprehend what they had

been through in a way that they found satisfactory. They also told me that I would never be able to understand it as I had not gone through it myself.

The content of the thesis has not only been limited by the difficulty of writing about a topic which is difficult to narrate, but also by the scarcity of people present to narrate the past. This thesis is about women and most of the material is provided by women. However, it is also important to gain men's perspective, which I have done to some extent. This was limited by the fact that the Quiché thought my most natural place was with women but also because of shortage of men left in the community who had knowledge about those aspects of life I wished to know about. Many of the men targeted by the violence were the most likely to question the *status quo* and were thus perceived to be more of a danger by the military. Those who may have gone as far as to join the revolutionary movement in the early 1980s were now either dead, still in hiding or, if living in the village, most unlikely to identify themselves.

Outside the village I ran the risk of other dangers. Although I presented myself as the "neutral social scientist" to the army, I had to take care that they did not think that I was a subversive owing to my close association with the Indians. In order to circumvent trouble, I would visit the army base every three months (for this was the time period which any unit and their officials would stay in a *municipio*) explaining that I was studying the Quiché. With time I included the effect of *La Violencia* among the list of topics I was interested in.

Another methodological problem is that I have little data relating to how the women were before the time of *La Violencia*. I have referred to ethnographies from fieldwork conducted in adjacent areas before the time of *La Violencia*, ^{but} these have not always dealt with issues I refer to in this thesis. I have used peoples' own reconstructions of Emol, their lives and how they were before this period but these are no doubt coloured by time and by *La Violencia* itself and have produced an idealization of the past.

The problem of memory

The encounter between researcher and the researched in relation to the material I present needs to be examined specifically in relation to memory, for much of the material relates to a time which has purportedly ended. The encounter which included memory exchange and the act of making one's accounts credible, is itself a performance in which the roles are interchangeable and constantly negotiated. In addition, the very act of eliciting a response instigates the organization of social experience in the form of memory; in other words, the question forces the informant to assume a stance on an issue in order to construct a credible response (although the women were adept in being evasive). To that extent, then, the research context is constitutive of the outcome, and the latter cannot be examined and analyzed apart from it.

Memory is thus more than the narrative of one's life experiences; it is a collaborative act and product between the narrator, the audience, the relationship between the two, and the spatial-temporal context. Hence, we are not merely spectators and audience, but "we are engaged. We are participants" (Grele et al. 1985:254). In the process of eliciting a personal experience narrative that "has been unconscious, habitual, without meaning in a historical sense" is rendered significant when "we ask about it and thereby give it historical meaning" (ibid:253).

While memory is a collaborative product - here I am not concerned with individual memories external to the social setting - ethnographic text production is the outcome of personal style, whims, and limitations of the researcher who tries to make sense of the data and to present it in a specific format, in this case a dissertation. A number of experimental ethnographies designed to represent the dialogic nature of the ethnographic inquiry have not been completely successful (see Marcus and Fisher 1986), since ultimately the final product is in the hands, and for the benefit, of the ethnographer. Consequently, the researcher is limited to enacting the role of mediator between the subjects of one's project and the intended audience. This is the role which I perform in the present case.

I may have recovered the women within the boundaries of their memories but I have been unavoidably selective in my thinking and remembering. I have attempted to be aware

of the interaction between the narrating woman now and the remembered woman before, between present and past, and the impossibility of fully recovering that woman's world as it actually emerged.

Ethical issues also include the pain of memory and its effects on informants and the intrusion and interference of other models in the research process. Ortiz (1985) has pointed out the potential mental health consequences of the life history approach. She likens the researcher's task to the surgeon's knife "[a]s holding the potential for both cure and disaster, for both *illuminación* and *confusión*" (*ibid*:101), and identifies five psychological consequences. In the first place, it validates the experience of the subject, conveying "the unambiguous message that the selectee is interested and that his/her life has value and meaning to someone else" (*ibid*:107); in addition, it has a "cathartic effect" (*ibid*:198-9). Secondly, it provides "a grounding in reality" through the narrativization and communication of one's life experiences to someone else (*ibid*:109). A third consequence is the potential for "increased family understanding and communication" (*ibid*:110). Ortiz' fourth outcome was the "fear reactions" that emerged when the manuscript was being readied for publication - the possibility that certain details would endanger the lives of friends and kin (*ibid*:112-113). Moreover, some women expressed reluctance to delve into a part of their life which was still painful. Finally, a rarer response was a "special sort of insight experience into subconscious processes" (*ibid*.). While there are many assumptions behind Ortiz's points, such as catharsis, it appeared from my observations of Guatemalan war widows that many of these seemed applicable.

Thesis Outline

A thesis which has violence as its central concern is, like the community under study, inevitably fragmented and a little disjointed. It is divided in three parts nevertheless.

The first part presents the setting where fieldwork was conducted: the province of El Quiché and the village of Emol (Chapter 2). So much of the thesis is about the drastic changes encountered by widows that it is necessary to give an idea of what gender relations were like before *La Violencia* (Chapter 3). Chapter 4 deals with *La Violencia*, explaining what it was comprised of and the competing explanatory discourses surrounding it; Chapter

5 is about past violence and present, ongoing, military violence, concentrating particularly on local vigilantes, the civil patrol and their *jefes* (chiefs/commanders).

The remainder of the thesis analyses different aspects of the violence and is divided in two parts. The first deals with the reformulation of women's everyday life which resulted from the murder and abduction of several men within the family (chapter 6). The next two chapters focus on different aspects of memory of *La Violencia* and how remembering, forgetting and the creation of narratives operate in women's present lives. Chapter 7 discusses the repercussions of being unable to bury the dead or even confirm that death has occurred, the effects of silencing the survivors and women's silent struggle to rebury their kin. Chapter 8 analyses women's private memories as covert-strategies which enable partial articulation of elements of "subjugated knowledge" that oppose the official "truth". It also examines how, through the reworking of memories, women rebuild a sense of personhood.

In the last section the cultural construction of repression is described. The chapters examine folk explanations of *La Violencia* (chapter 9); how the perception of the reality of *La Violencia* was influenced by dangers extant in the Quiché culture and how changing perceptions of danger served to fragment society (chapter 10). I will highlight widows' ability to transform social reality in the "public" realm by the reorganization of their families. They are also able to transform their memories and narratives within "private" realms. In this way they alter perceptions of themselves and their assailants which has a recuperative effect. Chapter 11 presents the conclusion to the thesis.

1. The concept of "culture of terror" might be applied here. Taussig (1984) has related this to that through which relations of domination are deployed into the culture and daily life of the other, dominated, group.
2. see Dahrendorf (1979:62) for an explication of Weber's concept of life chances.
3. Widowers were also left as a result of the murder and abduction of women. However, there were far fewer widowers than widows, given that men were the main targets of violence. I was told that widowers remarried almost immediately.
4. See, for example, writings on "primitive war" which has been of great interest to anthropologists (Malinowski 1941; Schneider 1950; Vayda 1968); peasant war and/or rebellion (Alavi 1973; Friedrich 1970; Wolf 1969); the state or the evolution of war

(Lesser 1968; Otterbein and Otterbein 1985; Webster 1975). Edited volumes on the anthropology of war include Bohannan 1980; Ferguson, 1984; Fried et al. 1968; Haas 1990; and Nettelship et al. 1975.

5. This has some parallels with the present case given that the Army Intelligence section of the army, the G-2 system, is run from the highest levels and has Gestapo-style powers of surveillance over the army command structure.
6. Research on the Guatemalan civil war which has not diverged much from this model include Carmack (1988), Manz (1988) and Smith (1990a). To be fair the severe conditions of war between 1979 and 1986 made field work untenable in Guatemala. Few ethnographies were produced during that time, apart from the edited autobiography of Rigoberta Menchú (Burgos-Debray and Menchú 1984). Field work became more viable in the late 1980s in some areas (see, for example, Annis 1987). Analyses which deviated from the above-mentioned paradigm began to be produced in the late 1980s. These include Smith (1988) who made an impressive analysis of the impact of war on weaving and Quiché (Totonicapán) ethnicity; Stoll (1990, 1992) who respectively provided exemplary data on the evangelical contribution to counterinsurgency and fascinating testimonies of Ixils on their position in the conflict in northern Quiché; Wilson (1990) sensitively assesses the implications of war on indigenous cosmologies. Work in other areas which attempts to understand war from the ground up includes Lan's (1985) excellent work on guerrillas and spirit mediums in Zimbabwe.
7. *Ladinos* are of mixed blood including white, *mestizo* and/or indigenous. However, they define themselves as non-Indian.
8. Cerezo was inaugurated on January 14, 1986, when he began to confront the military's entrenched and continuing opposition to reform. Before the elections, he noted that for the first six months of office he expected to possess only 30% of the power, then 50% after the first year and 70% by the fifth [final] year in office. He admitted that prosecuting military personnel responsible for disappearances and rural massacres would be like committing suicide. He disbanded the DIT (Department of Technical Investigations), the police intelligence force subordinate to the army's G-2, but only one DIT agent was actually charged (with assault) while the majority were offered transfers to the uniformed police. Since 1966, the DIT has been renamed and reshuffled three times with only superficial reorganization in its structure and methodology (America's Watch 1986).
9. (Painter 1987:xiv). Over the same period women had to contend with increasing hardship, such as lower incomes and increasing levels of malnutrition.
10. *Comité pro Justicia y Paz de Guatemala* 1985. There were an estimated 40,000 widowers in 1983.

11. If one included people who migrated permanently, Smith reports that certain townships (Chichicastenango, El Quiché, Chiché etc.) appear to have lost one third of their previous populations (1990a:20). These figures are gross underestimates because many were too afraid to come forward as they were afraid to give their relative's names for fear of repercussions.
12. According to GAM. The newspaper *La Crónica* reported that there were 108 clandestine cemeteries in Quiché, Huehuetenango and San Marcos (20 September 1991).
13. President Cerezo upheld the army's self-pronounced amnesty that was declared just before he took up office in 1986; he had campaigned on a promise not to prosecute army officers for past human rights crimes or death squad activities (Jonas 1991).
14. By the habitus of the group, Bourdieu (1977) means the propensity of its members to select responses from a particular situation or field. Unlike the concept of 'rules', habitus has the great advantage of allowing its users to recognize the extent of individual freedom within certain limits set by the culture.
15. Chajul, Nebaj and San Juan Cotzal make up the three points of this triangle. See map.
16. Council of Ethnic Communities "We Are All Equal" (*Consejo de Comunidades Etnias Runujel Junam*). This organization is best known for its organization of resistance to forced conscription into the civil defence patrols and the military. It also carries legal claims to a civilian government which, despite declaration of the new Constitution, most often ignores them. Its founder is a local *Ladino* elementary school teacher, Amilcar Méndez, who worked in southern El Quiché. Its aim in July 1988 was to use Guatemala's Constitution to protect peasants' basic human rights; villagers have been told by the army that the Constitution is a guerrilla document (America's Watch 1990). The group was quickly harassed by threats in letters and telephone calls, verbal warnings of army reprisals, "accidents" on the roadways, the rape of a family member and televised denunciations of its leader as "communist" and a "guerrilla" at government sponsored news conferences (*ibid*). Several people have paid for their membership in CERJ with their lives.
17. These temporary civilian militiamen are ex-soldiers. They are charged with supervising public order as well as organizing conscription in the villages.
18. The United States has shaped fundamental events in Guatemala through the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). U.S. intervention began with the backing of the coup in 1954 which overthrew the reformist government of Jacobo Arbenz [1951-1954] (Jonas 1991).

19. This is not surprising given I was viewed as a "*gringa*" which in Guatemala means any foreigner. North American contributions finance most missionary work in Latin America, including Guatemala (Stoll 1990:10).
20. Ironically, anthropologist David Stoll (who conducted fieldwork at the same time as me) writes that in the town of Nebaj in the north of Quiché during this period the climate was "almost *tranquilo*", despite occupation by the Guatemalan army and regular problems caused by two columns of the Guerrilla Army of the Poor. Life in the army's resettlements was less tranquil, with the villagers feeling trapped between two forces pressuring and threatening them. In Nebaj no one openly defied the army, despite the active presence of the guerrillas. There were no kidnappings during Stoll's stay.
21. *Coordinación Nacional de Viudas Guatemaltecos* - National Coordination of Guatemalan Widows. This human rights group was set up at the end of 1988. Unlike CERJ and GAM, it has female Indian coordinators. The *Ladino* leadership of the others has been questioned.
22. The Group for Mutual Support (*Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo*). This group, which was set up by *Ladino* relatives of the disappeared in 1984, sought information and action on disappeared *Ladino* and Indians. Its Southern Cone counterparts are the *Madres de Plazo Mayo* in Argentina.
23. Myrna Mack Chang was a British trained anthropologist who, through the institute AVANCSO published information on the internal refugees. She was murdered on September 11, 1990. After protests by the Catholic Church and the human rights movement made her murder a major case, her assassination was traced to high-ranking army officers.
24. International human rights organizations documented the continuance of systematic human rights violations and indeed a "serious deterioration" of the situation after 1987. In fact political assassinations increased after the installation of an elected, civilian president (in 1986); there were more assassinations in 1987 than in 1985 (*Infopress Centroamérica* [IC], 21 January 1988). The trend accelerated during 1988 and 1989, especially following several right-wing coup attempts, with a documented increase in death squad activities and crimes committed by official security forces (see Amnesty International and America's Watch reports, 1988-9). In the autumn of 1989, right wing/official violence escalated sharply, prompting fears of a return to the early 1980s.
25. By mid-1979 at least 7,000 Indians were refusing patrol duty despite retribution (Jonas 1991:185).

26. In the mid to late 1980s, Washington's Liberal Democrats pushed for increased economic and military aid to the Guatemalan government, thus weakening human rights requirements (Broder and Lambeck 1988). After Cerezo took office (January 1986) congressional Democrats increased Regan administration military aid requests for Guatemala from \$5 million to \$9 million; they also approved the sale of 20,000 rifles to Guatemala in early 1989 (Jonas 1991:210, fn2).
27. Zimmerman's states (in relation to Argentina) that "in spite of found distortion" [written] testimonies are as "absolutely necessary as verbal representations spurred on by death or forced silencing..." (1991:32). The same can be said about oral testimonies.
28. There has been much self-conscious criticism of conventional anthropological celebration of the Other. See Bourdieu (1977), Clifford (1988), Fabian (1983), Fisher and Marcus (1986), and Rosaldo (1989).

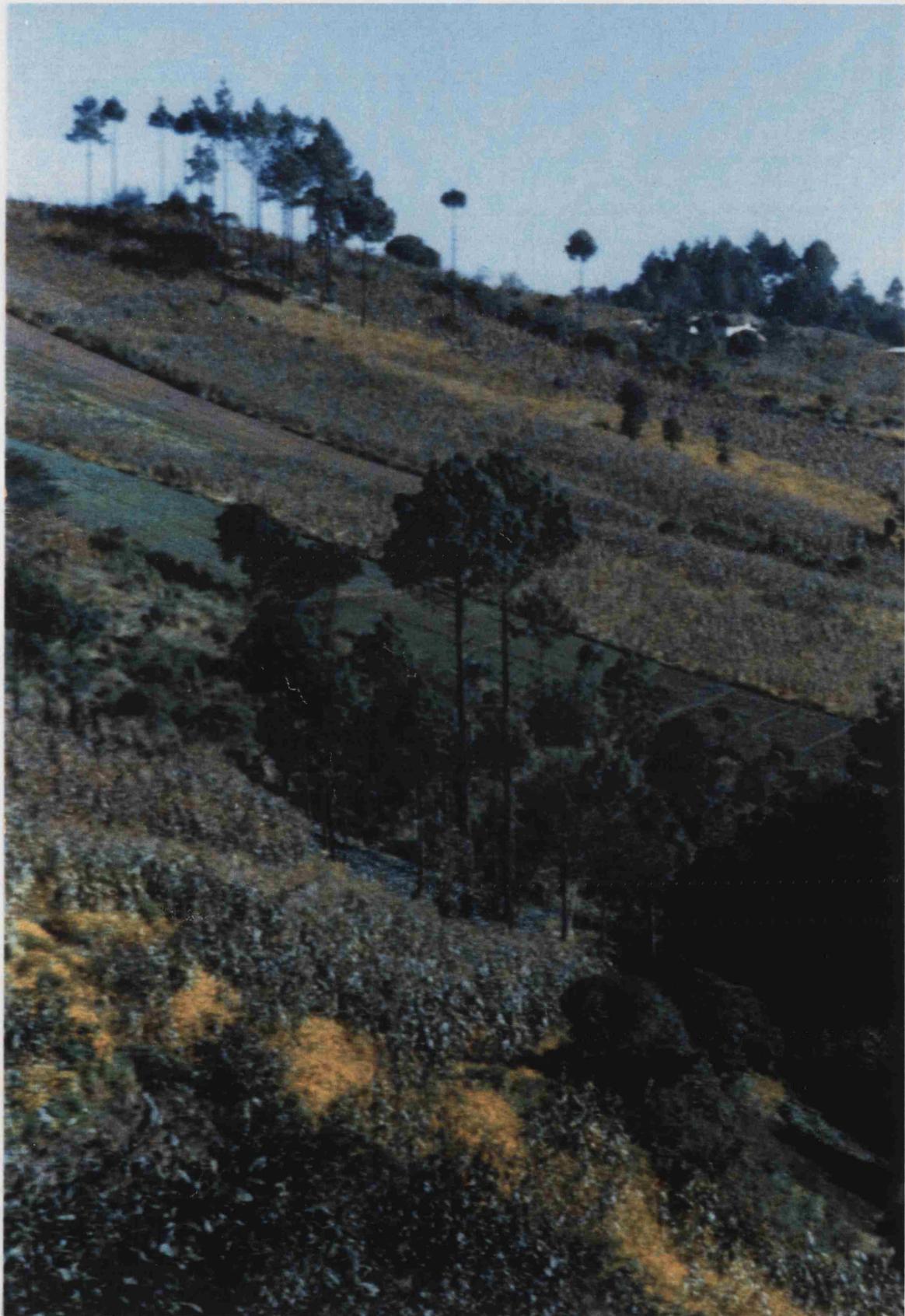


Plate 1: An area of southern Quiché

Chapter 2

The Setting

EL QUICHE PROVINCE AND THE VILLAGE OF EMOL

The province of El Quiché¹ is situated in the remote highlands of Western Guatemala, the highest non-volcanic range in Central America. The undulating hills of this province are beautiful with numerous *barrancos* (deep ravines), some of which drop over a thousand feet from the plateaux which reach around 6,000 to 9,000 feet above sea level. The mountains continue to be a stronghold of peasant smallholders and their *minifundia*.² Being an agricultural people who continue a traditional Mayan existence, the Quiché live according to the seasons.³

The total population of El Quiché is 557,004⁴ in a country of just under nine million people. They live in dispersed settlements or *aldeas* (villages) concentrated in various *municipios* (the smallest administrative unit)⁵ spread throughout the province which covers 8,378 square kms.

The municipio⁶

Each *municipio* has variations in topography, settlements, house types and methods of cultivation. There is also cultural diversity between Indians (who Emolians referred to as *gente natural* or *húmildes*, poor people⁷) of different *municipios*, who are seen to have different ways (*tienen otra costumbre*). This diversity is a long-standing phenomenon stemming from differences in pre-Hispanic heritage, various changing economic options, or historical experience (Smith 1990b). Nowadays these differences include indigenous costume, the maintenance of traditional ways and minor economic specialization which supplement the ubiquitous Indian occupation of subsistence corn farming.⁸

Each *municipio* has a town centre and a number of surrounding villages which may have further subdivisions, called *cantones* (hamlets), which may be adjacent to one another or up to an hour's walk away. Villages usually consist of between 80 to 300 families dispersed in family groups over the landscape, mostly on family-held land.

The *municipio* structure consists of a mayor, who chooses the municipal staff: a deputy mayor, a secretary and an assistant, a treasurer and two treasury assistants, a police *jefe*, and a judge. In the village an auxiliary mayor, generally chosen by the people of the village and authorized by the mayor of the *municipio* capital, deals with minor problems such as petty thievery and drunkenness. Larger problems are referred to the town mayor who may set up a commission to investigate the accusations. The *municipio* staff deals with land boundary problems, animal theft, rape and other violent crimes. Until 1982 mayors were chosen by popular vote but after that year's coup, General Efraín Ríos Montt appointed mayors to all *municipio* capitals. In 1985 mayoral elections were reestablished.

Emol is a village in one of the *municipios* of southern El Quiché whose physical details are purposely omitted or disguised owing to the sensitive nature of the thesis. It is comprised of a village centre and surrounding hamlets.⁹ Characteristic of most villages in the northwest highlands, its core inhabitants are the descendants of a few families who originally settled the village; many villagers are distantly related. Over the years a few families from other areas of southern El Quiché have bought land and settled in Emol when, for example, their inheritance was too small to sustain their family.

Ethnic diversity

Guatemala's population is estimated by most scholars to be about half Indian.¹⁰ The other, non-Indian, half are mainly mestizos, called *Ladinos*.¹¹ Because of the link between race and class in Guatemala, the upper-classes prefer to call themselves Creoles, whites or Europeans (Smith 1990b). This is not only because Guatemala's elite is mostly white rather than mestizo, but because *Ladinos* often share the same class position as Indians. It is commonly acknowledged that most of Guatemala's Indians are descendants of the Maya, but the likelihood that most non-Indians are too¹² is rarely if ever mentioned (*ibid*).

What has distinguished Indians and non-Indians over time has not been biological heritage, but a changing system of social classification, based on ideologies of race, class, language, and culture, which ideologies have taken on different meanings over time. (ibid:3)

Ethnic diversity elaborated within *municipio* distinctiveness generates a highly complex language for distinguishing the other. A hierarchical distinction is drawn between people from one *municipio* and those from another. Mutual distrust exists between different *municipios*. Indians from other communities, which usually correspond to the *municipio*, tend to be seen as less civilized and less worthy for one reason or another. Terms such as "not too bright" (*medio listos*) or "idiots" (*puros perdejos*) are commonly employed by Emolians to degrade the other. Considerable envy may be expressed towards a wealthier *municipio* or village by inhabitants of a poorer one. The army capitalized on these sentiments by actively setting one village, and hamlets within a village, against another.

In general it can be said that there are mistrustful relations with the outside on religious, cultural and social grounds. However, the Indian outsider, even one who has become "ladinized" (culturally assimilated),¹³ is not judged untrustworthy in the same way as the *Ladino* outsider. Although Indians who take on *Ladino* ways may be referred to as "those who advanced themselves (*se superó*)", depending on the particular way they have changed, they are disparaged by fellow Indians including Emolians. When Indians wear western clothes (*vestido*), they are said to be *puro moos* (pure *Latinos*). This especially applies to women, who are generally the conservers of tradition and are far more likely than men to wear their *municipio traje* (clothes); women who wear *Ladino vestidos* (normally only those who have moved away from the village) may even be deemed prostitutes. This is never said openly because the Quiché, unless inebriated, operate unwaveringly within the strict cultural bounds of politeness. People who privately deride such Indians contrast them with *puro indígena* (pure indigens); in this context, pureness refers to some sort of "ideal" type rather than genetic purity.

Generally speaking, by far the deepest cleavage is that between Indians and *Latinos*. This is most apparent in the main town of the *municipios* where the small *Ladino* population tends to be concentrated and where Indians and *Latinos* come into contact with one another. Here Spanish speaking *mestizos*, who wear European style clothes, dominate Indians socially

and economically (Sol Tax 1937:432).¹⁴ A more pronounced hierarchical distinction exists between Indians and *Ladinos* than among Indians of different *municipios*. Indians say that both Spanish speaking Indians and *Ladinos* are "civilized" because they are "educated" and can speak Spanish, although I sometimes had the impression that this attribution was made in a rather ambivalent and somewhat sarcastic manner. More common is Indians' clearly pejorative stereotyping of *Ladinos* as immoral, selfish, untrustworthy and dangerous; they are seen as "fearless" people *sin averguenza* (without shame). Many explicit and implicit (and sometimes ambivalent) messages are given to Indian children by their parents to prevent them from becoming "ladinized". Hatred of the Spanish or the *Ladino* has, of course, been a recurrent Indian emotion for centuries (Burgos-Debray and Menchú 1984).¹⁵ Despite unifying myths of national identity, the divisions between *Ladinos* and Indians have never been easily mystified. Given that the *Ladino* state and popular strategies have both intermittently utilized violence to enforce their interests, fear has also been another persistent emotion which has compelled Indian behaviour (Smith 1990b). *Ladino* expropriation of Indian land and the recent (1960s and 1970s) "regional-national restructuring" which benefited the upper (*Ladino*) strata and impoverished the Indian majority, further sharpened Indian perception of the *Ladino* "enemy" forces.

Ladinos and Indians have little interaction with one another on a daily basis. Most of the ideas they have of each other are therefore founded on prejudice and fantasy. Pitt-River's (1973) thoughts on the concept of "raza" (race) are relevant here. *Ladinos* confuse social race with physical race in order to exclude Indians from the human community; they classify Indians as naturally inferior and non human. This explains the mechanism which made it relatively easy for the *Ladino* army, like the Spanish Conquistadores before them, to commit violence on Indian populations on such a scale reaching genocidal proportions (Falla 1984 and Jonas 1991).

Ladino racism towards Indians is a well known phenomenon throughout Guatemala. *Ladinos* use many discriminatory expressions such as "*índitos*" (little Indians), "dirty", "stupid" and so on. Many Indians told me of instances of abuse by *Ladinos*, who openly insult them in the town markets and refuse to pay in full for their purchases. The *Ladino* view of the Indian as an uncivilized and savage creature not only leads to such treatment but is also at the root of *Ladino* paranoia that the uncontrolled Indian might harm them. Present

day *Ladinos* are not the first to feel such anxiety: colonialists also imputed astonishing, enigmatic and "natural" powers to the savage Indians or *índios salvajes* (Taussig 1987). Like the *conquistadores*, the Guatemalan army seems to subscribe to the paranoic's aphorism of attack before being attacked and uses the same mirror of terror which reflects the white man's worst fear in inverted form. It seems that officials projected into the stereotype of the Indian most, if not all, of those undesirable motives and characteristics they knew best: their own.

Thus relations between *Ladinos* and Indians do not help to reduce violence in Guatemala; in fact, mutual distrust and fear fed into *La Violencia*. Class division, which in the highland areas commonly translates as racial and cultural division, played a part in some groups' support for the civil patrols system (see chapter 5). A patroller recounted that when guerrillas (*los guerrilleros*) began visiting and occupying Uspantán, Quiché in 1980, the middle-class *Ladino* population petitioned for the patrol: "Since the guerrillas said they had come in favour of the poor, the *Ladinos* knew it would not be to their advantage to have them in our town since this could mean economic ruin for them" (America's Watch 1986:36). The *Ladinos* themselves were, however, least available to actually carry out the patrols and they were not coerced to perform them in the same way that Indians were.

The complex nature of ethnic relations is illustrated by the fact that the highest echelons of both the army and the guerrilla forces are filled by *Ladinos*. The lower ranks are made up of Indians (although poor *Ladinos* also fill the lower echelons of the guerrilla).¹⁶ Indians have therefore been politically used by both sides. In Guatemala, the great majority of those tortured, "disappeared", or killed were not white, middle class or European in culture as, for example, in Chile or Argentina. Many were not even *Ladino* but Indian and "other" in both physical and cultural terms. Indians, seen by the army as exemplars of chaos, provide the disorderly "other" against which even the Indian civil patrol *jefes* began to define themselves as civilized, rational, orderly and *Ladino* which helped them to join in the genocidal campaign against their own people (see chapter 5).

The population in the *altiplano* is overwhelmingly indigenous, accounting for 93.5% of the inhabitants of the *municipios* of southern El Quiché; the remaining 6.5% are *Ladinos* (*moos*). These numbers reflect the local inhabitants and not temporary residents such as the army. In terms of numbers, the Quiché are the largest of Guatemala's twenty-two Indian sub-

groups. Present day Quichés are a mixture of various assimilated indigenous ethnic groups.¹⁷ While they are all said to speak Quiché, they include groups from different *municipios* who may speak a different, albeit similar, language such as Tzutuhil and Uspanteca.¹⁸

RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES

Since *La Violencia*, many places only maintain the remnants of the gerontocratic hierarchy of rotating civil and religious offices. The colonial *cargo* system¹⁹ concentrated authority in the hands of older men - *principales* (elders) and *cofradía* (brotherhoods)²⁰ who climbed the hierarchy to rule the community - has been undermined. With the destruction of *cargos* (*patan*; duties, literally burdens) went the moral basis for these hierarchies, which revolved around the worship of Catholic saints. In the past, villages would visit one another's saint festivals and join in the procession and feast. The repression has virtually quashed this level of inter-community cohesion and cooperation.

Decline can be dated from the mid-1950s. The new emphasis on cash cropping and the resultant seasonal wage labour had a detrimental effect (Smith 1977, Brintnall 1979). In 1954, elections for *municipio* officials were introduced (Smith 1990b:229,n17). However, the introduction of political parties did less to thwart the system than the penetration of Catholic missionaries who began working at about the same time.²¹ Protestant evangelists have worked in the north of El Quiché since the 1920s²² but Quichés did not begin converting to the fundamentalist Central American Mission in substantial numbers until after 1950. According to a Spanish monk who I spoke to in Chichicastenango Protestantism did not make incursions into the south until the 1970s. They started to gain large numbers of converts there, as in other areas of Guatemala, in the second half of the 1970s following the disasters of the earthquake and the deterioration of the political situation. The converts multiplied at a rapid rate in the early 1980s when evangelical leaders, unlike their Catholic counterparts, did not turn against the military regime. By the time of my fieldwork (1988-90) Emol was 60% Protestant,²³ 25% Catholic and 10% *Costumbrista* (Maya traditional religion) and 5% without religion. I am not sure that these proportions are correct; it was not possible to carry out surveys because of the political situation. I therefore classified people according to self definition although it was difficult for me to talk to Protestants.²⁴

Costumbre²⁵

Despite the erosion of its power base, the *cofradías* (saints brotherhoods) continue to this day although much reduced in numbers, power and ritual performance. *La Violencia* had a drastic effect on the saint societies which disappeared in some areas during this time.²⁶ Increased poverty has also discouraged many families from participating in the *cargo* system because of the considerable expenditure demanded for ritual purposes and *fiestas*.

Costumbristas were attacked by the military and local vigilantes because of their perceived alignment with Catholics (in opposition to the growing number of Protestants) and because of the belief that *Costumbrista* shamans (*aj q'ijs/zajorines*) were using their powers to protect the guerrillas. One villager told me that they were also killed merely because the evangelicals "hated them". Despite their presumed religious authority, shaman-diviners lacked any significant collective organization of their own and were therefore easy to single out for attack. Not surprisingly, some shamans converted to protestantism in order to gain the protection afforded by this religion, for which they were sometimes disparaged: people said the shamans were motivated by offers of payment for preaching in the evangelical or charismatic churches. A local explanation for singling out traditionalists was that a local *jefe* had been a *Costumbrista* and had been involved in witchcraft battles with other *brujos* (witches) in the village. In the end, he decided that bullets were more efficacious in settling the battle once and for all (see Chapter 5).

Antagonism between *Costumbristas* and Catholics is much reduced compared to the late 1960s.²⁷ They continue to use the Catholic church on different days²⁸ and mark saints days and other village events with processions on consecutive days. Each disparages the other's celebrations while the Protestants (who also hold their own separate celebrations)²⁹ stay indoors and deride both. Both Catholics and Protestants disparage the small procession of die-hard *mayordomos* (*cofradía*)³⁰ and ridicule *costumbrista* dances (*zarabandas*) and alcohol consumption at these events.

There is some solidarity between the *Costumbristas* and Catholics because the local Catholic priest began to appeal to both. Additionally, members of both groups are more

likely to be aligned in their politics, their refusal of the patrols and in their criticism of the Protestants who were unwilling to participate in village development projects.

Catholics

Conversion to catholicism became more common after 1954 when European and American Catholic priests came to the highlands as missionaries and directed the task of breaking the *Costumbrista* structure; early catechists (lay teachers of catholicism) were said to have thrown villagers' personal idols and shamans' divining beans (*piloys*; *tz'te'*) into the ravines. Missionaries' experience of social injustice in the highlands led them to assist in organising cooperatives which, together with congregations, committees and political parties, helped to undermine the *principales* (elders) further.³¹ A few of these men, by raising themselves through the civil-religious hierarchy (the *cargo* system) became *principales*, a position often used to gain control of land and Indian labour.

By the mid 1960s, the struggle within Indian communities was between the *Costumbristas* and the commercial sector³² (Arias 1990:51) which was aligned with the Christian Democrat party (which was formed in 1955). The commercial sector, anxious to support groups that might obstruct more radical forms of social change, developed cooperatives and established rapport with *Acción Católica* (Falla 1978:427). This large social catechist movement, propagated mostly through groups of male rural leaders, carried forward the New Testament Christian patterns and values introduced by the Maryknoll missionaries and challenged the established norm of spiritual resignation.³³ This Catholic renewal movement, fused with elements of traditional paganism (Dunkerley 1988:474), became known as liberation theology although it was better known to peasants as the "word of God". Through Catholic Action groups, villagers came together to learn more about catholicism and to discuss community problems (Barry 1989:98).³⁴ With its focus on developmentalism, reform³⁵ and self-help measures, Catholic Action served as the point of departure for the search for a replacement for the ancient, sacred bonds familiar to the *cofradía* (Arias 1990). It also served as a refuge from the moral and economic effects of alcoholism because, like the Protestants in later years, Catholic Action criticized *Costumbristas'* drunkenness.

By the mid-1970s, the community was divided into three groups: the *Costumbristas*; the commercial sector, now clearly delineated as the Indian bourgeoisie (who leaned to the right and far right); and the radicalized Indian campesino (who leaned to the left and sought convergence with poor *Ladinos*)³⁶ who recognized neither of the two previous groups as their natural leaders (op.cit). Nevertheless, resentment and conflict arose in many communities because rural activists - many of whom were linked to the peasants' league (*Liga Campesinas*) and/or one of the revolutionary parties - became community leaders without having met the traditional requirements of the civil-religious hierarchy.

The Catholics, whose aim was to sustain a humanitarian response to rural communities' needs, were the antecedents to popular front organizations such as CUC (Committee of Peasant Unity), and the local village Committees for Improvement (*Comité de Promejoramiento*).³³ CUC, formally established in 1978, was a national, Indian-led, broad-based workers' union that sought no recognition from the state and possessed little leadership structure. It originated in Catholic socratic-style consciousness-raising (*concientización*) efforts and agitated for higher wages.³⁴ However, it was more than a protest organization for it had (and continues to have) a positive programme for economic and social justice. Its agenda only came to include organizing the masses for insurrection after heavy army onslaughts, although locals insist that only a very few members of Catholic Action and perhaps a few more of CUC actually joined the revolution.

Since the late 1970s, Catholic lay agents or catechists (*catequistas*) and the clergy have been accused of being communist and hence subjected to escalating repression. The army, ignoring socioeconomic conditions, particularly the land crisis, as a cause for rebellion, considered that the church's new social teaching and its focus on cooperative formation was causing the highland population to become insurgents.

The development initiatives which the clergy had inspired in many communities and which had been aided by foreign development groups, became restricted. The government and local elites began to assassinate cooperative leaders and directors of "Improvement" Committees. Anyone who solicited aid from either governmental or non-governmental agencies was viewed with suspicion. Handy reports the death of 168 co-op leaders between 1976 and 1978 in El Quiché (1984:244). The military perceived that the guerillas were

"fighting them with cooperatives" (Arias 1990). In November 1975 a request was sent to the army commander of the Santa Cruz del Quiché zone "to come and finish off the village's guerrillas" because they were "pure Cubans" who were "fighting against us with cooperatives and other idiocies" (Gurriaran n.d., cited in Arias, *ibid*). This probably refers to the popular organizations in which many catechists (also known as progressives or *progresistas*) had become involved via liberation theology.³⁵

These conditions led to an increased militancy among the popular organizations which had subsumed the church's peasant leagues. Hundreds of Indians began to organize in the struggle for their economic rights and to protest against the repression. Their religious conversion was a precursor to their political "conversion," that is, joining the revolutionary process (see Brintnall 1979, Falla 1978, Le Bot 1983). According to the Guatemalan Church in Exile,³⁶ as these men became disillusioned with the results of development schemes, they directed their message "not to solve economic problems through a new technology or financial organization [but] to free the mind from traditional constraints, the most profound being respect for authorities". Wilson (1990) similarly suggests that "there is a correlation not between development and insurrection but between violent repression of development and support for an insurgency". I suggest that both conditions are necessary as without the preexisting hope of a better future which development initiatives inspired, frustration through repression would not be so likely to arise. Storr (1989) also argues that revolt will erupt not when conditions are at their worst but when some hopes of improvement have been aroused and frustrated.

After several priests were killed because of their development of a "counterideology" and construction of grassroots popular organization (Frank and Wheaton 1984:44-45), Bishop Gerardi of El Quiché closed the diocese in the summer of 1980 and was forced into exile.³⁷ The lack of priests made it difficult for Catholic followers to continue to hold any programme together. The modern (orthodox) Catholic faction has gravitated towards the Christian Democrat party, continuing the intertwining of political and religious lines in rural areas: cooperatives, water projects and agricultural programmes tended to favour the progressive catechists.

The military perceived Emolians as Catholic and hence guerrilla sympathizers (army action actually drove villagers to become militant: as one villager told me, "the killing made people organize even more"). One hamlet was particularly singled out and virtually all Catholics (60 percent of the population) were killed, abducted, went into hiding or converted becoming fundamentalist Protestants. Catholicism never reappeared in the same form but "came back" in 1981 as the Charismatic Church, *La Renovación* or *Renovación Católico*,³⁸ a controversial new wing of the Catholic Church which appears to share more with Protestant evangelism than catholicism. They invoke the Holy Spirit in a manner reminiscent of pentecostal meetings, addressing one another with the evangelical greeting of "brother" or "sister".

Some Emolians claimed to belong to Catholic Action whilst also being in *La Renovación*; they revere the words of the Catholic priests and nuns and attend evangelically inclined Charismatic services where they were imbued with the Holy Spirit (charismatic renewal). They do not necessarily reject the political activism of liberation theology, which is a general characteristic of *La Renovación*.³⁹ Although they tended to reject the idolatry of the saint societies, some worshipped them and the gods of their ancestors behind closed doors.

Some Catholics differentiate themselves by asserting that they are "pure" (orthodox) Catholics, rather than Catholic Action (*Acción Católica*),⁴⁰ hoping that this label would be associated with greater political neutrality. "Pure" Catholics suspected that people involved in left-wing movements may have been responsible for the "disappearance" of their kin who had refused "to go over to their side". Catholics in general continue to feel that they have to tread with extreme care.⁴¹

Protestantism (*Evangélico*)

Throughout the Indian highlands, the most important incentive to convert from *costumbre* or catholicism has been the army's ongoing counter-insurgency campaign. Conversion to evangelism (called *evangélico*, meaning any non-Catholic form of Christianity [Stoll 1990:4]) added to the decline of the traditional Maya civil religious hierarchy.

The Protestants' most notable success has been in stabilising converts' households by overcoming male addiction to alcohol, controlling male sexual license and giving church authorities some sort of jurisdiction over the complaints of aggrieved women. The head of the Evangelical Alliance later asserted that the Catholic Church was keeping alive "idolatry, fetishism, alcoholism, and machoism - all that it defends is 'tradition'" (Larmer 1989:72).

A wave of people converted to protestantism as a result of disaster evangelism.⁴² Thousands of lives were lost when the 1976 earthquake ruined the adobe houses of Indian towns. Evangelicals handed out food and corrugated iron roofs. Many people in Emol (particularly in some hamlets) converted to protestantism though this was not so much due to the earthquake (the village was not badly hit) but because the area had incurred heavy military onslaught on the grounds that it was Catholic (see chapter 4).

In the 1980s, under the born-again Christian president General Ríos Montt, most protestant soul winners were vowing not only to "win Guatemala to Christ" but also to save it from revolution (Stoll 1990). Many survivors from the repression were pushed into this politically conformist fundamentalism and in parts of the western highlands evangelical churches became the dominant religion (Stoll 1988). Quiché people's testimonies suggest that it was the dictates of survival, not born-again religion⁴³ or missionaries' efforts, which motivated them to convert and thereby align themselves with the army. Villagers' pragmatic attitudes are reflected in their criticism of others for converting from reasons of *interés* (self-interest) or *ayudas* (handouts) rather than *convicción* (conviction). A few women told me that they had converted during *La Violencia*, having been promised that their husbands would be returned to them. Families and sometimes whole communities began attending evangelical services to protect themselves against the accusation of being sympathetic to the "radical" elements of the Catholic Church (Barry 1989:103).

Emolians occasionally admitted their conversion was a way of escaping confrontation with either side by virtue of the language of neutralism used by evangelicals⁴⁴ and charismatics. In practice, however, surrendering themselves to divine power made them allies of the army.⁴⁵ It was also more appealing to attend evangelical churches because, unlike Catholic ones, they had not been converted into army barracks and torture chambers.

The evangelical churches flourished⁴⁶ amidst the survivors of crushed radical movements. They succeeded in attracting many people from the popular movement which had its origins in Catholic Action. Such converts were especially mistrusted by Catholics and *Costumbristas* who suspected them of betraying their dead and "disappeared" kin. They were said to have "changed their minds" (*cambiaron sus cabezas*) by aligning themselves with the Protestants and therefore the army in order to survive. They were viewed as opportunists who would do anything for a small payment and were described as having "two hearts" (quieb u c'u'x). Protestants, in turn, feared that Catholics and *Costumbristas* would take revenge. For many people, protestantism represented safety and only the most courageous held steadfast to their religion and the ideals of the popular movement. Thus far, it seems that people have only really been able to see protestantism as form rather than content.⁴⁷

With the calming of *La Violencia*, the rate of conversion has fallen. However, some women who abandoned religious rituals a decade ago when they lost their menfolk,⁴⁸ have recently become receptive to evangelical proselytizers;⁴⁹ they are converting with the realization that their "disappeared" husbands are unlikely to return and perform *costumbre*, which meant they felt they had been left with nothing.

During my fieldwork, I observed the proliferation of evangelical churches. This reflects the endless searching which ensues when people seek answers to tremendous adversity, both chronic (hunger and alcoholism) and acute (*La Violencia*) over which they have little control. It also reflects increases in both village factionalism and villagers' inability to resolve differences. One solution was to divide themselves into different protestant sects (a local foreign catechist told me that some protestant churches in the nearby town comprised only one family). This has, in turn, created more dissention among people who suspect others' motives for conversion.

Thus, rather than being another instance of popular struggle, religious movements in the form of protestant sects became the denial of that struggle and a conspiracy devised to stymie it (Stoll 1990). Protestant conversion, during and after *La Violencia*, is a form of escapism⁵⁰. The attraction of pentecostalism was not only the church's ability to address people in terms of magical power (*ibid.*), the Protestant message was also more congruous with the usual Indian stance - fatalistic acceptance of the constraints on survival - than

liberation theology's one of ambitions for a better life. Through conversion comes the idea that one's life is not rooted in the past; there is also the millenarian idea that salvation is at hand. Indeed, conversion is not only a means of finding safety⁵¹ but also a means of dealing with disaster.

Sin religión

A few villagers told me that they lived *sin religión* (without religion), having converted to protestantism and then abandoned the religion without reverting to their former practices once the pressure lessened. Some people who converted in search of answers, abandoned the religion, despairing of support in any faith (see chapter 8). Even people who had never vacillated in their religious alignments lost faith in the clergy and traditional practitioners.

Religious identification

Today, as a result of rapid conversion, first to catholicism and then to protestantism, all three religions co-exist in Emol, even in the same family: for example, *doña* Candelaria was a Catholic; her brother, the president of the village improvement committee, a Protestant.⁵² Some families are even more divided: Santa, her sister and her mother were Catholic; her brother was an ex-Catholic who had reverted to *Costumbre*; her father was an unreformed *Costumbrista* and her half brother was a Protestant. These religious identifications spilled over into political loyalties and different support and information networks,⁵³ further atomizing family and village life.

Any one person can be involved in more than one religion. People who, for example, converted to protestantism as a survival strategy might attend services when the pressure was on but subsequently stop; they might remain nominally Protestant and attend services now and again. Many who turn (or return) to alcohol (which may not be all that uncommon)⁵⁴ give up attending services to avoid embarrassing condemnation of their drunkenness. Some Protestants clandestinely consult a shaman-diviner as well as, or instead of, attending evangelical cults. Many Catholics will also engage in *Costumbrista* practices. Like the Protestants, they will do so surreptitiously for fear of the disapproval of more avid converts.

Whilst some people consciously identify with one of the newer religions and follow its particular beliefs and practices, it should be noted that in the same way that catholicism is syncretized with traditionalism, protestantism is syncretized with both catholicism and traditionalism. It is clear that one cannot make a clear distinction between the religions as they are mixed up to different degrees. It is therefore hardly surprising that not only do some people's statements reflect a lack of firm identification with one religion (there are others who express religious anomie) but both Catholics and Protestants tend to revert to former religious practices at times of crisis.

The situation in Emol makes me believe that Carol Smith's statement is overly optimistic:

Community relations remain strong, often corporate [unchanging], not because of the dead weight of the past, but because of the continuing importance of community relations to an oppressed people ruled by the extremely repressive state. (1990b:20)

My experience in Emol and places like it indicates that repression split the corporate community⁵⁵ (see chapter 4). Villagers themselves claimed that the violence had caused an increase in *envidia* among villagers, defined (among other things) as a decrease in solidarity or community. Perhaps Smith bases her conclusion on material drawn from communities which were less torn internally than Emol. In Emol people were forced or chose to align themselves with a repressive regime which oppressed its own people (see chapter 5).

Notwithstanding the mistrust and discord which prevented Emolians from interacting with many of their fellow villagers, they gained certain material benefits from group activity, including those coordinated by the local Development Committees (*Comité de Promejoramiento*) since the late 1960s. The benefits of such joint activity helps to explain why some villagers are still willing to submit to the social constraints of the community and the state.

THE SOCIAL MARGINALIZATION OF THE QUICHE

Quiché-Maya Indians have been marginalized physically and socially from participation in the world of the nation state. They are, nevertheless, very much affected by its decisions about them and the effects of these decisions have been rather extreme. Quiché-Maya labour provides the bedrock of the national economy from which they themselves have been, for the most part, excluded. *La Violencia* affected Indians incorporation into the national economy (see Smith 1990a). In some areas of the western highlands, the violence caused *Ladinos* to retreat (see Stoll 1992); in the south, *Ladino patrónes* who had been displaced by Catholic cooperatives returned following the destruction of those cooperatives and the installation of the civil patrols.

Poverty and health

In 1980, 79% of the population was living in poverty; the proportion increased to 87% by the end of the decade (Barry 1989:60). Between 1970 and 1984, the percentage of the national income captured by the top 20% of the population increased from 45.5% to 56.8% (ibid). Indians have poor housing, minimal education and health care.

Among children there is considerable malnourishment⁵⁶ and a high death rate.⁵⁷ Rates of infant mortality are 160 per 1,000⁵⁸ and life expectancy is 47.5 years.⁵⁹ Many villagers have never visited a health clinic and are suspicious of their benefits. Estimates of the patient:doctor ratio for the highlands are 1:85,000. There are no doctors in the villages and most Indians cannot afford to be treated by the few doctors practising in the towns.⁶⁰

Although several villages have a potable water system, none of the houses has running water or drinking water. People rely on a few taps scattered around the village. A minority of villages have electricity which extends no further than the central buildings.

Education

Construction of village schools began in the 1950s but even today education is a privilege for Indians who have a literacy rate of 50% (Barry 1989:85). Gender and age affect

illiteracy rates. Very few people over the age of 50 speak Spanish and even fewer read and write it. However among all ages Spanish language and literacy rates are higher among males; most young men are bilingual but not necessarily literate in either language. Over 60% of women are monolingual and only 15 percent are literate (CITGUA studies 1987-1989). Among children from the age of seven to fourteen, 40% do not go to school; only 10% finish sixth grade (Barry op.cit). The national government does not encourage ethnic distinctiveness and schools have not fostered bilingualism but *castellanización* (Spanish teaching programme) to prepare Indian children for standard primary school.⁶¹ Rather, the state has been interested in transforming Indians into a homogeneous rural working class in a process called "social integration" which has separated them from their language and culture (see Handy 1984:260).

In villages such as Emol, schools were founded by local members of Catholic Action, who also carried out literacy and consciousness-raising programmes with older people. They recognized that learning Spanish was important in order to find employment and to gain political power. One widow (*viuda/malca'n*) used to threaten her grandson that if he did not go to school, he would not be able to find a job and he would be taken into the army which killed his father. However, many understand that the problem with Spanish, and school education in general, is that it is associated with *Ladino* culture. Thus, many Indians are hesitant to send their children to school. Parents who are sceptical about the wisdom of a *Ladino* education, mainly taught by *Ladino* teachers, resist the process of "social integration" by keeping their children out of school. They do not want their children to take on *Ladino* values because they do not want them to leave the village permanently or part with or disparage their own culture. Becoming educated also means a loss of interest in tending the land, and is associated with becoming lazy (*huevon*) and disrespectful. Moreover, children provide an important part of the labour force in any Indian household. At least one child in the family will migrate with his father to the coastal plantations. Thus it is often the case that even when a child is registered for school, s/he would be absent for many months. Many mothers had become ambivalent about the schooling of their children; it was clear to them that being educated was useful in procuring a regular job but they also realized that most educated rural Indians had been killed during *La Violencia*.

The rural economy

The conditions of Indian peasant life stem from the country's archaic land tenure system and excessive dependence on export-led agricultural development. Paralleling the agro-export economy is a system of peasant agriculture, characterized by small plots of land devoted to subsistence agriculture. As in other areas of the country, El Quiché's economic landscape is characterized by grossly unequal land distribution: fewer than 2% of landowners own 65% of the farm land (Barry 1989:68). One of the results of this unequal distribution is that 80% of rural Guatemalans live in desperate poverty, unable to satisfy their subsistence needs.⁶² USAID concluded that in 1979, 87% of farms were too small to meet a family's needs (ibid:6).

Chemical fertilizers were introduced by the missionaries in the 1960s. Despite an initial tripling of yields, repeated application has led to a decline in fertility because, as one villager told me, chemical fertilizers "made the land tired". In the period between the two extremes, corn changed from being a product for home consumption to a commodity to be sold in the market place; some Indians even reduced the size of their *milpa* (corn fields) to allow space for more commercial crops such as apples. In Emol, however, only 2% of families could grow commercial crops and even these were minimal.

Emol is a relatively poor village (although some hamlets are better off than others) and, despite the introduction of fertilizer, all the land is needed to plant corn for the family's subsistence needs.⁶³ Even then, few families can rely on subsistence crops (beans and maize) for more than six to nine months of the year. Some 20% of Emol families are landless, twice the average for southern El Quiché. On the other hand, some widows had sufficient land but could not find anyone to plant it for them. The implications of being landless or unable to produce corn goes beyond the economic aspect for most Indians. As Smith notes "without a territorial claim in a community of one's ancestors and the means to secure part of one's food supply, a Guatemalan Indian has great difficulty in retaining his her identity as an Indian" (1990b:20).

Only a few villagers were engaged in income-generating, specialist labour. There was some exploitation of the forest by woodcutters who would sell to house builders and coffin

makers. Local evangelical pastors expected remuneration for their services (and were criticized for this); traditional specialists - healers (*curanderas*) and Mayan priests/diviners (*aj q'ijs*),⁶⁴ a few of whom were women - were paid by clients. Midwives (*comadrones/aj cunib*) also expected remuneration. Some women were engaged in petty commodity production, endlessly plaiting *trensas* (braids of cane fronds), for which they were paid pennies.

Wage labour

Because of the land problem, many highland Indian families migrate to the south coast to work on the large plantations (*latifundia*). These fertile coastal plains are only used for agro-export crops such as sugar cane, cotton, coffee and bananas; production expanded in the 1960s and 1970s, augmenting the demand for seasonal migrant workers from the Indian highlands. Agricultural products account for over 50% of total export earnings; cultivation employs 53% of the labour force.⁶⁵ At crucial times in the harvest cycle, Guatemala's export economy is dependent on Indian labour - a classic example of the *latifundia/minifundia* model.

In recent years more villages have become dependent on wage labour not only because of declining land fertility but also because of the inheritance system which divides land among offspring. The situation has been exacerbated by further expropriations of Indian land during the 1970s resulting from a combination of advances in agro-technology (which increased its financial viability to agri-business) and contradictions in the government's "minimalist land colonization policy" (Jonas 1991). The Quiché used to be dependent on external sources of income to buy supplemental corn; now they need to raise cash to buy both corn and fertilizer.

Some women told me that villagers were better off since the introduction of fertilizer: as children, they had gone to the coast with their parents because every pair of hands was needed to earn money; now, only the head of the household, accompanied by one child, would go and for fewer months than before. Improved roads and transport facilitated travel between the town and plantation (where most men continued to work), so migrants could intersperse stints on the coast with visits home rather than enduring prolonged absences. Yet

despite the widows' perceptions, family incomes have not increased⁶⁶ in real terms for many years: inflation increased by 100% during my fieldwork.

Women have never had many options for wage labour. Some "natural" widows hired themselves out as agricultural day labourers, for which they were paid less than men; many took their children to the coast, continuing the patterns of their childhood.

Other sources of income

The construction of new highways, part of the unprecedented commercial growth of the late 1960s (which also brought mass communications media to many communities for the first time), also facilitated migration to the provincial and (more commonly) the national capitals, where people hoped to find work in petty commodity trade. Other people migrate to the border with Mexico and El Salvador in search of non-agricultural work.

Work in the city was attractive to the radicalized who sought to remain as anonymous as possible. Involvement in catechism, popular movement and the guerrilla facilitated the switch from farm work to city labour through the formation of an identity which is less strongly attached to the land - the left's millenarian dream may be the acquisition of more land, but this is conceptualized in terms which have little to do with Maya reverence for, or attachment to, the land.⁶⁷ As a result of becoming alienated from the local subsistence economy,⁶⁸ there is a growing tendency for men (particularly those with most initiative) to seek work in the capital city, though this is more common in some hamlets than others (when I asked why, I was told *es costumbre*, it is the custom). These young men began to stay for longer periods, setting up stalls and selling cheap modern knick-knacks (*fantasia*); they told me that working in the city was easier than heavy labour on the plantations and it was especially attractive to younger men who "did not want to get their hands dirty". Given that women rarely accompany their husbands to the city, the men enjoyed their freedom and some even took a mistress.

Work in the city was not seasonal and the usual pattern was to return to the village one week in every four. Two men who owned the village shop might return more often to make sure that their wives had kept everything in order.⁶⁹ Some, however, preferred

to keep to the same pattern as coastal work where they would work for a few months without returning home; others returned home only to work the land or for special occasions such as a life cycle ritual or a fiesta. Those who travelled home less frequently would send some money home with a friend or a child (I was never able to ascertain how much a man earned in the city, for a wife rarely knew her husband's total income). If they can afford to do so, men without reciprocal relationships vis-a-vis working of the land hire a *mozo* (labourer) or *jornalero* (seasonal labourer)⁷⁰ to care for their fields so that they can return to their work. However, every man came home to plant.

Older men objected to city life. They only go to the city to sell locally made wares, returning immediately to the village. They considered that one became exposed to many bad influences there and that young city workers were morally degenerate and dedicated to a life of stealing. It is certainly true that these young men were more exposed to *Ladino* values and violence and thus ladinization was most likely to occur among them.

CONCLUSION

Prior to *La Violencia*, the Quiché had experienced over two decades of spectacular changes: new authority structures (some imposed by outside institutions), new economics and new religions. Re-establishing and re-asserting reality after the eruption of chaos that was *La Violencia* is thus made even more difficult. The distortion of affective bonds and the destruction of communities through terror and deprivation (see Chapters 4 & 5) seriously undermined epistemological systems that would normally provide the raw material for repairing depleted frameworks of knowledge and meaning. Because of the changes which preceded *La Violencia*, people did not have anything approaching a stable cultural bedrock to return to. The basic social institutions that ground everyday life, the structures that substantiate knowledge, had already been badly shaken.

1. Guatemala is divided into twenty-two provinces or departments, each with an administrative centre (in El Quiché this is Santa Cruz) through which state-appointed bureaucrats, invariably *Ladinos*, direct local politics.
2. See Figueroa Ibarra (1980) for an excellent study of labour in the *latifundia/minifundia* system in Guatemala.

3. There are two seasons; the wet season which runs from May to October called *invierno* (winter,) and the dry season which runs between November and April called *verano* (summer).
4. This is the population for 1990 taken from *Estimación de Población Urbana y Rural por Departamento y Municipio 1990-95*; also in *Instituto Nacional de Estadística*. Government of Guatemala, February 1991.
5. Sol Tax (1937) was the first to contend that the *municipio* was the appropriate unit for studying Indian communities rather than language areas. This has been accepted by many anthropologists (e.g. Brintnall 1979; Falla 1978; Nash 1967; Reina 1957; Wagley 1941). Watanabe (1984) notes that both Indians and *Latinos* identify themselves according to their natal *municipio* (township). Political representatives of these units are members of the local community. There are 325 *municipios* in the whole of Guatemala; 150 are Indian and situated in the western highlands (Smith 1986). See Smith 1990b for reference to more recent work which suggests that the small and nucleated *municipio* studied by many anthropologists do not necessarily represent the communities of most Indians.
6. *Parcialidad*, corresponding to the *municipio* (Smith 1990b:28, n10) was the name the Spaniards gave to distinct social groups; they exhibit individually the characteristics Wolf (1967) considers typical of closed corporate bonding (Smith 1990b). These units, which have preHispanic roots (Lovell and Sweezy 1990), were aggregated by the Spaniards shortly after the ravages of the conquest for purposes of controlling the native population.
7. Richard Wilson (personal communication) found that *Latinos* and not Indians of Coban in Alta Verapaz referred to Indians in this way. This illustrates that ethnicity is not a single system but plural in both the representations and ways of referring to the "other". There is probably considerable diversity between Quiché and an area like Coban which has a much higher proportion of *Latinos* and is ecologically and geographically quite distinct from the northwest highlands.
8. Recent studies suggest that Indian ethnicity is both dynamic and complex, involving more than simply the persistence of specific cultural traits or socioeconomic conditions (Brintnall 1979, Hawkins 1984, Smith 1977).
9. When mentioning the women of Emol in this thesis, I am usually referring more specifically either to one of its wards or to the central part of the village. There are around 230 houses across both of these sites. Their characteristics are quite different in various respects: for example, the central area is more conservative, has a higher conversion rate (to evangelism) and a larger proportion of its inhabitants align themselves with the army.

10. See, for example, Barry 1989, Smith 1986.
11. The term *Ladino*, meaning "sagacious, clever, cunning" in Central American Spanish, appears to have been first used in the sixteenth century as an adjective applied to acculturated Indians or at least to those who spoke Spanish (cf. Tax 1941:21, Sherman 1979:187). By the early twentieth century, the term had disappeared in the rest of Central America (to be replaced by *mestizo*) but in Guatemala *Ladino* came to mean "oppressor in the western highlands, and homeless (and therefore permanent) worker in the cities and lowlands. With the coffee economy, the class positions of Indians and *Latinos* began to diverge" (Smith 1990b:86).
12. This is deduced from the fact that only a small number of Europeans migrated to Guatemala (see Morner, cited in Smith 1990b:3).
13. See Colby and van den Berghe who discuss Indians who adopt *Ladino* traits, "pass" as *Ladino* and abandon indigenous identity (1969:90-3). Brintnall (1979) discusses the processes of becoming more and more *Ladino*, distinguishing the different processes by which this occurs.
14. Smith writes that in the mid twentieth century, in the western highlands where most Indians maintain their permanent residence, *Latinos* did not share the class position of Indians, having become agents of labour and the oppressive state rather than labourers themselves (1990b:89). Under these circumstances, Indians came to identify *Latinos* with both state and class oppression (ibid.). *Latinos* were the first to move from the towns during *La Violencia*, which has benefitted Indians in some areas such as Totonicapan and the Ixil triangle where they have become both economically and politically more powerful.
15. The internal divisions have perhaps become more pronounced since the coffee economy reorganized the regional and class patterning of ethnicity in Guatemala because the interests that Indians and many *Latinos* still might have held in common became disguised (Smith 1990b:89). Coffee export economies were built in the four other Central American countries (which also held Indians, *castas*, and white Creole elites in the colonial period). Yet none of these emerged from the experience with a marked social division between Indians and *Latinos*. According to Smith, the marked social divisions between Indians and *Latinos* in Guatemala can thus only be explained by Guatemala's distinct economic and political history (ibid:91).
16. The army recruits 7,000 to 8,000 (mostly rural) young men between the ages of 18 and 24 each year, often forcibly; it incorporates up to 20% of the rural male population in this age group in two year hitches (Smith 1990a). There are also many more Indian men remaining in their villages who are army reserves (*reservistas*) who train every Sunday.

17. See Sapper (1985) on the mixing of different ethnic groups during the Spanish Invasion.
18. Guatemalan Indians speak some twenty different Mayan languages, and each community tends to have a different dialect.
19. See Bunzel (1952), Reina (1966) and Wagley (1941) on the traditional *cargo* system.
20. Farriss (1984) writes that there is a strong resemblance to *caj a de comunidad* (community treasure) in other regions of Mesoamerica but that this is originally a Spanish institution which the Mayas turned to their own ends. The *cofradía* (also called *mayordomos*) perform a mixture of civil and religious functions designed to promote the common good and ensure the survival of the community qua community (ibid:265).
21. See Warren (1978), Brintnall (1979), Falla (1978) Cabarrús (1979) and Wilson (1990) on the clash between the traditional civil-religious order and the catechists.
22. This was in Nebaj during the coffee boom where a pentecostal missionary and founder of the country's Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee Mission) enjoyed success with upper-class *Latinos*, not Ixils (Stoll 1992:155).
23. Recent estimates show that the number of evangelicals in Guatemala is supposed to have increased nearly sevenfold from 1960 to 1985 (to 1,597,000 out of a total population of 8,403,000 [Stoll 1990:Appendix 2]).
24. I had to be seen as *de confianza* (trustworthy) by the people with whom I worked; this meant being seen to be on their (political or religious) "side", thus making it impossible for me to work with Protestants (who were anyway less able to talk about *La Violencia*).
25. The word *costumbre* is applied to rituals and other behaviours associated with the local community rather than the church or the nation; there is an implication that no special justification is required for behaviours which are part of local tradition. Hence *es costumbre* (it is the custom) - the usual answer given to the enquiring anthropologist. Mesoamerican Anthropologists often encounter this seeming lack of cultural exegesis, epitomized by the constant *claim es costumbre* (it is the custom) in response to questions which aspired to access the meaning of events (Vogt 1976:1, Hunt 1977:28, 248-9). Rather than simply evidencing ignorance, disinterest, or obfuscation, however, such responses reflect the tacit manner in which Quichés learn their culture. Explications of this unfortunately goes beyond this thesis.

26. In Emol, the system collapsed completely during *La Violencia* and has only recently resumed with only a few participants - not even enough for positions to change hands.
27. Prewar studies of the western highlands show that the Catholic Church was rife with tension between priests, Catholic Action and *Costumbristas* (Brintnall 1979, Falla 1978, Warren 1978).
28. Colby and van den Berghe report that priests administering in Quiché gave two separate masses, one for the *cofrades* and one for the catechists (1977:146). I was told this only occurred in some of the more divided communities.
29. Wilson (1990) reports the same among the Q'eqchi' of Alta Verapaz; one level of inter-community cohesion and co-operation has gone because the inter-community worshipping of saints (*ibid*) has ceased. In Emol, however, villagers from other communities still visit on the annual festival of the patron saint. Protestants join in each other's services and the patrols across communities are led to celebrate occasions such as the anniversary of the formation of the patrols while the non-patrollers joined together in solidarity. In Emol, intra-communal cohesion was more effected by the splitting of the village into different groups.
30. In Emol the *cofradía* had virtually disappeared during *La Violencia* and had come back in a much diminished form. Since then, the same *mayordomos* house the saints and perform the duties as if in an exclusive club. One *mayordomo* houses two saints because a replacement could not be found when an elder *mayordomo* died. This contrasts with other areas, for example San Pedro Jocopilas in southern Quiché where, the *cofradía*'s position is more stable than the catechists' because of their ability to "mediate a situation of subordination" (Rojas Lima 1988:214).
31. Falla (1978) writes about the conflicts between Catholic Action and traditionalists in the Quiché town of San Antonio Ilotenango. See Brintnall (1979) and Warren (1978), who report similar conflicts in Aguacatán and San Andrés Semetabaj respectively. The threat that the catechists posed for the traditionalists is understood when considering Carmack's (1979:384) comment that "becoming a better Catholic meant a complete or partial abandonment of the whole world view, which also included the traditional agricultural methods".
32. They managed to accumulate capital by buying and selling outside the markets monopolized by the *principales* in their own communities. They challenged the *Costumbrista* control of religious rites and codes, thus situating themselves at the front of the movement against their communities' traditional beliefs.

33. Dunkerley notes that "there is some historical irony in the fact that the indigenous population of the area had been converted to catholicism largely at the hands of Spanish priests, no longer the companion of the *conquistadores* but proponents of popular liturgy" (1988:474).

34. Arias (1990) writes that members of *Liga Campesina*, an organization developed by *Acción Católica* and their students (catechists) in 1965, were labelled "communists". The literacy work of Christian communities formed during this time became transformed into organizational work with certain political perspectives after two events: firstly, the Central American Common Market was overwhelmed by a monetary crisis as a result of the oil embargo and the appearance of inflation in Guatemala in 1973; secondly, the earthquake in 1976. Catholic priests and foreign workers witnessed the army reselling international aid for profit while Indians starved or froze to death because they could not afford their prices. Arias writes that "the young leaders talked in general about the need to 'organize'. But practically speaking, none of the 'organizers' had any meaningful experience that would allow them to decide what type of organization they sought or needed" (ibid:244). Already in the early to mid seventies, organizing required a high degree of secrecy, because repression had already begun in El Quiché; an open public organization would have been immediately destroyed. Those organizing maintained secrecy for as long as possible until the organization became the Committee for Campesino Unity (CUC) in 1977.

35. The role of the Catholic Church in insurgency and counter insurgency campaigns is complicated. For example, simultaneously with its support of the 1966-1968 counterinsurgency (which followed its support of the 1954 "liberation" from the Revolution [1944-1954]), priests and other community religious leaders were translating Liberation Theology ideas into their daily work base, ultimately fuelling the revolutionary movement in the 1960s.

36. *Ladinos* themselves are differentiated into distinct classes within Guatemala, some staffing the bureaucracy of the expanded state, others owning various firms as well as employing Indians or other *Ladinos*, while yet others are workers or rural smallholders.

33. This government committee dates from the late 1960s. The central committee organized various smaller local committees to coordinate projects, e.g. potable water. Funds were solicited for these, sometimes with the help of the town mayor, from various potential donors.

34. Conscious-raising is a mechanism for organizing people to change oppressive conditions. Given their mostly *Ladino* leadership, the popular organizations and guerrilla groups are more concerned with class than ethnicity. However, both Indians and poor *Ladinos* were included in the organization. Groups concerned with ethnic issues, such as Maya-Nationalists, appeared in the 1980s but are not connected to the

popular movement (unlike human rights groups such as CERJ, which have become more aware of ethnic issues).

35. Warren recounts that the ideology of the catechists "proposes ladinization as a means to achieving social and economic equivalence of Indians and *Ladinos*" (1978:94). Falla concludes the same for the programme in Quiché, but here there was a greater effect on ethnicity (1978:545). Catechist services only took place in "Castilian" (Spanish), and the entire ideology of "development" was more extensive and well funded. However, Colby and van den Berghe suggest that the catechist programme did not make *Ladinos* of the catechists, rather it created an intermediate position "between the rest of the indigenous people and the *Ladinos*" (1977:115).
36. This is a revolutionary support group which serves refugees and publicizes atrocities. It was set up by several Sacred Heart priests after they were forced out of El Quiché.
37. The diocese reopened at the end of 1984 although the Sacred Heart Priests did not return. The Guatemalan Bishop recruited a pastoral team consisting of various European and Latin American priests as well as Maryknoll nuns and Sisters of Charity.
38. Stoll reports that in Chaj ul the Charismatics he came across stressed their separation from Catholics; they claimed to be abstinent, compared to Catholics' indulgence in "impure acts" (1992:244). The situation in Emol is different: Catholics converted wholesale to Charismatic religion. This hamlet was bombarded on account of being Catholic and all Catholics fled. One man described how he and two men were the first to arrive back in the village; there were no Catholic priests and the church had been taken over and used by the army as a torture chamber. They began to say rosaries in their houses in secret; then an evangelist came and "entered" them in the Charismatic Church which grew steadily as more people returned; it was the place where they could pray openly. When the Catholic church began to function again, some Charismatics welcomed the nuns and priests while continuing in *La Renovación*. Perhaps there was more variation in areas where people could choose between the different churches present in the village.

Many traditionalists, who had until that time comprised 40% of the population, also converted. One villager told me that 90% of Emol's inhabitants converted to protestantism; however, like many others, he included Charismatics in his estimates of evangelical converts. The Charismatic Church arrived in the area of El Quiché surrounding Emol in 1976 but the Catholic priest there was said to "keep it at bay".

39. Stoll (1992) writes that some claimed charismatics used their spiritual renewal to define themselves against the guerrillas. He writes that in Cotzal of the Ixil triangle the army allowed charismatics to go door-to-door with their message of repentance at a time when everyone was afraid to go out for fear of getting killed. The leader of the Charismatic church, a former catechist, was chosen by the army to lead the organization of the civil patrols (ibid:96). However the ambiguous or confused identity

of charismatic converts was apparent when members of the charismatic churches who profess no interest in things of this world suddenly joined the peasant league (see chapter 4 for details on this organization).

40. Organizations such as the church professed to be apolitical. But while in the town Protestant sects competed with one another and with the Catholics for "souls", these religious lines tended to overlap with competing political parties. In the countryside the Catholics had launched Catholic Action, which split the Indian peasants into traditional and modern (catechist) factions. A real rupture of the existing power arrangements appeared in rural centres when community members of Catholic Action founded schools to develop a new young leadership core. Study groups addressed topics such as peasant rights; the country's constitution was also studied in order to contrast what was written with reality (Arias 1990:241).
41. This preoccupation is justified when considering, for example, events between 1990-91 when Myrna Mack Chang (see introduction) and Julio Quevedo Quezada, lay consultants to the diocese of Quiché, were murdered. The bishop's concern for the communities of Popular Resistance was thought to be behind the killings. Julio Quevedo Quezada, an agronomist working for the Catholic agency Caritas, was shot dead in Santa Cruz del Quiché on July 15, 1991.
42. In the largest urban centre in the western highlands, conversion to protestantism began before *La Violencia*. According to Evans, pentacostalism assisted Mayans moving into new patterns of assimilation into the national and world economy (1990:102).
43. Stoll (1990) writes that while every Sunday on television Ríos Montt preached to his country on the importance of morality and good citizenship, his army was putting down a communist insurgency by slaughtering thousands of Mayan Indians. One aspect of his evangelical adviser's role was to deny that the Guatemalan army was committing massacres in its anti-guerrilla drives. At the same time it was serving as a humanitarian screen for survivors, especially evangelicals, by inducting them into the army's pacification efforts.
44. Stoll writes how he got bored in evangelical cults because of repetitiveness of the ritual language and lack of theological content but he realized that the whole point of pentecostal worship was to say very little at all (1992:150).
45. According to Stoll (1992:159), "catechists and traditionalists could also adopt the language of neutrality, but evangelicals were the most practised in its deployment. In contrast to Catholic Action's language of commitment to the community, conversionist religion offered a convenient rhetoric of escape from confrontation."

46. They do this with generous support from the United States.
47. There may also be other extraneous reasons for conversion. The Protestant pastors in Emol as well as other areas seemed mainly interested in increasing their incomes as has been found among other Mayan converts in Mexico (Aulie 1979).
48. Linda Green (1991) working with Kaqchikel war widows in Chimaltenango, distinguished between "conversion" and "identification" because of widows' simultaneous identification with more than one religious group. I found that while this would apply to some of the widows I worked with, others joined different religious groups for pragmatic reasons without any apparent identification.
49. One woman whose husband used to carry out *costumbre* for the family did not carry on the practice in his place after he was killed in *La Violencia*. She was left without any religious practice for seven years. Evangelicals began to visit the house and to tell her that belief in the spirits "*no sirve*" (is no good). Finally, in November 1988, one of them convinced her to join their evangelical temple. She told me that she did not remember (remember here means something to do with actually carrying out a practice not that she literally forgot) anything of the *costumbre* and that she was happier being an evangelical.
50. Some suggest that pentacostalism was not "escapist" because it was necessary (e.g., Cook 1985). While it is certainly true that conversion saved lives there was still an escapist element to it.
51. Because Guatemala's communities have usually resisted state extraction of their resources, the relationship between Guatemala communities and the Guatemalan state has typically been antagonistic. Because groups such as the church have been more useful in helping the state meet its own organizational goals, its relationship to the state has been more symbiotic than oppositional (Smith 1990b:13).
52. When *doña Candelaria*'s husband and eight year old son were kidnapped, her brother was able to rescue his nephew but not his brother in law. He would help his sister when she asked (see Chapter 6).
53. Thus when Santa's alcoholic father broke his skull (an accident), he would have wanted treatment from a traditional shaman/healer (he was too ill to decide). Santa and her sister, both liberal Catholics, thought shamanistic treatment would be helpful; their *Costumbrista* brother also wanted him to have traditional treatment. Their maternal half-brother, an evangelical Protestant, suggested taking him to the local *Ladino* doctor. Santa's mother, a devout Catholic convert, wanted to take her husband to the priest (although ordinarily he would not set foot in the Catholic church); however, she felt unable to make a decision in the face of conflicting advice from her

sons. Her indecision was exacerbated by her fear of potential gossip concerning how he met his injuries. Surprisingly, Santa's father survived.

54. See Hinshaw's (1975) study on Panajachel.
55. See Eric Wolf (1967) who introduced the concept of the closed corporate community. See Smith (1990b) on how it is possible to talk of communities as being closed with respect to some practices (e.g., marriage) but not in relation to economic or political "ones as long as the political changes did not threaten the unity of Indians vis-a-vis the state" (ibid:20).
56. Health workers in the health centre in Emol told me that 70% of children from birth to 6 years are malnourished. The majority of these come from families which are incomplete because of *La Violencia* or marital discord.
57. Barry (1989) writes that 42,000 children die every year in Guatemala from preventable or curable diseases. This indicates the abysmal health, nutrition and poverty in Guatemala and also reflects the widespread economic violence.
58. This figure is from a USAID study and estimates rates for the highlands in 1984, a figure which predates *La Violencia* (Painter, 1987:4,fn.6).
59. This is contrasted to 64.5 years among *Ladinos* (Barry 1989).
60. James Painter writes that Guatemala has one of the poorest health records in Latin America. "During a July 1986 visit, the head of UNICEF for Central America, Agop Kayayan, stated 'Guatemala has the worst infant mortality rate in Central America. Five children every hour die from diseases such as diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, measles, or polio'" (1987:4,fn.6). A USAID study put infant mortality rates for the highlands at 160 per 1,000 in 1984, a figure which predates *La Violencia* (ibid).
61. This programme began in the 1940s and was expanded in the late 1960s into a new programme which trained bilingual *promotores* (Indians with less training than teachers) to prepare children for school. Stoll (1992) writes that North American Bible translators from the Summer Institute of Linguistics were involved. This is an Evangelical mission with aspiration to teach Mayas to read the New Testament in their own language. The programme was subsidized by USAID (ibid).
62. AID, Land and Labour in Guatemala, An Evaluation. 1982.

63. Between 15 - 20 *cuerdas* of land would be necessary for this (a *cuerda* is measured in *varas*; one *vara* is 33 inches). Stadelman estimates that 1 hectare = 2.471 acres = 22.77 *cuerdas* (Stadelman 1940:130). Only about a dozen families had more than ten *manzanas* (one *manzana* = 16 *cuerdas*) of land.
64. This literally means day worker. Other names used for this are *zajorín* and chuchqajau (meaning mother-father - see Bunzel 1952).
65. Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) Country Profile 1989-90, p16.
66. Wages on *fincas* (large farms) tend to be low because there is not much work and migrants must accept whatever they can get (around Q3.25 a day, which is equivalent to about US\$0.75). Schmid (cited in Handy 1984:207) estimated that wages including "maintenance benefits" averaged \$US1.10 a day. The low wages and inhumane conditions contributed to the massive strike on the *fincas* in the early 1980s.
67. The displacement of *Costumbristas* implies the gradual displacement of agriculture as the Indian population's *modus vivendi*. As this was abraded further by rapid change, there was also an erosion of community and the ability to link self, neighbour, and place.
68. Some scholars suggest that Indians are still attached to land for religious, identity and economic reasons (see e.g., ethnographies of Bunzel 1952, Brintnall 1979). This fits in with my own findings among many of the older generation but less so in younger ones. There are a few young people who have consciously tried to halt the process of the loss of traditional ways of life.
69. When they returned home to tend to the shop, it sometimes operated as a *cantina* (local bar) in the evening. These shops sold minimal food stuffs, beer, fizzy drinks, cigarettes, soap and batteries.
70. Their work included planting, weeding and harvesting maize and beans. A *mozo* was paid from 2-4Q (4 Quetzales = \$1) per day depending on their ability to work hard. Women also procured daily work for which they were usually paid between 1.5-2Q per day. Smith reports that there is no generalized wage level in western Guatemala (1990b:229,fn15). The wages set by the plantations for seasonal labour serve as a general barometer. But each highland community establishes its own wage in relation to the plantation wage (in most cases for agricultural labour), and that "community wage" tends to regulate wage levels in all branches of production in the community (*ibid*).



-Plate 2: Woman weaving

Chapter 3

Gender Relations Among the Quiché Before *La Violencia*

In order to understand women's lives in the present, particularly in relation to changes since *La Violencia*, the following sections examine women's roles in various spheres before this time. I begin by examining a woman's place within religion and secular politics. In order to understand the changes that a war widow endured (see chapter 6), I describe what her life would have been like within the conjugal unit, both in terms of marital relations and the sexual division of labour; in general, it may be said that men and women had clearly prescribed roles and that there was a considerable sense of continuity within the conjugal unit. I discuss what happens in cases of marital breakdown, including residence patterns and remarriage because this has implications for what women did after *La Violencia*. I also examine marriage in terms of its implications for a woman's identity because this, too, is affected by widowhood (*viudez/malca'nil*). It may be stated that in the traditional economy of Quiché, women's gender identity included them as members of a household and an ethnic group. However, women did not gain access to resources or acquire political clout through community spheres: their access to these resources was usually through their husbands.

RELIGION AND SECULAR POLITICS

Community religion and secular politics were male dominated. It has been suggested (see Wilson 1990) that modern religions in Guatemala (such as catholicism and evangelicalism) have undermined women's positions of power within religious spheres because Catholic priests and Protestant pastors are always men. However, it appears that women did not occupy the highest echelons of the hierarchy of *aj q'ijs* either. Women participated in the newly formed Catholic Action as catechists. Protestantism, however, seems to allow no room for female religious teachers.

In Emol, as in other areas of Quiché, there are female aj q'ijs, (shamans/diviners), catechists and *cofradía* but no female *principales*, priests or *pastores* (pastors). Women's position of power in the religious and political spheres has been generally undermined in recent years, owing to the destruction of the *cofradías*. Women played an important part in the saint brotherhood (*cofradía*), each of which have an equal number of male and female *cargo*-holders (*alcalde/mayordormos*). In Emol, unlike some other areas of Guatemala,⁷¹ female *cofradía* stood in their own right; they did not have to be the wives of the *alcaldes/mayordormos*. Both male and female *mayordormos*, however, had to be married.

A few exceptional women became influential in religious and political spheres following involvement in the catechist programme which gave younger men and women the opportunity to become more politically active. A woman's participation may have depended on her ability to speak Spanish (although some, in fact, learnt the language through becoming catechists). The majority of catechists were men but part of their consciousness raising included addressing issues such as gender (in)equality. Some catechists therefore began to allow their wives to travel outside the village and a few of them became involved in organizations such as CUC; recently, however, female catechists who participated in this process have become marginalized in their community. Women's success thus depended on the willingness of other members of the community to let them hold positions of authority. Communications with political networks continued to be almost exclusively handled by men.

Female aj q'ijs (shamans/diviners) have become more common in recent years because so many men were killed during *La Violencia*. People should only become aj q'ijs⁷² if it is their destiny (patanih) to do so (some Emolian women were said to practice without this prerequisite). The Maya concept of patanih (destiny/tribute/service) encompasses ideas of obligation, calling, and fulfilment of one's proper role in the universe.

Mayan shaman/diviners' activities are hierarchically ordered. A female aj q'ij can not hold the highest position, called aj mes (literally, person of the table)⁷³, who can

communicate directly with the spirits of the dead. While both male and female aj q'ijs travelled alone to sacred sites, a female aj q'ij was unable to travel unaccompanied to important sites beyond the village perimeter.

Both male and female aj q'ijs were able to divine the causes of illness and cure patients. Both were concerned with matters of protection and the revelation of the cause of misery in one form or another. However, there was some division of labour between the two sexes: male aj q'ijs were more concerned about the well being of the community as a whole; female aj q'ijs often acted as midwives (*comadrones*).

In secular politics, women were given secondary importance by men, who made most of the decisions. Post-menopausal women commanded some respect and their opinions were sometimes incorporated into decisions concerning village secular politics. The male partner of the household unit had the means to enter the political sphere through his competence in Spanish, which women generally did not have, especially in Emol. He made contact with *Ladino* powers such as the town and municipal mayors and thereby mediated between the Indian villagers and the State.

MARITAL RELATIONS AND REMARRIAGE

Among the Quiché marriage was almost mandatory for both men and women. Although arranged marriages and the pressure to marry diminished after people converted to catholicism, unmarried adults of either sex continued to be an anomaly. Unmarried men were not economically and socially respected and women still unmarried by their mid-twenties were sometimes suspected of being witches.

The union between man and wife was said to be natural. When speaking about marriage, people would sometimes refer to Quiché mythology which relates that married men and women lived together in the conjugal unit like the sun and moon; if a person was left without a spouse, the situation was said to be contrary to nature⁷⁴ and an obstacle to the achievement of the ideal of complementarity and balance.

The creation of the marital unit was a highly formalized process which extended over the period of a year.⁷⁵ There has been a slow erosion of this process due to religious conversion to catholicism or protestantism, the process of ladinization and economic hardship. Nevertheless, prior to *La Violencia*, these practices were still preserved, particularly among the *Costumbristas* and, to a lesser extent, among Catholics. The disintegration of traditional values has since accelerated. This is partly due to the general militarization of the countryside which began in the 1950s, and partly to the establishment of the militia groups, the civil patrols, in 1982 when patrol *jefes* and military commissioners (ex-soldiers) became the village authorities. Nowadays, in some areas of Quiché, a desirable prospective groom is not so much someone who is honourable (a virgin like his intended bride) but a man who has performed his military service.

Mutual respect and meticulous regard for individual property rights existed within the marital relationship. Generally, couples aimed for emotional reserve which was achieved to some degree with the help of parental (and, in the case of *Costumbristas*, shamanic)⁷⁶ guidance. Over the years of marriage the couple worked towards equilibrium in the family unit. This pertained to the couple's behaviour towards each other and within the wider family network and especially to balancing the division of labour. A man who went astray by not tending the fields properly or not contributing enough to cover weekly household expenses and so on, was admonished by his parents and family elders; a woman who did not complete her wifely duties in the household was similarly cautioned.

In order to understand war widows' predicament, it is important to understand that keeping a marital unit together, despite problems, was highly valued in Quiché society. A daughter's transfer from her nuclear family to her husband's and the formation of the marital unit had powerful cultural sanctions which were not easily reversed. At the time of union, couples are formally advised that they should not separate until death. Marriages were generally stable and separations infrequent; parents would usually do everything in their power to discourage a separation.

Nevertheless, there was considerable tension in the conjugal unit even before *La Violencia*. Drinking and wife beating were common; afterwards, both the incidence and severity of domestic violence increased. One young man told me that his drunk father killed

his mother; his maternal uncles then killed his father in retaliation, leaving four young children to fend for themselves. Quiché men tend to be extremely jealous; it was said that some men's jealousy led them to kill their wives during *La Violencia*, when murder could be committed with impunity (a current black joke is that divorce was no longer necessary). Husbands often suspect their wives of having illicit affairs, despite the fact that it is usually they who are duplicitous. Men often took up with another woman during fairly short periods of separation when working on the coast or in the capital; it was not uncommon for a man to take a second identity when he went to the city and a second wife to go with it. Because of their economic dependence, women's attitude towards polygamy and abuse is one of tolerance; they are reluctant to leave an abusive man because of cultural pressures, their religion and, latterly, because of the dearth of marriageable men. One of women's most common sayings was "*tengo que aguantar*" (I must bear it). Nevertheless, abandonment for another woman is the most common reason for marriage dissolution.

Although women withstood considerable abuse from their husbands and tolerated considerable penury, they did have the power to leave⁷⁷ but they were usually reluctant to do so, especially if they could not return to their parents' home. Furthermore, if a woman left her husband, she might have had to leave her children, particularly sons, in her ex-husband's household. If she remarried, her daughters might then be given up for adoption within her extended family because second husbands were unlikely to want to support non-biological offspring. A more immediate problem on separation was that women were likely to be forced to give up all the property which had accrued to the marriage and even the crops they had helped to cultivate. After many Emolians converted to catholicism in the late 1950s, divorce⁷⁸ became more of a stigma; previously, separation had been a relatively painless affair - the separated woman would simply return to her parental home.

Directly after a woman lost her husband, she would normally return to her father's house. Her male relatives, especially her father and brothers, would support her by providing both financial assistance and labour in her corn-fields until she remarried. Traditionally, shortly after separation or the death of a spouse, the elders would call together the mourners to acknowledge the family's loss and give direction to the handling of the event. A young widow was encouraged to deny her grief, advised to look for a new partner⁷⁹ as soon as possible and to look forward to her future family. In the case of an "ordinary" death it was

almost as though a widow's first husband had not existed. Some women, however, viewed remarriage as a betrayal.

Even before conversion to catholicism, widows (malc'anib or viudas)⁸⁰ were a less desirable marriage prospect than unmarried women because virginity at the time of marriage was valued by both sexes. Indeed, a previous union was usually kept secret (even by widowers and male divorcees); reasons for this were largely expressed in terms of jealousy of prior relationships.

RESIDENCE PATTERNS

Residence upon marriage was usually virilocal, which has implications for land inheritance. Traditionally, only sons inherit land; a girl forfeits any entitlement she might have to her father's land on her departure for her in-law's house. Groom service was traditionally performed for the one year "engagement" period leading up to the change of residence. Brideprice in the form of fruit, bread, chocolate and money was paid, particularly in the case of a rushed marriage. The departure of a married woman to her husband's home marked a dramatic change in the bride's life.

The girl usually lived with her husband in his parent's one room, adobe house for at least one year during which she grew into her new identity. She was addressed as "wife" (ixokil) by her husband's relatives of his generation, as "daughter" (u mial or ral) by those of the senior generation and as "mother" (nan or chuch) by those of the junior generation. She retained her patrilineal surname throughout life as well as taking on her husband's.

The newly married woman was quite vulnerable because she might be treated as an unwelcome "stranger", particularly if her marriage did not comply to the norm of *municipio* endogamy. A new wife had to prove her worth by working hard, learning the ways of her in-laws' household and "respecting" (conforming to) the family's ways which included, for example, wearing their particular design of clothes and speaking their dialect. Only in this way was she slowly accepted into the family. Complaints were likely to engender conflict, particularly with her mother-in-law.

The association with her husband's family sometimes detracted from the girl's membership of her own family, though this depended on the personalities of members of both families. A girl's visits to her parental home might have been restricted by her in-laws if, for example, they feared that she would gossip to her parents about the running of their home. Generally, however, a married woman's own relatives had minor but continuing responsibilities both to her and to her children. Contact was maintained by visiting, often facilitated by marriage within the vicinity. The bonds of personal affection and sentiment between a girl and the members of her nuclear family were sometimes strengthened, rather than lessened, by separation. Even an older widow such as *doña* Flora, who was around 50 years old, continued to visit her mother's home although *doña* Flora was more likely to provide practical support rather than to receive it.

A married son would eventually make a bid for independence by requesting his inheritance and the means to build his own house. Unless a son eloped, this rarely happened before the second year of marriage. The husband discussed the matter with his wife and, if she agreed, the couple would begin to build their new home which would usually be close to his parents' house. The girl would therefore continue to be part of her husband's extended family. After land inheritance was given, labour would still continue to be cooperative as each male member of the family would help with each other's land in a reciprocal fashion.

Traditional practices have been affected by a number of factors including men's migration to the capital for work. In such cases, a husband might delay forming a separate household, leaving his wife in his parents' home while he was away. This arrangement was often preferred by a husband who, while being freer to satisfy his own desires in the city, was still highly possessive towards his wife and wanted his family to supervise her movements. Working in the city allowed some men to evade their responsibilities, prolonging their dependence on their natal families and delaying achievement of greater responsibility for themselves.

A woman might have been reluctant to leave her parental home if she foresaw a life ahead alone with her in-laws. In this case, her husband was invited to reside in her parents' house (in which case no brideprice but groom service was made), especially if there were no grown sons in her family. If the groom's family had little or no land or money, they were

normally very willing to take advantage of this option. However, uxorilocality was still the exception rather than the rule.

SEXUAL DIVISIONS OF LABOUR

To understand the position of women in the Quiché economic system and how this changed upon widowhood, we need to know the nature of "normal" female and male participation in both subsistence and exchange spheres, including the relation and importance of each sphere to the overall economic system. For the sake of expediency I will describe the subsistence and exchange spheres separately. I do not thereby imply that they are independent.

Subsistence production among the Quiché took place at the level of the household. This unit may have been extended to include single parents of the conjugal unit and spouses of children and even grandchildren. The Quiché preferred economic autonomy for the household and there was little shared land beyond the bounds of the extended family, a kin group of patrilineally related males who, together with their wives and unmarried daughters, functioned as a cooperative unit.

While the nuclear family may have been a self-contained unit for the routine business of subsistence, it was not necessarily the most efficient unit. Help was only solicited outside the household for certain rather specific tasks, such as house building and during the heavy corn planting and weeding season. Collective farming, where land was held and cultivated jointly by people not necessarily belonging to the same kin group, has long since died out as a tradition. Nevertheless, a few co-workers may have laboured together during the heavy corn planting season in cases where the adult male population of the family was small. These would normally be *compadres* (fictive kin - co-parent) and selected friends who usually expected their help to be returned in kind. Women would help each other in a reciprocal fashion after the birth of a child or when large amounts of food had to be prepared for life crisis events such as funerals.

As an ideal, there was a clearly separated, but inter-dependent, principle of division of labour among the sexes in agricultural and household tasks; in practice, things were

somewhat flexible. The organization of household production varied from one household to another, depending partly on any outside or non agricultural occupation of the husband. Men and women may be able to do each other's tasks but normally would not do so unless absolutely necessary.

The traditional division of labour by sex in subsistence activities ranged from nearly absolute (spheres which define a man and woman) to pragmatic flexibility or interchangeability.⁸¹ In general, men were involved in corn production and wage labour; women were involved in the transformational processes including the processing of corn, cooking and the reproduction of children.

In principle, women's activities centred on and around the home, to which they were generally confined after marriage. The extent to which this principle was actually followed varied, depending on, for example, the husband's propensity towards jealousy or on practical factors such as widowhood. It was not only a husband who restricted women's movements: both men and women disseminated threats about women who wandered far from the house, unaccompanied by an in-law. Such malicious gossip was a common, veiled form of aggression (mostly employed by women);⁸² in a face-to-face society such as Emol where reputation still had some currency, malicious gossip provided a relatively safe means of social sanction.⁸³

The notion of complementarity (but not necessarily equality) between males and females is the ideal; the archetype of male-female complementarity is the married couple. Although, overall, both had control over resources and decision-making rights, the husband is considered head of the household. Senior men specialize in long-term management of major capital assets (which are never large), while senior women supervise the day-to-day administration of the household. Men had the predominant role of breadwinners and negotiators with the outside, *Ladino* world. Although they would consult their wives, men's voices would be more influential in decisions involving major expenditure. Men did not interfere with their wives' decisions when they acted in their capacities as wives. In general, men were not coercive over women who were acting in accordance with their gender prescribed roles; there, women had independence. However, if a woman failed to meet her expected labour and economic contributions to the household, she might be accused of

laziness and unceremoniously returned to her parents' home. *Doña* Angela's first marriage dissolved when she became sick; when she became too unwell to walk, her in-laws tied her to a chair and carried her back to her parents' house, where they left her "*de una vez*" (once and for all).

Depending on the sphere of activity, either men or women may have become more dominant in making decisions, though negotiation and joint decision making occurred in most spheres. If a man developed a serious alcohol problem, his wife may have had to take over most decisions, especially if she was the only responsible adult left in the household. However, this was rarely the case before *La Violencia*.

As far as agricultural labour was concerned, "men take responsibility for maize crop fertility" (Wilson 1990:136). It was men's role to make the final decisions on corn planting and caring for the *milpa* (corn fields); the actual work was also regarded as men's work. Apart from weeding and gleaning, women only work on the corn fields if a man cannot find anyone to help with the heavy work of planting or harvesting; this is done as inconspicuously as possible for fear of ridicule. When asked if they ever helped to plant, women replied, "that is what we have men for", "no, the women here make the *tortillas*" and, "no, the women here are weavers". Wilson's ethnography on the Q'eqchi' throws some light on the reasons for women's embarrassment: he contends that "there is an overt association between the planting activity and the human sexual act...men...inseminate the earth (ibid:132)" which he suggests is female gendered while the planting takes place. It then returns to a masculine state. In Emol, the men also plant one type of beans, *frijol de milpa* (*kunaq' rech abix*), with the corn;⁸⁴ about six weeks later (when the corn has germinated and the earth's gender is masculine again), women plant the *frijol de surca* (*poq'op*), using dibble sticks, in the furrows between the hills of corn. Nevertheless, women's planting of beans is, perhaps, a modern phenomenon in El Quiché; Bunzel observed that women do "nothing whatever" in the fields, not even the harvesting: "It is against the whole theory of marriage and household economy, and the relations of men and women for women to have any part in the providing of food" (1952:53).

Women also planted and were exclusively in charge of the production of secondary crops which grew in between the *milpa* and in their vegetable gardens. However, maize is

the valued food. It was a woman's role to take the final decisions about the transformational processes of maize into food and household consumption. They were also in charge of actual activities around these tasks. According to the Quiché, even if one has eaten a meal of other foods, one is considered not to have eaten unless once has consumed wa (transformed maize products: food) from their own home.

Women had the monopoly in food preparation, including the lengthy and laborious process of turning dry, hardened corn kernels into a soft maize dough which was patted into *tortillas* and cooked on a griddle. Their transformation of food into edible forms was seen as integral to the whole subsistence process. Just as women did not normally participate in maize production, men did not normally help in maize dough preparation. Women's identity as grinders was such that even after the introduction of electric corn mills, women preferred to grind corn with a heavy grinding stone pin and slab because "it tastes better that way".

Women are also responsible for buying, raising and selling domestic livestock (a cow, a few sheep, a pig, a few turkeys, chickens and rabbits). They collect and prepare *zacate* (leaves from the corn crop and cob kernels) for the large animals. Women take their animals to pasture with a friend who also brings her animals, or with a child or two; they never went to the pastures alone. Other tasks pertaining to the house included caring for children, washing clothes, health-care, gathering herbs and wild plants, making cheese and soap (from pig's fat, now a more-or-less obsolete practice) and, traditionally, weaving.

Small children remain in their mother's care because of their dependency on breast feeding. As children grow older, their fathers become more involved in their moral education and other decisions concerning their development and contributions to the household. Fathers usually decide whether children should attend the local school. Girls rarely go to school although some women try to persuade their husbands to let a daughter attend, the idea being that this would prevent the girl from remaining monolingual and marginal like herself.

Women had little contact with the outside world which clearly contributed to their position as conservers of local language, culture and world view; for example, women tended to be monolingual and wore the traditional clothing (*traje*) of the *municipio* whereas men were often bilingual and wore western clothes. As the primary socializers of young Emol

children, women's influence enhanced the effectiveness of this role, ensuring that children's later experiences grew out of an orientation already centred on the distinctly non-*Ladino* environments of family, household and community. Wealthier men might speak better Spanish, travel more often to *Ladino* market towns, and buy more consumer goods, but women and children in such households actually had little direct experience of life beyond the village. Innovations did occur within families, however, because men migrating to the city were more likely to bring new goods into the household. Changes were introduced piecemeal and could be slowly accepted by women and children more as local innovations rather than as an integrated set of new ideas and practices. Emolian women and children most frequently left the village to work as seasonal labourers on Guatemala's coffee and cotton plantations, but there they came into contact with other Indian workers like themselves.

Children provided a supplementary workforce from the age of about six or seven. Young boys accompanied their father to tend to the fields; they were also sent to herd the family animals - a cow, a sheep and a goat or two - and to collect firewood. Girls were expected to help their mothers with household chores such as sweeping the house and washing. When they were a little older, they assisted with cultivation, grazing animals and collecting wild plants and small pieces of firewood.

Pragmatism may have encouraged a certain amount of cross-sex training, particularly if a family had children of only one sex. In such cases, daughters were sometimes recruited sporadically to help work in the fields; they may have also accompanied their fathers to the market. Similarly, young sons could be induced to tend a baby, build a fire or turn *tortillas* on the *comale* (grill). However, major dividing lines for the central subsistence tasks are rarely breached.

LOCAL MARKETS

Emolian villagers used local marketing as an intimate part of the partial subsistence economy even during the time of my fieldwork. Marketing in the bi-weekly town market (and, prior to *La Violencia*, in other local markets which ceased following massive kidnappings on market days) gave both men and women the opportunity to exchange a small excess of locally produced goods for other local goods and imported items from other regions.

Even though cash was involved, local marketing did not normally increase the "income" of a household as much as it increased its utility and fulfilment. For most Quiché, the market was a mode of simple commodity exchange arbitrated by money: if, for example, a woman needed a bar of soap and some sugar, she would go to the market with a milk product, sell it, and buy the required goods.

A woman went to market accompanied by her husband or, if he was away working, with another member of the family; she never went alone. A "good" man would go with one of his sons to do a week's shopping with the income he earned. There was no rigid differentiation between types of product sold by men and women in the local market although there was a general tendency for men to sell corn and for women to sell garden produce (beans, vegetables and fruit), livestock (an animal, a chicken or two) or other products (cheese, *trensas* or weaving). She kept the money she earned from selling these products to buy weaving materials, basic medicines etc.

CONCLUSION

The ideal of complementary on the cosmological level translated into male subordination of women in every day life: Quiché men are very *macho* towards women having absorbed dominant *Ladino machismo* attitudes. The cultural ideal was for a Quiché woman to be supported and protected throughout life by a succession of men - father, brothers, husband, sons (and in the case of divorce or widowhood, father and brothers again and then second husband and subsequent sons) - who provide agricultural labour, *gastos* (household spending money) and ritual protection by performing *costumbre*. A woman's responsibilities were centred on the household and she was confined to the home, only leaving it in the company of her husband or another adult male relative. She was unlikely to have been to school or learnt Spanish (the vast majority of Emolian women are illiterate and monolingual); conditions were such that her role as conserver of tradition could hardly be avoided.

The period of rapid change preceding *La Violencia* led to a blurring of male and female roles. The increased dependence on wage labour, with its attendant risks and problems - men's prolonged absences, the possibility that they may take up with another

woman, the separation from the land, exposure to *Ladino* ways - strained the cultural ideal. It also placed extra burdens on marital relations and on women themselves. *La Violencia* skewed gender relations even further, particularly for widows.

71. For example, among the Q'eqchi'; see Wilson 1990:51.
72. In other areas of Guatemala there are only male aj q'ijs.
73. This is the most powerful of shamans or ritual specialists. The term aj mes comes from Spanish *mesa* (table) which referred to the small wooden altars used by these shamans in their rituals. In addition to the divinatory powers of the aj q'ij, the aj mes could summon the spirits and talk with them, usually to ascertain the cause of a client's affliction and to define the ritual payments required to allay it.
74. The principle of complementarity is in evidence at the cosmological level. The gods appear in the Quiché Popol Vuh (Mayan Counsel Book) not as single entities but as divine pairs, in female and male couples (Tedlock 1982:72). Duality is viewed as an essential feature of the living as well as of the Mayan sacred.
75. cf. Bunzel 1952, Burgos-Debray and Menchú 1984, for descriptions of the Quiché marriage ritual. Girls who elope are said to be *robado* (stolen). This term encompasses those marriages where only marriage payment is made to the wife's household with little or no engagement period or ritual (cf. Bossen 1988 on bridewealth).
76. Among *Costumbristas* it was the role of the aj q'ij (shaman) to admonish the couple morally and to reassert the marriage norms between the man and woman who rarely fulfil the ideal of spiritual union. They believed that only way to overcome yabil (illness) which results from secret desires or actual deeds, was to confess to one's spouse and perhaps one's parents or in-laws, in the presence of the aj q'ij.
77. Bossen notes that "a transition to high individual cash income upsets the balance of mutual needs. The higher earning husband begins to feel that his spouse is rather expendable and that he could easily replace her. He tries to provoke her to leave" (1978:154).
78. cf. Bunzel 1952:131 on the undesirability of female divorcees.
79. Chimaltecos did not wait much longer than the twenty day ritual period (Wagley 1949:46). This is common in other societies: for example, Hart and Pilling write that a widow is remarried at her husband's funeral (1968).

80. This is the Quiché word for widows, divorced, separated and abandoned women and single mothers. In Spanish, different terms are used for widows (*viuda*), divorced (*divorciada*), abandoned (*abandonada*) and single women with or without children (*soltera*).
81. In villages where women plaited *trensas* (which would be made into straw hats), I also saw men doing this work while on patrol duty: they said they do it so as "not to waste time". It is pertinent that cane work used to be men's work at a time when women were still weavers.
82. It was also claimed that women may also poison their husband's food.
83. Another form of indirect violence which pre-dated *La Violencia* was witchcraft (*brujería*), a mode of violence resorted to by both men and women alike. See chapter 10.
84. Semen is associated with corn seed, not beans.



-Plate 3: Woman in a town of southern Quiché

Chapter 4

LA VIOLENCIA

The period of rural terror referred to as *La Violencia* lasted from 1978 to 1985. Nominally, it was a confrontation between military and guerrilla forces. From the military's point of view, it was a battle against communism, against an armed and dangerous menace within; guerrilla terror needed to be met with counter-terror. However, despite constant government rhetoric that the army's purpose was to defend *la patria* (the state) against alien enemy forces and ideas (not unarmed civilians), the military onslaught reflected state paranoia and hostility towards an ideologically selected scapegoat: the Indian. This became increasingly explicit as *La Violencia* progressed. Thus, though guerrillas were the initial targets of the counter-insurgency campaign, the boundaries of this category expanded to include ever increasing numbers of (predominantly Indian) people within the victim category. Eventually, the armed forces turned their attention to innocent but "potentially dangerous" civilians.¹ This resulted in *La Violencia*, state violence against the indigenous population which assumed genocidal proportions. This is not a new phenomenon, but its most brutal expression to date.

La Violencia reached its peak between 1981-83 under General Lucas García's rule and that of his successor, president Efraín Ríos Montt, crushing armed resistance and seriously weakening the guerrilla forces. At its height, members of all sectors of society were vulnerable to random bullets and bombs. No-one felt safe because the killings became increasingly random; the death of innocent villagers, including women and children became almost routine.

THE COURSE OF LA VIOLENCIA

The counterinsurgency war began with the successful routing of (mostly non-Indian) guerrilla forces in eastern Guatemala in the 1960s. The structural transformations culminating in the 1960s-1980s (see Reyes 1986; Smith 1990b) had a profound effect upon Indians' self-conception (Arias 1990) and became the basis for the vast Indian uprising in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Jonas 1991). The Indians had organized into catechist and *campesino* (popular movement) groups which were seen by the government as the main source of guerrilla support (other supporters included urban intellectuals and poor *Ladino* peasants). The rebellion developed within village religious structures, despite the revolutionary movement's explicit marxism. The violent repression directed at Catholics, co-operative leaders, improvement directors and members of popular organizations began in 1976; in El Quiché, the repression began in Ixil country in north El Quiché and soon extended south to the *municipios* of Chichicastenango and Santa Cruz. The guerrillas responded by taking selective action against army sympathizers.

Following García's election in 1978, the government appears to have decided to prevent revolutionary forces from prevailing in Guatemala (as they did in Nicaragua; Anastasio Samoza fell in 1979), no matter what the cost. García reactivated the counterinsurgency apparatus in 1978 and used it to quell all real or perceived² opposition to the government throughout his four years in power.

The first Emolian to be killed by the army died in 1979, the year the military began to terrorize Indians. One man told me:

They falsely claimed that he was one of the captains in charge of the guerrilla and they burnt him alive to make an example of him.

Tactics also included locking Indians inside churches and threatening them with assassination should they continue talking about "injustices". From 1980, the villages of El Quiché endured wholesale bombing and burning and selective and mass kidnappings. Widespread killing, using a scorched earth policy, began in El Quiché, Chichicastenango and Alta Verapaz in 1981, then spread to other areas. The army set fire to houses, schools, health

centres, churches and crops; stole or killed livestock; maimed and raped³ women. The symbolism implied in the army's choice of property on which to aim their attacks and their mode of committing violence upon Indian people was probably not coincidental. Destruction of property - especially agricultural assets or domestic property of practical or sentimental value - has a significance "deeper than vandalism" (Clayton 1991:3).

The state controlled anti-terrorist machinery assumed a life of its own. Death squads became autonomous units, taking full initiative in seeking out victims. Clandestine⁴ detention camps and cemeteries were established, as were installations to house and torture the kidnapped. As one man told me, the "tradition of death" had begun.

After the 1981 army crack down, Catholic organizations helped the Indians to fight back. Apart from the *campesino* organizations, which they had helped to set up, the catechist programme was the only existing supra-community social organization among the Quiché; catechist courses became the only venues in which Quichés from different villages could formally gather to discuss important issues. For exactly these reasons, Bruneau (1979:225) says that Christian base communities are the "seed bed for popular initiative under authoritarian regimes".

In the second half of 1981 and continuing into 1982, the guerrilla mounted major attacks. In Chichicastenango, the police station was attacked by the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) and four policemen were killed; the town hall was blown up. In the middle of the year, in Santa Cruz, the town guerrilla unit blew off the tower of the governor's administration building; other guerrilla units blew up roads leading in and out of the town, sometimes trenching them to stop traffic flow and painting "Viva EGP" on the paved highways. At the end of the year, a force of 500 was said to have attacked the Santa Cruz military base; in early 1982, guerrillas blew up the Santa Cruz electrical transmission tower, leaving the town in darkness for four hours. The army increased its presence by moving in more troops and vehicles, and regained control of the roads around Santa Cruz.

The army clamped down even further in 1982: the plan was to terrorize Indian populations and separate them from the guerrilla troops. The category "enemy of the state" broadened to include anyone who might be susceptible to subversion: villages no longer

needed to be suspected of guerrilla sympathies to be attacked. The existence of developed local institutions such as cooperatives and schools was sufficient reason to fall foul of what one missionary described as "the army's 'preventative' measures". In the army's view, such advanced villages were potential guerrilla sympathizers and this was enough to warrant their destruction; the state supported this view, visualising non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as an armed force acting with guerrilla organizations in attempt to disturb the status quo. Thus the repression wiped out NGO-trained health workers; teachers, *promotores*,⁵ clergy, catechists and lay church workers were targeted because of their influence and leadership role within communities. As a consequence, many programmes curtailed their work or withdrew from Guatemala in the early 1980s (Davis and Hodson 1982).

Catechists were labelled "communists" not only because of the liberation theology that many preached but because the peasant leagues and co-operatives they had established were considered a threat to the state and the landed oligarchy who depended on an Indian labour force. They were murdered wholesale. Survivors of army attacks told of catechists being garrotted, hanged from trees, chopped to pieces with machetes or locked into churches and burnt to death.

Beginning in 1981, after the destruction, civil society was re-organized along military lines (cf. Smith 1990a & b). The first step was the institution of a military presence throughout the country-side. Previously, the army had been concentrated in four urban bases; today it has major bases in each of Guatemala's twenty-two departments and garrisons in almost all towns with over 10,000 inhabitants. Smaller military camps or squadrons remain permanent fixtures in rural areas of highland *municipios* where insurgent groups made (and continue to make) their presence known.

The army programmatically reformulated norms, reconstituting the basis of society with concepts of order conceived in military terms. The army represented itself as an entity composed of superior men, entrusted with the duty of protecting the "father-land" from foreign and, particularly, domestic enemies. As part of its pacification plan, the army has attempted to restructure and reprogramme Indian communities. Obligatory civil patrols, development poles, model villages, strategic re-education camps, penetration roads, and the encouragement of evangelical proselytizing, are all part of the army's overall plan to

undermine the Indian community and to assert the dominance of "the national identity" (Barry 1989:112).⁶

The creation of the vigilante system (the civil patrols)⁷ in 1982 (see Chapter 5) under Ríos Montt's government, was intended as the last phase in the plan to obliterate unarmed resistance. Military commissioners (ex-soldiers who were paid to assist the army in further recruitment⁸ and to act as spies) often helped the army to organize "voluntary" patrols in their communities (Smith 1990b:272). The civil patrols undermined all community power structures and added to military authority, allowing them the control of interpersonal relationships which had previously eluded them. At its peak the vigilante system incorporated over 10% of the country's total population⁹ under military supervision. The advent of the civil patrols brought a pernicious twist to the violence, as villagers were forced to kill each other:¹⁰ from 1982 to 1984, public village massacres and other atrocities were carried out by patrols acting on the orders of their *jefes*. Military violence and destruction did not cease with the introduction of the patrols; the deployment of terror by security forces and their *esbirros* (henchmen) continued to be unpredictable.

It is estimated that at the height of *La Violencia* (1981-83), 15,000 people were "disappeared" and at least 90,000 were killed¹¹ (excluding Guatemala City)(GVIS);¹² three of the country's twenty two provinces accounted for 25,000 adult deaths (Carmack 1988:7). The highest number of deaths was in the province of El Quiché (GVIS),¹³ which bore the brunt of mostly military but also some guerrilla attacks. Although I have no figures for total population loss in southern El Quiché, a 48% population shortfall has been estimated for the hardest hit area, the Ixil triangle in north El Quiché (Stoll 1992:4).

My data on the extent of the war in El Quiché are fragmentary; information is generally concealed, often kept under lock and key. Informants report that the army killed people in most of the *municipios* of Santa Cruz and Chichicastenango and in every Emol hamlet. People would arrive at a village after a massacre and find no one alive in sight; in one instance, people came under fire when transporting forty bodies to the mortuary. The number of deaths attributed to any one army unit during this period ranged from one to one hundred. A member of the voluntary fire brigade (*bomberos voluntarios*),¹⁴ set up specifically to recover the numerous corpses strewn across the countryside, told me:

The numbers of bodies began with one or two, steadily increasing to fifteen. Eventually massacres of a hundred at a time were taking place in the villages. These included women, children and babies.

During the same period in Chichicastenango, government firemen collected over 1,300 bodies; a more realistic estimate of the numbers killed would be 4,000 out of a population of 35,000 while the number of "disappeared" is inestimable. Reported deaths in Santa Cruz for the same two years totalled 4,077, of which 2,020 were recorded as "unnatural" deaths. Both figures are probably too low (Carmack 1988:56), not only because of army attempts to conceal the atrocities but also because many deaths were not reported: many people denied that relatives had been killed because they were afraid that such a revelation would imply that they, too, were "subversives". According to human rights organizations,¹⁵ there were 54 massacres in El Quiché during 1982 alone. Carmack estimates that Santa Cruz and adjacent communities lost at least 10% of their Indian population, excluding those who left their settlements (1988:57). In Emol over a thousand people were killed in just one year.

Less obvious forms violence, including symbolic and psychological ones, have the effect of re-victimization. Recent sophisticated tactics are intended to perpetuate terror through, for example, constantly creating situations which bring to mind memories of past events. Deep in the country's interior, "army psychological-operation teams show videos about the threat of communist 'delinquents' and 'terrorists' to Indians who, having never seen television before, are more mesmerized by the medium than the message" (Barry, 1989:5).¹⁶

Further north (in the Ixil triangle), "model villages" and other concentrated resettlement villages were set up between 1983 and 1985 as part of the army's pacification programme to regiment the population and keep them away from the guerrillas. Since 1986, when a "democratic" government replaced the military regime, other forms of colonizing, homogenizing and domesticating Indians have been deployed.

La Violencia was predominantly a rural experience; killings in the towns and cities were somewhat selective. Foucault's (1979) model explains the historical shift in European social control from focus on the "body" to the "soul". In Guatemala, the process would seem

to be in reverse, reverting to the conquest period in that *La Violencia* involved the physical annihilation of thousands of people. Ironically the people that Foucault (*ibid.*) identifies as representing the "soul" - including attorneys, members of human rights groups working on behalf of the "disappeared", students and labour organizers¹⁷ - are specifically targeted¹⁸ by the military.

CHARACTERISTICS OF LA VIOLENCIA

La Violencia is characterized by invisible webs of causation. The public construction of a suspected subversive by the state, through the performance of political assassination, creates personifying imagery of the origins of violence and disorder. The occasional arrest by the military envisions the "subversive" in order to process this juridical object through various systems of banishment and obliteration that include breaking the suspect under interrogation, imprisonment, and covert assassination. This construction of the stigmatized (the subversive), which was sometimes rhetoricized, and the creation of an immanent doom around this object, functions as an imagery of contamination through which the counterinsurgency forces predetermine the legitimacy of army operations.

La Violencia was relentless and unavoidable. It comprised two types of violence: the visible and the invisible. Overt violence consisted of burning and bombing villages, a tactic called "operation cinders" within the army; it was also referred to as a "clean up" of a group the army portrayed as less than human: the guerrilla. Visible violence also consisted of public executions, massacres which addressed no one but were an end in themselves, intended to completely efface the identities of individuals and populations. The government made no secret of some of its violent actions: it wanted to terrorize the rural population, which it viewed as subversive.

Invisible violence was covertly performed by clandestine organizations belonging to both the army and the security forces, although the military (and the government) disclaimed any involvement in their atrocities. Victims simply "disappeared", leaving a silent space.

Invisible and visible forms of violence seemed to aim for completeness and silence on the one hand and brutal suppression on the other. This is revealed with ruthless clarity

in atrocities comprising both types of violence: a common example is the dumping of mutilated bodies in public places following unwitnessed abductions and secret murders.

Anonymity was another controlling mechanism. Whilst some bodies were identified, most were not. Many had been transported from elsewhere, stripped naked¹⁹ and disfigured: bodies were frequently described as having been tortured (*torturado*) or bearing the signs of torture (*señales de tortura*)²⁰ including fire and acid burns, stake insertions, flayed skin, mutilated genitals and amputations. Sense organs were a common target of both symbolic and literal assault: ears and tongues were cut out, eyes gouged or burnt out. This was a potent meta-message: all sense is attacked, leaving the population without "sense", without the means to perceive, reason, criticize, or, most crucially, name the guilty.

Many bodies were placed openly in towns, on farms, to evoke terror among the local population. Corpses were found in deep gullies, rivers or clandestine graves. Certain liminal places became regular dumping grounds, particularly crossroads, river banks and roadsides. The scene was depicted by two villagers:

The bodies were dumped at the crossroads which lead to several villages...they were not from here...we did not know where they came from, nor do we know when they were dumped. Many of them would appear just like that, usually in the morning. They were like the trees that the army had cut down and lined up along the road [to facilitate military movements in the wooded highlands]. They were in such a state, all mutilated, with their tongues and genitalia missing, sometimes in the nude. Many were not from here; we could see that when they still had bits of clothes on.

It was terrible...there were dead all around. Since we could not bury them²¹ the dogs ate them. They carried bits of them round in their mouths...the dogs were fat in those days...Everyone saw the dead in this state...The dogs were so used to seeing the dead that one day one went for the arm of a man who was stone cold drunk and it almost dislocated his arm before he was roused.

Perpetrators were also often anonymous, *desconocidos* (unknown people), many of whom were non-uniformed security forces (death squads). Yet it seems that during the worst period of *La Violencia*, villagers were not always sure which side was doing the killing and,

in cases of unwitnessed abduction or killing, evidence of culpability was indeed sometimes flimsy. However, villagers' uncertainty probably reflects a reluctance to attribute blame for fear of retaliation.

Psychological techniques were also used. In 1981, for example, Toj Medrano, leader of the *Comité Unidad de Campesinos* (CUC) and radio announcer, was captured by the army and imprisoned in the capital. He was given "repressive treatment" and forced to broadcast ant-revolutionary messages over the radio. He was then flown by helicopter over the villages of Chichicastenango and Santa Cruz and forced to use a loadhailer to tell the so-called guerrillas "that the struggle is useless". The army professed to have let him go after "re-orientating" him to act as their informant. The man who told me this story said Medrano escaped:

[He] continued to work as a liberator of the people, as one of the original four surviving members of the original forty founding members of the CUC.

Considering that Carmack (1988) was told that Medrano was kidnapped (in May 1980) and found dead the next day with his hands tied and skull crushed, this can be seen as part of the villagers' myth making, providing the grains of hope essential for resilience.

La Violencia was also characterized by the suppression of religious practice, a counter-insurgency practice designed to stifle all communal organizations which are not integrated into the army. In their first days of training, according to one ex-soldier, young Indian recruits were told most vehemently, "God does not exist, only the army".

Traditionalist Maya-Quiché religion was also suppressed. In some villages, the local religious confraternities (*cofradía*) virtually disappeared; their position had already been seriously weakened before *La Violencia* began. Some *cofradía* in Chichicastenango closed their houses altogether while others remained open for restricted hours so that people could still visit the saints.²² Shamans were also severely restricted in their ability to practice.

Predominantly Catholic communities came under heaviest bombardment; many people converted to protestantism as a pragmatic survival strategy as this religion was aligned with

the army.²³ Even so, villages such as Emol (60% of whose inhabitants are now Protestant) remain "criminalized" for having had a high proportion of catechists, as I discovered during my fieldwork (1988-90). One day I told a man from Santa Cruz that I was going to Emol: "Oh", he replied, "the village of the guerrilla".

In 1980 after the assassination of several priests and the threatening of another, the Bishop of Quiché ordered religious to abandon the diocese (Carmack *ibid*:45).²⁴ Dozens of churches and parish houses in El Quiché were appropriated by the army for use as local garrisons in which the military would torture prisoners in order to "punish" them or extract information about the "organizers".

The military created insecurity through the destruction of private life (see chapter 5). Situations were created in which people could not trust anything or anyone, thereby eating into the social fabric at numerous points, poisoning or breaking down relationships of solidarity. One of the ultimate effects of terror is the destruction of networks of stable expectations which lie at the core of any set of organized human relationships. All kinds of crucial social relationships will dissolve if everyone in a society is marked as an actual or conceivable miscreant.

THE GUERRILLA

Supporters and Sympathizers

The guerrilla strongholds were in the rural areas; Arias (1990) claims that the vast majority of CUC militants joined the guerrilla organization, dissolving CUC. In the hope of improving their lives, people in the highlands organized spontaneously along either class or ethnic lines but without any type of ideological guidelines (*ibid*). Among the Q'eqchi', frustration of development led to mobilization (Wilson 1990). Others, such as Rigoberta Menchú (see Burgos-Debray and Menchú 1984), suggest that army massacres galvanized her people to revolutionary militancy. Some peasants were radicalized by their participation in CUC to the point at which open declaration of war was made in May 1978 following the massacre at Panzós in Alta Verapaz of seven hundred Q'eqchi' Indians who peacefully protested against eviction from their land.²⁵ Other large scale killings, such as the massacre in the Spanish embassy in January 1980, and the assassination of leaders such as the Indian

Mayor of Santa Cruz in 1981, pushed many Indians into joining the guerrillas. Many Indians had joined the popular movement because of its Christian perspective (see chapter 2) but these events served to radicalize them.

One Quiché man told me that after the Spanish embassy massacre²⁶ in which a man from Emol died, the people from Emol "began to work" (they began to fight back) directly or indirectly by, for instance, providing the guerrillas with food, clothes and occasional shelter. Arias claims that between "250,000 and 500,000 highland people participated in the war in one form or another" (1990:255). From the safety of exile, someone told Carmack (1988) that after 1980, more than one thousand Indians from Santa Cruz alone joined the guerrillas:²⁷

These and many others recruited from surrounding communities were organized, trained, and armed by the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP),²⁸ the organization that for ten years had been operating in the northern part of the department of El Quiché (ibid:56).

At its peak, the organization had seven *frentes* (fronts) including two in southern El Quiché, consisting of 6-8,000 armed men and half a million active supporters. The guerrillas apparently had strong support in some areas (see Carmack 1988, Smith 1990b). "Paramilitary organizations, forms of self-defence, were organized to provide food and clothing for the permanent [mostly EGP] guerrilla units whose members were mostly Indians with relatives in various villages. Indians also began to collaborate in large military operations" (Smith 1990b:255). In others areas the infrastructure was less established and arms scarce (only a few antique rifles), so few supporters actually became active aggressors. Generally, villages under guerrilla control had traps (staked pits) along their boundaries; people were instructed in the placement of sentries and the planning of escape routes into the canyons and forests.

The scale of military repression made guerrillas desperate for new recruits. They visited the Indian villages, attempting to elicit their support (Carmack 1988). An old man from Chichicastenango told a U.S. reporter that guerrillas would arrive in the village centres, call the population together, and state their case. According to the Indian, no problems arose if people listened quietly: "but if you object to something then they will come to your house

at night and kill you. His daughter...spoke out and was killed by the guerrillas" (ibid:59). Coercive strategies were sometimes used but conscription was unheard of.

Carmack (ibid.) suggests that the majority of the hamlets in the isolated mountainous zones of Santa Cruz and Chichicastenango harboured guerrillas. However, support in southern Quiché was never as great as in the north, especially among the "Communities of Population in Resistance"; but neither did ordinary villagers express their position as forcibly as the Ixils, who referred to their position as "between two fires" (Stoll 1992).

I have few details regarding guerrilla military action in the area of where I worked; it was also difficult for me to assess the degree of the support for the insurgent forces, especially many years later. I was always apprehensive about asking too much about this subject which caused obvious discomfort and fear among my interlocutors, whose survival had been partly due to their diplomacy. I got the impression that the men who may have been militants were dead. A few had fled the community and even when I tracked one man in Guatemala city, I was still unsure if he had been part of the popular or revolutionary movement.

Most people denied that anyone became a guerrilla (in the sense of carrying arms) because they were afraid, with good reason. Part of the difficulty was that the army had tried to create the impression of potential, if not actual, total support for the guerrillas and had apparently convinced itself, by its indiscriminate reprisals, that all Indians were subversives. Indian villagers told me that they themselves were still unsure how widespread support for the guerrillas had been/was. Most, being fearful, told me that they knew of very few guerrillas and most of those had now left the village or had sold out to the army.

Some people ventured to tell me that they had been "organized", a general expression which, when used by men, indicates that they belonged to either a popular organization, trade union or guerrilla group. They were either afraid to specify which or just did not make the distinction between, say, CUC and the EGP (women were more likely to conflate the two). Others flatly denied that they had belonged to the guerrilla or that the guerrilla even came to the village:

The people do not believe what the army say as they accuse them of being guerrillas, CUC was here and they are not guerrillas, for they do not carry guns.

Others led me to believe that the most villagers did to support guerrillas was to supply food and shelter. According to one villager, there were around a dozen active sympathizers in any one hamlet; it appeared that they carried out propaganda, training and attacks in other areas not in their own village. However, I received conflicting reports: some people told me that guerrillas from other *municipios* carried out military actions in the area and then left; others told me that local guerrillas carried out actions (such as blowing up bridges) if not in their own village, then in nearby towns. Some people said that guerrillas from outside brought good guns which they left with locals; others said that local guerrillas were never armed with more than the antique hunting rifles used to shoot birds. Guerrillas from one village were also said to come to the aid of people from other villages who were being attacked by the army. For example, when the village of Chupol in the *municipio* of Chichicastenango was attacked in March 1982, Indians from Santa Cruz Quiché were apparently among the guerrillas trying to aid the Chupol victims: "the guerrillas fired at the helicopters as they flew by" (Carmack 1988:59). An Indian woman from Chupol told him:

[A] group of young people who belonged to the guerrillas helped us to organize the departure and calmed us down and told us to trust them, that they would help us. (op. cit)

Participation in the organizations aligned to either the left or right was not equal among communities. One woman told me:

There were two groups here [in her village], those who wanted to learn [about equality etc.] and those who didn't because they were afraid.

One reason for the unequal distribution was that the *Liga Campesina* was taken over by CUC (after 1978) which, in turn, was taken over by the EGP (after 1980), an organization which was heavily influenced by the catechists: not all villages had the same distribution of religions. Sometimes families were split over the issue of incorporation into the successive movements.

Men and women were not equally represented in the popular and guerrilla movements. Because of a gender barrier which separates male and female activities and obstructs women from extra-community relations, women are generally less susceptible than men to outside influences and the new cosmology of the catechists or, later, by guerrilla ideology (or, later still, military propaganda); all of these discourses were more directed at men.²⁹ Many women had not known what a guerrilla was when the army accused them of being one; only a few became involved, at least with the popular movement, and even then not for reasons of ideological commitment. Some women were persuaded by friends and relatives to go to the meetings without knowing what exactly they were about.

Women who joined were usually young, single catechists who had become politicised through the teachings they received. Older women were politicized and pushed into participating in the *lucha* (struggle) as a result of their experiences (witnessing the murder of their menfolk, suffering disappearances, rapes and other violations). However, women gave me the impression that mostly men were involved in the popular movement up to the early 1980s. One woman persuaded her husband and son to join the organization because she had been attracted to the teachings about equality between *Latinos* and Indians and the "delivery of the word of God".³⁰ There were also attractions in terms of promises of material benefits, especially land and higher wages.

Current views of the guerrilla

Many of the subversive "crimes", if actually committed at all, were "wrong" only when viewed from the perspective of the state's interest in social control. While the government authorities and their newspapers generally succeeded in stigmatizing subversives as evil through and through, members of local communities often supported their underground activities. Local residents often perceived the subversives (who were sometimes their relatives or neighbours) to have ^{been} a less than threatening presence in the village and even felt protected by them.

There was no consistent opinion about the guerrilla forces among the people with whom I spoke. People's perception and opinion of these forces varied over time and, perhaps, in different contexts, when talking to different people and so on. In general,

however, people who had previously perceived the guerrillas positively now tended to see them more negatively.

Despite the processes of condensation and association typical of memory, the majority of subjects clearly distinguish between the early and later guerrilla periods (with a corresponding changing view of the old and new army).³¹ At first what was seen as offering a millenarian future was, retrospectively, viewed by some as *engaño* (deception). Other people, including some who had been involved at the time, said that the guerrilla only came to *fregar* (bother) them. People more susceptible to army propaganda likened the guerrilla to coyotes, deceiving villagers.

Some people felt let down by the EGP because it had not fulfilled its promises of a "new law", a new social order to end exploitation and ethnic discrimination. Indeed, according to some, the guerrillas ran off with their guns when the villagers were bombarded by the army. People who are more politically aware attribute failure more accurately to the overpowering army onslaught followed by the militarization of the countryside. I found such opinions more common among men.

Many people spoke about the forces in general terms for certain ordeals remained outside of personal family discourse. If a family member was a guerrilla, families preferred not to talk about this in specific terms but elected to be silent. In only one case did anyone (a non-Emolian) admit to me that a member of their family was a guerrilla. Usually the perception of heroism vis-a-vis guerrillas was blocked by the discourse of the family at home. This was not because families felt anger and frustration because they had fought without achieving the promised millenarian dreams but, rather, because they did not want to admit that they had ever been involved.

Women spoke about their romanticized image of the left-wing forces, or, as they called them, the "organized", in general terms. *Doña Lydia*'s statement reflects this:

They had many good ideas and they spoke of equality. They spoke really well and raised people's consciousness, making us aware of how we worked for the benefit of the rich and not ourselves...But then they disappeared like the spirits do.

Voicing such an opinion, however, is unusual: most people will not admit to having any positive opinion about the guerrilla. It is more usual to hear analogous stories told via dreams; for example, one woman dreamt of soldiers coming into her house and everyone abandoning her, leaving her alone to face them. She explained to the soldiers that her visitors were teachers (organized men were said to teach less learned villagers) who had "not been doing anything wrong".

Gradations of guerrillaness

The villagers' concept of the "guerrilla" was no more an absolute than the military's. However, gradations were along different axes: one could be more, or less, of a guerrilla and therefore more, or less, dangerous.

Many people fled temporarily but usually only men known to be at risk of selective attack - they may have learnt that they were on "the list" or a family member may have been kidnapped or killed - fled for any length of time. However, a few complete families did leave the village.³² Fleeing villagers sought safety for themselves and their families in the relative anonymity of urban or coastal areas; the choice often depended on the presence of family or like-minded friends with whom they could seek refuge. People working on the coast, who received word of the situation at home, just did not return. But such displaced people were hunted down by army intelligence people, kidnapped and killed by plain-clothed army personnel who picked them up off the street or by death squads who gunned them down (see Chapter 5).³³ A few families fled over the border into Mexico.

People who left were generally the most resourceful, both in terms of material wealth and connections. The freedom to move was facilitated by the creation of an identity which could withstand the abandonment of the land. The construction of the self as someone who would survive was also a highly significant factor: some people were convinced of their innocence and that therefore the ancestors would protect them.

The further afield one fled from the village, and the longer the period of refuge, the more of a guerrilla one would be perceived to be. Anyone who fled the village was suspected

of being a guerrilla and those who never ran accused those who left even for a short period of being a guerrilla. One woman told me:

One man from Emol left during the worst part of *La Violencia*. He went to work on the coast. He did not return for two years. During this time his family, his wife and children did not know if he was dead or alive. He came back after amnesty was called but was not among those who were killed [by the *jefes*]. Now, because he left, people say that he is a guerrilla...

Those who did not go far or remained outside of villages for a short time said that people who went further afield or stayed away longer were guerrillas. But when those who went far and remained there for a long time returned, they said that the real guerrillas were those who remained in the mountains. This ranking may have been partly due to people's hopes of saving their own skins by "passing the buck".³⁴ Some qualification needs to be made about this, however. Sometimes families became separated when some members were forced down from the mountains; such returnees would not refer to family members who remained behind as "guerrillas". An exception to this is the case of an abandoned wife whose husband had taken on another woman in the mountains.

The idea of being "more" guerrilla implies being more "other" and therefore more dangerous. The Guatemalan identity is, among other things, conventionally tied to one's place and, through being displaced, one is more exposed to "otherness". Displaced people who return are thus seen as frightening even if they were not associated with being guerrillas. However they invariably are.

MEANING AND REPRESENTATIONS OF LA VIOLENCIA

Quiché defence mechanisms and recourses to justice

There is no concept of violence *per se* in the Quiché language. The act of inflicting physical harm on another person is, instead, described using specific verb forms which contain the type of instrument or the body part with which pain is inflicted within the meaning of their action. The violent act involves two specific persons, mediated by a specific type of object, for example, "he gave him a hand" (he slapped or hit him), "he gave him a foot" (he kicked him), "he struck him with a stick", "he cut him with a machete" bounded by

a mutual understanding of place. The classification of violence according to the object extends to insults or violence perpetrated via "painful" words (c'ax tak tzij). The meanings of violence stretch to physical hurt which is enacted by words. Their execution has to be deduced from their ultimate result: the calamity, injury or death of the recipient.

The understanding of aggression (and the terms used to describe it) were not of course limited to physical violence. Long before *La Violencia*, the world surrounding the Quiché contained physical violence caused by war, natural disasters and the banal physical intrusion of death; constant potential aggression also stemmed from their cultural constructions of the supernatural world (see chapter 9). The latter was full of undesirable beings. Furthermore, the ordinary and mundane tensions that life in a village or in a neighbourhood necessarily entail may lead to accusations and suspicions of witchcraft, the ultimate manifestation of an unspoken, hushed, if not hidden aggression. Beyond direct physical aggression and beyond the more subtle operations of witchcraft, acts of violence could still be perpetrated between living human beings even in abstentia. This might include a person who, at night, has transformed into a win (see chapter 9) being overpowered by the devil resulting in his death within seven days³⁵. Quiché people normally see themselves the victims rather than as perpetrators, an ideological perception perhaps reflecting, in part, the different experiences of colonial domination to which the Quiché have been submitted.

However, unlike forms of aggression such as witchcraft against which a shaman could perform rituals of protection, the present repression (like the violence during the Conquest) was enforced on a people who were unequipped with institutions to enable them to counteract it. Quiché society during *La Violencia* was devoid of suitable mechanisms for defence: they were unarmed, had no military organization or cult of violence. Relations of solidarity were based on diffuse exchange relations between households and centred on religious grounds and the fertility of corn rather than military solidarity. The Quiché-Maya people, while attached to locality, did not have a strong sense of community as a whole, but only in pockets; society is household based with the supposition that husbands sow corn and women transform it into edible forms and reproduce. They are traditionally a passive people vis-a-vis outsiders, accustomed to being subordinated to *Latinos*, a way of being that has been internalized; they are not geared to political action. The role of victim is familiar to them and, in the present violence, they have been re-victimized.

Among the Quiché, traditional expectations of "just" behaviour do not involve taking the law into one's own hands; retaliation through direct violence is rare (unless the injured party is drunk). In cases of violation of justice, the Quiché had recourse to the village authorities, who would attempt to rectify the problem through legal means (the town mayor [*alcalde*] would refer serious cases to the mayor of the provincial capital), or to a witch or sorcerer (*brujo*) if they sought retaliation.³⁶ Killing is traditionally regarded as an illegitimate response and is deplored; retribution is said to be in the hands of ancestors (or God), who are seen to settle matters either by sending illness or death to the guilty party or his/her children or by destroying their goods (such as their maize crop).

La Violencia had an immediate impact, severely disrupting authority patterns established in early colonial times. These had remained virtually unchanged until the recent catechist intrusions, which may have facilitated the replacement of local authority by one based on violence (and memories of violence). The judicial system became non functional and people were left with no procurable mode for settling scores. During *La Violencia*, however, some people learned to redress wrongs and exact retribution through denouncing their enemies (*enemigos*) to the army as subversives or, less commonly, to the guerrilla as army spies (*orejas*, ears).

The Cleavage of Time and Space

Historical time has been split apart by *La Violencia* and this is reflected in people's speech. The period of intense violence is used by many Quiché as a temporal marker - before *La Violencia*, during *La Violencia*, after *La Violencia*. Thus the term *La Violencia* suggests a discrete period which is now over: it is as much a euphemism as more oblique expressions such as *aquel tiempo* (that distant time) which are employed in an attempt to relegate them to the past, by declaring that, like the Spanish *conquistadores* (conquerors), they were "things of another time". In reality, however, the violence continues as some people acknowledge: "*la verdad es que La Violencia siempre se mantiene*" (the truth is that the violence always continues).³⁷ What differentiates "after *La Violencia*" from current violence is its intensity and degree.

Men were usually more likely to be aware than women of the unprecedented scale of violence as historical fact. Several men made analogies between this period of violence and the Spanish invasion. The scale and pervasiveness of the disaster led more than one observer to call attention to the parallels between the Spanish conquest of the Quiché and the Guatemalan army's current military "counter-insurgency" programme. To the Quiché, the Spanish Conquest has never lost its contemporary relevance.³⁸ Historical sources (Remesal 1932, Juarros 1981, Ximénez 1929, Las Casas 1909 and Estrada Monroy 1979) indicate that the military massacres of the 1980s were worse than those committed by the *conquistadores*. Wars in between were seen to be of lesser intensity and were not considered comparable in this respect. When I asked people if they had used the expression *La Violencia* to refer to previous episodes of violence, the answer was invariably negative.

The term *La Violencia* suggests that the Quiché see this particular period of violence as something different from past clashes between insurgent and counter-insurgent forces. *La Violencia* stands out as the violence because the scale of the counter-insurgency forces exceed that of the remembered past; the disruption to people's lives exceeded anything they previously knew or experienced. *La Violencia* was a time when blood was said to run in torrents (*chorros*), a time of intense fear and panic when people frequently ran from soldiers, when they did not think but were like mindless zombies with their eyes to the ground, trying to survive. It was a time of pervasive surveillance and monitoring (referred to as the *control*), when markets closed and the squares were deserted; when people did not plant their *milpa* (corn fields) and the fields were said to look like the wild countryside (*puro monte*); of scarcity and hunger, with only *tortillas* and salt to eat and only water to drink.³⁹ I was told it was a time when brother fought brother, sons fought fathers and killings occurred between spouses. The end of the world, as forecast in the bible, had arrived.

People indicated that the beginning of *La Violencia* was marked by a specific event, although not everyone cites the same one. For example, one Emolian woman said:

It all began in 1980 when two *judiciales*⁴⁰ murdered two men and then pilfered houses. The five people were taken from their house at night, one night after another. From that time onwards the villagers were terrified. People moved from their houses if they were on the road-side or further in land. When the army came everyone fled into the ravines. Some remained on the coast where they had been

working.⁴¹ Others fled there, to Guatemala City or to the capital of the department. Those who were already on the coast working simply did not return. Many of these were subsequently "disappeared", for the informers (*orejas*)⁴² pointed them out to the forces with the implication that they had been organized.

Other people marked the beginning of *La Violencia* in a local, personalized way, attributing the initial incident to a *desconocido*, a person in disguise; one woman told me that it began with the kidnapping of her own husband from his bed. A few people said *La Violencia* began when some villagers were killed by the guerrillas, non-locals who carried out their "task" and left; people who mentioned these events indicated that they had occurred prior to the violent military action of the late 1970s. However, for the majority of Emolians, the beginning of *La Violencia* is marked by army atrocities.

People lived under conditions of uncertainty and violence for several years. Villagers took it in turns to watch for signs of attack. The church bell was always rung when the army approached, although sometimes soldiers descended without warning. Encircling a village was the most common counterinsurgency technique; the soldiers closed in, throwing grenades and bombs as the people fled in panic. Villagers fled to the canyons where they would remain for days, sometimes months, at a time. Highland residents, even those in large towns, describe a period when their families slept hidden in mountain thickets, under trees or in the forest, eating only wild plants if they were unable to return to their houses to procure food. People reluctant to abandon their village chose to move inland to lodge with friends or relatives. Villages were not abandoned completely (as they were in the north, where they were razed to the ground).

Not surprisingly, the past has become idealized; life in Emol is portrayed as though it was considerably more harmonious and united than after *La Violencia*. Emol in "time before" is the "wished-for former state" of widows, whose daily realities are painful and arduous from dealing with the practical and emotional burdens of multiple loss. This is not to say that they longed wholeheartedly for conditions of former times, for even then they worked hard, endured hunger and bore the brunt of racism. The Golden Age was the time before the Conquest.⁴³

Nevertheless, *La Violencia* marks time into good and bad parts with respect to many fundamental aspects of community life. "Time before" was good, a time in which the community was viewed as populated (and therefore *alegre*, happy), unified, friendly and relatively less poor.⁴⁴ In "time after", the present, people's lives are impoverished; they live with the insecurity of a new type of danger, increased intracommunal fighting, greater malicious envy, jealousy, selfishness and egotism. It was a time when the price of everything soared.

The history of events appears as a prop for individual time and acts as a framework for community time. The events of the late 1970s and early 1980s structured much of life "after" *La Violencia*, especially with the killing and disappearances of kin and the installation of the patrols. The history of involvement in the political struggle of the popular movement also provided social meaning for both supporters and opponents.

Specific events which caused an obvious disruption of life and time included the permanent closure of a market:

One market day in X *encapuchados* (black-hooded men) pointed out the "bad" people from Emol to the plain clothed army man who he accompanied. The selected victims were then thrown into trucks and driven away. When the trucks were full they were slung into jail until the next day. All the people identified in this way were never seen again. On the following market day in Emol the army rolled up with several trucks. All those attending the market and living in the houses surrounding the square were thrown into the vehicles and driven away. Over a hundred people vanished.

With the organization of individual time and its commitment to memory, people also referred to key moments in the individual life cycle which also served as markers for certain events during *La Violencia*. However, the stages were not marked in the normal way; there were no baptisms or marriages during this time because the clergy had left the Department and, in any event, the circumstances of war would usually not permit them.

Language

La Violencia is an institutional term which has found its way into Quiché discourse; it refers solely to the violence which occurred between 1978 and 1985. Several synonyms for *La Violencia* are commonly used, including "*la represión*" (the repression); more oblique references include "*aquel tiempo*" or "*la época*" (that period of time or epoch), "*la cosa*" (the thing), "*el dolor*" (the pain), "*el castigo*" (the punishment), "*la situación que pasó*" (the situation which happened) or just "*la situación*". While being employed to describe the same series of events, these apparent synonyms carry different meaning and may be employed for different effects.

Activities said to occur around *La Violencia* were expressed using disarticulated language such as *organización* (organization), *subversivo* (subversive), *progresista* (progressive). These terms were like oil and water because, owing to the disparity between the language of the military state (Spanish) and the peasant language (Quiché), there were limits to the extent to which concepts could be translated from one into the other (cf. Asad 1986). Moreover, if the authorities used, for example, the word "subversive", they were not obliged to explain its meaning to the peasant and the peasant, when using the word in conversation with me, didn't necessarily explain his or her failure to understand what it meant. People sometimes indicated that they had no idea of what a word meant when they first heard it; at other times, they thought they knew what it meant because they were able to make analogies to what they assumed were similar concepts in Quiché. In conversation with each other, these words were used to gain authority; however, they also provided a cover-up language. There was tacit agreement not to convey meanings or explain what the situation really was.

The term *La Violencia* is used to connote a whole series of micro events described using different terminology which has the same practical effects. The most common is abduction, which became so commonplace that the special term "to disappear" (someone) has entered the Quiché lexicon⁴⁵ as a transitive verb. The term *desaparecido* (literally "disappeared", referring to governmental kidnappings) acquired its grammatical versatility as a verb and participle ("to be disappeared"; he was "disappeared") in Guatemala almost a decade before the term was exported to Chile and Argentina (Simon 1987:14). The

"disappeared", after being kidnapped, are "likely to be tortured or killed, or detained (becoming *detenido-desaparecido*, detained-disappeared) for a long period, without any legal protection whatsoever" (Amnesty International 1987:8).

One only has to compare the word "disappeared" (*desaparecido*) with its synonym "kidnapped" (*sequestrado*) to see how the experience of *La Violencia* has beguiled the search for meaning through language into the practice of deception. Like "disappeared" and "kidnapped", living and "living" (in *La Violencia*) and dying and "dying" (again in *La Violencia*) do not mean the same. When used in a context of terror, all are always euphemistic (and sometimes neutral), like the term *La Violencia* itself; however, the implication is that one should not discuss it. These euphemisms are idioms for representing the epoch of the unspeakable (see chapter 7).

Indians soon learned that it was dangerous to use the new words *La Violencia* and "disappeared": even mentioning words which directly referred to military violence could lead to the speaker's death. The terms, particularly "disappeared", captured the power of collective terror; the use of such words even in intimate discussions produced a chilling effect. It was therefore safer and more comfortable, when referring to taboo events, to use ambiguous words such as *llevado* (taken from) or *sacado* (taken out) instead of *sequestrado* (kidnapped) or *desaparecido* ("disappeared").

The meanings, like the acts to which they refer, thus live a clandestine existence. While apparently describing certain events, these terms simultaneously mask the real meaning of what actually occurred. Many expressions are employed by people to nullify impact by expressing what ~~they say~~ only by using a construct which intimates that it is not saying it (cf. Bourdieu 1991). This forms part of the "discourse of denial which recognizes and reproduces the initial denial, instead of denying it in order to discover what it denies" (ibid:153). The use of words like "disappeared" stimulated a form of prerational thinking: just as a child or husband "disappeared" one day, they could so "reappear" another (see chapter 8). But all these terms carried for the speaker unspoken connotations of death and torture.

The use of a particular euphemism such as *desaparecido* often reveals political opinion. People referred to the army, for example, as bad people (uj itzel tak mnak) and

those who do harm (ix ix bnal c'ax). I only heard the expression le camesenelab, the assassins, used in relation to soldiers and the *jefes*. Occasionally, one had to know where a person's sympathies lay in order to know who they were talking about: some people used negative expressions (such as *enemigo* (enemy), *matón* (thug/killer)), commonly used in relation to the army, to refer to the guerrilla.

Women would express their stifled anger and fear of the *jefes* using indirect language, saying "nxej wib chque rcamsnel" (the killers scare me) or wäy⁴⁶ xepe le cameseneleb" (a scream of terror when the assassins appear). New expressions are used to refer to patrol *jefes* who murdered their neighbours, including bnel re (the guilty), bnel c'ax (he who does bad) and camsnel (killer). Oblique forms of expression have been developed to enable people to avoid trouble, should they be overheard - "la mi' tomt ix cher xi rbneltak re" (I don't know if they told you, but the perpetrators have returned again). In all these expressions the agent is referred to in an ambiguous way to avoid the risk that naming carried.

Many people studiously used neutral expressions; they would refer to the army for example as "the men with big boots" (the guerrilla were believed to have ordinary shoes or to go barefoot) or rax kij, the green men; they might call the guerrilla "*esos de la montaña*", (or *del monte*)⁴⁷ and names of plants (such as boxnai).

An ambiguous label for the guerrilla was canches or canch (apparently from kan achi yellow man), an expression also applied to fair skinned foreigners (including Spaniards in 1542).⁴⁸ This was also a way of referring to them with humour. Other ambiguous expressions employed to refer to the guerrilla were "people from that side", "the people from *el monte*", "those of the other piece", "those people" and the "people with arms". Sympathizers called them "*hermanos del monte*" (men of the mountain).

When people referred to events which comprised *La Violencia*, I noted that *they* switched from Quiché to Spanish in the same phrase; code switching occurred as part of the processes of becoming politicized. There was an aspect to Spanish which provided a new political language for the Quiché who said they had *ideas* (ideas) in Spanish and thoughts in Quiché.⁴⁹ There was an oscillation between the two languages. Depending on what was

being referred to, one could be human in one and not in the other; one could be *Ladino* and the army in one language but an ordinary peasant in the other and so on.

The sense of intimidation was increased by the use of euphemistic language in public discourse to keep certain social facts out of sight, masking and sanitizing the many nasty facts of domination; they are designed to obscure the use of coercion. Euphemism, in the broad sense of the term as it is being used here - the self-interested tailoring of descriptions and appearances by dominant power holders - is not confined to the spoken language: anonymous flyers would be prepared in secret and delivered in secret, a tactic which still continues. In 1988, after a massacre in a nearby *municipio*, I found flyers littered along the street; in another instance they were found scattered in an idle bus in the bus depot in my resident town. Sometimes, soldiers handed out flyers depicting, say, patrollers guarding the village against the guerrilla devil (see Figure 1 & 2) to children in schools.

Having the power to stigmatize persons and activities that seem to question official realities is another aspect of the manipulation of language. The "enemy of the state" came to include not only those suspected of giving succour or sympathy to the guerrilla but also anyone who might be susceptible to subversion. Rebels and revolutionaries are labelled "bandits" and "criminal hooligans"; the patrol *jefes* added culturally specific categories to the list of people labelled "guerrillas" (eg, satanism) and, more recently, anyone who refused to participate in the patrols or is a member of a human rights or women's group. The fluidity of the definition of "subversives" illustrates that the stereotype is not a given but continuously constructed and reconstructed.

The military encouraged and accentuated recourse to gross simplification and generalization, allowing people to put themselves and those like them into broad categories over and above the individual. The regime's resort to stereotypes takes place at a series of different levels, from propaganda to the hidden discourse of informers. Attention is diverted from the political claims of people the army have labelled as subversive; by denying status to rebels (or ordinary people perceived to represent them), the authorities assimilate their acts to a category that minimizes their political challenge to the state.

At the same time as the specifics of *La Violencia* were being denied through censorship and the manipulation of language, the bodies of the dead displayed literal and metaphoric wounds. In making innocent Indians repeat the fate of the few guerrilla sympathizers, the process of mimesis and metonymy were used to link the killing of guerrilla sympathizers to the killing of innocent Guatemalans. Opposition to (supposed) communist ideology is expressed through brutal attacks on the bodies of the Indian. These actions are a "kind of grisly polemic directed at the onlookers and the wider national audience" (Sallnow, 1989); each death is the death of the guerrilla in microcosm.

1. Paranoia still exists. During a conversation at the army base in the Ixil triangle in 1989, an official told me that the army will only feel safe when it has taken over the Ministry of Education because "the children of Guatemala are the future subversives of the country", intimating that subversive operations are carried out by biased teachers.
2. Anyone who solicited aid from either governmental or non-governmental agencies was viewed with suspicion. Handy reports the death of 168 co-operative leaders between 1976 and 1978 in El Quiché (1984:244).
3. Rape carries with it a connotation that the victim is submerged under the perpetrator's power to be used and then disposed of (Clayton 1991).
4. Martin-Baro (1990) claims that repressive governments usually maintain their authority by keeping their repressive style and their techniques for repression private and secret.
5. *Promotores* were local people who were trained by both government and non-government agencies as their local intermediaries.
6. Guatemala has 24 model villages containing some 70,000 people ~~which~~ have still not been dismantled; the State Department calls them "half-way houses" and "rural settlements" but most other people call them "concentration camps" (Simon 1987).
7. *Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil* - or Self-Defence Civil Patrols - referred to as PAC.
8. Young men from every village were conscripted into the army for two years; additionally, there were also "reserves" who lived with their families and trained every Sunday. From my own enquiries, it appears that few Indians opted to carry out their military service and most, in fact, were opposed to it. The fact that many soldiers who

were directed to carry out raids on Indian villages were Indian men rather than *Ladinos*, is psychologically significant.

9. See McClintock 1985.
10. Indians in the lower echelons of both the army and the guerrilla had been killing other Indians since the beginning of *La Violencia*, albeit not from their own village. There are those who think there is a genocidal aspect to this, as the upper echelons on both sides are *Ladinos*.
11. These figures are estimations of the carnage of *La Violencia* and the period both proceeding and following it. Official figures are likely to fall short of the true numbers.
12. Guatemala Geo-Violence Information System.
13. Smith (1990b) writes that Chimaltenango and northern Huehuetenango were two of the four most severely hit areas. However, recent figures from GVIS (1992) show that El Quiché was the worst hit area of the country.
14. The police worked in conjunction with the army and the *bomberos* (fire-fighters) and took over some of their functions.
15. *Masacres cometidas por el ejército, 1981-85* - map published by Guatemalan church in Exile.
16. There is a division of labour within the national security service. The S-5 or G-5 officer represents the socially conscious side of the army, the civic action (for psychological warfare) branch. These are officers with higher education who are responsible for befriending villages and persuading journalists. Other officers were in charge of units dedicated to kidnapping, the most renown and fearsome being the S-2 or G-2, the Army Intelligence section. Many of the G-2 "specialists" or civilian employees who work on a contract basis are said to be ex-soldiers with a proclivity to murder.
17. Foucault's (ibid.) "social regulators" who he sees as replacing jailers and torturers in post 16th century Europe.

18. Sometimes such occurrences were reported to have happened simply by "mistake". While some people were never heard of again, it was discovered that others had been picked up by security officers, tortured and then killed. Such incidents might have come about after an anonymous call to the security forces which identified the victim as "subversive".
19. Corpses were stripped to prevent identification. Only women wear traditional clothing which identifies their *municipio*; most corpses were male.
20. In an unpublished manuscript Adamson writes that approximately 50% of all cadavers were described as showing some sign of torture (1992).
21. People were often too afraid to take away the bodies they identified as relatives. They did not want to identify themselves as a relative of a "subversive". They were also terrified by the state of the corpses.
22. Nowadays in areas where the *cofradía* exist with any force they usually form a symbiotic relationship with the army. Catholic priests work but with restrictions and fear.
23. Evangelicals were said to have been provided with identity cards which specified their religion.
24. One Guatemalan priest remained cloistered in the Bishop's headquarters in the capital of El Quiché. When I met him he was the priest in Chichicastenango. He told me he hardly left the town for fear of his life. Occasionally he would journey through the mountains to a distant parish upon the request of locals who convinced him of the need for his visit.
25. Painter wrote that the Panzós massacre was the most important factor in bringing Indians into the armed struggle (1987:46).
26. In January 1980 some Indians from Quiché, including those from the *municipio* of Santa Cruz, joined the delegation of protesters who, after being rebuffed at the American Embassy, attempted to peacefully occupy the Spanish Embassy in Guatemala City. Twenty three Indians died there when the embassy was fire-bombed by Guatemalan security police.
27. In Nebaj, further north, the EGP expanded rapidly only after making common cause with the Catholic radicals who, according to one version, took over the lower and middle levels of the EGP around 1978 (Stoll 1992).

28. The Organization of People in Arms (ORPA) which, like EGP, emerged in the 1970s, worked more in other areas of Guatemala. However, since 1982, these and two other revolutionary organizations (PGT and FAR), united in the National Revolutionary Union of Guatemala (URNG). This functions as both the diplomatic and military command of the armed revolutionary movement. While marxism-leninism has been the dominant ideological tendency within the URNG, there are also strong liberation-theology and social-democratic tendencies.

29. Irene Silverblatt (1987) comes to a similar conclusion in the context of colonial Peru.

30. The insurgency characterized as a popular movement is sometimes said to be inspired by ethnic feelings. Emolians seem to suggest that issues of equality on class lines and ethnic lines, insofar as it was associated with this, drew people to the popular movement.

31. The perception of a change in army tactics was expressed in an interview with an army official, who said:

We've defeated the guerrillas but the commys are everywhere....Before we thought that we could defeat the guerrillas but when you kill 100 another 500 would appear. So it seems that one has to take an integral approach, socio-economic and psychological. The last army made the mistake of thinking that the battle was between the army and the guerrillas. But those of us who have gone to university know that the real menace is the communists. The *campesinos* are fooled and taken in by the guerrillas. We've expanded our tactics of learning the Indian languages to get closer to the people.

32. The *Ladinos* who lived in predominantly Indian towns were the first to abandon their homes for safer areas.

33. Displaced people were apparently considered "subversive" because they came from areas where there had been armed conflict between the government and armed opposition. Others are reported to have been killed or "disappeared" simply because they had witnessed army attacks on their communities.

34. This was encouraged by the army who extracted information from people (sometimes during torture sessions) leading them to believe that if they furnished them with the right information then they could save their own skins.

35. see Saler 1969 on the jwin/win.

36. See Bunzel (1952) on "asking for justice" in relation to men who feel that they have not received a fair proportion of land inheritance.

37. Women also indicated that they did not see a linear progression through this time, that it had been and gone. They often felt, during threats or attacks which occurred, or through recognising the repetitions of similar events which preceded *La Violencia*, that they were about to return to those times: "We always have the feeling that we are returning to those times".

38. The Spanish *conquistadores*, after first accepting the Quichés' offer of peace, seized the rulers of the kingdom and assassinated them. They burned the capital and then terrorized the surrounding rural peoples who by that time had taken up arms. Spanish victory was achieved through superior weaponry (horses and firearms) and ruthlessness (Indians were massacred and chained as slaves). In many ways the army's recent actions in Quiché (for example, public executions of community leaders) symbolically duplicate the conquest. Similarly, the army's rural campaign resembled that of the *conquistadores* (see chapter 5). George Lovell might corroborate their sense of continuity in this new period of cultural genocide: "Viewed in historical perspective, it is disconcerting to think how much the twentieth century resembles the sixteenth, for the parallels between cycles of conquest hundreds of years apart are striking. Model villages are designed to serve similar purposes as colonial *congregaciones* - to function as the institutional means by which one culture seeks to reshape the ways and conventions of another, to operate as authoritarian mechanisms of resettlement, indoctrination, and control" (Lovell 1988:47; cf. Manz 1988).

39. Several things are being said in this statement. Food supplies, brought by sympathizers, were undoubtedly erratic and scarce. Yet transforming corn products into food, especially *tortillas*, is the defining role of womanhood; the transformed corn product, again especially *tortillas*, is the definitive Quiché food (wa) (See Chapter 2). So, despite the hardship endured in the mountains, the women seem to be saying that life was in some ways lived as it should be.

40. Talk of the *judiciales* in Guatemala is not a simple reference to plainclothes detectives; *judiciales* can mean any section of the security forces who carry out "disappearances" and killings. The national police corps is officially under the jurisdiction of the Interior Ministry although in fact every branch of the security forces is subordinate to the army.

41. Dunkerley notes that at least 100,000 terrorized *campesinos* remained in the plantation zone after 1982-1983 rather than return to their communities in the highlands because they feared being perceived as 'fleeing' and thus rebel supporters (1988:496).

42. Manz writes: "It is widely believed that the army has established broad networks of informers in most communities. Some people suggested that the soldiers dress up like guerrillas, trying to engage people in conversation to see if they criticize the army. Prior to the counterinsurgency campaigns of the early 1980s, local military commissioners and their assistants primarily carried out and coordinated army intelligence. Now the military directly coordinates a more elaborate informer network, probably through the G-2 (military intelligence). The common perception is that those who act as spies are trying to clear their own names or are paid for the information they pass on" (1988:70).
43. It should be mentioned that the Spanish conquest (like *La Violencia*) was not a singular event. It may be seen as a complex and irregular process that established new political geographies which sometimes imitated older cultural cleavages, privileged culture brokers from both indigenous and European backgrounds, and ignited a long history of rebellions and other performances of cultural resistance (Farriss 1984; Jones 1989; Lovell 1985).
44. The idealization becomes apparent from accounts of witchcraft (*brujería*) which were prevalent even "before" *La Violencia* (cf. chapter 10).
45. Isbell makes a similar observation among the Quechua in Peru (1991:14).
46. The word wäy connotes extreme terror which is usually expressed in relation to the supernatural (such as a xibnel or ghost) whereas wuy connotes a more "natural" fear.
47. *Persona del monte* means to be a bastard - a wild person from the bush.
48. This is an example of Quichéized spanish.
49. *Ideas* referred to new concepts, political matters and sometimes malevolent intentions. *Thoughts* referred to traditional affairs or mundane concepts.



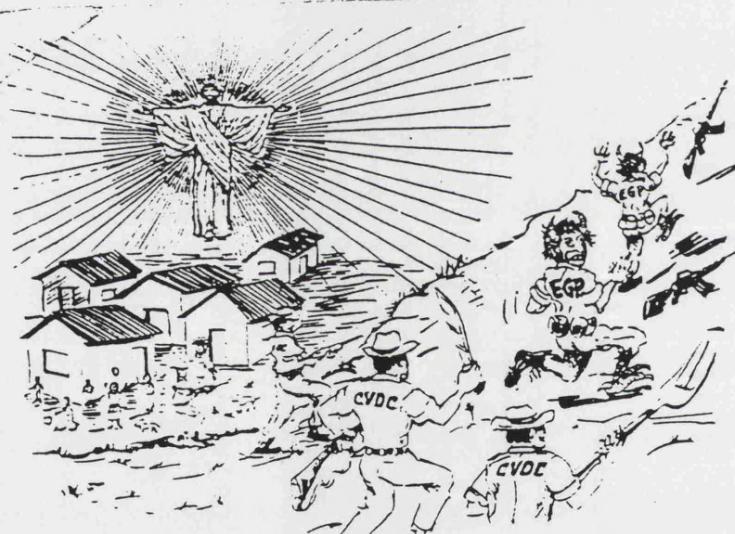
-Plate 4: Civil patrols at a mobile outpost

DIOS NUESTRO SEÑOR GUIA Y BENDICE
A QUIENES LUCHAN COMO HERMANOS POR
MANTENER LA PAZ Y LA DEFENSA DE
SUS HOGARES.



Our God, guide us and
bless those who struggle
as brothers to maintain
peace and defend their
homes.

BIG BAD DEVIL!



¡DENUNCIALOS!



DENOUNCE THEM!

After living a
horrible experience
with your loved ones,
do not allow the
ORPA terrorists to
continue killing in
your community.

Figure 1. Fliers distributed in Quiché villages

Chapter 5

The *Jefes*¹ of the Village Patrols and their Violencia

It was some time in 1982 when the village massacres began. I actually witnessed the one that occurred in Emol. A *compañero* and I happened to visit that day. In fact I remember now that it was the *Dia de Cariño* (St. Valentine's Day). As we approached the village it could have been any other day. It was early and everything was shrouded in the freezing mist so we were unable to see much as we entered from the road. Then, as we drew closer, I heard shouting. I remarked to my *compañero*, "the patrollers must be doing their exercises early today". But, then, as we drew nearer still, I realized that the patrollers were doing no ordinary exercise. No, it was not ordinary at all...for they were clubbing men...to death. I remember that there were about twelve men and two boys and they were lying on blankets, some were under them. They were groaning and bloodied [Were they guerrillas?]No, I do not think they were guerrillas for they carried no guns...They were local men. [Who was doing it?] The *jefes* were...well, at least they were giving the orders to the patrollers who were the ones who were actually doing it.

One *jefe* noticed us advancing and he quickly put us in the school with the children who were already locked in. Some had hoisted themselves up to peer out of the windows. In horror they watched the fate of their relatives. Their mothers and grandmothers stood outside...staring, paralysed, in silence... When the men were virtually dead they locked the women in the church so they would not follow them when they dragged the bodies down a canyon to two big holes which the men had unknowingly prepared earlier, for their own burial. Apparently there, before their graves, another man, not a *jefe* or patroller but a village sorcerer (*brujo*) took it upon himself to perform the final blow...

(Local witness - a non-indigene of Emol)

In this chapter I portray the violence in Emol since the inception of the civil defence patrol system (*Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil*),² paramilitary vigilante groups. I shall shed light on why some men met the military half way, killing promiscuously within their own community, and examine what psychological and cultural processes enabled them to go

against the traditional values of the closed corporate community. I shall explain the incentives for cooperation with the patrol system and villagers' lack of resistance to it.

I shall explain who did what, and why, during this phase of *La Violencia*. I highlight the various levels at which violence operated and attempt to explain its impact on both "perpetrators" and "victims". I contend that all villagers are, in fact, victims because everyone is subordinated to the military state even though they occupy different levels of the state hierarchy. I shall also investigate the operation of control, focusing on local power-holders (*comisionados militar* and especially *jefes*) who acted as the fulcrum in the precarious balance of power. Their positions of so-called strength³ were in fact vulnerable to the whims of the military and the words of women. The perceived danger from widows was particularly galling at a time of crisis of male identity when masculinity needed to reassert itself and when *macho* violence became a socially sanctioned "recipe for living".

I shall consider psychological violence in El Quiché in general and in Emol in particular. This is an issue which has been referred to by several authors (e.g., Manz 1988) but insufficiently addressed. Psychological violence severed the connections between people, controlled their ways of being together and relating to each other, and attempted to destroy the possibility of free dialogue and thought. I shall depict how the widows "lived with" the horrors of the blatant and more subtle forms of violence surrounding them and how they lived on a day-to-day basis with their murderers of their male kin.

I have drawn on the literature from other examples of domination and terror (eg, Nazi Germany and Argentina). I propose that a generic quality pertains to the processes of these phenomena, including psychological ones and those which relate to social group memberships and power relations. However, I believe there is also a considerable degree of specificity to the shape of personal domination and terror, and people's reactions to these, in each particular case. I have attempted to clarify some of the specificities which pertain to the present case.

THE PATROLS

(a) Representation and reality

The patrol system has left tragic scars on the Guatemalan highland communities, where poverty, fear, petty feuding and the replacement of traditional legal systems by arbitrary military force have made the patrol system a dangerous conduit for vigilante justice and abuse of power. The cultural landscape of rural Guatemala has been more profoundly altered in the past six years than the past century. (America's Watch 1986)

La Violencia can be divided into two phases: the first phase was characterized by killings by outsiders (the army and the guerrilla) and the second by insiders (village men). In both phases, violence was perpetrated predominantly against Indians by Indians under *Ladino* command or control.⁴ However, in the second phase *Ladino* (State) control was denied and obscured.

The patrol system grew out of the army's reorganization of the countryside along military lines. Obviously such an exercise stretched army personnel resources and some kind of support system was required. The army created networks of trained "psychological warfare operatives" and other informers, who were paid by results; of military commissioners (*comisionados militar*), ex-soldiers who organized military reserves and did other work for the army;⁵ and, most importantly, of civil patrols, which effectively drew almost all rural house-holds in every village under their control: female-headed households were an obvious and significant exception.

The paramilitary vigilante system originated in southern Quiché and was expanded into the civil self defence patrols in 1982 under General Efraín Ríos Montt. The authority of the patrol system was assigned on the basis of the "war" situation which challenged the military organization. The absence of any law or formal decree concerning the establishment of the patrol system allowed President Ríos Montt to present them not only as part of his "beans and bullets" programme⁶ but also as being independent of official structures. The patrols were represented as a spontaneous, voluntary expression of patriotism: a 1982 government booklet described patrollers as "having organized themselves with minimal hierarchy...to repel terrorist attacks". However, a secret army document circulated in the same year disproves these

claims (America's Watch 1986:19). Smith writes "The civil patrol system became the cornerstone of military controls over Indian communities, in-so-far as it organized (and continues to organize) Indian communities into paramilitary forces under direct military command" (1990b:272). The system was established in virtually every *municipio* of the western highlands between 1892 and 1983, after the military had replaced elected officials with appointed ones. It remains in place as the main local-level political weapon of the military even though local officials are now elected (*ibid*).

Patrols were organized in areas of greatest conflict - although all Indian villages were considered subversive, some (such as Emol) were deemed more so than others - fully supervised and controlled through a military style hierarchy⁷ by each army command (McClintock 1985). In fact, the army considered Emol so subversive that they delayed the formation of the patrols for fear that they would only be arming guerrillas.

Practically the entire highland population eligible for duty (all village men between the ages of fifteen and fifty)⁸ was inducted into the civil patrols, thus forming an extensive counterinsurgency model. Numbers rapidly increased (from 25,000 to 700,000) during General Efraín Ríos Montt's government (1982-83) and continued to rise under General Oscar Humberto Mejía Victores' rule (1983-1986). When a civilian president was elected in 1985, an estimated one million Guatemalans were serving in the patrols nationwide (America's Watch 1986). The province with the most extensive patrol network (with an estimated 86,000 members) was El Quiché which, like other areas with extensive systems, has a high concentration of Indian villages.

The rapidity with which rural Indians were absorbed into the patrol system resulted from several factors including fear (of both armed forces but especially the military), ignorance of the world beyond their immediate area, their own cultural values (particularly the high value placed on conformity and obedience to authority) and the collapse of traditional authority structures, all of which were manipulated by the army.

Fear certainly figured a great deal in men's compliance with the patrols given that over a thousand people from Emol were killed by the army. Most men joined the patrols under the mistaken impression that they were legally required to do so, though Guatemala's

constitution says that participation is voluntary; many men continued to participate once this fact became general knowledge. However, the legality of the patrol system was neither here nor there for most Indian men: those who opposed the establishment of patrols in their village or refused to participate were labelled subversives and became prime targets for assassination or abduction. Patrollers' incentive to cooperate in the initial stages was high: even men who complied but who failed to carry out their duties "properly" (by not keeping strict hours, for example) were killed, tortured by the rest of the group, jailed or at least degraded.⁹

The army fed Indians' fears by reminding them of the implications inherent in the "subversives'" return. This was achieved by incessantly producing and reproducing the fear of being infiltrated and overrun by "bandits" (communists) who were represented as antithetical to the basic necessities and values of Indian life; the "enemy" was created by an emerging ideology based on cultural devaluation. The incredible intra-communal violence which took place in Quiché communities in the early 1980s can be partially understood in terms of the creation of this "enemy" in fulfilment of the military's ideology. The killing of Quichés by Quichés was the realization of an ideology on the bodies of its victims and the result was the creation of a pervasive sense of terror. Anti-communist ideology was used to define groups challenging the *status quo* by associating them with the devil (see Chapter 10); communists were represented as unworthy and morally inferior - i.e., in the same terms used by *Ladinos* to devalue Indians. Indians' concepts of communism were based on what they were told by the army. If communism did not exist, the army would have invented it.¹⁰

The extreme onslaught of the army's counterinsurgency initiatives from 1978 to 1982 shattered the administrative structures of rural areas. Traditional authority structures had also been weakened, if not destroyed. Authority in traditional Indian villages stemmed from elders who were the receptacles of history, ritual specialists and mediators between their communities and the gods at sacred sites; they also acted as mediators within the community, settling disputes. Their power, based on age and prestige, was diffuse and enforced through social sanction, not violence. Many surviving elders and shamans (*aj q'ijs*)¹¹ were murdered by their replacements, the army-backed patrol *jefes* (commander/chiefs) and military commissioners. Village health promoters were also a common target; because of their many contacts in the community, they were viewed as more subversive. Power was now based on violence.

Local authority structures were remodelled by the military. The army realized that the effective inclusion of local Indian communities under its control required intermediaries to fill the communication gap arising from political and cultural disparities between the violent *Ladino* institutions and the Indian. The essence of the intermediary's role, unlike that of previously existing leaders, was to have a foot in both camps in order to facilitate negotiation on both sides (cf. Wilson 1990). The new power holders - the patrol *jefes* and military commissioners - share the Quiché language and history, subscribe to Quiché cultural norms and live as their neighbours do and are pivotal to the new structure. The army used the patrol *jefes'* personal and cultural identity, their cultural commonality with the Indians of their communities, as a means of penetrating those communities and the Quiché value system. A *jefe* could appeal to the Quiché value of behaving as a respectful Indian by serving the community by carrying out patrol duty; he could even represent himself as being dedicated to doing this himself, perhaps even believing it. Yet at the same time, he was associated with the military who had given him a gun and permission to use his *Ladino*, patriarchal power with impunity.

The value the Quiché place on conformity, obedience to authority and respect was another important factor. Milgram's (1974) research on obedience to authority indicated that numerous average people can be provoked by someone of even limited authority to dispense electric shocks, which they presumed to be extremely painful and even life-threatening. Milgram, whose subjects were paid, suggested that people can enter an "agentic" mode in which they surrender individual accountability. They no longer evaluate the morality of an action independently but see themselves as agents of authority. There is perhaps more to the story in the case of the unpaid Quiché who "cooperated". Even though not all volunteered, as Milgram's subjects did, the motivation to obey also comes from their cultural values. Obedience is a major cultural value which is essential for collective functioning. Showing respect for authority has been inculcated since the time of the Spanish Invasion, if not before. It has been suggested (Fromm 1965) that people who grow up in an authoritarian culture have difficulty assuming responsibility for their own lives. Consequently, people may have acquiesced not only from fear but out of well worn codes of respect.

Pressure to conform probably intensified because of people's fears of the consequences of others' failure to carry out their patrol duty. Thus, most Emol men joined the patrols when

they were first set up. Some men even returned to Emol when the patrols were formed, because they were given assurances that this would guarantee their safety; however, most of these men - many of whom were Catholics and/or involved with CUC - were massacred as they were still deemed to be guerrillas, even though they had surrendered and complied with the demands of the system. Villagers who had remained in Emol throughout *La Violencia* were afraid of being criminalized and hence attacked on account of those who had fled. Thus, by labelling anyone who left the community a guerrilla, the "enemy" of the State became the "enemy" of the community. Perhaps turning a blind eye or even becoming a *jefe* and a murderer transpired because people who had never left Emol felt the need to prove to the army that they were not on the "enemy's" side. One villager explained:

The army came to threaten the *jefes* of the civil patrols. They told us to pluck out the rotten apple from the community so that it would not contaminate the rest. They told us that if we didn't it would indicate to them that we were also guerrillas. So the patrols did it to avoid being killed themselves. But the fact is that many of the victims had no connections with the guerrillas.

Thus the tendency for the group, or at least the hierarchy, to control the individual was even greater than under "normal" circumstances; yet at the same time, groups were increasingly atomized along horizontal axes.

Another factor facilitating men's absorption in the patrols was loss of identity as an Indian male: the value of being a male agriculturalist associated with locality¹² was undermined as men fled their homes for extended periods during *La Violencia*; in its aftermath, membership of guerrilla groups lost whatever positive social identity it had. The villagers' collective identity may have been shaken by the assignment of the "subversive" label, from which most Indians wished to escape. However, a space for the reassertion of male dominance was created through peasant involvement in either the armed forces (insurgent or counterinsurgent) via the current emphasis on violence as a means of solving political conflict.

The patrol system effectively forced people to choose between casting their lot with the army or risk their lives by going against it. Both negative incentive (literal survival) and "forced-choice"¹³ worked against passivity and stimulated active co-operation by villagers¹⁴

and any unwillingly conscripted *jefes*. Here we see how the state used elements of community to achieve its own ends.

(b) **State terror**

The State set out to destroy individual autonomy¹⁵ through terrorization. This was facilitated by extreme conditions of insecurity, including the deprivation of basic needs during *La Violencia* such as food and safe shelter not to mention the threat of loss of life itself; in this way the State was like the omnipotent parent and God. The Indian population was perhaps easily victimized because conditions of deprivation at the time were far more extreme than that described as "limited good" (Foster and Rubenstein 1965) which divide the community. It is difficult to deeply terrorize a well fed and housed community (Bettelheim 1986:297); Guatemalan Indians' long history of poverty, fear and submission - they have been forced to abandon (to some extent) their customs and costume, robbed of land and labour - together with the sudden intensification of terror and extreme anxiety, probably made them easier to herd into the patrol system.

There had been innumerable incidents of grotesque violence in Emol (see Chapter 4). Additionally, in Emol's church, which had been commandeered by the army following the closure of the diocese in 1980, interrogations involving forced betrayals were said to take place. Whether true or false, the dissemination of such rumours, or myths of terror, is instrumental to softening individual subjects and entire communities. This is crucial to what Taussig (1984:469) has termed the cultural elaboration of fear and terror. Terror ultimately destroys the network of stable expectations that lie "at the core of any set of organized human relationships" (Barrington Moore 1954:175-6), feeding into communities' tendency to be isolated, atomized and divided by suspicion and mutually destructive rivalry. Such communities prop up systems of terror more effectively than those without chronic hostility (Walter 1969). Hostility within Emol was chronic: feuding between factions, including religious ones, had been exacerbated during the period of intense violence preceding the formation of the patrols.

Terror was exacerbated by both the arbitrariness of violence and the situation of impunity in which it was committed, which meant that no one was innocent.¹⁶ Anyone can

be a victim, regardless of individual choices; innocence is irrelevant. Yet conditions of legality imply there must be a way of being innocent (Walter 1969:342). If there is no way of avoiding transgression, or if people are bound to be charged with offenses they did not commit, then innocence is impossible. No-one can be secure in the terror process because the category of transgression is abolished. Being taken from one's home for interrogation, having one's house subjected to surveillance by the security forces, supplants the necessity of testimony and evidence. The techniques and rhetoric for specifying, controlling, harassing and neutralising a suspected terrorist can thus be applied to arbitrary victims chosen by the state for political theatre and the periodic advancement of hegemony. Arrest no longer requires an overarching juridical edifice or legal code to secure its claim to truth.

(c) **The Patrol system and how it functions**

The patrols were presented as a means of policing and eradicating "subversive delinquents". They were to serve as the army's eyes and ears; they were sometimes called on to serve as shock troops during army raids against the guerrillas. In exchange for these services, hamlets were to receive food and other social services, although these rarely materialized. Rather, the civil patrol system has been a coercive means of military control against an enemy whom the army claims lurks in every corner but, like the spirits, rarely appears.

Patrol functions include intelligence gathering, informing, surveillance and the attendant effects of harassment, provocation and intimidation. Day-to-day duties include informing on any suspicious person walking about at night, the language spoken and what was said; reports are delivered daily to the unit *jefe*. The patrollers' activities have the potential to go beyond this, to various forms of economic and social action and to more military roles.

While on duty, the patrollers stand guard at the village mobile out-posts (*garitas*) or *destacamentos* (army bases, set up simultaneously with the patrol system) at the entrance of every village and along solitary roads leading into the mountains. Unknown persons are interrogated about their destination, purpose and length of stay. If literate (and many are not),

patrollers record the registration number of the occasional passing vehicle. However, I doubted whether the patrollers I saw sitting with their rifles outside the village patrol base were capable of very much action: their stares gave the impression of complete vacuity.¹⁷

Patrollers serve in units (*peletón*) of between fifteen and thirty men under a *jefe*; each unit serves a 24 hour shift every four to ten days. The variables depend on the size of the village and the degree to which the army considered it subversive (i.e., the more subversive the village, the more frequent the patrols and the greater disruption of economic and social life). Such considerations also affected the weaponry given to patrols: villages would be given a few army-surplus weapons which would be carried by the duty patrol (villages considered particularly subversive were given none at all); sometimes villages had to buy guns from the army, each family or unit contributing to the purchase. The inadequacy of the arms provided (in quality and numbers) meant that many men patrolled armed with machetes or hand-carved replica guns. Thus, although local power holders had sufficient weaponry to terrorize and massacre fellow villagers, many communities were vulnerable to attack even from better armed villages.¹⁸ The army strategy of exacerbating local factionalism devolved to the patrols.

Similar strategies were invoked when choosing unit and area *jefes*. Patrollers generally chose a unit member to be its leader. However, in areas of greater military involvement, military commissioners or the army itself selected the *jefes*, sometimes choosing an existing leader they could trust (such as long term army supporters, Protestant pastors), sometimes ratifying the position of a volunteer, sometimes co-opting political opponents (catechists, ex-guerrillas). It was unusual for *jefes* to have any previous involvement with or attachment to the army. Once appointed, they were constantly on call; there was no duty rota for *jefes*.

Jefes supervise patrollers' duties and make weekly reports to the local military detachment or closest military base (usually in the nearest town). In smaller villages, civil patrol *jefes* report either to the military commissioner in the nearest town or directly to the local military detachment (America's Watch 1986). The degree to which a patrol is supervised and regimented by the military depends on many factors including whether or not there is a military detachment in or near the town; secondly, whether or not the patrol *jefes*

and military commissioner have served in the army and the extent to which they are in accord with the army; thirdly, to what degree the community is united; fourthly, relations between Indians and *Ladinos* in a given town; fifthly, the amount of real or suspected support for guerrillas in the past (*ibid*).

In Emol, patrollers reported to the civil patrol *jefe*, who seemed to carry the most power in the village (the different echelons of *jefes* were obscured in Emol). The *jefe*, military commissioner (who served a shorter time in post and was subordinate to the *jefes* at the time of my fieldwork) and the president of the village Improvement Committee all worked together.¹⁹ Thus the *jefes*, as a result of the military's reorganization of the village power structure, were the mediators of power and, together with the military commissioners (*comisionados militar*), worked as the village's "new authorities".²⁰

Power at the local level depends as much on the individual history and personality of the particular villager as his position. Although the *jefe* normally took the lead, sometimes the *comisionado* was the most brutal. In the vast majority of the cases, both use their authority and access to the army to abuse the local population. Idiosyncratic factors - such as whether the *jefe* has done his military service - play a part in anomalous power relations between *jefe* and commissioner. The distribution of power between *jefes* and commissioners also determines their relationship with the patrollers and the rest of the village.

THE JEFES

Who became *jefe* and why

I was given brief histories of several Emol men who became *jefes* when the patrols were first formed. These men either volunteered or were selected for this position which they knew would bring them some sort of reward (status or avoiding loss of life) although they did not know what the job entailed. A degree of "forced choice" ensured that men who had not volunteered did not reject selection: the line between being selected and volunteering is not as distinct as it might, *prima facie*, appear.

It is necessary to attempt to characterize those offered the position of *jefe*. Given that *jefes* came from a variety of different backgrounds (army supporters, guerrilla, catechists,

cofradía, etc) one cannot say their motivations for accepting the role (other than the desire to remain alive) were similar. However, there was a common denominator: they were people the military commander or his delegates saw as potential collaborators.

The terrified ex-guerrilla could, in theory, work his way back to social acceptance (as defined by the military) by turning himself in and expressing true repentance by giving the names of his *compañeros* (people belonging to the same organization) and becoming a *jefe*, the newly recognized authority. A small number of former guerrilla collaborators and guerrilla leaders surrendered to the army of their own accord and not only joined the civil patrol but elected to become *jefes*. In fact people labelled as guerrillas had few options other than to be zealous patrollers because of their greater need to be perceived as "loyal". Two former guerrillas from one village in southern Quiché who became *jefes* were reputed to terrorize the local population. One was said to denounce other villagers as subversives and ask the army for permission to bring them in; the other was said to rape women and boast about how many people he had killed since becoming a patrol *jefe*. It is very difficult if not impossible to shake off the guerrilla label. Local factionalism determined whether "subversives" survived or not.

The successful power of the army in defeating the guerrilla has such appeal for the insecure guerrilla that it may become internalized as his standards and values. Originally, he may have resented the power that controlled him, but any strong power also exerts tremendous appeal (see Staub 1989). I assume that this is especially the case for the victimized Indian for whom the post of *jefe* offered hope of defence against further attack. Safety was probably a strong motivation. Siding with the powerful army provided the vulnerable person with feelings of control. Attachment to the army perhaps also fulfilled a frustrated need for community among persecuted villagers (ibid). The process of change in group alignment was probably not a smooth or constant one, although events like the massacre, which I explain below, probably accelerated it.

In some villages the army co-opted catechists to head the vigilantes, an obvious strategy to divert any anti-military sentiments or activities by keeping them busy with patrol rather than church matters (cf. Wilson 1990), though this was not always successful from the army's point of view. A denounced leader (a catechist) was replaced by a man who owed

his advancement not to villagers' respect or to his achievements of honour but only to the State that appointed him (i.e., the *jefe*). As likely as not, he was resented and secretly blamed by the friends of the man he replaced, giving him even more reason to prove his usefulness to the state by greater compliance with its demands, since he could not count on his own group to support him.

Other *jefes* were reputed to have aspired spontaneously to power. Having failed to attain legitimate power in their communities, some aspired to a position in *Ladino* society which had previously eluded them because of their Indianness; others may have exercised illicit malevolent powers (as sorcerers, for example) and, given the high rate of conversion to protestantism, were relieved to find a new way of regaining authority.

Power was sought by the frustrated and granted to people willing to venerate hierarchic authority, thereby attaining an otherwise unreachable social elevation; for a man who has been poor and without status all his life, serving as a *jefe* meant the immediate power of a rifle and the ability to evoke fear in fellow villagers who had denied him respect. Although the job of *jefe* was fundamentally despicable, it was the appointment which conferred the most authority within the new social structure.

Power was also sought by many among the oppressed who unconsciously strove to identify²¹ with their oppressors: army indoctrination caused men, through their service as patrollers, to identify with their aggressors and commit themselves to the cause they fought for. Villagers' identification with the aggressor, even before the setting up of the patrol system,²² made them, like their oppressors, fear the guerrilla.

There has been a good deal of anthropological discussion of what "identification" might be.²³ I suggest that the process of identification that *jefes* (and some patrollers) went through differs from that in the anthropological literature because of the special circumstances in which the Quiché identified with the army. The situation of fear generated by the army probably increased people's suggestibility (cf. Sapir and Crocker, 1977 on this process). I do not want to suggest that all behaviour can be explained in terms of identification. I suspect that some people merely complied with the dangerous authorities rather than taking on their agendas as their own. It is apparent that the motives of the *jefes* were not, however,

homogenous in character - that is, truly cultural. Among other collective motives, their ideological and identity-related ones become integrated with personal motives (e.g., power, sadism).

A *jefe*'s "identification with the oppressor" is bound by, or perhaps oscillates with, an identification with the oppressed; although token *Latinos*, *jefes* are still Indians, some of whom had been literally beaten into shape before being allowed the freedom to take on the job. When performing their role as *jefes*, they identified with the army and its objectives - they were the saviours and protectors who killed for the public good; in their own eyes (and those of the army), their behaviour, then, was seen as moral and righteous.²⁴ However, most *jefes*, when they put down their guns and returned home to their roles as Indians, agriculturalists and household heads, identified with their Indian neighbours who maintained that murder was a heinous transgression. Thus the *jefe* moves back and forth, as it were, between two worlds: the world of the *Ladino* soldier and the "offstage" world of the Indian, in which he may have to answer for his behaviour in the former. To the extent that oscillation existed (and this diminishes as *jefes* become increasingly distant from their community through the carrying out of their role), there must also have been some confusion, self doubt and, perhaps, self hatred. In order to avert this uncomfortable switch, some remained behind the mask of the *jefe* even when at home, continuing with their tasks beyond the line of duty.

According to Bettelheim (1986), the more absolute the tyranny, the more debilitated the subject, the more tempting to him to "regain" strength by becoming part of the tyranny and thus enjoy its power. In accepting all this, one can attain or regain some inner integration through conformity. But the price one must pay is to identify, without reservation, with the tyranny; in brief, to give up autonomy. People with the least strength for one reason or another were those who sold themselves over to the army. Among these types were those most frightened of dying, with the least inner strength, whose strength had not been fortified by their family or were less able to meet a dangerous outside world on their own terms. They were less likely to achieve security in their most intimate relations, so they had to make sure that their world around them was friendly and supportive. They were, in turn, degraded by the acts they were forced to commit, which they then blamed on the victims: "blaming others, or outside conditions for one's own misbehaviour may be the child's privilege; if an adult

denies responsibility for his own actions, it is another step toward personality disintegration" (Bettelheim 1986:192). This analysis may apply more to Germans during the Third Reich than to the Quiché who are socialized into putting responsibility outside of themselves, perhaps as a result of centuries of having little control over their lives as a people or as individuals.²⁵ Nevertheless, I believe this process still applies, even if to a lesser degree.

Many self-appointed *jefes* sold themselves over by conforming to the desires of the military State. Among them were men who no longer made a distinction between inward and outward conformity because they were both one and the same: no self-censorship was necessary because they were censored once and for all through their internalization of the army's forms and expression which imposed their form on all ~~their~~ expressions (cf. Bourdieu 1991:138). Of all categories of villagers, *jefes* who volunteered for the position can be seen to have given up the most autonomy.

It is important to point out that despite the psychological conformity and identification with the soldiers or *jefes* on the part of any actor, occupying any position, there were also strong defences that worked in the opposite direction. This was even so among those *jefes* who appeared to "accept" their roles, for this did not necessarily entail "real" support, devotion or consent understood in a psychological sense. Identification was not wholesale, completely lacking or unwavering but varied according to time and context.

The "training" and position of *jefes*

Villages had between four and ten *jefes*, depending on their size and how subversive they were perceived to be (Emol had nine). Once the *jefes* were named, they were taken away for three months' "training". The most villagers could tell me about this was that they were taken to a particular military base in Quiché and that they were *bravo* (fierce) when they returned. The men were brought back to the village by soldiers who installed them as *jefes*. The military then built a patrol base (*destacamento*) at the main entrance to the village and moved themselves in the church (when they eventually left, the church had blood stained walls and broken windows)²⁶ from which they proceeded to give the new *jefes* six months of what might be euphemistically called on the job training to ensure that they were

sufficiently brutal. It was during and immediately after this "probationary" period that the worst internal violence occurred.

The *jefe* was to become the terror of ordinary Indian's lives because, like the fascist or torturer, he could turn his identity into violence and pain at random (Taussig 1987:3-72). The patrol *jefe*'s daily relations with "his" community and its people vacillated from camaraderie (*amistad*) and affection (*cariño*) to violent abuse and punishment. The violent unpredictable seesawing is fairly characteristic of *jefes*, particularly of those installed when the system was first established.

In the eyes of the local Indians, the ability to exert arbitrary physical violence constitutes the basis of the *jefe*'s permanence as a powerful authority figure; the respect he is accorded is based on fear, replacing traditional means of accruing respect. A *jefe*'s ability to turn violent is a privilege constructed around historically specific forms of violence practised among the Quiché (within the family; witchcraft /sorcery). This association is attested to by people's claims that some *jefes* were *brujos* (witches) as well as devils. Interestingly, there is a continuity between the activities carried out by *jefes* and those carried out by people in the early colonial period. Indeed, the practice of *brujería* (witchcraft) could have provided the cognitive schemas or representations of reality that served as a blueprint for a *jefe*'s violent behaviour.²⁷ *Brujos* made demons enter people who then abducted people and raped women (cf. Sahagún 1950-1963). In some areas, the *jefes*' power came from villagers' implicit permission for them to take over the malevolent power of witches (*brujos*).

The *jefe*'s possession of violent power not only resulted from his compliance with or permission from the military but from his fluency in the historically distinct codes of political legitimation, power and social difference corresponding to forms of social reproduction. Relations of difference, constitutive of power, currently form a specific system of social exchange based on the reciprocal social and territorial constitution of masculinity, honour/respect and vengeance.

The military state offered its followers a new, tenuous identity through identification with the Guatemalan state, and an equally suspect self-respect through its ideology of the superior, military/*Ladino* race. These satisfactions were necessary for the State to gain

complete external control of the individual without bringing about his immediate and utter disintegration. It also provided the *jefe* with a sense of connection and support (see Staub 1989): it is more than likely that his friends resented his new found, illegitimate power and the crimes he committed. The alliance the *jefe* made with the *oficiales* shattered his solidarity with his own social group and reinforced his active co-operation with the military power (see Walter 1969:286-7). *Jefes* from other villages became the in-group as the local *jefe* became increasingly connected with the army and increasingly distanced from his fellow villages, who became more other and inferior; it seemed that *jefes* who functioned "best" were those who joined and supported each other, especially given that (at least initially) they had to overcome some social prohibitions. Shared enmity emphasized the formation of community between villages among designated segments (a process which was developing in Quiché prior to the formation of the patrols; the catechization programme and popular movement also encouraged this to a lesser degree).

The *jefes'* estrangement from their communities was clearly demonstrated when an amnesty (*amnistia* or *amistad*, friendship, another euphemism) was announced in 1986 by the newly elected civilian president; the army's position was perceived as being slightly weakened and most *jefes* absconded to the coast, remaining there for several years. It was said they feared vengeance from victims' families; when they returned, they posted guards outside their houses. Nonetheless, some were not too frightened to exercise the violent authority they had accrued as *jefes* over the years: whilst having (officially) renounced their position, some instructed the new *jefes* from behind the scenes.

Autonomy of *jefes* and patrollers

Men's different roles in life before becoming *jefes* made them behave differently and take on the role of *jefe* with greater or lesser gusto. Some *jefes* were unwilling accomplices to military actions; they merely wanted "to make it through the night" (America's Watch 1986:47). *Jefes* who were neither pro-military nor ambitious were presented with tremendous dilemmas and little reward. Such *jefes* may have had to provide names to military officials who needed to fill their quota of subversives in order to satisfy the higher echelons of the system, thus becoming reluctant accessories to military actions. Co-opted young catechists and health promoters (technicians) were more likely to be in this category. One unfortunate

jefe from another village ended up in the army base (from which he never emerged) because he was unable to completely disguise his reluctance to act as *jefe*.

A few *jefes* actually helped non-compliant patrollers by, for example, securing their release from jail; one *jefe*, who had been a member of the local peasant union, was able to help the widows in his village after their husbands were disappeared. Nor did all military commissioners sympathize with the army: some occasionally played a protective role towards their villages, using their position to find out who was on the army hit list and saving their lives as a result. While I was in Quiché, a commissioner in a southern village which had disbanded its patrol system was accused of being a subversive. It was clearly dangerous for the individual *jefe* or commissioner to be seen to be circumventing the military's intentions and those who tried to help others showed great courage.

Many men who attempted to work against the dominant forces before *La Violencia* were still opposed to the system; this was manifested in their opposition to the patrols, despite the fact that they complied out of fear or peer pressure, performing their duties without having internalized the army's values. This was confirmed in one man's statement that, excluding the few who changed their minds (*cambiar su cabeza*), "the majority of the Catholic Action people do not want to participate in the patrols".

Some *jefes* committed atrocities because it was prudent to comply. When this is combined with the exemplary punishment of the occasional act of defiance, such as the killing of remiss patrollers, a kind of dramatization of power relations is realized. One may curse such domination - preferably behind the scenes²⁸ - but one will, nevertheless, accommodate oneself to its hard reality. The effect of reinforcing deportment in this way may be behaviourally nearly indistinguishable from behaviour that arises from willing consent.

Less sadistic *jefes* were probably compensated less and probably suffered more with guilt afterwards.²⁹ They consequently needed to provide more compelling reasons for their need to kill victims other than the need to remain alive themselves. Loizos (1981:110-111) writes that

...in war [...] men feel free to do things they would be ashamed of doing in their home towns or villages for fear of discovery and punishment. They are free in two different senses: first, the disorganization of war zones permits private acts of violence, and secondly things may be done to enemies which will be shrugged off by one's own people. "It was war. They were enemies".

In Guatemala during the time of chaos the former certainly seems to apply to many people's behaviour. But while the *jefe* who had internalized the idea that Indians who were not aligned with them, were the "other", the subversives, the enemy, they never shrugged off their murders like the Cypriots in Loizos's study. There was instead tacit justification for the killings. They never admitted to any killing whatsoever, at least not in public (although this may have formed part of their hidden discourses among themselves) because they lived in fear of persecution, although this never happened.

While some outwardly complied while retaining their former values, others gave themselves up, at least on a symbolic level, and violated respected Quiché values. The *jefe* who chose or was chosen to fulfil this role was no more free to be himself than the villagers he terrorized. The *jefe* whose life had been threatened for "subversive" activities committed before assuming the role faced a similar scenario.

The fact that the military forced the *jefes* to conduct atrocities, thus creating miasmas of terror in their own villages, illustrates that *jefes* were also subordinate Indians; they too were subject to most egregious persecutions. Sometimes elaboration was the *jefe's* way of privately asserting their independence from the army. The villagers' way of subverting this was, for example, to inform the army about the *jefe's* violence. At these times it became obvious that the *jefes* were not perceived as the real holders of power; the army triumphed in becoming the saviours while the subaltern, the *jefe*, was labelled as vile. Being seen as the saviours and at the same time the real holders of power imposed a limit on the military's violence: it had to be seen to control the *jefe's* further acts of violence. The army *official's* display of reprimanding the *jefes* did not, of course, put an end to the *jefes'* violence. Perhaps the fact that the meeting with the *jefes* occurred behind closed doors had something to do with this.

However, the army was unable to entirely control the repercussions of their domination over the *jefes* nor the *jefes* over the patrollers. The military did not have complete control over the ways that personal domination, including punishment, humiliation and exploitation of villages, took shape on a local level.

Mario: profile of a mean *jefe*

Only one of the original collection of subalterns, Mario, an illiterate Indian aged between 45 to 50 years, remained in "power" by the time I arrived in Emol. Mario, a former *brujo*, had never fled nor relinquished his overt command. Mario demonstrated his power and fearlessness (or perhaps merely his psychopathic tendencies) by staying put. He held steadfast to the army's view that he was ridding the community of "subversives" and "bandits"; he was saving *la patria* from the evils of a godless, alien, marxist "infiltration".

Mario seemed to love authority. It was not known exactly how he had achieved his position and speculation was rife. *Doña Josefina*, illustrating recognition of the problem of class as opposed to race, suggested that "Mario had contempt for the poor and that is why he allied himself with the army". Unlike most patrollers, Mario and some other *jefes* were "those whose wisdom is evil" (itz'el u no'j). Others suggested that it was merely his somewhat disreputable air which made him attractive to the army who had recognized his capacities as a competent puppet. The most common interpretation was that he had plotted to obtain the position and used his powers as a sorcerer (*brujo*) to obtain it, thus implying that his desire for power was very strong.

Since securing office, Mario gained greater authority (than he had as a *brujo*) as he had come to share the army's twisted megalomaniacal illusions during his years in power. His authority was facilitated by his brutal durability and smooth adeptness with the military powers. One suspected that he was encouraged on his path by the military who, no doubt, had little respect for him but profited from his flair for sustaining order through terror. They knew, as perhaps Mario himself sensed, that the army was the ultimate judicial authority. Like other *jefes*, Mario accrued power over and above the civilian and supernatural authorities.

Through becoming a *jefe*, Mario was given an opportunity to climb from the depths of subservience common to most Indians; he was also able to present a facade of exerting his own will. His actual autonomy is restricted to a very limited sphere, largely defined by the army, within which he operates with devastating effect. As Bourdieu (1991:27) says, once agents have "established their own appearance of self-sufficiency, they can engage in the verbal battles which characterize the political field with a certain degree of autonomy, concealing from themselves and others the social bases upon which their power, and the power of their words, depends".

Perhaps Mario's personality (and that of others like him) was already predisposed to follow the codes of conduct which typified the system. Zimbardo (1969) has identified the potentially assaultive over-controlled person who couples outward conformity with inner alienation arising from a socialization process that exaggerates conformity to the rules of the social system.³⁰ Both the collapse of traditional authority structures and the impotence of the judicial system meant that there were no means of restraining such people when they lost control, which they frequently did. Such people present a paradox particularly in the face of the destruction of world views (as happened during *La Violencia*), for they seem to have a strong need to identify with a strong authority.

Many Indian males are socialized into masculine violence through exposure to male violence within the family; perhaps Mario's parents were punitive towards him. I am suggesting here that a relationship exists between masculinity and violence through the role played by the family in the construction of a male identity in which violence is accorded a socially sanctioned place. This is then given expression within the wider society.³¹ Growing up as an Indian, Mario learnt that others were hostile. Both his immediate experience of his family and his experience as an Indian may have taught him the importance of allying himself with the powerful. He may have been susceptible to taking on a violent male identity owing to his personality and a strong identification with his father and other violent men he encountered in his environment as a youngster. Subsequently, because of his "training" by the army and other factors, he easily turned against the powerless.

Whatever the reasons for it, what was different about Mario was his demeanour and his way of strutting around the village. Also distinct was the venom and fear he inspired in

many women and the venom which he himself exercised against fellow Indians who were just like his former self. Women noticed how similar Mario was to the military in both his behaviour and his attitudes towards "poor Indians" (*humildes*). The women suggested that the military's agenda which he learnt as *jefe* were merely added to his own, which was already different from that of the humble Indian. The following conversation between *doña* Flora and *doña* Eugenia is representative of women's malicious gossip concerning Mario, and expresses their antipathy towards him and the women associated with him:

Doña Flora:

You know they say that this *viejo* (old one) who is in charge of justice [*jefe* of the patrol] went [had sexual relations] with the wife of another. He was doing lots of things with her ...they say that there are three women with this *viejo arrugada* (wrinkled old one, Mario).

Doña Eugenia:

Jesus! Jesus!

Doña Flora:

And the woman [Mario's wife] has a [female] worker who lives with her.

Doña Eugenia:

Ahh [she says with admiration].

Doña Flora:

And the girl now has a baby.

Doña Eugenia:

She already has a child?

Doña Flora:

Yes, they say that the woman's [Mario's wife's] daughters-in-law taunt her, asking her who the father of the child is, but the wife denies it because it is convenient for her. And the *patrona* [the woman for whom she works, i.e., Mario's wife] tells them not to bother the girl asking them, "why are you interrogating her? She is my helper, she's the one who feeds my cows and sheep, you've no reason to ask her questions". She tells them "I'm here to attend to her [basic] necessities", and she does all she can to block her servant from answering herself...I expect that the two of them are in cahoots [implying that Mario's wife allows him to commit adultery with the girl].

Mario identified readily with the army whose officials (*oficiales*)³² sometimes came to the village and made speeches about the need to continue with the patrols. I had little way of telling whether his identification with the powerful was deliberate, knowing, or unconscious.³³ It was impossible to discern how much of his performance of master and saviour was part of an attempt to display a tenable performance which he thought mimicked the soldier's or how much of it had been internalized. Perhaps the way he behaved was influenced by the negative image that the widows had of him: the image others have of us also shapes our own images of ourselves (Mead cited in Bettelheim 1986:56).

By identifying with the violent *Ladino* soldier³⁴ and behaving like him, Mario too became a *Ladino*, at least on some levels. My observations indicated that Mario imitated those whose power he desired. He must have trained in order to make his body more like a soldier's; he was taller and more brawny than the average Indian and people described him as even larger (cf. Watson 1971);³⁵ women suggested that like the soldiers he ate more meat than the ordinary Indian. He did not go so far as to affix bits of soldier's khaki³⁶ to his own clothes although he had acquired an old pair of cast off army boots which I saw him wear now and again; however, the second hand cast-offs worn by most Indian men were in notably better condition. It seems he zealously endeavoured to copy the behaviours and learn the cultural codes of *Latinos* and soldiers (which did not necessarily overlap). He emulated their beliefs (he attended the evangelical church which has been associated with the military state since the presidency of Ríos Montt), public ceremonies, gestures and expressions. Recently, for example he alleged that "human rights activists are killers".³⁷ Bettelheim, describing a similar phenomenon in Nazi Germany,³⁸ concludes "only attempts to emulate the SS can explain such behaviour" (1986:171).

As a consequence of his efforts to be a militarized *Ladino*, Mario seemed to think of himself not as a *servidor* (servant) as most unassuming Indians do, but as a saviour or lord. He appeared impervious to the hatred he engendered in widows, who claimed that he was still a sorcerer (he had already had pretensions to authority then) and seemed oblivious to the inevitable mockery of the military who were indifferent to his fate.

Scott (1990) suggests that there is a discrepancy between the "public transcripts" deployed in the open exercise of power and the "hidden transcript" communicated securely

and exclusively off-stage. He described George Orwell's dilemma in the essay "Shooting an Elephant": as the leading actor in the piece, Orwell realizes that he is a hollow puppet, a mask. He also discerns the audience's readiness to mock him should he not follow the institutional script. However, Mario had more to fear than loss of reputation should he dare to drop his mask; his private fear of loss of status or of life itself was more vital. He therefore could not afford to let go of his role of *jefe* anywhere. Mario remained in this role longer and more constantly than Orwell and in much more intimidating conditions and it is therefore unlikely that he could not avoid being changed by his experience. The fact that he relished his role as *jefe* would also suggest that he would more readily fit into it. So while in the beginning Mario may have gone through the process of role switch and oscillation, with time he became transformed in a way that was unlikely to occur among ordinary patrollers or even some *jefes*.

Bettelheim writes (with reference to concentration camp inmates) that it was very difficult to stay alive and unchanged inwardly, for efforts to avoid change endangered lives (1986:127). However, Bettelheim's distinction between outward compliance and the genuine acceptance of values belonging to another morality is not clear. I would imagine that some concentration camp internees, like men coerced into participating in the patrols, changed their outward surface conduct while holding on to their beliefs from former times. It has become increasingly evident as the patrollers resist carrying out their duties after eight years that some, at least, were merely complying in order to remain alive without internalising the army's morality or even truly believing their rhetoric. Indeed, they may even be more opposed to the whole system than ever, before having had to choke back their opposition to the system for so many years and having seen that the pay-off is so low and even negative. Among those who still continue, one cannot assume that they have internalized the army's values; those who resist patrol duty now-a-days are threatened with abduction and/or murder. Moreover, perhaps their convictions are to some extent . . . determined by the context in which they find themselves; they are not necessarily fixed.

Mario was different because he seemed to have internalized the army's norms rather than merely conforming to them because it was prudent to do so. It was not that he had internalized dominant norms which resonated with his own: he had elaborated his script (of *jefe* and *Ladino*) on his own. Moreover, he seemed to carry it with him wherever he went,

even into hidden domains; it seemed that the switch between the public and the hidden did not occur to the same degree with Mario as with other vigilantes or even *jefes*.

I suggest that it was psychologically necessary for Mario to remain a *Ladino* at all times. But in order to do this he had to kill and re-kill the Indian part of himself because he was never able really to escape who he was. Mario achieved this by splitting³⁹ off and objectifying that side of himself in others (who were Indian) and attempting to rid that side in himself by literally killing other Indians;⁴⁰ racism against Indians has resulted in a self-hatred and a consequent need to exterminate. I contend that through murdering his own kind, Mario symbolically killed a part of himself. The apparent ruthlessness with which he directed the massacre of village men whom he considered his subordinates sprang not only from his fragile personality⁴¹ or his obsequiousness towards the military but from his own desire to destroy the Indian part of himself from which he wished to escape in order to achieve "real progress". His public violence was unleashed against the Indian part of himself, at last finding articulation of all that he had suppressed and which Indians had stifled for centuries. Mario had the opportunity to unleash his frustrated anger; the problem is that it was released against an object of displacement and not those who had been aggressive towards him. The anger could not be completely dissipated because it still had to be quelled before the soldier and real *Ladino*.

Mario was a complicated individual. He was not only a renegade and an accessory. In some measure he himself must have become progressively convinced by army rhetoric and propaganda and the press that he was a protector of his space from the "subversives". His illiteracy meant that he was particularly susceptible to the symbols provided by the army. He did not have access to information which might refute their propaganda. Given that he saw himself as aiding the process of protection of the community, i.e., preventing the subversives from indoctrinating the Others in his community, and not that he was repressing them, he felt free to act out his role blatantly. His perception of himself as different and less vulnerable than the villagers to subversive indoctrination hid the fact that Mario, like his aggressors, was genuinely afraid of subversion and of becoming subversive himself.

The *jefes* of Emol, of whom Mario was said to be the most brutal, went further than army orders (and were conceited about this). It seems that Mario's behaviour, like that of

many other *jefes* of his ilk, arose from curious amalgam of a cult of obedience and complete lack of control. There was an oscillation between the two and at times the latter had the greater force. I was told that villagers called upon the army to help them stop the *jefes*. The intensity of the aggression may be partially explained by the fact that Mario learnt the violence from the soldiers who had previously attacked him (as an Indian) and saw that he had the opportunity (as a *Ladino*) to exercise it with impunity. The power that the role of *jefe* may have had on him is suggested by the work of Zimbardo et al. (1974) who claims that such power can lead to greater devaluation and cruelty towards the other, especially when he is degraded.⁴²

There is little playing with the rules of the cultural game with people like Mario; he was unlikely to be confident in his cultural identity (as either Indian or *Ladino*) which was under threat. Mario, like other *jefes*, knew that his position did not rest on a collective belief that it was legitimately his; nor was his position guaranteed by his installation as *jefe* or made concrete by a uniform.⁴³ There were connotations of insecurity from both sides, exacerbated in recent years in Southern Quiché when the whole institution of the patrols came under threat.⁴⁴ Some villages partially abandoned the system.⁴⁵

Mario feared demotion to the state of the "other", to the ranks of those he had killed. This was particularly threatening after he had conducted kidnappings, torture and public massacres, which had only been made possible by the construction of neighbours as something "other".⁴⁶ Actions that publicly contradict the basis of power are threatening, especially to someone like the *jefe* who has been put into a position of power on dubious grounds. Therefore *jefes* like Mario lost all empathy with their fellow villagers; any softening of attitude would have been noted by any other *jefes* or soldiers present and they would swiftly have fallen from power. Their own survival depended on becoming and remaining - to put it mildly - insensitive.

Like all oppressors, Mario was aware of the need to shield himself from those over whom he felt he had power. He probably protected himself from retaliation both by means of his powers as a sorcerer (*brujo*) and with a number of government informers (*orejas*). Mario was not only less likely to be confronted by others because of this shield but in his consistency he was also protected from self confrontation for his crimes. Perhaps if, like the

ordinary patroller, he had switched back to being Indian he would have confronted the fact that the crimes he had committed were against his own people.

My portrayal of Mario should not make him out to be a devil (although he was certainly perceived by many to be one). He had much in common with other self-appointed *jefes*, among whom were many frustrated men who tasted power and were intoxicated by it.⁴⁷ Staub writes that even self-selected perpetrators "evolve along a continuum of destruction" (1989:18). Mario suffered from the well-known syndrome of prolonged and unchallenged power and its symptoms were visible in him: dogmatic arrogance, clinging to the levers of command,⁴⁸ regarding himself as above the law.

THE JEFE'S PRACTICES

The specifics of the violence varied not only between departments but also village by village. They were determined by local peculiarities of culture, history (including extant disputes within the village and between *cantones* of the same village) and the personalities of individual *jefes* and *comisionados*.⁴⁹

Public Village Massacres

The injury that a crime inflicts upon the social body is the disorder that it introduces into it, the scandal that it gives rise to, the example that it gives, the incitement to repeat if it is not punished, and the possibility of becoming wide-spread that it bears within it.

Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*

At first the actions of most *jefes*' were motivated by a desire to save their own lives. However, massacres conducted under army coercion affected the perpetrators, beginning a process which the *jefes* continued in an apparently auto-suggestive fashion, having been convinced that they had the ability to make further displays of power. The violence they were forced to commit may have also resulted in what Lifton (1986) calls "psychic numbing", an anaesthetizing of emotions which diminishes sensitivity to the suffering of others. The massacre was also a most extreme form of degrading an already devalued population through

dehumanizing them.⁵⁰ In fact, all Indians tend to be seen as a subhuman species by *Latinos*; by casting his lot with the army, the *jefe* may have seen himself as being "more" human.

The public massacre was the most dramatic rite of legitimization. It was also one of the most effective ways of mortifying the Indian. Massacres reinforced the *jefe*'s violent authority; the arbitrary boundary between him and other Indians was consecrated and the established order was thus sanctioned. This is perhaps intended to be an identity-fixing event, rather like the more gentle procedures described by Goffman (1961) who advanced the now classic model that the induction of both inmates and their keepers into the closed institution parallels rites of passage and establishes the total gauge of discipline in the institution. Induction is an unavoidable rite of defilement for the new inmate, who is stripped of many outward components of pre-institutional identity. In many instances the new inmate, once bereft of these identity components, has very few resources with which to counter this massive socializing onslaught (ibid:18-30).

Dramatic displays of investiture of violent authority had the effect of transforming the representation of heretofore more-or-less equivalent villagers into victims and perpetrators (*jefes*).⁵¹ Furthermore, they transformed the representation that the *jefe* had of himself and the behaviour he felt obliged to adopt in order to conform to that representation. Given that the group he was devaluing was in fact very similar to himself, he had to devalue them with a vengeance in order to protect his own newly formed identity (see Staub 1989).

The massacre was an act of communication which signified to the *jefe* how he should conduct himself in relation to the "enemy" and other scapegoated villagers while signifying to the latter how he could act towards them. It also had the effect of discouraging the *jefe* from deserting his role: if he crossed to the other side, he too could become the object of violence rather than its agent.

The massacre atomized the horizontal links among the objects of this act (the villagers) which had the effect of increasing mistrust and, hence, terror. The place of the atomized, subsumed subject (the villager) is determined by a central authority (the *jefe*, who is in turn under the military) (Foucault 1979). Atomization arose partly because of the betrayal involved when one neighbour killed another while others stood by, paralysed and

unable to act, protect or aid victims.⁵² Even if they could have acted, they may have refrained because attempted interference could lead to execution.

Like other elements in a whole series of official rituals,⁵³ the massacre quelled villagers' remaining will. There was no choice other than to comply with this rite. Families and other villagers (many of whom were distantly related) became passive or more active participants in these atrocities; the affective bonds between parent and child, husband and wife were severed with the resultant reorganization of the family unit. As Argentine journalist Jacobo Timmerman writes when witnessing the torture of his family, "suddenly an entire culture based on familial love, devotion, the capacity for mutual sacrifice [the latter has most resonance among the Quiché] collapses" (1981:148). Bystanders who passively observed the massacres may even come to devalue the victims in order to justify their own passivity (Staub 1989).

Women felt as though they themselves were being sacrificed concurrently with the slaughtering of their children. One woman said that it was as though she herself was being killed.⁵⁴ This arises from the woman's empathy and identification with the experiences of her relatives who were beaten in front of her and the creation of an atmosphere of intense exchange during the massacre in which the boundaries between the self and the other were broken.

That victims played a part in their own destruction has been suggested by Arendt (1958 a & b) (in relation to inmates of concentration camps) and others (e.g., Hilberg 1961, Davidowicz 1975). In the present case, villagers, ordinary patrollers and especially widows were usually passive, particularly in the presence of a *jefe* who, in turn, was passive before a soldier. There are many reasons for this. They were denied the possibility of defending themselves against the intense anxiety that results from seeing the intentions of harm-doers; more importantly, victims face overwhelming brute force. As the continuum of annihilation progresses, there is a parallel progression of psychological change in the victims. They give up hope, moving along a continuum of victimization.

The massacres were the vehicle through which the body became the place where the "atomists of pain" (Foucault 1979:11) exercised their practices.⁵⁵ These practices and the

acts of abduction which led to the "disappearance" of Indians (in fact, of Guatemalans from all walks of life) were not simply methods of eliminating perceived enemies of the State: rather, they must be seen as a process both constitutive of and expressing - although in a negative and debased form - the cultural meaning of the totalization of society by the military. The acts can be viewed as "cultural and psychological meta-messages conveying multiple messages" (Scheper-Hughes 1987). She argues that the symbolics of political pain underline the destructive and re-organizational agenda of the military operation (ibid:237). The massacres in Guatemala were literalizations of the military's fantasy of "re-organizing" the Guatemalan landscape of power relations.

Punishment of so-called transgressors via massacres, like the punishment of patrollers who did not wholly comply, was less intended to punish them than to force all villagers to do as the State wished: villagers were to refrain from involving themselves with the guerrillas, the patroller was to cooperate with the patrol system and the *jefe* was to carry out massacres - willingly. In this sense the process of massacre and abduction illuminates, in the form of a new political ritual, the essential relationship between a totalitarian state and Quiché society: *Ladino* power in relation to the Quiché has always given them the ability to exercise power over the Indian. The tendency for *Ladinos* to devalue and assign Indians as other and inferior is a longstanding precondition to harm them.⁵⁶

The initial massacres which the army forced *jefes* to carry out on the bodies of others, or ordered the *jefes* to force others to commit, were calculated collective spectacles of torture in which entire families participated. Restructuring power relations thus involved "reorganization" down to the level of the family and even the "self".

Violent invasion of private space

The serious threats to women's lives were the most severe form of chronic intimidation from within the community. Threats of rape, abduction and massacre were issued by the assassins of their male kin. Women knew these were not idle threats as they had already been subjected to such experiences by both soldier and *jefe*.⁵⁷ Threats of kidnapping and killing of women and children were dealt out with a vengeance, especially to widows who joined human rights organizations or "neutral" NGOs (non-governmental

organizations). Women were threatened with having bombs dropped on their gatherings and with being "disappeared" on the way to meetings. The *jefes* warned that they might be forced to take them to the military base or kill them once and for all (*de una vez*). The *jefes* claimed that guerrillas were connected to such organizations and were attempting to find increased membership among the widows; they organized demonstrations against CONAVIGUA and other organizations, forcing patrollers and other villagers to take part.

The *jefes* intimated that further violent acts were likely to occur, reminding women of past incidents of violence against them. Allusions were made to particularly repugnant incidents such as the case where a group of widows from a nearby village were left to perish after being beaten and then shoved down latrines, structures which consist of deep holes covered by cement cylinders and wooden tops.

The *jefes* created a plethora of social experiences of other indignities: control, submission, humiliation, forced deference, sexual and labour exploitation, and punishment of the widows. These affronts formed the foundations of women's fear, anger, and resentment. The *jefes* also tried to augment women's sense of impotence, frustration and bile⁵⁸ by flaunting their power, intruding in their houses⁵⁹ and extracting goods, labour and services from them, making sure that women knew that they could fulfil any violent or other whim with impunity. It was noticeable that *jefes* such as Mario gained gratification from having the absolute power to make others flinch.

The *jefes*' monothematic message of silence - "don't talk to anyone or your children will be killed" - permeated the community. Women were threatened with further violence against their children if they spoke about the atrocities or the clandestine graves.

The army attempted to indoctrinate school children by circulating flyers (see figures 1 & 2) depicting, for example, the guerrilla as the terror of the church and the patrols as its saviour. In villages where men refused to participate in the patrols, children were asked where their fathers were, the implication being that they might have gone with the guerrilla. Children were encouraged to spy on their parents, which robbed family life of its intimacy; the knowledge that they could cause a parent's death was intended to destroy the respect and fear children have for their parents. Few children denounced a parent but the threat of it

loomed large. On the rare occasions when such denunciations did occur, their terrible consequences were made widely known and were enough to sow distrust.

Fear of denunciation from within damaged the family as a source of inner security; dreading the consequences of what "they" might do or say in front of other family members was particularly destructive. This fear gripped parents and elders, weakening their security within the home; it dried up the main source which fed their self respect and gave them a sense of worth and thus of inner autonomy. The fear, more than the fact of betrayal by children or mates, made it impossible to lower one's defences even within one's four walls. Trust, which is the greatest value in intimate relations, became a danger instead of the relief it should have been. It turned family life into an experience of continuous caution, of strain of being on guard if not openly distrustful;⁶⁰ it became a weakening experience at a time when it might have provided greater security. What is said here of the family was also true to a lesser degree for less intimate group associations, which the *jefes* warned were infiltrated by informers.

The army's invasion of private, previously safe places during *La Violencia* was continued by the *jefes*. Time and space were also invaded. Many violent acts took place under the cover of darkness; people are still being dragged from their homes for interrogation. While the dark is traditionally feared, it became a time of increased insecurity when everyone was at home in order to avert claims that they were engaged in seditious activity. The night is normally a time when the villagers return to the home for the main family meal, conversation, relaxation and sleep. It is also the time of some sacred rituals.

The home was woman's main everyday sanctuary up to the time of *La Violencia* when they were raped within it, their relatives were "disappeared" from it. In Emol at the height of *La Violencia*, soldiers killed women within their sweat baths (*temascal*). A naked pregnant woman was taken away from her *temascal* during an army round up, and was never seen again. Following or proceeding these acts, women were forced to abandon their homes, which were then looted and razed to the ground.

The home became a space over which the two sides fought for the attention of those within it. Some people said the guerrillas

came to give their *platicas* (talks) to villagers in their homes at night (see chapter 3). *Desconocidos* (unidentifiable men) came to the home, attempting to recruit influential and other villagers; if unsuccessful, they sometimes returned to abduct them. Incidents such as burning the houses of human rights members continued up to the time of my departure. Someone told me they had recently been asked if their house could be used as a look-out post by the guerrillas.

Another menacing strategy is the policing of the semi-open discussions of women (and resisters of the patrols) in order to censor any indication of disloyalty, division or weakness that would appear to improve the odds favouring those ready to stiffen their resistance to the *jefe's* domination.

THE CLIMATE OF FEAR

In the current situation in Quiché, the sensation of a general "climate of fear" is attested in villager's spoken words. The splintering of groups down to the level of the family meant that villagers could no longer discern a single frontier; rather, there were many, perhaps innumerable, confused frontiers which stretched between them. The enemy might even reside within one's (extended) family, which was said to have become disintegrated (cjch quieb pa choch). The solidarity formed in the early 1980s, already fragmented through suspicion of betrayals among villagers before the formation of the patrols, was degraded further. The hoped-for allies were no longer there. No one really felt secure in knowing who was friend or foe.

I had the impression that, for different reasons and to different degrees, everyone in Quiché was afraid. Overriding fear has not been exclusive to the subordinated widow; the development of social forces (popular movements, human rights, women's groups) may exert a reverse threat of sanctions which may cause ruling people (patrol *jefes*) to fear the people and become apprehensive about the loss of power and privilege.

The *jefes*, patrollers and widows are all Indians subject to government terror, manipulation and to the internalization of imposed language. This became apparent when soldiers arrived and the *jefes* suddenly stepped into line; their relation with the army was

perhaps not that dissimilar to the basic way widows complied with them. However, the scripts they were meant to follow as participants in *La Violencia* were not the same.

There was fear on both sides. The widows fear further violent acts by the *jefes* and some patrollers; the patrols are afraid of what the army and *jefes* might do to them; they, in turn, terrorize each other and the people of their hamlet. Any action that might remotely suggest connection with the guerrillas - leaving town, collaborating too closely with the church, hiding relatives - is reported to the army.⁶¹ To suggest that ideas about guerrillas enabled hoards of villagers to be put under control is very much in keeping with Foucault's (1972) analysis of the discipline of society. The *jefes*, taking their cue from the army, saw 'guerrillaness' as spreading like a disease.

Anxiety was another motive for conformity and non-action on the part of the widow, the patroller and *jefe*. People's own anxiety forced them to conform to the law of the *jefes*. It was notable that most patrollers continued to serve the system even after they discovered that they were not legally obliged to ^{do}/so, though this may have been partially due to some identification with the army's values, personal gain and sadism. Apart from a few courageous men, most men continued to comply because they saw that those who didn't were killed, kidnapped or made into pariahs of the community. A less serious example of this was provided by a young man who lived in the town: he felt that he could not return to his village because he was afraid of the "hated in the peoples' eyes" which, he told me, was fuelled by the fact that he had left to study for a short while and had not carried out the patrol.

The reason why the patrol system was so effective in breaking horizontal relations and as a result destroying community relations can be found in Wolf's (1967) thesis of closed corporate communities. Expectations were built up in the Indian since early childhood that those inside the community were relatively benign (especially within the family) and those outside were dangerous. This was a prime motivating force of community life. Such understandings do not change overnight, even if people no longer match the changes in life situations. It is not easy to stop seeking security where one has always found it. So the Quiché continued to seek security in their homes and their communities and in the relations therein, even when they knew, at one level, that it was no longer there.⁶²

To hope and look for something so important as security, self-respect and respect from others - in short for the experiences that breed autonomy - in situations that do not offer them, means only one thing: the person has to realize that he is totally mistaken in the way he is going after what, after bare necessities, is most important to his survival as a human being. Bettelheim writes that "at this point we can see the psychological appeal of tyranny" (1986:293).

Women's fear

Women's constant fear that *La Violencia* was about to return was fed by sporadic news of violence committed by either the military or guerrilla in other areas of Guatemala. Although women gave me the impression that they felt perpetually threatened by the *jefes*, after such news their fear intensified. Yet despite the devastating destruction directly perpetrated by the army, the women felt that their worst enemies were the *jefes* and their informers.⁶³ Soldiers would descend like an unpredictable, destructive tornado and one lived in constant dread of them but there were hours of respite in between, whereas the *jefes* exerted pressure without abatement; women felt it continuously, especially at night when they were most likely to descend.

Women's reported experiences of being treated like subversives were based on reality: women had also been tortured and disappeared. Their anxiety was exacerbated by the fact that soldiers and policemen (*judiciales*) were never arrested. Although men too lived with the fear of death and disappearance, to which they were actually subject with far greater frequency than women, their experiences were different because of gender; men were not assaulted by continuous violence from the same directions. Nor did similar acts resonate with them in the same way: their family histories may have contained memories of, for example, violent, drunken fathers who abused their wives.⁶⁴ I expect that grown sons, unless they were unusually close to their mothers, would not identify with the position of victim in the same way that adult daughters would (Quiché children are encouraged to identify with adults of the same gender).

The source of women's anxiety concerning the *jefes* who they saw daily, was complex. They feared that the *jefes* would kill them; they were also afraid that they might become like

them by, for example, taking revenge, something which they sometimes expressed in their fantasies. The easiest way to quiet such anxiety was to believe that one was made of "different stuff" and could never fall so low.

The mere presence of the *jefes*, particularly murderers such as Mario, is a continuing source of intimidation. Mario was seen by some to be the sole mover of the massacres in Emol and the person behind the persecution and intimidation to which widows were continually subjected. *Ex-jefes* who murdered were intimidating even when they were no longer in command. This intimidation was exacerbated when women "fell into" a position of dependency and prostitution⁶⁵ with the *jefe*. They perhaps did this because of conscious fear or the unconscious drive to act according to the role they were assigned or to please the authority. A woman may even be flattered by such attention (this may have happened in the case of one widow who herself intimated this). It is with trepidation that I suggest that there may have been a few widows, demoralized by a recent history of abuse which resonated with their own personal history of abuse^{who} elicited further abuse.⁶⁶

More subtle forms of intimidation

The resonance of various forms of intimidation according to one's 'habitus' is also relevant to the present discussion. Intimidation is "a symbolic violence which is not aware of what it is (to the extent that it implies no act of intimidation) ~~and which~~ can only be exerted on a person predisposed (in her 'habitus') to feel it, whereas others will ignore it. It is already partly true to say that the cause of the timidity lies in the relation between the situation or the intimidating person (who may deny any intimidating intention) and the person intimidated, or rather between the social conditions of the production of each of them. And little by little, one has to take account thereby of the whole social structure" (Bourdieu 1991:51).

There is every reason to think that the factors which are most influential in the formation of the 'habitus' are transmitted without passing through discourse and consciousness, but through suggestions inscribed in the most apparently insignificant aspects of the things, situations and practices of everyday life. Thus the modalities of practices, the ways of looking, sitting and standing, keeping silent or speaking ("reproachful looks" or

"tones", "disapproving glances" and so on) are full of injunctions that are powerful and hard to resist precisely because they are silent and insidious, insistent and insinuating.

Bourdieu claims that "the power of suggestion which is exerted through things and persons and which, instead of telling the child what he must do, tells him what he is, and thus leads him to become durably what he has to be, is the condition for the effectiveness of all kinds of symbolic power that will subsequently be able to operate on a 'habitus' predisposed to respond to them" (1991:12). In a world which privileges *Ladinos* and exercises racism against Indians, a Quiché person is already predisposed to respond to various forms of symbolic power for all that which impinged on him as an Indian. But in a situation of atrocity and intimidation, victims are worn down and regress to child-like states so that their "habitus" is more vulnerable to further manipulation. For example, telling the widow that she is "the wife of a guerrilla" with the life-threatening danger this implies, means that over time she may even be resocialized to respond to the *jefes*. Sometimes she may be conditioned to respond to the *jefes* as if she was, for example, truly guilty. The *jefe* and the patroller who have also been diminished have likewise been made susceptible.

The *jefe's* fear

What the *jefes* feared changed over time. For example, their fears of vengeful witchcraft attacks were succeeded by fears of justice being brought to bear by trial. These fears led Emol *jefes* to massacre the village's *brujos* (witches) to prevent victims' relatives from seeking revenge through *brujería* (witchcraft). Later, the *jefes* feared that the widows' memories of their perpetration of criminal atrocities would be exposed. The *jefes*' fear of justice arose more from the rhetoric of human rights agencies than from the government; the judicial system had not been used properly since *La Violencia* began in the late 1970s.

Less psychopathic and sadistic *jefes* perhaps retained their residual beliefs that the ancestors would ultimately punish them on the day of reckoning. Mario's conversion to protestantism and his identification with the *Ladino* army and their "modern" ideas was a rejection and an attack (sometimes literally against those who did not convert) against Indian elements. This can be seen in part as a reaction against his fear of the malicious ghosts of the men he murdered (see chapter 10); he had to stiffen his nerves by denial of their efficacy

and reality. The Protestant *jefes* and Indian soldiers did not always accomplish this denial: shamans told me that these authorities asked them to perform rituals of protection for them against anticipated ancestral punishment and suspected witchcraft revenge attacks.

Most *jefes* feared the widows because they were outside their direct control; hence the unrelenting assault directed against them. Particularly vulnerable to persistent harassment and worse were widows the *jefe* considered especially threatening - leaders of one form or another such as shamans (*aj q'ijs*), women who refused to convert to protestantism, members of the women's group CONAVIGUA, and the human rights groups GAM and CERJ - who were threatened with annihilation.⁶⁷ It was the *jefe's* fear of these widows that made him more determined to control them.

The feeling of camaraderie between women whose husbands had been "organized"⁶⁸ or killed by the same side, the "same head" (mind), already weakened by minimal life conditions and the splitting of the community resulting from *La Violencia*, was further weakened by suspicions that surviving men may have betrayed the widows' husbands. This was exacerbated in some communities by patrol *jefes* and military commissioners who fomented suspicion among women in order to discourage them from becoming a strong force.

CONCLUSION

Militarization adapted to Quiché society, but also the latter adapted to militarization; in their day-to-day choices,⁶⁹ individuals took account of the demands made by the army and the resources it offered, assessing in turn what it was opportune to accept and what not. Certainly, this took place within the margins allowed, but it left significant room for manoeuvre.

It should be clear from the foregoing discussion that through their training and their own practices, the *jefes* followed a script of violence that, notwithstanding the common practice of witchcraft, was relatively unprecedented for the Quiché male.⁷⁰ Violence and masculinity were more closely intertwined within the *macho* military culture than within the Quiché culture. That the *jefes* and ordinary peasant patrollers initially followed their scripts

without much variation upon the theme was due in part to the pressure to conform which exists in Quiché society even under "ordinary" circumstances. Once sanctions on behaviour were relaxed through the assassination of traditional power holders, many *jefes* felt free to embellish the army's script and embark on a personal reign of terror.

There were also considerable variations between one *jefe* (or commissioner) and another; not all vigilantes are evil, as has been noted by other writers.⁷¹ Among those *jefes* who were less severe were men who attempted to mediate rather than merely act as the state's puppets. Their example shows the possibility of actively choosing not to stoop to compromise at whatever price. It also shows the less conscious operation of a person's 'habitus'. Some intermediaries, normally people in positions of minor power such as local village or town mayors, catechists and health promoters, "did nothing evil" but instead saved many people. Carmack (1988) and Stoll (1992) write about (and I myself heard of) a few cases where even patrol *jefes* and village military commissioners either turned a blind eye, gave a helping hand or failed to report on people out of friendship, goodness of heart or calculated self-interest.⁷² The sociological, historical and psychological reasons for this are probably multifaceted, particularly as we are dealing with different areas of Guatemala, albeit all within the department of El Quiché. These men may have been, for example, guerrilla collaborators or catechists whose lives would have been threatened if they did not show active sympathy with the army's pursuit. Others, who may initially have been bystanders, later became *jefes* when most of the original ones fled for their lives. Others such as Mario, became perpetrators as a result of their personality or predilection to kill. He was not an exception but merely one of the more violent *jefes*.

The local character of violence exercised by the *jefe* was to some extent determined by the way the local population reacted. This may have been out of conscious decision and, also, their 'habitus'. In other, less obviously dynamic situations, one can imagine that, on the one hand, a more readily subservient local population might be punished less than one where the *jefe* felt the need to continually reassert his authority. However, on the other hand, one can also conceive of a situation where the *jefe*'s bravado was called by resistance where he might then acquiesce. Although there were situations of the latter type (see chapter 8), I assume that the state maximizes on local violence and that the endemic anomie, for example, helps further its goals.

Like the widow, the *jefe* is ultimately forced into submission because he is a subaltern and his higher position in the echelon means that he is controlled by both sides, both by his superiors (the army) and the widow. In sum, the forcing of villagers in all positions in one way or another, therefore, reflects the "adjustment" to the tyrannical system of the military and its local manifestations.

1. Chief or Commander.
2. In 1988 the name of this institution was changed to *Comité Voluntarios de Defensa Civil* (CDVC) to emphasize that the system was voluntary although in reality it was obligatory.
3. One might imagine that the Indian, with his newly acceded position, is different in degree if not kind from the *Ladino* soldier who had endured elite status. As Staub (1989:226) writes in relation to the Argentinean army, they protected their status and position as part of a belief system and world view, within which their long held elite status had become their inalienable, "natural" right.
4. Some writers (eg, Jonas 1991, Falla 1984) have pointed to the genocidal nature of *La Violencia*.
5. Military commissioners are civil agents of the army who serve under army discipline - usually local villagers who have served two years in the army. The town-based head of the commissioners is often a *Ladino*. America's Watch (1986) reports that local commissioners in the smaller towns are self appointed; in Emol, commissioners are elected and invariably Indians. Some men may have wished to refuse the appointment (two years' army service does not necessarily imply army sympathies) but refusal led to being considered a "subversive". In some places the commissioners are said to take the place of the army.
6. This propaganda programme offered peasants a choice between death or flight (bullets) or military "protection" including limited hand-outs (beans) in army-controlled areas.
7. America's Watch (1986) reports that the typical structure is:
 1. military zone commander
 2. lieutenant of local detachment
 3. head of the military commissioners
 4. military commissioner
 5. *jefe* of the civil patrol
 6. *jefe* of the civil patrol battalion
 7. *jefe* of the civil patrol platoon

8. *jefe* of the civil patrol squadron
9. rank-and-file civil patrol member

8. Unofficially old men and boys as young as ten years of age would also carry out the patrols with sometimes disastrous consequences - while I was in Quiché one boy accidentally shot and killed another. Many of the boys, and some enfeebled men, were not taught how to use the patroller's rifles. One newly appointed commissioner shot himself in the foot in 1990 shortly after new weapons were delivered to the village.
9. They were forced to carry out nonsensical tasks such as carrying rocks from one place to another and then back again. Performing such meaningless tasks was degrading, given that one of the strongest Quiché values is to work hard and not to waste time doing things *por gusto* (just for the sake of it).
10. The military's representation of "communism" bore no relationship to the guerrilla leadership's professed Marxist Leninism which in turn had little relevance to most Indians who joined the "organizations" for various reasons described in Chapter 2. Hence many people's genuine bewilderment regarding the death of their relatives, who had "only" been involved in X or Y.
11. It was less usual for shamans to be among the massacred; reasons for this had more to do with the local patrol leaders in Emol than army orders.
12. Identity in respect to one's physical location has been more important than any essence or being among the Quiché. There is no verb for being in the Quiché language.
13. The method creates a social condition that closes alternative chances of action until the individual must choose between two evils, both of which would be rejected in an "open" situation. As people move to avoid the more noxious alternative, the struggle mobilizes their energies and they actively co-operate with political authority to gain the positive increment of the lesser evil. The incentives to co-operate may be increased if the increment appears as a relative advantage, and if an individual must compete with his fellows to seize it. In that case, the subjective alliance he makes with the officials shatters the solidarity of his own social group and reinforces his active co-operation with despotic power" (Walter 1969:286-7). Barnard (1968) understood that force may be used when authority does not secure voluntary co-operation, and that force creates a new authority when the coercion is accepted. Coercive authority offering a "forced choice," then, may also elicit active cooperation.

14. Historical factors may also explain the ease with which the population was herded easily into this system. It was not the first time Guatemalan Indians have been forced to give their labour. The original system of forced labour, the *encomienda*, gave individual Spaniards the right to the labour and tribute of whole Indian villages. The *encomienda* system eventually evolved into the *repartimiento* system in the late sixteenth century. The only difference between them was that under the latter, villages were forced to pay tribute to the Spanish Crown instead of individual land owners as a means of assuring the success of colonial society (America's Watch 1986).
15. The concept of autonomy has to do with a person's ability to govern him[her]self and with a conscientious search for meaning despite the realization that, as far as we know, there is no purpose to one's life. It is a concept that does not imply a revolt against authority *qua* authority, but rather a quiet acting out of inner conviction, not out of convenience or resentment or because of external pressure or controls.
16. Military presidents justified their killing of civilians. Ríos Montt claimed that "the problem of war is not just a question of who is shooting. For each one who is shooting there are ten working behind him." His press secretary, Francisco Bianchi, continued: "The guerrillas won over many Indian collaborators. Therefore the Indians were subversives. And how could you fight subversion? Clearly you had to kill Indians because they were collaborating with subversion. And then it would be said that you were killing innocent people. But they were not innocent, they had sold out to subversion" (Amnesty International 1987:96).
17. People with developmental delays and physical handicaps were inducted into the patrols. Only the most incapacitated men were excused. Surprisingly, I only met one man who was no longer able to carry out the patrols at all. He had always been of a rather fragile disposition and the torment he received from the *jefes* and other patrollers caused him to suffer a break from reality from which he never recovered. He remained bed ridden and incontinent.
18. A foreign diplomat revealed to Carmack (1988:63):

Patrols from six small villages went to the town of Chijtinimit [Chichicastenango, El Quiché] in July and August of 1983 and confronted the local patrol with a list of villagers whom they suspected of being subversive. The visiting patrols threatened to attack the town if the local patrol did not execute the reputed leftists, so the patrol complied by killing 25 of their own men.
19. See America's Watch (1986) for other examples of Improvement Committee members being instrumental in imposing order.

20. It should also be mentioned that in some villages (at least in recent years), individuals occupying different and even the same roles might have aims which are antagonistic to one another.
21. This is a psychological process whereby the subject assimilates an aspect, property or attribute of the other and is transformed, wholly or partially, after the model the other provides. It is by means of a series of identifications that the personality is constituted and specified.
22. For example, some men from the village were the black hooded men who pointed out their *compañeros* in the market square who were then "disappeared".
23. e.g., Rigby 1969. This has also been described within the psycho-analytic literature as a defence mechanism, for example, by Anna Freud (1936): faced with an external threat, the subject identifies himself with his aggressor. He may do this either by appropriating the aggression itself, by physical or moral emulation of the aggressor, or by adopting particular symbols of power by which the aggressor is designated. Anna Freud describes the variety, complexity and compass of the mechanisms of defence including repression, projection and turning against the self, among others.
24. In reversals of morality, leaders of mass killings often come to regard their actions as good, right and desirable (Staub 1989).
25. This is reflected in the concept of destiny, or *suerte*. See chapter 9.
26. The church (tjaa dios) is "the house of god"; tjaa X is "the house of X", the village patron saint, their saintly protector seen to be erected by long forgotten ancestors. The Emolians used to come to the church to pray to the images of Catholic saints, Christ and the Virgin Mary for protection from the dangers and uncertainties of an often hostile world. This house had been proof that even as times changed, the past could live on into the present - it had been a familiar abode in an increasingly uncertain world but now that abode itself became uncertain.
27. See Heusmann & Eron 1984.
28. To some extent the lack of blood vengeance among the Quiché may be more apparent than real, for anger over a murder is as potent as any other cause for hatred and may have repercussions for the future. On rare occasions it was intimated that witchcraft and sorcery were performed against the *jefes* although people were generally reluctant to admit that they knew anything about such malevolent practices lest they themselves be suspected of *them*.

29. One shaman told me he had several patrollers, including *jefes*, among his clients and that some Indian soldiers came to him repeatedly to "confess" their crimes and ask the ancestors for "protection".
30. These people must deny or repress all hostility and are generally unresponsive even to extreme provocation; "but when they finally attack...their actions tend to be extremely assaultive". Zimbardo's psychological analysis can be applied not only to individuals such as Mario but, because of its emphasis on conformity and the denial of hostility (notwithstanding witchcraft, which can be seen as a form of aggressive response), to Quiché society as a whole. Zimbardo claims that if an assault occurs it is towards the one who showed aggression in the first place. But the Indian *jefe* did not have the power to assault the army, for he was an accessory and inferior. Staub suggests that a culturally induced respect for authority can join with governmental propaganda and repression in creating uniform views about events (1969:65).
31. See McKendrick and Hoffman (1990): the experience of violence in the home may become perpetuated in wider society in many forms.
32. The soldiers who oversaw the local municipal unit.
33. I did not try and speak to him because I too felt terrorized by him. I first encountered him running towards me with gun pointed, execrably accusing me of being a *gringa de España* (foreigner from Spain) who was in collaboration with a group of people who had apparently just stolen the guns from the police in a nearby *municipio*.
34. It should be noted, however, that the army has many Indian recruits. Up to 20% of all rural Indian young men between the ages of 18-24 are forcibly conscripted; they are "invisible" in that they sent to areas of Guatemala away from their homes where they generally do not speak the local dialect.
35. Watson (ibid.) observed the close connection in the local mind of the Tairora between size and power. In Guatemala, *Ladinos* are generally taller than the Indians.
36. Bettelheim (1986) describes how prisoners arrogated to themselves bits of the SS' uniform onto their own.
37. In May 1989 one villager was ordered to kill five CERJ members on these grounds.
38. Bettelheim describes prisoners' acceptance of the SS's language. Such rituals are not

uncommon e.g., the SS and Greek torturers had rituals of group identification and a special language (Gibson & Haritos-Faturos 1986).

39. The term splitting as used in psychiatry and psychoanalysis is varied. It was used by Freud among others to evoke the fact that man/woman, in one respect or another, is divided within him/herself. Projection is the process through which that which is split off is thrust upon another person or situation.
40. This was also due to the ideological work of "objectification" (which is linked to that of "displacement", the extroversion of aggression, frustration, grievances etc.) on external agencies. I cannot say with any certainty that such processes which are explained in western psychoanalytic literature apply to Mayan Indians or, more specifically, Mario.
41. Bettelheim contends that "unintegrated, asocial tendencies are always present in man; under certain circumstances the inhibitions controlling them break down and they appear openly, unrestrained; having to be in the concentration camp leads to a breakdown of these inhibiting forces; if different persons react differently, if the inhibitions of some stand up while those of others fail, if some even strengthen their defences against behaving asocially, it can all be ascribed to their different life histories or personality make-up" (1986:16).
42. Toch (1965) writes that the changes which occur with becoming a member of a group is greater in groups which have the same characteristics as the patrols i.e., those that exert more control over members and require more total commitment, more extreme actions.
43. The patrollers' obligatory uniform consisted of a straw hat, repainted green or camouflage, and a tee-shirt stamped with the local patrol emblem and their "company" number and name of their town.
44. By mid-1989, at least 7,000 Indians were refusing patrol duty, despite retribution - assassination, kidnapping, intimidation, etc (Jonas 1991:185).
45. President Cerezo had campaigned on a guarantee to permit villagers to vote on whether or not to preserve the PAC but did not realize this in the face of army resistance.
46. Sadism aside, in order for one villager to wish to kill another it seems necessary for them to believe that there is a separateness, a boundary, an inferiority of the victim in comparison to the persecutor. They needed to believe that they do not share solidary relations nor common substance, and that they are not the same category of person. Indeed, the killings may have been most problematic for those "ordinary"

villagers forced to kill other villagers by order of the *jefes* because they had not made this mental leap and saw no difference between themselves and those they were forced to kill. It is not that villagers had never been violent towards each other: it had been regular practice to solicit witch-craft, which is said to kill, though this would have been against a perceived enemy, someone who was therefore not necessarily the same category of person or who needed to be taught a lesson.

47. America's Watch (1986) reports on another self-selected *jefe* in a village in southern Quiché (Chichicastenango). This man, a former guerrilla, had been dissatisfied with the level of power allotted to him by the guerrilla and therefore turned himself in voluntarily to the army and joined the civil patrols. He then began to terrorize the local population raping widows and threatening villagers. He would go around saying "I used to be the guerrillas' mother and now I'm the army's" (ibid:35).
48. In the colonial period, Indians more adept at Spanish legalities soon replaced the fading Quiché aristocracy as community leaders but, unlike the old regime, these Indians acquired their power by adapting to the newly imposed colonial order and thus had a certain interest in its survival. It also appears that many of these new Indian *caciques*, or political bosses, were no more averse to abusing their fellows than were the Spanish *encomenderos*.
49. Stoll writes that in Ixil country, refugees who fell under the army's control were drafted into "civil patrols" which were then sent out against the insurgents, who retaliated with massacres of their own (1992:4). In southern Quiché whether the patrols' attacks on so-called subversives were motivated by the army or were carried out on their own initiative is a moot point. Many widows perceived the latter to be the case.
50. Denial of humanity to the victims enabled the perpetrators to conduct the massacres with greater ease.
51. The ordinary patroller, i.e., any village man, became either perpetrator or victim depending on whether he was on duty or not.
52. Montejo (1987) gives one villager's account of this situation:
One villager stood, waiting to be killed by the army, having been erroneously accused of being a guerrilla. He turned to other villagers who he thought could have saved his skin by telling the army that he was innocent. As he tried to catch the eyes of others they averted their gaze. Finally, he caught the attention of one man who looked at him reacting as though the devil himself had peered at him and he said, softly, knowing what it was he wanted, "I am afraid" and with that he walked away.

53. Tambiah argues that "all ritual, whatever the idiom, is addressed to the human participants and uses a technique which attempts to re-structure and integrate the minds and emotions of the actors. The technique combines verbal and non-verbal behaviour and exploits their special properties" (1968:202).

54. Many of Quiché women's roles are care focused, more so than the Western woman's. I therefore conjecture that their capacity for empathy may be greater than ours and the thwarting of her care-giving, to put it euphemistically, possibly even more devastating.

55. Foucault has devoted considerable attention to the phenomenon of torture and public execution in European social history, observing: "The function of the public torture and execution was to reveal the truth; and in this respect it continued, in the public eye, the work of the judicial torture conducted in private. It added to the conviction the signature of the convicted man. A successful public execution justified justice, in that it published the truth of the crime in the very body of the man to be executed" (Foucault 1979:44).

56. This is a prevailing human tendency as is the process of scapegoating (see Staub 1989:48-49).

57. cf. Manz 1988:92 for accounts of rape which occurred in Huehuetenango during *La Violencia*.

58. Women complained of facial discolouration (dark brown marks) which they claimed resulted from problems of the *higado* (liver) arising from *enojo* (anger/aiwal).

59. The army and *jefes'* looting of empty homes and their continued incursions while women are present therefore has particular significance to the Quiché. Bunster-Burroto (1986:304) suggests that such intrusions are an "assault on a woman's sense of self and, a, manipulation of her traditional role as wife and mother. The protection and refuge of the home is shattered, and the control and coherence she maintained in the intimate sphere of the home is destroyed as well."

60. Witchcraft was not practised between nuclear family members as far as I could tell, so this was a major difference which went beyond the repercussion of denunciation.

61. Carmack notes that the Patrollers of the *municipio* capital of El Quiché, Santa Cruz, are directly tied to the co-called G2, or intelligence, agents of the military base (1988:64).

62. Another additional factor is written about by Bettelheim whose main thesis in "The Informed Heart" is that a repressive regime can so disintegrate the personality of adults that they can "firmly believe what they would know to be false if their anxiety permitted them to know it" (1986:290).

63. Stoll writes that local discourse in Nebaj emphasizes ^{that} the external origin of the violence is exculpatory, to deflect blame from local men who committed crimes under duress from external forces (1992:266). In southern Quiché there is more of a deflection from the outside to local origins of the violence which is not seen in political terms but in terms of envy. I surmise that villagers' discourse of locally motivated non-political violence is in part due to *their* attempt to protect themselves from incurring further political attack or from being denounced as an army or guerrilla spy.

64. An act which would frequently be seen by children, because houses were often comprised of one room.

65. Widows sexually exploited by the *jefes* were accused of being prostitutes by the *jefe's* wives. See chapter 6.

66. cf. Wagley for an instance of rape of a widow in the same department before *La Violencia* (1949:36).

67. Some widows who did not want their sons to patrol when they grow up, were also members of CERJ. CERJ also supported the widows who were increasingly harassed as the human rights groups' membership grew. For example, the head of this organization, Amilcar Mendez, made an investigative trip to the village of Parraxtut, Sacapulas in Quiché when the president of CONAVIGUA in that village was shot dead in her home.

Villagers are warned not to become involved with all of these organizations which the army deem as "guerrilla" organizations. In 1990 four Indians were "disappeared" after being abducted from an estate in Suchitepéquez department by soldiers. Before the men "disappeared" the army had organized national press conferences at which they produced people they described as guerrilla defectors who accused CERJ of links with the armed opposition. Videos of the statements were then shown throughout the areas where CERJ is active and the army warned the villagers that they would be killed unless they denounced CERJ organizers (Amnesty International report 1990b). In July 1990 a GAM member was abducted and murdered (*ibid*).

68. In secure contexts, *doña* Flora would spontaneously label people who had been "organizados" and those who had not. It was apparent that she trusted those who had, although her attempts to be a "good Christian" led her to help those who had not.

69. On the importance of subjective choices, — Barth's (1981) analysis is crucial. This emphasizes the role of values and intentionality in shaping behaviour. Pertinent in relation to my analysis is his principle that choice is not synonymous with freedom and ~~men~~ and women rarely make choices under circumstances of their own making.
70. It was the ability to perform violent acts without punishment which differentiates the *jefe's* violence from that Indian who might share the culture of Quiché masculine violence (such as the violence exercised towards women); their respective positions relative to the State places him in a different position with respect to the ability to exercise *Ladino* (state) violence.
71. For example, Manz 1988, Carmack 1988, and Stoll 1992.
72. For example Carmack (1988) recounts a situation where a *jefe* did not want to kill people from his village but then a decision was made on the level of the village that the few should be killed because, if not, the entire village would be likely to perish. More recently, when I was in Quiché, one *comisionado* received death threats for his support of the dissolution of the patrol system in his village.



Plate 5: Woman working

Chapter 6

Women's Lives as Widows (Malca'nib)¹

Doña Eugenia:

We feel undermined because no one cares for us. They call us "women without men". In this way they deride us. They gossip about us when we are forced to work the *milpa* (corn field) because our men are not here and we have no money to pay for a *mozo* (worker). There are so many splits in the community these days that we do not receive help from others. Before, everyone helped each other. We would join together, lend a hand to those who needed it...But not any more.

Don Alberto:

Every *cantón* had their own concept of widowhood and this affected the way they treated them. Some tried to integrate them, others rejected them, controlled them and harassed them. Their conception depended, in turn, on the information they received, usually from the *jefes*. Some desegregated them because they were afraid that they would be called the wife of the guerrillas and then this would spread to the whole village. They thought it was better to incorporate them into the community so that there will be no distinction between widow and non-widow. Others decided to assimilate them because they thought "if we leave them aside then they will take revenge on the community". Some, while realizing this, still rejected them because they could not bring themselves to do otherwise. They thought "how do we support the widows if they are the ones who caused the trouble in the community in the first place?" They decided that they must be punished for what they imagined they had done, whether in fact they had or not.

In this chapter I assess the various levels of change women experience upon the death of their husbands. Widowhood represents a sharp interruption and, commonly, a reversal of fortune: the loss of a spouse invariably produces severe economic hardship. Yet widowhood is not a steady social state at all, even for those women who have accepted the role as irreversible and fixed.

Given that widowhood should be understood primarily in the context of gender definitions and relations, I will examine it in the light of "normal" gender relations described in Chapter 3. Widows are disadvantaged by virilocal residence patterns, the tendency to patrilineal inheritance, the sexual division of labour and lack of employment opportunities for women in the village. This was exacerbated by a greater than ordinary loss of male kin affecting individual households and the village as a whole. Women were not socialized to be war widows, nor to deal with the hostile world into which they have been cast; they had to be re-socialized. For war widows, widowhood as an arrest of life history dramatized in a rite of passage, is frozen in its liminal stage. The war widow and those close to her became stigmatized and isolated; her children may come to be seen as "children of the guerrilla". Normally the category of stigmatized includes both deliberate violators of the moral order and those who fall into it through no fault of their own (through birth or the caprices of fate, for example).

The large number of widows, their stigmatization and the relatively low rate of remarriage, has meant that they are not reintegrated into the world. New tensions are therefore added to lines of connection established (for example, through their children) in an attempt to sustain previously experienced demands. The lack of usual community support compelled women to take up men's roles and this led to a disruption of gender relations. The perception of widows as being competitors for traditionally male-gendered activities, power and resources has led to increased attempts to marginalize them, particularly by certain categories of men. The taking on of male roles and responsibilities by war widows has added to these women's multiple identities with both positive and negative repercussions on psychological, social and economic levels.

The losses incurred in *La Violencia* meant that the family has had to make many adjustments within its internal structure. One of the striking features of similarity in the women's narratives is the decisive role that they played in giving direction to that reorganization. Many women recall living a sheltered life which did not extend beyond the village; some women never went to the capital city, even though their husbands and sons worked there; others went there for the first time when their families fled *La Violencia* and a few stayed there after their husbands were killed.

WIDOWS' RESIDENCE PATTERNS

During *La Violencia*

Although a woman usually accepted her husband's decisions on matters of residence, it is notable that many women had considerable influence in deciding whether or not to move during *La Violencia*. In fact, it appears that women came to play a far more active role in a new area of decision making, taking risks and dealing with the hostile external (and internal) world in this period, as *Doña Josefina* indicates:

I had a dream about two weeks before they kidnapped my husband...In the dream he was abducted so when I woke I told him, "Leave man! Go to the *fincas*! Go wherever you can so that you will be spared. Then, once it is all over, come home".

Doña Ana had the final word in her argument with her husband:

My husband was the one who usually gave the orders but this situation was a little different for I really did not want to leave the house. I was thinking of my animals because, you see, they are mine. If we left then we would have to sell the cows. But if I would have sold them then I would have no way to make money for myself. So I told him, "the cows are mine, I will not sell them and no one orders me around!"

A woman widowed before *La Violencia* tended either to remain in her husband's home and to be protected by his kin or her own sons, or to return to her natal home. A war widow's place of residence (see Appendix II for examples) depended on a combination of factors, the most common of which are as follows:

- (1) Economic factors: most importantly, entitlement to the husband's land and property.
- (2) Personal factors: whether a widow had a good relationship with her in-laws, particularly her mother-in-law.
- (3) Whether other male kin, including adult sons and father-in-law, were dead or missing leaving several widows in one household with no adult men.
- (4) Having the option to live elsewhere. Examples include parents calling their widowed daughter back to their home; a daughter deciding to return home to be with her mother, who may also be a widow.

- (5) A widow might move away from the threat of loss and/or destruction of land and property.
- (6) The widow's fear of remaining without an adult male protector, especially in homes where multiple kidnapping and/or killing had occurred.
- (7) The refusal to flee because of reasons of strong attachment to the house and land, personal dignity and the conviction that harm would not befall them because they were innocent.
- (8) Remarriage and transfer to the man's home (this is not normally relevant in the early stages of widowhood).

War widows' residence patterns in the acute phase of *La Violencia* (1978-1982) differed from the chronic, low intensity war which followed. The practice of virilocal residence is of profound significance for widows and they tended to be reluctant to leave their husband's home and lands in both periods. Although a man's wife generally takes over his land when he dies, her in-laws may use various ruses to deprive her of her full inheritance rights. I knew one family who accused their daughter-in-law of soliciting her brother's help to kill her husband, to whom she had been unhappily married, in order to take over his land.

If a widow moved, she usually returned to her natal home or went to a brother's house. A small minority of widows went, alone, to the town, another *municipio*, the capital city or the south coast. These women were among the least fortunate of widows, alone and landless, with neither parental family nor in-laws to support them; they spent most of the year working on the coast or in the capital. If they returned to the village at all, they would only stay for a brief period, living with a neighbour. I was told that it was most likely that many widows in this group had died of melancholy or *susto* (fear). Women also left for these places if their lives were under threat or they needed to earn an income and could afford to take themselves and usually some of their children to the chosen destination. *Doña Luisa* explained why she did not leave:

I did not want to go to Guatemala [City] because I did not have enough money to pay the bus fare. And even if I could have reached there I couldn't have found food, having no money. In any case, I did not like the idea of going to another place.

During the acute phase of *La Violencia*, some women were abandoned outside the village when their husbands were kidnapped from the place where the family had taken refuge; *dofia* Lydia and her small children were left in the capital city after her husband was kidnapped from his street stall. She stayed in the city until her husband appeared in her dreams and told her to return to the village to "plant the corn fields" the way he used to.

Widows' long term residence

Long term residence following widowhood varied. An estimated 80% of widows live without another adult (excluding grown sons) in the household. The remaining 20% lived with both parents, both in-laws, their mother, their mother-in-law, a subsequent husband (in her home or his) or with another lone woman (a spinster or a widow).²

A few widows who had fled during the acute phase of *La Violencia* and had remained in their place of refuge for a period varying from a few weeks to a couple of years, returned to the village during the chronic phase. They returned because they felt that their land was threatened or because they were led to believe that the village was safe once "amnesty" was announced. Sometimes a widow returned to find that she had neither home nor property; the house may have been burnt down by the army or taken over by her husband's family, together with his land. People who left their houses, even if they only moved within the village, seemed to have more difficulty in getting re-established than families who stayed put. In the most extreme cases, people were killed upon their return because leaving was perceived as a subversive act.

However, most women who left the village never returned³ because they were afraid, had no land to return to, had found an alternative means of livelihood, or had remarried. A major source of resentment among women who never returned (a few of whom I traced in Guatemala City) was that their land, goods and animals had been stolen by people remaining in the village; in fact, such thefts were perceived as threats and had sometimes prompted the women's departure. Contact with the village was rarely severed completely; most women paid short, secret visits to their extended family and close friends, attempting to remain as hidden as possible from the rest of the village.

Many widows who had not been displaced remained in their husband's house (if a separate one had been built) or their mother-in-law's house, only leaving if they remarried or, in cases where the land was not owned, when they could not pay the rent. In most cases, however, men owned at least some land which their wives had the potential to take over on widowhood. Some young widows felt that they could not manage alone, particularly if they had no grown sons or extended family to help with land maintenance. These widows would leave their husband's land, returning with male helpers only at corn planting, weeding and harvest times. Other widows were too afraid to sleep in their husband's house because of intimidation and harassment by the village *jefes* and being bothered by the spirits of people who had suffered violent deaths. These women might sleep in another widow's house, returning to their own house during the day.

Hardier and more resourceful women would remain in their husband's home, refusing to desert their land at all costs; their circumstances were perhaps more favourable than those of women who had left. Among women who stayed, one might find more than one widow in the household, for example, a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law after both husband and son were killed: the mother-in-law looked after her grandchildren while the daughter-in-law earned what income she could. This mutually convenient arrangement was more beneficial to the mother-in-law because a daughter-in-law, even with sons, was still under her authority; the daughter-in-law's position in the household may be weakened following the death of her husband.

FEMALE HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

The change in men's work patterns (see Chapter 3) meant that women in less poor families were left alone in the village for longer periods. This affected women's survival, as did the long periods of time they were alone when their men were forced into hiding; women had to fend for themselves and their families, assuming economic and other responsibilities under extremely difficult conditions; they had to leave the vicinity of the house with greater frequency and go further afield, which many women initially found distressing. Despite their experience of seasonal labour migration, women's daily routines had seldom strayed beyond the village; even if women had, say, travelled to the market when

their husbands were away, the ideology remained that their place was in the home with their animals.

Generally, the long separations which occurred when men fled the village were not beneficial to the marriage or the household; husbands sometimes formed second relationships in their place of refuge⁴ and wives, despite the consequent reduction in income and support, had to pretend that their husbands were away working and not in hiding. In such circumstances, the husband was still considered the head of the household. However, the negative consequences of separation during *La Violencia* may have prepared women for the transition to widowhood. Widowhood brought the perception that women now had to go into the male, outside world alone, that they no longer had the protection of their menfolk.

There is a variety of types of *de facto* female-headed households which are not recognized by the Quiché as such, arising from male migration, divorce or separation (which, since *La Violencia*, has considerably less stigma attached to it than widowhood), female assertiveness or male delinquency, incompetence or drunkenness. Even if a man leaves his wife on his land for another woman (a very uncommon event), it is unlikely that she will become the household head unless there are no other adult men in the household.

Female headed households were uncommon before *La Violencia*. Women's life expectancy was lower than men's, so "natural" widows were a rarity; where "natural" widowhood did occur, women were expected to return to their parental home to be supported by their father and brothers until remarriage. Nevertheless, female headed households, as defined by the Quiché, usually result from widowhood. Today, between 10-25% of households in southern Quiché are female headed; in Emol, 25% of households contain widows.

The corollary of large numbers of widows was a shortage of men, especially in some families, with the result that a widow's extended family could not meet their traditional obligations to support her. Community support, particularly in the form of male labour, had been widows' main source of livelihood, providing a sort of "moral economy".⁵ The erosion of this institution had already begun before *La Violencia*; diminishing community

solidarity resulting from the growth of individualism and competition within villages involved a certain withdrawal from each other's personal problems.

With the inception of *La Violencia*, this institution disintegrated further. Communities were unable to provide widows with the kind of assistance to which "normal" widows had been accustomed. Most widows were neither provided with economic aid nor labour assistance owing to ² lack of able bodied adult men in the village and insufficient funds; some whose fathers and brothers were still living were given help in the form of some food and old clothes. Labour was rarely on offer because of lack of time, a problem which was exacerbated by the 24-hour patrol duty men had to carry out every few days.⁶ I did see men from the extended family network offer help to a widow who was complaining about her hardship but, in the end, the offer was not fulfilled. However, it must be understood that such support was never a pure "gift". ^{Labour from} Male members of an extended family or *compadres* (godparents) who assisted, for example, in the planting of corn, would be reciprocated in kind at a later date. However, reciprocation became difficult if not impossible in extended families which lost several male members. Normally, only sons helped their widowed mothers because, apart from helping their mothers out of affection, they too expected reciprocation at some point in the form of the land itself - their rightful inheritance.⁷

A brother who takes responsibility for his sister might have a negative interpretation of her situation: "I know exactly what my brother-in-law (sister's husband) was involved in". Fulfilling one's responsibility in the community put one at risk; however, some men did provide financial support for their widowed sisters, despite political and religious differences which were a source of much fear and friction within the family. For example, *doña* Candelaria turned to her brother when she was desperate for help; at the same time she criticized him for trying to convert her to protestantism and even suspected that he had been involved in (or at least had some power to prevent) the killing of her husband (see Appendix I).

Help and support in the form of inter-household transfer furnished by in-laws was much less common. In fact, in-laws were often perceived as a source of harassment rather than support.⁸ Apart from the fear that they would rob her of her land, a widow lived with the threat of sexual harassment from her father-in-law, especially if he was a village *jefe* or

military commissioner. There might even be mutual accusations of subversive activity between in-laws.

Help from in-laws usually only occurred when a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law were both widowed, lived together and shared similar beliefs. In these instances, the mutual assistance given was mostly on the practical level; there did not appear to be much emotional support although such behaviour was generally muted in Quiché society where people tend to be rather stoical. A mother-in-law was more likely to console a friend than a daughter-in-law. This can be seen as a projection of the hostilities and competition⁹ which exists between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law on an emotional level, despite their cooperation on practical levels. It may merely reflect the reserve demanded by elders.

Fear, suspicion, isolation and lack of communication between villagers were major factors contributing to the lack of help given to widows. While many killings seem to have had no political or ideological basis, villagers often assumed or contrived a story that the dead men must have been involved in some political activity. Once men had been abducted or killed, neighbours and former friends were fearful that any association with their family would implicate them. Widows were often socially isolated within their own villages and wards. Isolation was exacerbated by the fact that a widow was considered a dangerous person, owing to their social condition of "liminality".¹⁰ Widows dwell in a twilight zone of social indefiniteness; they have lost their old status, are unable to take on the traditional status of widows and have not acquired a new status. Wives of the disappeared experience a double dose of liminality because they do not know if they are a widow or a wife.

Widows do, however, receive emotional support from their children and often became dependent on them if both their husbands and older sons are killed. This meant that the marriage of daughters was particularly traumatic for widowed mothers, especially if they were then left alone their house; nevertheless, for economic reasons, a mother might prevail upon her daughter to marry quickly. A married daughter provided little practical help but she would make an extra effort to visit her widowed mother more frequently. She would also provide her with various services such as caring for her when she was ill. A particularly kindly son-in-law would also offer to help his widowed mother-in-law by maintaining her land.

However, it was largely through the practical and emotional support of their sons and daughters together with a degree of self-reliance, that widows continued to survive. Through her children and perhaps other widows a woman developed an emotional support system which was perhaps more dispersed or merely different from the traditional pattern. In this way she achieved as measure of reintegration, reweaving a pattern of caring and involvement in the world.

INCOME GENERATION

The loss of a husband's meagre earnings was many widows' biggest problem; family income for most widows dropped to almost zero during *La Violencia*. Initially, women's fear of leaving their homes limited their opportunities for generating the income they needed in their new role as household heads. Later, women looked for work in the subsistence and exchange spheres, working as urban and rural labourers, including seasonal migration to the coast. Even when they could find work themselves and they had adult sons who could bring in an income, they were invariably poorer than before *La Violencia*. Widows have experienced additional problems in recent years because of detrimental changes in wage:price ratios. Inflation and static wages (and sometimes reduced wages) have resulted in the tripling of prices for basic goods in real terms.

Subsistence

A widow particularly missed her husband's agricultural labour. Despite the apparent relaxing of gender-specific restrictions in agricultural tasks, barriers to women's cultivation of corn were still enforced. Thus any adult males in the family - elder sons, brothers and so on - were recruited to tend the corn fields; women would rather have their very young sons plant the corn than do it themselves. In recent years, finding someone to do this work has become increasingly difficult because young sons have become accustomed to city work and do not want to dirty their hands with agricultural labour. Widows only cultivate their own corn as a last resort; this provokes derision from fellow villagers passing by, who shout "what's the matter, haven't you got a man?" Such jeering was painful and humiliating for a lone widow.

Doña Flora's two grandsons, both under the age of ten, had to struggle with their dead father's and grandfather's heavy hoes when planting the family's corn. Despite their efforts, *doña* Flora had to find the money to hire an old *mozo* (male labourer)¹¹ to do most of the heavy work; she also had to find cash to buy fertilizer. Usually she was unable to afford sufficient amounts in time and her fertilizer was often laid down past the optimum period; moreover, *mozos* were normally busy spreading fertilizer on their own land during the peak time. *Doña* Flora was reasonably well off because of the amount of land she owned yet she could not afford to pay a *mozo* to tend to all her land, so some of it lay fallow. As a result of all of this, her corn yields were invariably poor and only lasted for about six months.

Doña Josefina's grandfather, with whom she lived, cared for her cornfields but, because of his age and chronic alcohol problem, his work was slow. She sometimes hired her fourteen year old half-brother as a *mozo*. She complained that a widowed friend's son she had adopted during *La Violencia* when the friend wanted to remarry, provided neither labour nor cash to purchase fertilizer for her fields.

Exchange

Women usually find some work in the village over and above their usual work of making *trensas* (plaited cane fronds) or weaving. They may look for wood to sell or help with tasks relating to maize production.¹² Many women made the most of their traditional skills by selling foodstuffs, preparing a range of maize foods such as *tortillas*, *tamales* and cornmeal drinks (*atole*, "the drink") from their maize and milk products. Women carry an enormous load of these goods, together with eggs and vegetables from their gardens, in large baskets on their heads to the bi-weekly town markets. Always accompanied by a child, women trek for several hours through the mountains to save their bus fare. In between sales, the women invariably keep themselves busy with other work in order not to "waste time", embroidering belts and other handiwork which will be sold on another occasion either directly to a customer or to a middle man who might have a stall in the market. Women weavers sold huipiles (smock tops), although they earned little from this skilful work.

Like their husbands before them, widows took to the habit of drinking at the end of the market day, squandering their hard-earned money on alcohol. Women sometimes ended up in a drunken stupor in the road (a very rare occurrence prior to *La Violencia*), their children sitting beside them, waiting patiently for their mothers to sober up - just as the women themselves had waited for their husbands. Although a woman's resort to alcohol may be seen as a temporary relief, it may be also be viewed as a (negative) aspect of the male responsibilities she has had to take on.

Paid work (rural)

Women work as *mujer campesina* (female peasants) on other people's land for which they earn about Quetzales 2.00 (about US 0.50¢) daily. This work tended to be seasonal, unlike their traditional work as weavers and *trensa* makers which they did on a continuous basis.

In villages where women continued to weave up to the time of *La Violencia*, widows say they have little time for this now that they have taken on men's work; some widows were forced to give up weaving altogether, while others may slowly work away at a commissioned *huipil* in order to earn a few *centavos* (producing a *huipil* generally takes a married woman about three months). Giving up weaving not only entails a financial loss but, more importantly, a loss of identity, a loss of a sense of continuity with the past.¹³

In other villages, widows earn a meagre income by plaiting *trensas* which are then sold to be made into straw hats. They would plait as they walked to fetch water, with a basket of corn on their heads, a baby on their backs and their hands busy; there was hardly a moment when their hands were idle. Their earnings from this were so minimal that it was really not worth the effort (five *centavos* daily),¹⁴ yet people were still judged by how quickly they could *trensar*. This may reflect the need to maintain a sense of continuity in their identities in the face of monumental change.

When women needed to buy fertilizer or, when times improved, they wanted to buy new clothes for the village *fiesta*,¹⁵ women sell a pig,¹⁶ sheep or cow. However, women were reluctant to do this because they had fewer animals than before *La Violencia*;

many animals had been sold, stolen or had died during the intense violence; women had trouble keeping their animals alive afterwards. Only sheer desperation would force a woman to sell land;¹⁷ this normally only happened if a husband left his widow with huge debts to pay. Widows have no access to credit and, desperate for cash, they would sometimes be forced to sell land at ridiculously low prices.¹⁸

A less common way for widows to make some money was through specialist activities such as midwifery or curing. This work was not too lucrative however, because women empathized with other women's poverty and normally charged according to means. *Dona* Josefina told me that she only took up the work as an *aj q'ij* (shaman) after *La Violencia* in order to serve others in the community because there was no one else to do it; so many had been killed or were in hiding. However, *dona* Josefina had assumed this role when she discovered that it was her destiny (see Appendix I). The Quiché believe that they are predestined to carry out a particular set of responsibilities in life and breaching this code is thought to lead to illness, craziness or death; a woman who takes up these professions is taking considerable risks if it is not her destiny to do so. Yet some people were forced to take up specialist activities: for example, *dona* Ana began to practice as a midwife when her daughter went into labour in the mountains where they lay in hiding from the army.¹⁹

Other dangers were attached to women's performance of specialist functions. Rumours circulated that women became midwives and shamans after *La Violencia* in order to legitimize staying out late at night to "organize" and to cavort with men. The latter accusation had been levelled at midwives and female shamans before *La Violencia* when the threat implied by such rumours was relatively minor.

Paid work (urban)

Widows with no land or family were forced to uproot themselves and their children to the town, the capital or the coast in search of a livelihood and shelter.²⁰ In the town they would rent a room, paying for it from the small income they earned as washer-women, cleaners and cooks in *Ladino* or relatively affluent Indian households. If they had somewhere to leave their children, they would work as live-in maids (*Ladinos* usually stipulate no children). In desperation, a woman *might* abandon her children, normally to a friend or her

extended family; sometimes children were left to fend for themselves, which occasionally resulted in disastrous accidents if the children were very young.

Seasonal Migration

Most women migrate to the south coast for three months of the year.²¹ This was often the first way that widows made a wage after their husbands were abducted or killed. It is a pattern of work they have been familiar with since childhood; as children and newly weds, girls would work making *tortillas*. Unless desperately poor, mothers did not go to the *fincas* because living conditions there often resulted in their children's deaths.²² Women who returned to the coast after many years, weakened by their harsh experiences during *La Violencia*, could no longer adapt to the severe conditions.²³ Some were said to have died from a combination of this and *tristeza* (sadness). Natalia, told me that her mother had died on the coast in 1983. She had gone there to find work shortly after the abduction of her son and disappearance of her husband (from the Sunday market) because she did not have the option to return to her natal home or to maintain her family in the village. Shortly after her arrival, Natalia's mother fell ill and died, leaving four orphaned children.²⁴ Natalia, the eldest, was 12 years old at the time and had to take sole responsibility.

CHILDREN

Labour and income

I have no father, and I have to keep my mother and work the land so that we can eat.

(11 year old boy from Emol)

Children's worth increased as a result of *La Violencia* because their mothers looked to them for support on various levels in the absence of other "normal" support systems. They became a crucial source of social security for their widowed mothers who sometimes felt incapacitated by the experience of *La Violencia*. *Doña Ana* commented:

The other women [with husbands] can lift a *quintal* [100 lbs] but I need my children's help. Actually I can lift a *quintal* but then I can hardly walk ...My children help me, they take the place of my husband.

The highly restrictive nature of female employment opportunities meant that child labour, however scanty, was often the main source of income in many female-headed households in Quiché.

Older male children were solicited to act as protectors to their mothers and as breadwinners. Both boys and girls were put to work prematurely by their widowed mothers and grandmothers. Usually only boys were wage earners; girls were generally kept at home.

Boys were given the responsibility of men's work as agriculturalists and protectors at a younger age than leaving home to earn an income, although this varied from family to family. After *doña* Eugenia's husband and only son were killed, she and her daughter-in-law were left with only young children in the house. The boys were set to work immediately but, as they were only eight and ten years old at the time, their work was not very lucrative. *Doña* Candelaria had two teenage sons among her ten children. When their father was killed, one was working as a street vendor in the capital and the other was studying with the aim of becoming a teacher but was forced to leave his studies and take up business with his brother.

In many families, elder sons had also been killed in *La Violencia*, so the children who worked were rather young. Children as young as seven years old were sent to seek employment in urban areas or the coast, preferably accompanying an adult male relative or friend. By the age of eight to ten (instead of the pre-*La Violencia* norm of thirteen) boys travelled together, without adult accompaniment. They worked in towns and cities, shining shoes, selling ice cream, helping on street stalls (selling cassettes, batteries, cheap watches and other paraphernalia) and sliced fruit; on the coast, they harvested coffee and cotton on the *fincas*.

Girls were also set to work immediately following their father's death. They tended to perform women's tasks, often working independently of their mothers at a younger age than normal, while their mothers tried to fulfil the roles of their missing husbands. Mothers were sometimes forced to leave children as young as five years old in charge of younger siblings or even to leave a toddler in the house on its own.²⁵ Widows and their daughters

stayed up all night making, for example, *trensas*. When talking about the period, women sometimes expressed guilt about the harsh way they were forced to treat their children to make them work harder.

In southern Quiché, girls accompanied their mothers to the *fincas*. They helped their mothers fill baskets with coffee or make *tortillas* for the male workers; some girls were taken on as maids by the *finca* owner. Occasionally, girls were sent to the town or city to work as maids in *Ladino* households, only returning home about once a year; the luckier ones would be allowed to visit their homes more frequently, bringing a small contribution to the household. Maids were as young as eight years old, although older children were preferred because they could work harder; they were invariably made to wear *Ladino* clothes and shoes for the first time. Mistreatment of maids was common; physical abuse, sexual abuse by the men of the house who saw them as their property, was not unheard of.

The practice of sending girls to work as maids existed prior to *La Violencia* but was rare in southern Quiché.²⁶ Parents were reluctant to let their daughters go, knowing that they would be harshly treated and fearing that they would pick up bad habits from the *Latinos*. However, sometimes poverty forced families to let them go.²⁷ Among the women I know, only *doña* Candelaria sent her daughter to work as a maid. However, she suffered remorse over this and, of course, her daughter's departure caused further loss to the household.

Widows had control of a greater proportion of their children's wages than they had of their husbands' income. Some women told me that their sons would give them Q100 or so saying, "here, you know what we need to buy". This could be more in the way of cash than they had been given by their late husbands because the practice was that he provided *gastos* (money for household expenditure) which amounted to much less when he did the weekly shopping at the market, something which women took over. However, some sons, like their fathers, were more avaricious than others. In any case, widowhood generally gives at least senior women evident economic control of the household.

While mothers were pleased to have financial support from their sons, some were afraid that their sons had become undisciplined and had turned to drink and pilfering.²⁸

In highland towns Rambo, James Dean and martial arts videos are played nightly, a seemingly harmless form of entertainment for young lads. However, these fictional representations provide normative and behavioral models thus, to a certain extent, constituting reality (Chaney 1979). Therefore mothers' concern had some foundation for some boys became addicted to these videos identifying with James Dean, Rambo and other violent characters. One young man told me that when the army grabbed him for military service, he managed to escape by throwing himself from a truck using a Ramboesque stunt.

Mature male roles

Mothers say that eldest sons who take on their father's work take on their father's or grandfather's position in the family. According to the Quiché, one becomes a Quiché Indian man through performing the functions of one. *Doña Flora* once jokingly claimed of her eight year old grandson, "now Sebastian is my husband, he plants my fields and he goes with me to the market". It was also interesting to note how Sebastian was imbued with the characteristics of his grandfather, a phenomenon which I noted in other boys who took over the tasks of a particular relative who perished in *La Violencia*.²⁹

On more than one occasion I observed that a son also took on the authority of his missing or dead father, and sometimes exercised this over his mother. *Doña Candelaria*'s son forbade her to continue practising as a midwife, an occupation she had taken up after *La Violencia* in order to earn a small income. He objected to the gossip about his mother "talking" (having sexual relations) with other men during her visits to her clients' houses; he thought that she should be at home. His objections to his mother's work coincided with an increase in violent activity in the beginning of 1990, which made people more afraid to visit each other's houses because of its subversive connotations. I suspected that *doña Candelaria*'s son was really afraid for his mother but found a culturally acceptable and altogether safer way to justify restricting her movements.

Women with no sons or only young sons and grandsons would sometimes complain about their relative disadvantage. *Doña Flora* remarked:

I tell the woman that she should feel consoled by the fact that she has three sons...They take the place of her husband. But me, I am on the streets once and for all.

It was considered better to have children of either gender and of any age than none at all, even though it meant having a mouth to feed, because they provided valuable companionship at a time when several losses were incurred:

If only I had children I would not miss my husband so much. And if I had several children I would feel better. You see when my only child goes to graze the animals, I have to stay alone in the house and this makes me feel very alone. *Doña Chepa* has children who go to take the animals and others to keep her company at the same time. She always has someone talking to her.

REMARRIAGE³⁰

After *La Violencia*, widows were impelled towards remarriage for a variety of reasons. On one level there was the widow's own need to gain the support and protection in a household in which the entire adult male population had been depleted. There was an equally compelling necessity for a woman ^{to} hide the fact that ^{she} had been married to the "war dead" in order to avoid accusations of being a whore, a witch or the "wife of a guerrilla". One widow told me she felt coerced into remarriage to end the malicious gossip which surrounded her. This, however, did not end this woman's problems: her second husband was an alcoholic who, knowing how dependent she was on him, began to abuse her; his parents exacerbated the acrimonious situation between them and ended up snatching her eldest son.

However, so many men had been killed that remarriage became increasingly difficult. As far as I could tell, considering the cultural and pragmatic reluctance to mention previous liaisons, the incidence of remarriage among widows is low (in contrast, widowers almost invariably remarried immediately). It is difficult to determine the extent to which the low incidence of remarriage might reflect a positive choice on the part of a widow who wished to avoid, for example, dealing with another violent man within marriage. In fact, the distinction between deliberate rejection and external obstruction is itself not clear-cut, since

widows' chances of remarriage depend on the opportunities they face, the support they and their children can expect and their "habitus" (cf. Bourdieu 1977).

Childlessness and age

The two decisive factors influencing the likelihood of remarriage (apart from the dearth of marriageable men) are childlessness and youth. The incidence of remarriage is highest among young, childless women; childlessness seems to be the overriding factor.³¹ Childless widows are an attractive prospect for men who do not want to take on the financial responsibility of a widow's children. Mothers-in-law might also be reluctant to take on responsibility for any children a new daughter-in-law may bring with her. Some widows were forced to abandon their children on remarriage; one widow who had no relatives with whom to leave her young son, left him with *doña* Josefina, who saw him as an investment at the time. Some men did not even want the responsibility of their own children from a second union: one widow who got together with a man on a *finca* and was abandoned when she became pregnant, suspected he already had a wife in the village.

A childless widow was especially desirable if she was living on her husband's land. A woman might choose to remain in her first husband's house in order to retain entitlement to his property and land; there was strong suspicion that men married such widows for their land, living on it while continuing to cultivate their own. This was viewed as particularly dishonourable and provoked *chismes* (rumours) and *envidia* (malicious envy): it is not so much that a man has a lot of land and wealth but how he acquires it which is important among the Quiché.

Widowed mothers widely expressed the fear that a second husband might not take care of the children from her first marriage. One reason for this is that step-children have no rights to their step-father's property and a woman fears that if she remarries her children may also lose their rights to hers. Likewise, if a widow leaves her husband's village to remarry and gives her children to her parents or someone living elsewhere, she may forfeit the right to her deceased husband's land. A woman who wants to remarry and move to her new husband's land may therefore leave her children with her in-laws, thus keeping the land but incurring further emotional loss and ~~in~~ security later on in life. If she takes her children

with her, troubles can arise between the children of both partners' previous marriages. One woman told me of the fighting between the adult children of her first and second marriages: the children from her present marriage did not want her older sons to have a share of their father's land.

Many women told me that they did not remarry "because of our children". *Doña Candelaria* assumed that she would have to leave both her house and her four dependent children if she were to remarry:

How can I remarry when all my things are here? Furthermore, I have my children and I would not leave them alone here in the house.

Destitution: the loss of nurturance

Doña Ana:

It is better that I go with my [dead] father (husband)³² as there is no one to talk with here and there is no maize for the children.

Among the Quiché nurturance is usually referred to using the idiom of the provision of *gastos* (household expenditure) and labour by a man (and prepared food, by a woman). Typical retrospective judgements were, "he was a good husband; he always worked hard and returned from the market with enough supplies", or "during the *fiesta* he always brought us a new outfit".

The loss of men's nurturance, which largely centred on the provision of foodstuffs, was a severe problem. Widows spoke of the family diet before, during and after *La Violencia*. Prior to *La Violencia*, families ate three meals of maize and beans a day; they also ate the eggs their chickens produced. At the height of *La Violencia*, families were reduced to eating two meals a day. Their only source of food was what they had in storage; they ate no beans and little maize and were unable to eat their usual fill of *tortillas*. Some widows ground up corn cobs, which are normally fed to animals, to make flour. The destruction of crops added to the misery of many families. Many told of times when wild plants and water was all they could give their children. Since *La Violencia*, the food situation had improved but some families still only ate two meals a day. Some ate few beans

and had to sell their chicken eggs in the markets to raise cash for even more essential goods. Malnutrition existed prior to *La Violencia*, worsened during it and lessened afterwards; it continues to be a problem among poorer households in most communities, especially among widows' families.

The easiest, and most conventional, way for a "natural" or a "war" widow to overcome loss of income and labour would be to remarry. While it is an advantage to have a man to care for her land, a woman might decide to try to struggle on by herself, finding a temporary *mozo* (worker) instead of a permanent husband to work her land.³³ At first I thought that the remarriage of a woman whose husband has been kidnapped indicated her resignation to his death. Some women indicated that their uncertainty about their husband's fate did prevent them from remarrying; other women who hoped their husbands were still alive nevertheless remarried for pragmatic reasons:

My husband was kidnapped, I still don't know if he's dead; all I know is that he is not here. I couldn't manage the children so I married a man who agreed to support us.

Some women spoke of the desperation that led them to remarry. They would tolerate an unhappy second marriage because of the need for financial security:

The death of my first husband practically changed everything. I was left feeling melancholic, desperate and lonely. I was even at the point of committing suicide. You see, he was everything to me. But a year passed and then I began to live with another man in another village. This union was not a great success. I never felt that he was equal to my first husband because he beat me frequently. I would leave him but then we would get back together again. I tell you he was not a good man. But in the end I decided that I would tolerate all his madness for I didn't know how I would manage without him.

Doña Luisa also explained what transpired in her second marriage, illustrating the complexity of relations within the household:

I left my second husband because he beat me and he gave me no money. This was in part due to my mother-in-law, in whose house we were residing. She encouraged me to leave once when her son was away on the coast. She said that I should leave before he returned to beat me again. So I left and returned to my parents' home. But then

he came to get me. I soon realized that my mother-in-law was not trying to protect me but in fact it was sometimes her fault that he hit me.³⁴ Although she supported me at times, at other times she turned against me. She also undermined me by asking me why I had married her son knowing that other women had left him before. But I decided that I had better tolerate it for if I left him I'd find it exceedingly difficult to live.³⁵ Also ka manak (our people) would think badly of me.

Doña Ana thought that if a woman is financially secure, then there is no need to remarry:

You know they tell me that a man fell in love with *doña Tomasa* but she didn't want him because she has grown sons who maintain ~~her~~ and therefore has nothing to worry about.

A widow with young sons may remain single if she has the use of her husband's land³⁶ and a means to maintain herself. A widow with her own home and land may, however, become a man's concubine without either partner changing residence. In this way she may procure his financial support without jeopardizing herself or her children (although potentially dangerous rumours may start to circulate about the liaison). Widows living in their mother-in-law's house had less opportunity to form such liaisons.

Protection and Companionship

Women without husbands are said to have no one to take care of them, especially if there are no adult males in their household. The need for protection has increased in recent years owing to the *jefe*'s constant threats of sexual harassment which ~~has~~ contributed to women's feelings of helplessness. Women ask rhetorically "*Con qué me defiendo?*" (How can I defend myself?), referring not only to practical matters but the supernatural threats that fill a woman's world.³⁷

Women frequently referred to the loss of someone with whom to make decisions. They would complain saying, for example, "Now there is no one with whom to decide which colour corn to sow...". With the help of an aj mes (worker of the table), *doña Josefina* often consulted her husband's spirit on various matters; in this way she could continue to make decisions with his help several years after his death.³⁸ Many of the tasks pertaining to

family life which women had to take over and reorganize had previously been hidden in "normal" times. Two widows explain:

Doña Candelaria:

He was head of the house, he is the one who worked and earned money, he was everything. He cultivated the *milpa*, I never touched the hoe when he was here nor the fertilizer much less do the work itself. I only carried out the preparation of the food, looked after the children and kept the house clean. This was my work but now everything is in my hands.

Doña Josefina:

The others have planted their corn. But my worry is that we've yet to do this. This is the most problematic consequence of not having a man in the house.

The Quiché consider the loss of companionship, being left alone, to be a sad (*triste*) state of affairs. This was not spoken about often for the Quiché are generally reserved about such matters; the most they tended to say was, for example, "it is different now without our partner, we talked about everything". I unwittingly provoked raucous laughter when I asked women if they missed their husbands' company other than as providers; it appeared that they thought I was referring to sexual relations which, other than when gossiping or drunk, they would only address obliquely. Some women admitted to missing their husbands as companions, even if they doubted *their* fidelity. *Doña Josefina* told me:

When my husband was alive he would go to the centre of Emol and return at 8 or 9 in the evening...I didn't ask him why he arrived late or where he had been. Who knows where he had been...perhaps with another woman. But I didn't inquire about this.

Women who spoke of life not being the same without a husband included widows whose financial worries had decreased because their sons were now old enough to provide the household with a constant income. *Doña Flora* and *doña Eugenia* discuss this:

Doña Flora:

But isn't it good that you were left with two young sons [grandsons]?

Doña Eugenia:

This is some consolation but it is still not the same because one always needs a husband.

Doña Flora:

Yes, I suppose they are necessary.

Doña Eugenia:

It's different when one is a couple [she begins to cry].

Rejection of remarriage

Women who had a negative experience of conjugal life might decide not to repeat the experience. They saw no advantage to having another husband who got drunk, beat them, and failed to provide them with *gastos*. Young women are prepared to "tolerate" men and their sometimes violent ways within a marriage but older women have the opportunity to avoid this a second time round.

Older women with a positive experience of conjugal life might also avoid remarriage because they wanted to preserve the image of their husband; their determination not to remarry may reflect their determination to maintain psychological ties with him. This was typically expressed in terms of "remembering"³⁹ a dead or "disappeared" husband:

How would I act if I saw another person who wasn't my husband when I still remember him so well? Listen, if another man came who wasn't my husband, I honestly think that I wouldn't be able to stand it.

A woman's perception of her late husband not only as a "good" man but also as a valued authority in the community seemed to influence her decision not to remarry. Men who had been community leaders, presidents of the village's Improvement Committee, catechists and health promoters were viewed as honourable men by their widows, who tended to share their politics. These widows tended to view their husbands as martyrs; their men were exceptional but nevertheless such idealization may be related to their refusal to remarry.⁴⁰ Perhaps these women were unable to let go of the past; at the same time, however, they were also among the most resourceful women, capable of eking out a living on their own.

Bowlby's work suggests that if the relationship with the dead husband was remembered in perfection and mourning incomplete, the person may be hampered in their efforts to rebuild their lives by attaching to other objects (1961:335). It is possible that some women whose husbands had disappeared chose not to remarry because they were stuck in the phase of idealization:⁴¹ they were unable to mourn their dead properly. In fact, they were denied confirmation of their spouse's fate and deprived of the opportunity to perform funerary rituals; even when a husband was known to be dead, women were still unable to see or bury the body.

A woman's religious beliefs and identifications can also influence whether or not she remarried. Catholic women sometimes conveyed the image of being like Penelope waiting. This was encouraged by an unmarried female catechist who would come to speak to them "in the name of the Virgin" (see chapter 7). Some *Costumbrista* widows told me that their husbands had told them (via an aj mes) not to remarry but to "act well" (be chaste).⁴² A few of these women simultaneously boasted and lamented about their chaste ways; for example, *doña* Eugenia asserted, "and now that we have been left alone we seem like children...".⁴³

Some widows claimed that others, who, like themselves, had not remarried were honourable, "respectful" and "imaginative". They said that they themselves had no desire to marry again, sometimes intimating a notion of destiny. *Doña* Candelaria told me, "I became a widow and that is how I have to remain". It was not uncommon for these same women to joke and gossip about those who have remarried. *Doña* Tomasa caused much laughter when she remarked:

She remarried because she did not like being alone...who knows why...I suppose its because the body doesn't like to be deprived *socegado* [here she refers to sexual desires].

Women who declined remarriage indicated that remarriage would mean taking on an older man who was divorced or separated, a widower or a man who wanted a second wife. Their general opinion about men today was that they were "no good"; they had lost trust in men, viewing them as lascivious. Moreover, they suspected that almost any surviving male

may have betrayed their husbands. The following conversation, which expresses widows' intimidation by men and their ambivalence towards remarriage, is a typical of many I heard:

Doña Ana:

A man came two times and almost entered in the *corral* (animal pen). I was not in the house the second time he came so he spoke with my son, Santos, asking for me. This man's name was *don Juan*. I didn't know him personally but I knew that his wife had died the previous year. I said to my Santos that maybe he had come to ask after me [marriage]. What an unnerving thought! If he comes again I would not know how to respond.

Doña Flora:

You must say to him, "excuse me, I do not want to talk to you"...that's all.

Doña Ana:

Yes, I suppose so, for apart from anything else he's already very old.

Doña Flora:

And if you did, you'd only be left in his house for him to die with you. And what would you want that for?

Doña Ana:

You know, on another occasion I attended the Mass together with my children and we saw him there and he was with another [woman].

Doña Flora:

That's awful!

Doña Ana:

Yes,...It was a Wednesday when I saw the old man at the mass and then he came to look for me again the following Friday. I thought that he was very ugly. So after that I asked my children to accompany me [when she left the house]. I also told them that should this man come to look for me when I was out, they should tell him not to come again. I insisted on this because, really, the man is very old and it appears that he's after all the woman. In fact it seems that he goes around chasing all the widows, at least that is what is daughter-in-law told me. *Son puros desaseados* [they are pure filth], these men.

Doña Flora:

They are all like that. *Don Thomas* did the same with *doña Cecilia* and not only with her but with all of them. But if this man has daughters-in-law who wash his clothes and cook for him, what does he want with a wife...perhaps he's a little crazy or something.

Dofia Ana:

Yes, now I can't trust them [men] because, who knows, perhaps they ate the brains of [killed] the poor ones [their menfolk]...Did he come here as well?

This conversation can be understood as an expression of envy in the light of their own lack of opportunity to remarry or as a justification of their own refusal. Widows who said they did not wish to remarry would, on occasion, admit that life was just not the same without a husband, a contradiction that is more apparent than real. Such ambivalence is typical among widows who were still in a general state of disequilibrium.

But one cannot exclude the possibility that women's overt rejection of remarriage was a means of saving face in the light of scarce opportunities. Older widows with children do have less opportunity, but they sometimes have less need to remarry; they may also have more authority to refuse.

SOLIDARITY AND CONFLICT AMONG WIDOWS

Dofia Flora:

The consolation we have is that there are several of us widows and we advise each other. The others tell us: "leave your concerns aside for it is better that you should not be sad".

Solidarity exists among women who have suffered losses whether their menfolk died from natural causes or were "war" dead though there is, perhaps, a limit to the understanding and empathy between them. The experience of unnatural widowhood also differs: women whose kin were killed by the *jefes* and the army (by far the numerical majority) were called "wives of the guerrilla" by army sympathizers whereas the other widows were not.⁴⁴

There is a further differentiation even between women whose menfolk were killed or abducted. Women whose relatives were abducted have a different experience from those who know their men to have been killed. Like "real" widows, they too are considered to be malca'rib, a term which refers to being single after marriage (it is also used to refer to separated women) and is traditionally used to mark a permanent state. However, in the case

of the wife of an abducted man, it refers to a temporary state, as she lives for several years in the hope of his return.

Difficulties sometimes arose from the recognition that others experienced different degrees of loss. A widow whose children were also killed might ask rhetorically of another widow, "why did her children live while mine died?" At times she held the women with children responsible for this, especially if the women were on different sides.

While some widows cooperated with one another, at least in some domains, others were competitive. Conflict exists between the widows who compete for resources, making them each other's rivals. Groups of widows may suddenly form factions if they believe that resources are unfairly distributed.

Conflict also arose because widows do not all share the same views on how they should behave once they are compelled to leave their traditional roles behind. Every widow seeks a new way of being which will allow survival but each has different capacities to be innovative; many are uncertain of the best way to proceed. There was perhaps less uncertainty among the *Costumbristas*, for they went to shamans who made mirror-like interpretations of dreams and signs to help people relocate themselves, confirmed their sense of orientation and identity and even told them, in the most practical terms, what they had to do.

All widows tended to observe and be highly critical of each other. Their disapproval can be seen as a reflection of their own insecurity as they take on new roles. It may also be a projection of the conflict which many women experienced because of the demands made of them and their own self-doubt and self-criticism. This was reflected in women's narratives of the explanations they received from the spirits regarding their aberrant behaviour. For example, *dona* Josefina communicated with the spirit of her husband (through an aj mes) and obtained an explanation for her alcoholism following his death. It indicates the aj q'ij's (and possibly her own) partial attempt to reconcile her behaviour:

I went to ask him why I liked to drink so much. I was desperate about this. I said, "when you were living I did not have the urge to go running into all the bars".

[JZ] And what was his response?

Doña Flora:

He said, "The truth is, it is not your fault. They [*brujos*] did this in order to destroy you. Ordinarily you would have no reason to drink but since the people killed me and since you already had this [tendency],⁴⁵ you've succumbed to it."

One of the most common and acceptable bases for widows' overt criticism of each other revolved around moral and religious differences. Widows attempt to correct one another when they perceive others to behave immorally. The ideal for women, especially younger ones, is restraint and avoidance of public attention though this is barely possible under the widows' present circumstances. Another widow had told *Doña* Josefina that she was behaving incorrectly:

One woman, Santa Yac [another widow], who came to visit me when I was ill told me off saying that I only got drunk for the sake of it (*por gusto*). She said that she thought it was dreadful that I let my children go without eating when I get drunk. She said I got drunk *por joder* (to make trouble).

Even widows who form supportive networks within the community according to affinity, natal family, religion or other group membership such as popular movements and widows' groups, resorted to gossiping about one another sooner or later. For example, *doña* Josefina and *doña* Flora shared similar politics but *doña* Josefina, who remained a *Costumbrista*, felt criticized by *doña* Flora who converted to the "renovation" (Charismatic) religion, a puritanical Catholic sect which criticized alcohol consumption, playing or dancing to the *marimba* (wooden xylophone) and so on. As an *aj q'ij*, *doña* Josefina drank as part of her duty and *doña* Flora criticized her on these grounds and for "talking to" (have illicit relations with) men. She once suggested that *doña* Josefina had even killed a child conceived in one of her illicit affairs by drowning it in a water hole.

Widows whose husbands and/or themselves were viewed to be on opposite sides kept an eye on each other and generally did not mix, other than to greet each other politely as a way of avoiding conflict. However, there were exceptions to this: *doña* Flora, for example, invited an old woman who "had not been organized" to come and live with her for a while after her husband died. I could never really understand why she did this, especially after she

told me that the old woman was in fact a q'ol q'ol.⁴⁶ *Doña* Josefina herself said that she was trying act on her Christian beliefs.

Women who took on leadership roles in women's groups were criticized by widows who refrained from such activities; some widows, despite being forced out of the usual women's domain, still felt it necessary to achieve a balance and did not wish to entirely relinquish a woman's traditional place. *Doña* Flora indicated that she felt criticized by another widow not only for leaving her house to do the male tasks she is now forced to perform, but also for her work as a widows' leader:

I am desperate because this woman [another widow] tells me that I'm ill [immoral] because I am never in my house. She says "now two weeks have passed and you only have *paseado* (gone around frivolously) while I am here doing all my chores".

WIDOWS' AUTONOMY

With their husbands dead or missing, women learnt to make important domestic decisions and take public action. They were sometimes unwilling to remarry, thus resuming a more dependent role. These women implicitly contested and challenged male constructions of the female role, usually only in private with female interlocutors.

Women realized that despite preaching about equality in their catechist classes, men did not necessarily change their behaviour but still expected the traditional divisions of labour to operate in their personal lives. Women who ventured into traditionally male domains did not necessarily expect a new division of labour at home; in fact, they seemed to want to maintain the domestic division as it was.

Despite their heavier work load, widows did not want to relinquish their broadened repertoire of roles, including participation in economic and other public spheres; nor did they want to suffer further abuse and penury at the hand of another husband. Becoming the breadwinner brought not only an income of one's own and the necessary running of the family economy, but also a new identity, making women more self-reliant and confident.

Their new working lives did not take them away from their family completely for they were usually accompanied by other family members. Moreover, it brought them into contact with women in similar positions; these networks, unlike those of their previous family constellations, meant a relative absence of social control.

Doña Teresa:

We were sad for two long years. You see, when they were alive, our husbands looked after all our necessities. They got the fertilizer, they were responsible for the expenses of the house, etc. Without them we could find little consolation. The first year was the most difficult, then the next year we learnt new skills little by little. I taught myself how to work, how to buy things and how to maintain the family. We learnt to be both father and mother to our children.

Many women derived an everyday feeling of accomplishment in their non-traditional roles and thereby experienced a diminution of their depression:⁴⁷

Doña Josefina:

When our corn fields grow then little by little our sadness disappears...

Doña Teresa:

Only then [when the corn grew] did I find some consolation. Now we still think of our husbands but it is less painful than it was before. We have finally learnt how to live without them. Now and then we still get sad because of them ...well not because of them, *per se*, but because we have necessities which we can't fulfil given that we are widows.

It appears that despite the burden of their double role of being women and men, mothers and fathers, widows have become confident of their ability to move in heretofore relatively unknown, male, spheres.⁴⁸ Once they got used to it, many women began to enjoy their freedom, newly acquired knowledge and sense of mastery.

Doña Flora once told me:

Ladinos treat us badly in the market place and on the buses. They say that we want loads of money but we, as widows, are beginning to know a little. Before, as wives, when we used to go to the town we would not even think of ascending the steps of the town hall. Now we not only ascend the steps but we even talk to the mayor!⁴⁹

One woman who attended widows' groups and Spanish language classes told me: "all our lives we have big ears". She explained, "women were like donkeys who are unable to speak". Learning Spanish facilitated both women's movement in the *Ladino*, male world and their access to a certain type of knowledge. The Quiché consider Spanish to be the language of power: the power of the government, army and *patrón* (employer/owner).

Doña Josefina:

I have changed a little in all ways now. I feel that I have more knowledge about things. I feel that I have learnt how to speak [Spanish].⁵⁰ Now with facility I can inquire about different subjects. Whereas before I did not realize about things and neither was I able to think.

Interestingly, despite their greater poverty, widows were more likely than other families to send their daughters to school up to the sixth grade. This is partly due to their realization that their own lives had been handicapped through their inability to speak Spanish. However, I believe there was more to the story than this: in the face of the death of so many sons, daughters became the symbols of the future for women.

After eight or so years of managing on their own, widows experienced increased self-esteem. This is illustrated in the following exchange between two widows:

Doña Flora:

We've been alone for eight years.

Doña Josefina:

Yes, we've been alone for eight years and we're still alive.

Doña Flora:

We're alive and we're dressed and we've done it on our own.

Normal life cycle events, such as a child's marriage, made widows realize that they had managed, despite the odds stacked against them. *Doña Eugenia* was particularly happy when her granddaughter married and the marriage took place in her house.⁵¹

Eventually, widows felt they were able to cope and had achieved a degree of autonomy in terms of the control of economically productive resources and their own activities. Other women were also aware of this, as expressed by the wife of an alcoholic:

We too would be better off alone. We would be able to work better. If only men [their husbands] did not exist...then we would be able to decide what to do without needing to follow their orders.

However, widows' autonomy was to cause a different set of problems.

PERCEPTIONS OF WIDOWS

Married women's attitudes to widows

Married women think that widows could jeopardize the stability of their marriage; they feared that widows' apparent economic autonomy resulted from illicit affairs with their husbands⁵² who they suspected of giving cash and gifts to their mistresses.⁵³

Widows told me that when a patroller forces himself on a widow, she is then singled out for accusations. Revenge is also taken against all the widows, while at the same time the identity of the particular patroller is protected. One woman explained:

When the wives of the patrols find out that a widow slept with their husbands they take revenge on all the widows. They accuse them of all sorts of things and collectively they ask the accused widow "why do you sleep with our husbands?" So in the daylight no one knows which man it was.

Dona Flora explained her perception of married women's sentiments towards widows:

Women who still have their husbands are very angry at us. They act as though we have done something to harm them. They suspect that we intend to steal their husbands. They also taunt us in public saying, "why don't you stop scrounging and go to work yourselves."

Conflict also arose between wives and widows who fought over scarce resources, including aid. Married women were envious of the widows' supposed ability to obtain economic assistance because of their status as widows. Widows were seen to receive aid from development agencies and the government; however, aid was minimal (and only handed out once) and only a few widows dared to collect it because they were too afraid of displaying their status. They therefore tended not to participate in NGOs, even if they were

invited to do so. Additionally, recipients of aid were ridiculed by other villagers who were not offered any compensation, especially by those who had lost relatives but were not widows. NGOs realized they were exacerbating conflict within villages by making a distinction between wives and widows and that indeed all women suffered from poverty. Widows who did apply for aid generally displayed considerable order and dignity in the way that they requested and received it; they were not covetous or greedy.

Some widows thought that women's attitudes towards them had been affected by their husbands' crimes, that their men's acts had transformed the meaning of relationships with others and the definition of being human with other humans for both wives and husbands.

Doña Josefina:

Who knows why the women have changed their thoughts now. Perhaps they have been affected by the fact that their men have carried out many assassinations.

Married women were perceived to be angry at, and jealous of, widows for the mere fact that they managed. *Doña Josefina* explained:

We succeeded, we have managed in the end. Because of this the women who are still married say, "these women are pure shit. Who knows why they've acquired so much intelligence".

The perception of other women's anger in turn provoked indignation among widows.

Doña Josefina expressed this;

Before when I went out, say to the market, my husband accompanied me and there were no problems. But now I go out and I encounter some women who appear to be angry with me. They insult and offend me. Perhaps they would have reason to treat me so badly if I were divorced or something. But I did not separate with my husband out of choice, did I?

Men's attitudes

Widows' successful performance of men's role was confusing for men⁵⁴ because of Quiché society's traditional strict divisions of labour; it was also threatening for men

whose own masculinity and perceived role as the sole providers and negotiators with the "outside" *Ladino* world was thrown into question. Moreover, what it is to be a strong man changes in the context of war. Violence in the form of wife beating was perceived as "*muy hombre*" (manly) before *La Violencia*; the image afterwards is generally even more macho and violent.⁵⁵

Women's independence was most threatening of all to *jefes* (see Chapter 5) whose identity as a male can be seen to be even more in crisis than the "normal" Quiché male whose idea of masculinity has also been challenged. The *jefes* feared that women's growing strength would lead to their own demise should women find the courage to report their crimes. They had a vested ~~inter~~^{rest} in maintaining their threatening, violent, *macho* image.

Widows' Self-perceptions

Widows were forced to alter their image of themselves in the world although in order to maintain a sense of continuity, thoughts about the self lag behind actual changes in behaviour and role position. Although some widows learnt Spanish, they did not view themselves in any way as *Ladinas*,⁵⁶ and only on some levels did they perceive themselves as being "male" because of the work and roles they took on. At the same time it was very important for them to continue with their own work as grinders of corn and to wear local women's *traje* (dress) which states that they are available for the men of their own community and not the "*Ladino*" soldiers or civil patrollers.

Bunzel suggests, with reference to the importance of occupation among the Chichicastecos, that "one's occupation is one's distinguishing characteristic, as inseparable a part of one's personality as one's sex. The fulfilment of life consists of the completion of what is expected of one. For this reason, perhaps, it has been possible to enslave Indians without sapping their integrity, and to exploit their labour without degrading their persons" (1952:34). However, I did not get the impression that a woman who took on men's tasks (apart from those which are taboo and cause her mortification to perform) were degraded by carrying them out. If anything, I had the impression that her esteem was increased through the performance of tasks which are accorded more value in the male, *Ladino* world.

However, at the same time, her thoughts of herself as an attractive sexual being did appear to diminish.

In the early stage of fieldwork, I asked one widow, via my interpreter, how the woman thought that the rest of the community viewed widows. The interpreter answered me herself, saying:

I believe that we aren't pretty any more now that we are no longer with our husbands...How can I think about how I am when I do not even have time to look at myself?

I explained that I wanted her to relay the original question to her friend *doña* Ana but she asked her a different question: "How do women seem now that they were widows? Are they still pretty, does anyone [men] want them?" Both women laughed. *Doña* Ana answered:

I think we are not very pretty nor much good because we are unable to do it [have sex] any more.

Widows appear to identify themselves as "other" in contrast to their memories of what they used to be as marriage/sex partners, which they see depicted in traditional, married women. They view themselves not only as both "women and men" (with attendant positive and negative effects) but as children because of their chastity and dependence (despite the autonomy they have gained).

By not being allowed to conform to the cultural model of woman or widow, they are anomalous beings who different categories of beings in Quiché society attempt to categorize. Some widows show that they accept the negative identities ascribed to them; others run off and remarry in their attempt to reject them. Others, perhaps strengthened by their position of solidarity with other women, take on new positive identities, dimensions which in a few cases have even been mobilized to political ends.⁵⁷

CONCLUSION

In the beginning, the widows' loss of complementary partners and adult male kin generally forced them into an unprecedented state of dependency on economic and labour

support of others.⁵⁸ This dependency was frustrated for various practical and psychological reasons and women were forced to take on traditionally male roles to a greater or lesser degree. Despite the extra laborious work this entailed, women gained a sense of esteem from this; they said that they felt they had more knowledge and that they were more capable (*más capaces*).

Because of *La Violencia* and the ongoing violence in all its permutations, widows were denied entry into "normal" Quiché social life. They were no longer harnessed by male authority within the household, which has had negative as well as positive repercussions for the widow. With time and the help of available grown sons, they were able to acquire a degree of economic self-sufficiency, independence and self-esteem. Some of the more resourceful widows enjoyed greater autonomy than previously, but with this came greater responsibilities which not all widows wanted to accept; given the chance, widows, especially younger ones, opted to marry again. However, many widows either chose or had to remain single and were forced to become both "mothers and fathers".

It is interesting that neither younger nor older women mentioned the possibility of redefining gender relations as a way of dealing with male violence. This is, perhaps, partly because *Ladino* patriarchal norms have become entrenched in the lives of Indian women.⁵⁹

From childhood, male and female Quiché are brought up to "work hard"; play is condemned and the idea of sacrifice encouraged. The idea of taking on more work was therefore not as distressing as one might imagine, apart from the resultant exhaustion (reflected in their frequent lament that their bodies ached⁶⁰ and they "had no time"). Moreover, owing to the crisis situation which freed behaviour from daily practices and norms (cf. Bourdieu, 1977), women have taken on men's work, including political activity, with apparent ease. This change in work affected the way women defined themselves: as women, as men⁶¹ and as children, perhaps even in the same context. This was not only due to any "failure" in performing the tasks of their own identity (such as weaving or being a sexually active woman) but also because of the necessity of performing men's work. However, the usual commitment to adult social, economic and sex role values, which are normally taken for granted and which continue unthreatened and consistent, was thrown into question by the massive loss of the male population.⁶² Both the individual woman and the whole

community experienced anxiety from their abrupt role changes despite mechanisms which minimized the perception of the actual change. Women were perhaps least of all prepared for the ridicule provoked by their assumption of the most male gendered task, namely corn planting.

Widows are in a "liminal" state, caught and fixated in a passage through life that has left them socially ambivalent and ill-defined, "betwixt and between", condemned to a kind of seclusion no less real than that of the initiate in the puberty rites of many "primitive" societies. As yet, no identity has been made available to them in their society; they are denied re-entry into social life. The state has not taken any measures to alleviate their problems but, instead, has used the missing men as another political weapon in its moral arsenal against the guerrilla. Widows' liminality was apparent in their interactions (and often lack of interaction) with both married women and men. Widows were unprepared for the social isolation they experienced. They were perceived by most categories of people as dangerous, liminal beings and thus a threat to the stability of Quiché society. This fed into the national perception of war widows as "subversive" and a threat to Guatemalan society as a whole. Widows were unprepared recipients of unwanted and unfavourable identities which made them objects of prejudice.

At best, widows are viewed as outsiders or as the symbolic other and hence recognized as being separate and apart. At worst, they form a special sub-group of scapegoats within a long established category of scapegoats: the Indian, who has been the national scapegoat for 500 years. In the process of scapegoating, the stigmatized (cf. Goffman 1963)⁶³ are to a certain degree held responsible for their perceived flaws, and are thus transformed by society from victims to culprits.

1. The term malca'n (widow) is also used to refer separated and divorced women or single mothers. Therefore, a woman who refers to herself as malca'n does not necessarily think her disappeared husband is dead.
2. The vast majority of households containing widows belong to four types: single widows; nuclear widows (widows with unmarried children); "affinal" households (widows living with in-laws); and "filial" households (widow, married son, and possibly other persons).

3. Guatemala City's population doubled between 1976-1987; massive migration following the earthquake continued through *La Violencia*, creating a broader axis of poverty. Half a million people live in squatter settlements on the outskirts of the city; 50% of shanty town dwellers live in extreme poverty and a further 25% live in poverty. Jonas writes that there has been a "marked feminization of poverty as half the families in the huge El Mexquital shantytown, for example, are headed by women" (1991:183).
4. Some men remained with their second wives after *La Violencia* instead of returning to the village, particularly if their land back home was rented. Indeed, on a couple of occasions, women admitted that they did not know whether their spouse had died or whether he was living with someone else.
5. Wilson observed that in Q'eqchi' villages, traditional village reciprocity was now led by catechists. It included initiatives such as the collection of money for those who suffered a tragedy, organizing work parties to repair a roof or plant a maize crop for a widow or abandoned woman (1990:208-9). Wilson's ethnography implies that Q'eqchi' villages are less divided than those in Quiché.
6. This situation was exacerbated by the fact that service in the patrols restricted men's travel to the coast or the city (unless they paid someone to perform their duty for them). This effective ban on travel caused considerable economic hardship.
7. In some areas of Guatemala, land goes straight to the son at the father's death eg. Chimaltenango, Huehuetenango (cf. Wagley 1949).
8. Tambiah assumes that "precisely because the [Asian] Indian woman is incorporated into her husband's household and joint family, she enjoys greater economic security than her African counter-part when she becomes a widow" (1989:416). This, however, is not the case in Guatemala. Dreze (1990) also concludes from his research in India that this is not necessarily the case there either.
9. cf. Bettelheim 1986.
10. see Turner 1967:93.
11. An old man was preferable to a young one because he would be paid less - Q2.00 per day (plus meals) instead of the usual Q3.00-Q4.00.
12. Women earn Q2.00 daily; over the year they earn a total of about Q84.00 (approximately US\$20.00).

13. cf. Annis (1987:Chapter 6) for a fuller understanding of the meaning of relinquishing weaving.
14. Less than one penny.
15. Traditionally, men would buy their wives a new set of clothes at fiesta time.
16. Valued at Q80.00 in 1989.
17. Bunzel writes that since an Indian holds his land "beneath the hands of [the] ancestors and as a trust which [one] must pass on to [one's] children, the sale of land is a great sin against the ancestors as well as against one's children" (1952:23). Nevertheless, it occurred.
18. The price of land varies according to its distance from the town. In 1989, land five kilometres from the town cost Q3,500.00 per *cuerda*; land considered far from the town was worth Q500.00. Women told me that they had sold their land in remote areas for Q100.00 or less although inflation since the early 1980s would be taken into account.
19. Many pregnant women were said to lose their babies during *La Violencia* because of *susto* (fear). cf. Wilson on the treatment of pregnant women and the association between production and reproduction (1990:150-152).
20. See Wilson (1990:223) on the implications of loss of land ~~for~~ tradition.
21. They make about Q250 gross in three months.
22. A common cause of death was malaria exacerbated by malnutrition.
23. cf. Schmid, 1973; Hoyt 1959; Dassaint 1962; Melville and Melville 1971.
24. Estimates of children orphaned by *La Violencia* range from 100,000 (Jonas 1991:183-4) to 250,000. Up to 10,000 children have become street children in Guatemala City, where they come under attack from the security forces.

25. Even when both parents were living, children this age might be forced to look after younger siblings. One woman told me she had been left to look after her younger sister when her mother accompanied her father who was a shaman. When she was five years old, Rigoberta Menchú also looked after younger siblings while her parents harvested coffee on a *finca*. When she was eight years old, she began to earn money on the *finca* herself (Burgos-Debray and Menchú 1984:34).

26. This was more common among the Ixiles or Uspantecos further north (cf. Burgos-Debray and Menchú 1984).

27. Very poor families who had lost members to the violence were also forced to send their children to work as maids. Sometimes girls wanted to go because they saw it as an opportunity to learn Spanish (cf. Burgos-Debray and Menchú 1984).

28. Children see the army and the village patrol *jefes* as the strong ones, the authority. In fatherless (and grand-fatherless) families there is no one to tell children stories which carry moral import or that they should remember the ways of the ancestors. Quiché moral values are disrupted further still because children see that one can get places by killing with no repercussions. This has implications for sons' treatment of mothers and husbands' treatment of wives, given that *machismo* has increased. Among fatherless children this is contrasted to their own families which have become female-headed, and female dominated if several men from the household have been killed (see drawings). Among these families, boys are unlikely to have a male model to instill the values of the Quiché male, including that of being agriculturalists which may even become women's work in their household and not something that they want to do. Boys who travel to the capital associate with, and aspire to becoming, *Ladinos*, rich and powerful. One young man who works in the capital boasts that people there take him for a *Ladino*.

29. The psychological repercussions of being imbued with the character of dead relatives are not insignificant but are beyond the scope of this thesis.

30. cf. Bossen (1978:145-146) for details on unprovoked widowhood among the Mam which largely parallels the situation in Quiché.

31. It cannot be assumed that a young widow would be childless: even 17 year old widows were likely to have at least one dependent child. Several women widowed at the age of twenty five (eight years prior to our encounter), had not remarried. In Emol, the youngest widow was only 19 years old when her husband was killed; she already had four children. However, it was more usual for a woman with four children to be in her mid to late twenties. On average, women had four children on widowhood: approximately 45% of widows had four to six children and 55% had one to three children.

32. This is how husbands are referred to at times.
33. It is interesting to contrast this with marriages among the Ixiles of northern Quiché, whose villages were razed to the ground between 1980-1981. They lived a nomadic existence in the mountains and faced not only an uncertain future but the possibility of never recovering their lands. Here, despite the dire conditions, including repeated displacements to escape from the advancing army, marriages or "unions" took place between people whose spouses were known to be dead and even those whose spouses were just missing. The decision to marry was uncomplicated by economic incentives or disincentives.
34. Harsh treatment by mothers-in-law has been written about extensively in the literature on India (e.g. Dandavate 1989:18). This is milder and less typical among Guatemalan Indians.
35. Bossen writes that among the Mam "women tenaciously remain", despite their husbands' attempts to provoke them to leave, knowing that they would not be able to accumulate enough capital to maintain a comparable standard of living (1978:154).
36. Wagley 1949:46.
37. *Costumbrista* women also lost the protection that was solicited by their husbands in daily rituals carried out in the home at the home altar. Women told me that they did not take over this function.
38. This would only be possible for a *Costumbrista* who solicits the help of an aj mes. Western psychologists reporting on people who say that their dead loved ones who appear in their dreams are their companions who they continue to consult, say they have "denial woven into their dreams" (eg. Hodgkinson and Stewart 1988:13).
39. The same term was used in connection with dead ancestors although men who died a short while ago are not considered to have become ancestors yet.
40. Raphael (1983), whose model of bereavement is drawn from Bowlby (1961, 1969), Freud (1959) and Klein (1948), writes that:
In the earliest phases of the bereaved one's review of the image and memories of the dead are often idealized, the deceased and the relationship remembered in perfection. Then, if mourning is progressing satisfactorily, more of the real memories, the positive and negative aspects representing ambivalences inevitable in human relations are recalled (ibid:44).

41. This may go on at the same time but on a different (less conscious) level than the political functions of the idealization of the dead discussed in Chapter 7.
42. Although this could be seen as a projection of their own.
43. By referring to themselves as being child-like, women also allude to the fact that, like children, they did not hear, think nor speak about what had happened to their menfolk (cf. Chapter 7).
44. Although they are not called "wives of the army sympathizers", some women spontaneously differentiated widows of men who were thought to have been killed by the guerrilla.
45. I expect that this refers to her *nahual*. See Appendix IV.
46. A q'ol q'ol is a creature capable of turning into an animal which goes about killing children at night. *Dofla* Flora recognized that her house guest was a q'ol q'ol because of the hardly perceptible white streak in her hair.
47. Erikson describes how the survivors of disaster feel depressed because they do not seem to belong to anything and there are no longer any familiar social landmarks to help them fix their position in time and space (1976:62). It is conceivable that widows, who had become pariahs to their community and deprived of the means to reflect back a sense of meaning to them, begin to feel less depressed as their feeling of suspension diminishes.
48. This had already begun with catechization, when a few women became catechists. These were usually catechists' wives or young, single women who could speak Spanish.
49. It should be pointed out that this task is not one that any widow, indeed any woman or man, would undertake owing to the general racism which threatens them. This is something that only a select group of women, who have become leaders of the village's widows' group, have the courage to do.
50. I do not mean to imply here that women think that speaking Quiché is unimportant. The value women attach to speaking their own language was demonstrated, for example, when *dofla* Maria's son married a woman from the Ixcan area who, though self-defined as Indian, only spoke Spanish. Behind her back, women gossiped that

she was really a *Ladina*. The girl made an effort to learn Quiché; she also began to wear the local clothes and was slowly accepted by the family and community.

51. The marriage was not simple to arrange because her prospective in-laws wanted to see her father's official documents which had been confiscated by the patrol *jefe*; this meant that his death could not be registered and thus his status was unofficial. Her father had attempted to give his papers to his mother, *dona* Eugenia, when he was taken to her house by the patrols before being murdered in a village massacre. His mother reported: "At that point the patroller shouted 'xo' (meaning keep quiet, though usually said to animals making a din) and pointed his gun at me so I was unable to take his papers and who knows what became of them".
52. cf. Foster (1979:137) on the maintenance of equilibrium among the Tzintzuntzan: those who either gain or lose something are viewed as a threat. Progress violates preferred norms of behaviour; falling behind may provoke envy, jealousy or anger in overt or hidden aggression.
53. It seems that the Quiché are much more judgemental about polygamy than the Mam who are commercially better off (cf. Bossen 1978:191).
54. cf. Bettelheim who proposes that "when social change is rapid, there is not enough time to develop the new attitudes needed for dealing with an ever changing environment in terms of one's own personality [in this case the demands of his male role]. This makes the individual 'confused' and uncertain ...weakens his integration and he grows less and less able to respond with autonomy to new change" (1986:79).
55. See Manz for other reasons why civil patrols cause increases in marital violence (1988:78).
56. Sommer writes about the paradox Rigoberta Menchú must negotiate in her politics of cultural preservation: ie, the possibility of becoming the enemy (*Ladino*) by learning their language but needing to know Spanish in order to make her an effective leader (1991:35). Smith writes of the "Indian 'rebel' who assimilated just enough of Western ways to effectively resist Western incorporation" (1988:209). In Quiché, communities' sense of identity was often enhanced when they adopted the Spanish language (Falla 1978:559). These profound changes represented a new stage in their response to national society: a higher degree of articulation with the *Ladino* world (objectively) was part of their redefinition and recovery of identity (Falla 1978, Lovell 1988). However, one should not view increased contact with the *Ladino* as signs of ladinization in a simplistic sense.

57. For example, participating in demonstrations as a member of CONAVIGUA.

58. The situation is somewhat similar among "natural" widows in rural India with some variations because of different restrictions (Dreze, 1990).

In Africa, the situation is quite different. Rural women have much greater access to the means of production and to employment opportunities than widows in Guatemala. Potash notes, in an editorial introduction to papers on African widows, "one of the most consistent findings of this volume is the degree to which widows are economically self-reliant...Generally, widows support themselves, sometimes with the assistance of children" (1986:27). An emphasis on practice leads the authors of this book to dismiss as "oral tradition" the commonly held view that communal support is automatically provided for African widows.

59. Women who have become politicized are beginning to question this. A few younger women appear to have taken the decision not to marry. Some of them were active in Human Rights organizations and seemed to suggest that marriage would be incompatible with their political activities.

60. This, of course, was due to other factors, including poor diet and the somatizing of psychological pain (see chapter 11).

61. The only other "ordinary" context (ie, unconnected with *La Violencia*) in which I heard a woman say she was a man - in fact, very male (*muy hombre/macho*) - was when she described herself as very angry.

62. Lifton, in analysing the reactions of survivors of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima, stresses that in the first days following the explosion, those alive faced "...annihilation of the self and of individual identity, along with the sense of having virtually experienced that annihilation; and the destruction of the non-human environment, of the field or context of one's existence and therefore of one's overall sense of "being-in-the-world" (1967:30). I suggest here that in a culture where one is defined by what one does to the extent that people are in Quiché, then dramatic changes in this resulting from the loss of one's complementary partner are also crucial for this sense.

63. One of the problems with Goffman's category of the stigmatized is that it is so broadly inclusive that it loses boundary and specificity of content. The ranks of the stigmatized, as deviants from the normative order, embrace most ethnic and racial minorities, etc.

219



-Plate 6: Women with photos of dead/missing relatives

Chapter 7

Popular Memories of *La Violencia*

Without forgetting it is quite impossible to live at all. (Nietzsche 1980:10)

It may be imprecise in some details because it is based on two memories (his and mine), and then over long distance human memory is an erratic instrument, especially if it is not reinforced by material mementos and is instead spiced by desire (again, his and mine) that the story be a good one. (Primo Levi 1986. Cesare's Last Adventure)

Experiences, like tales, fêtes, poetries, rites, dramas, images, memories, ethnographies, and allegorical machineries, are made; and it is such things that make them. (Geertz 1986:380)

The aim of this chapter is to examine women's private unofficial memories which articulated their own version of events relating to *La Violencia*. I propose that neither memories nor the process of remembering is untainted but that both are employed for a variety of political and social purposes. The State uses¹ public official memories for rhetorical and political purposes; widows, through reworking unofficial secret memories, turn personal tragedy into narratives: both are designed to undermine alternatives.

I examine women's memories, the process of remembering and the construction of narratives in the context of deliberate² violence to people's memories. This violence includes silencing by official memories and other, less tangible practices which are just as profound as physical violence from which they are not entirely separate. More than the violence itself, the silencing of people's memories by the state continues to affect victims for years because the silence becomes internalized.³

The memories flowing behind the silence include villagers' memory of the massacre, a recurrent theme which makes a different truth-claim from official history.⁴ The state's interest in social control has resulted in the criminalization of both Quiché victims as enemies of the state and widows as the wives of guerrilla.

In this chapter, memory is not understood as something solely internal to the individual: trauma alone is not seen to limit what a person can register and hence recall. Memories are also dependent on the social and historical conditions of their production and reception: processes internal to the individual cannot really be separated from external conditions. My aim has not been to sort out what is true from what is distorted by memory because, apart from anything else, this would not have been impossible. How credible can a memory be when attempting to resuscitate events a decade after they occurred? The concept of credibility is problematic here. Since oral testimonies are human chronicles as opposed to merely historical ones,⁵ the difficult mingling between past and present attains a magnitude that exceeds any concern with accuracy. At times factual errors and omissions are bound to occur; but they are inconsequential in relation to the multiple layers of memory that give rise to the representations of the "self" that I shall be portraying here. The fact that the meaning of endeavours is appreciated with the knowledge of hindsight, when it had not been so conscious and clear for women in the past, does not undermine its significance in the present.

In this chapter I rely on psychological literature on human functioning in situations of extreme stress. Here one encounters the problem of cultural translation. Could the women I interviewed and observed have been displaying something altogether different from, for example, the breakdown of personhood I perceived? After all, my perceptions are informed by western psychological tradition. Another doubt is how a violent event is processed psychologically in another culture. These central questions require an answer but I was unable to examine these deep psychological processes. There is also the question of how much memory manifests specific indigenous cultural elements (such as narrative forms) and to what extent reconstructions are affected by violence. Could the fact that people seem to remember less and speak less about past (and future) events merely be to do with the fact that Guatemalan Indians are more focused on the present and less concerned to remember the past than we are? Bearing these and other questions in mind, I will note processes that seem

relevant to the Quiché. Some of these processes reverberate with those of the holocaust which have been written about by survivors (eg. Bettelheim 1986, Primo Levi 1988, Frankl 1964). I will also draw on some analyses of Argentina.

I will refer to the strategies employed by Quiché women, using their own memories and narratives. Despite the trust that grew between us, one can only assume that what women called up from memory and their language exchanges in general were edited according to their changing perceptions of me; these evoked different emotions and thoughts, which evoked different states which in turn determined, in part, what was evoked from memory. The women were also influenced by the everyday changes in situations, their own frame of mind at any particular moment and fluctuations in the state of oppression. In other words, the women and their memories reflect and re-present a specific moment in the process of history. This presentation has been edited, in turn, by my ability to process the material, by the flow of my own memory, the aim of my pursuit, and by an element of guard in my own constructions.

THE SILENCING OF WOMEN

Memory was especially affected by the destruction and chaos which *La Violencia* brought to every day life. The increased surveillance and control which followed further atomized Quiché society. Family structure and routine were also affected by a disruption of time. There were shifts in the relationships between individuals and the State and between the public and private spheres. Indeed, the division between public and private was broken down as the public invaded the private and vice versa. The public sphere invaded private spaces on several levels yet private⁶ memories challenged the official sphere. The entire history of the *La Violencia* can be re-read as a kind of war against memory, a sort of Orwellian falsification of memory, the falsification of reality.⁷ In other respects, it might be seen as a negation of reality because the army has attempted to deny people access to truth, thus contaminating their morality and their memory. This has entailed the cultivation of historical amnesia which Williams (1977) defines as the suppression and neglect of alternative and oppositional voices. In Guatemala, this included the voices of human rights groups, relatives of the dead and "the disappeared", and so on. It becomes clear that this kind of amnesia is "a means of social control" because it both "furnishes a base for undisputed

triumph of official ideology, and because, by weakening the sense of personal identity (by negating people's own history), it deprives them of a sense of efficacy and, thus, the capacity to organize and initiate actions" (Pateman 1975:35).

The terrorization that exists in El Quiché creates a divided reality, one that refuses to credit any particular explanation of a violent act as definitive though people generally know what happened. Armed groups are often described as having taken pains to disguise their identities in order to mislead people about who they really were; however, some people admitted they knew who was behind the metaphorical (and sometimes actual) mask. Maria, a Quiché woman now living in the capital, told me:

The soldiers always hide their faces and make out that the general population do these things.

The memories of what actually happened can be classified as "popular memories" (PMG 1982). These unofficial memories can be studied as the politics of forgetting (Zemon Davis and Starn 1989) - or forms of what Foucault (1977) calls counter-memory. For Foucault (*ibid*:139-64), counter-memory is composed of the residual or resistant strains which withstand official versions of historical continuity. The precise terms and definitions are less important here than the working principle that whenever memory is invoked, we should be asking ourselves: by whom? where? in what context? and against or in relation to what?

On the national level, the army was active in historical construction and historical amnesia. This was translated locally mostly by paramilitary leaders (the civil patrol *jefes*) and military commissioners who, for fear of prosecution, wanted to negate the violent acts they had perpetrated. Thus, at the local public level, villagers remembered in contradiction to the para-military leaders' presentation of the official historical past, that is, against a coherent and unified narrative that blames the dead men for *La Violencia*.

The imposition of silence came not only from the commands, injunctions or threats of injury delivered by these forces. Like many aspects of the repression, the censorship was not official but hidden. People remembered against the military forces' direct and indirect mandates to forget. Villagers were told not to speak about anything they had seen the *jefes*

do during *La Violencia*. Juan told me that when he returned to the village the *jefes* warned him:

Never will you tell anything [about the atrocity] anywhere, never will you inform others what we did here.

Locally, *jefes* and military commissioners⁸ continually threaten, control, persecute, and occasionally rape and kill widows⁹ in order to ensure their silence. They were aware that the widows' memories had the potential to infiltrate history by providing access to hidden domains of the past long since obliterated by the official version of history offered for public consumption (Ariés 1982:111,116-117).

There is a contradiction here between women's reluctance to speak because they perceive themselves as lacking the authority to do so and the *jefes*' (and army's) perception that women's speech is potentially very powerful and carries the threat of death. The *jefes* fear that the women will be heard and taken seriously. A few women are aware of the power accruing to their speech owing to its potent content. This awareness motivated them to use the threat of their speech as a lever to do forbidden things such as visiting the clandestine graves (see chapter 8).

Symbolic domination¹⁰ ensured ongoing insidious intimidation. The same vilifying images of the dead were constantly remembered in the context of the political theatre of national security.¹¹ The dead appeared as communists, rebels exorcised in a national cleansing of "impure elements". They were used by the state to initiate and sustain a process of colonization of a national consensus about the importance of monitoring a "communist/devil free" nation. This was achieved through carrying out one's patrol duties and through the constant ritual¹² of persecuting, "disappearing", torturing, harassing (through accusations of subversion and deviancy) and causing harm to members of society who refused to conform.

Re-membering¹³ in Emol, where leftist forces had been strong, therefore occurred against the official version, or the "Truth", which was that subversives needed to be eradicated to protect others from armed rebellion and take over.¹⁴ What concerns me about the notion of "truth" in this context is the way in which the official "truth" is established to become an

official ideology of a Guatemalan nation state in the post-war era. By "truth" I mean the Foucaultian concept, thoroughly historicized as discourse, which is constructed by "the will to truth" (Foucault 1972). The Guatemalan state's "will to truth" has been practised through an official ideology of anti-communism.

With time, the silence of the repression was internalized, that is, the language of *La Violencia* and the lack of speech were both internalized. Acting secretively almost became a cognitive style. The Quiché also have other ways of occluding their behaviour: they will often say that they are going on a *mandado* (errand) which seemed to indicate that something sinister was about to happen when the errand was mundane and innocuous. Even when they did speak, their voices were hushed and their tones conspiratorial.¹⁵

The "silence" was pervasive but not total. In fact, *La Violencia* came up sooner or later in many conversations, not only in private but also in more oblique ways in public. Many things were said, despite reticence and repression, even about so-called subversives; women would say, for example, "she was organized" or "he was not organized". When I asked for more details on what this meant I was dismissed with the answer "these were meetings that were held at night" and then the subject was changed. There was a great reluctance to discuss *La Violencia* in any great depth.

People avoid explicit discussion in all contexts because of their fear of *orejas* (ears, meaning army spies). In order to be evasive people sometimes told me that the violence was only minor or even absent in the area. When women did speak about the perpetrators of *La Violencia* they used symbolic markers, for example, "they burned the buses", "they killed the men", "they kidnapped people from the market place", "they bothered the widows". In a few words women provided each other with a summary of events, conjuring complete scenarios of shared experiences and avoiding the dangers of full or open discussion. This way of speaking also gave the speaker the illusion of safety, for through the ambiguous discourse of "they" and "that side" one does not have to reveal one's analysis or political sympathies.

As well as being forced to forget (or at least not to speak), people were also forced to stop performing rituals in which they memorialized their dead.¹⁶ "Natural" mnemonic devices or markers such as graves, altars, photos, and rituals such as funerals and services

were forbidden. There were few reminders of the war dead in the landscape; they had no graves in the village cemetery and relatives did not always want concrete markers for recovered bodies because they were afraid that this would bring remaining family under the suspicions of one side or the other. Women refrained from wearing the widow's traditional black hair ribbons for the same reason. Relatives feared remembering and they feared voicing their memories; they even feared mentioning the names of the dead, particularly those suspected of being native guerrillas and communists. These fears, compounded by the large number of dead, meant that with time one atrocity tends to merge all too easily into the next and memory of events, and even of the dead themselves, is impaired. Almost unbelievably, some people forgot the names of their close dead or missing relatives. One woman, for example, while providing seemingly insignificant details about a violent incident, momentarily forgot her husband's name; she showed signs of relief when she eventually recalled his name, several minutes later.

THE SITES OF REMEMBERING

Women exercised the utmost caution when they shared their memories with one another or with me because the gaze of the state extended into the intimate crevices of society. Thus women normally only spoke in the least patrolled and most autonomous sites. Such social locations were narrowly restricted. Generally speaking, the smaller and the more intimate the group of close confidantes - family, friends and others perceived to be on the same side (*de la misma cabeza*) - the safer the women felt to freely express themselves. *La Violencia* had undermined trust in relatives and neighbours; suspicion was rife that they may have reported the women's murdered kin. Consequently, silence has been adopted as a mechanism of defence and survival in all but select groups.

As they went about their every day lives, women chose the most protected locations in which to speak. These ranged from the most intimate places such as their sweat baths (low adobe structures in which they bathed communally, four at a time) to open spaces such as the secluded hills; groups of women would join a female aj q'ij (shaman) who went there to perform ritual services for healing and other purposes. More guarded conversations took place in their houses, when out grazing their sheep, tending their gardens and in other locations considered relatively safe. However, the creation of a secure site for hidden

discourse did not require any physical distance from assailants when linguistic codes and gestures - opaque to the dominant - were deployed.

I heard women relate their memories in these sites; at first the women were wary of me but, as trust developed, I was regarded as someone who gave them permission to speak and to remember. With time and my delving questions, some women began to speak about some events for the first time; they also began to reveal memories which were progressively more idiosyncratic and un-elaborated, in contrast to the well trodden narratives of memories which were stereotyped and fixed.

THE TRIGGERS OF MEMORIES OF *LA VIOLENCIA*

Depending on the context, the women would relate their memories in anything from a rather detached stance to being moved and sometimes even possessed by them. Whether memories flowed or were laboured also depended on conditions including, for example, the women's own frame of mind. Sometimes only one question was necessary to trigger a flow of memory from one woman to another in a concatenation of revelations and reflections.

On many occasions a complex kind of "reversible continuity" seemed to establish itself in women's accounts. They moved from the past to the present and from the present to the past and future. Often, when recalling the crisis, women's conversations were deflected from past worries to present anxieties: when *doña Josefina* was talking of her husband's abduction, she suddenly began to talk about her present feelings of insecurity. In other instances women's conversations were suddenly deflected to the future; they would speak about concerns relating to fertilizer for the next planting season or more temporally distant concerns such as whether their children would have sufficient land when they became adults. Primo Levi exposed part of the problem of reversibility when he observed that "one can think one is suffering at facing the future and instead be suffering because of one's past" (1988:71). This problem is perhaps exacerbated among women who have been silenced as they had less opportunity to renegotiate or rewrite the narrative of the violent past and were therefore unable to allocate it to a comfortable place in the historical past.

Sometimes *doña* Josefina's recollections of *La Violenica* were punctuated by moments of anxiety relating to the present. Long after she had agreed to my recording some of our conversations, she suddenly turned to me and, with notable (and understandable) anxiety, asked about the fate of the cassette tapes. Women's omnipresent anguish was sometimes exacerbated by emotions evoked from the memories they recalled; at other times, current emotions triggered memories of event which occurred when they were in a similar emotional state in the past and which they would not have had access to if they had been in a different emotional state.¹⁷

I noticed that women were possessed by their memories: they seemed to return momentarily to the world they were trying to evoke instead of recreating it for me in the present. Their eyes would turn inward and although they appeared to be looking at me, they were back in the hostile climate of *La Violencia*. Sometimes tone of voice seemed to convey anguish more than the contents of their speech. At these times women suddenly appeared to wrestle with deep memories of painful or guilt provoking events.

Sometimes women could find no language adequate to describe the atrocities they had survived although they were clearly remembering something in some form before my eyes. Most women grappled for explanations that were absent or incomplete. One woman, after a phase of apparent mental struggle, confessed:

What I saw when I looked at what they were doing to our men, was totally beyond me, totally beyond my experience.

Women faced the problem of how to "translate" ideas and sentiments into expression when there were no words to describe them accurately. Once, when speaking to me about her murdered son, *doña* Eugenia suddenly seemed lost for words; she asked her grandson to bring out the photos of his father to show me as if the picture could tell me more than her words could convey.¹⁸ Emotional language in these situations seemed to be lost to memory and forgotten. This was also illustrated in another incident involving a photo. Samantha, *doña* Flora's daughter-in-law, never spoke about her dead husband. The family initially told me he had been disappeared. Later, they told me that he had been killed. Then they told me that he was buried in the village ravines. Samantha was not the most talkative woman at the best of times but she seemed to be completely inarticulate on the matter of her husband. She

also appeared quite stoical when anyone else spoke of the times of *La Violencia*. This might have arisen from the fact that I only spoke to her mother-in-law's presence.¹⁹ *Doña Flora* tended to negate Samantha's suffering and told me that she was the one who had shed many tears over him. However, one day when she brought out a photo of her son which had been tucked away and wrapped in layers of papers, her grand-daughter seized it from her hand, ran into the kitchen and thrust the photograph under her mother's nose whereupon Samantha burst out crying. She continued to weep pitifully for some time but she became no more verbally articulate on the matter of her husband.²⁰

Cues triggering echoes in memory could be something occurring in the women's environment whose meaning was reframed by events of the past. Reminders included suddenly recognising the site of a violent event. However, daily reminders occurred more in social interactions than in the landscape because the army attempted to obliterate evidence of its brutality. Few physical markers of disaster remain other than the charred ruins of houses;²¹ these relics have special significance for the Quiché as the home normally serves as a mnemonic device to remember the dead who traditionally die there.²²

Temporal markers include times when their missing men would have performed cyclical agricultural tasks. Each meal is a reminder that one is denied the opportunity of sharing food with missing relatives. As one woman remarked "when he returned at 8 - 9 o'clock in the evening I was always close to the fire waiting for him. I always think of him during that hour". More occasional reminders include anniversaries and life cycle ceremonies because at these times male kin would have arranged matters and ensured that everyone was well provided for. Women are also reminded of their kin when they are penniless and when they are threatened by the *jefes* who come to their house at night. More idiosyncratic reminders were, for example, if a widow married a violent man, she may remember her former, gentle husband.

An unanticipated incident of further violence was the most dramatic precipitant of spontaneous memories. One of the most powerful memory triggers I observed was when a bomb exploded in the outskirts of Emol. This shocked villagers because there had been few bombs in recent years; bombs had ceased to be part of life in the present. Villagers were reminded of both the destruction from past bombs and the full force of *La Violencia*. *Doña*

Flora appeared to be "possessed" by her memories following this incident and began relating memories I had not heard before. Her ambivalent attitude to the event surprised me: she expressed both excitement that the fight had not been given up and terror about further losses which she might incur. The most frightening and grotesque events which she had protected herself from came flooding back to her mind. Previously she had alluded to them with considerable reserve but now, in an emotional state, she revealed them in graphic detail. She described how soldiers dragged her husband naked from his bed and how he got on his knees to beg forgiveness. In the subsequent days and weeks, her dreams became dominated by violent incidents and she related them to me in a more spontaneous way than on previous occasions. She also told me of threatening incidents which, after a gap of some years, were again occurring at night: one morning she told me black-hooded men had surrounded her house during the night. Although there was certainly some reality in her fears, they were almost certainly based on past events.

The only other occasions when women's narratives appeared to be disinhibited was after they had imbibed alcohol, when they produced more incriminating memories, perhaps knowing that their words would be attributed to diminished responsibility. Even then, I doubted that their memories were released recklessly, for hyper-vigilance was second nature to Quiché women even before *La Violencia* though this tendency has become emphasized since.

THE OPTION TO FORGET AND THE INABILITY TO REMEMBER

People are silenced because they are too afraid to speak but their inability to speak may also arise in contexts where they have little access to their memories. This depends on political, social and personal (mood, state etc.) conditions which may either shield one from one's memory or release it.

Memory operates at different levels. Both social dynamics and psychic processes inhibit or enhance recall; they may be more, or less, under an individual's control. Women used various conscious and unconscious devices in response to the State's demands that they forget. They were also active in the process of forgetting owing to the need to protect themselves from the pain of remembering.

Favret-Saada (1991) asserts that conscious devices employed to forget are caused by different elements or factors depending on whom the social actors are. The devices include silence, mutism, negation, forgery and confusion, all of which were used in El Quiché, as far as I could see. A less conscious device for forgetting, writes Favret-Saada, is repression; another similar unconscious device is denial: both protect one from psychic dangers. People may deny certain especially painful and disturbing aspects.²³

Women may defend themselves against burdensome memories by impeding their entry. It is easier to deny entry to a memory than to release oneself from it after it has been recorded. This raises problems with issues of attention, perception and memory. It is possible that when something horrific takes place, people register the fact at some level but do their best to avoid attending to it on a conscious level; however, they cannot resist its subliminal entry. On some level, then, perhaps women did not forget but they did not have it in conscious, accessible, mind because they could not cope with the experience in the first place. Material may not have been processed because all attention was directed outwards - upon survival from one moment to the next: people's thoughts were oriented in the present during *La Violencia*. In normal life they thought about tomorrow and about the months ahead, although it seemed that even under normal circumstances the Quiché never think as far ahead in the future as Westerners do. But during times of crisis the daily struggle for existence meant that they had even less time than normal for reflection.

In situations of terror memory is affected by the rapid and drastic alterations of awareness within the person and in their relationships with the world (Shurtz 1988:171). I was told "you did not know what your thoughts were" after *La Violencia* began. It seemed that people lost the ability to think about themselves in the situation in which they found themselves. Usually, they could say, "when I get the fertilizer", creating certain theoretical probabilities and then imagining themselves into those situations; they knew how to think about them because they had precedents in their experience. But no one had ever said "when I am in *La Violencia*" and therefore the mind remained blank. There was no way of imagining *La Violencia* in advance or of thinking about it when they were in the midst of it, because mental processes function in relation to something that happened previously, that had been felt, seen or heard. Without this, the usual mechanisms of perception and memory - such as association - do not work and chaos results.

With extreme experiences, all (or almost all) the factors that can annihilate the mnemonic register can also deform it. Distortion may arise from psychic distress, torment and other causes. On occasion something might have been taken in and transformed and remained in mind in that state and not as the original experience. Panic and terror are followed by heightened distortion and perception of judgement (Symonds 1976:30). Wallace has described the sequence of disorientation and numbness, denial, severe anxiety, and finally anomie or despair which arises from personal loss and the destruction of one's familiar world (1961:202-206): "The entire affective world, constructed over years with the utmost difficulty, collapses with a kick in the father's genitals..." (Timmerman 1981:148). Paralysis, including that of thought, takes place with this collapse of a person's conceptual order.²⁴ Unless the world can be made whole again, even with a different configuration, these reactions may last and are bound to affect memory. Re-configuration, if it is achieved, is also likely to affect the mnemonic record.

During unprecedeted events like *La Violencia* the dramatic changes and shattering of people's social reality may serve to break down familiar mental categories.²⁵ Thus, it is also possible that people were unable to keep events in mind because they could not be integrated into cultural categories, concepts or codes of significance. Much of knowing is dependent on language, on people's ability to grasp and recall their experiences through formulating them in language. Because of the radical break between trauma and culture, victims cannot necessarily find thought categories for their experience; since neither culture nor experience provides structures for formulating acts of massive aggression, survivors cannot articulate trauma even to themselves.

Death can be considered fundamentally doomed to non-narratability, by its rupture of language.²⁶ Normal language becomes transformed at the level of cultural models for the articulation of grief (Das 1990) but there may be no cultural models through which to transform normal language for the articulation of massive unprecedeted atrocity. Furthermore, knowing - in the sense of articulation analysis, elaboration, and reformulation requires the preservation of a detached sensibility -is destroyed in situations of horror (Laub 1992:3). Close to the experience, survivors are captive observers who can only repeat it. They cannot make sense of it; they cannot know it cognitively. Perhaps they will not be able

to remember it, except as haunting, fragmented visual percepts that they cannot integrate actively into their personality.

The difficulty in remembering and narrating probably also results from the difficulty in putting the diffuse and chaotic experiences of *La Violencia* into some sequential order.²⁷ Gestalt theoretical analyses corroborates this idea. Empirical investigations of memory capability show that what is already gestalted is remembered with far greater facility than the experience of chaos (cf. Koffka 1963). Chaos enters the memory as an impression of chaos, without taking on meaning. For traces to remain in the memory the experience must be structured: what is well remembered is what is found in the memory as organized units, and ordered memory hangs on ordered experience.²⁸ Memory, like history, must be chosen, severed and carved up (Lévi-Strauss 1966:257) in order to avoid chaos.

The lack of chronological reckoning of violent events by the majority of people was striking.²⁹ During the time spent hiding in the ravines, it was impossible for people to orient themselves according to usual markers of time (such as the corn cycle) or to structure days according to the sequences of an ordinary day.

In spite of all these impediments to memory, the secrecy and obstruction of recall and impediments to remembering and articulation, people's memories flow behind the scene of forgetting. Foucault writes that memories work against coerced forgetting, albeit at their own pace, "a pace quite detached from any seizure of central power" (1975:27). *Doña Ana* admitted that although she pretended and wanted to forget, she always remembers although normally at a level of private remembrance:

I always say that the only time when I shall be able to stop remembering this is when I too leave this world. Even if I pretend that I have forgotten I will not have until that time.

This comment only refers, of course, to what she can remember. The question then remains whether violence obliterates any of a person's memory or whether the situation of terror prevents access to it. Primo Levi (1988) writes that certain sorts of memory may be forever irrecoverable. But it could be that the memory is still there but in a chaotic, unnarratable form. Sometimes, context would prompt the retrieval of memories. This was

most clearly illustrated in certain situations such as when the bomb went off, releasing memories which had previously not seemed to exist at all. In this type of situation the memories evoked are likely to be more pristine and unelaborated and less likely to have incorporated past narratives on the event.³⁰

Gender had a decisive impact on the way in which violence is experienced and the world reformulated. When referring to the same events, women exhibit greater denial, lack of registration or integration of painful details than men perhaps because they have different resonances with the different gendered groups. Likewise, men and women may select against or censor different memories. Women may repress their memories of concrete events along with their emotions while men may be more likely to remember facts while repressing the emotional content. Men are sometimes inclined to embellish memories of gruesome events although either gender may exaggerate atrocities in certain contexts (such as when trying to incriminate someone). However, I do not believe this was the men's objective when speaking to me.

Issues of gender and race (which relate ultimately to power) also had an effect on people's choice not to remember or perhaps to remain silent. Silence is encouraged by a lack of "symbolic capital" to endow their speech with authority and ensure they will be heard (cf. Bourdieu 1977). Being women and monolingual Indians entails various practices which renders widows mute (cf. Ardener 1986). A young man, Luis, illustrates this:

My mother has not been educated, she is *gente natural* (indigenous) and she is unable to understand...she remains confused. We don't talk about it [*La Violencia*] but only talk about matters of day-to-day living...not the future nor the past ...especially not about what happened for we do not have the authority to talk about it.

But while forgetting, not narrating or at least remaining silent, women also remembered; the silence and forgetting should not only be viewed as lackings but present absences or negative spaces which shaped what was remembered. Silence and forgetting worked themselves back into memory for they structured what was, and is still, remembered. In fact, women's re-membering and their forgetting of *La Violencia* are understood to be two sides of the same phenomenon - the past in the present.

REWORKING MEMORIES **- THE CONSTRUCTION OF NARRATIVES OF THE PAST**

Sternbach suggests that written testimony (in Argentina) is an "unburial, an unearthing of the truth that translates into an invasion of the space occupied by official history" (1991:94). Here I suggest that oral testimonies do not "unearth" unofficial truth in a pristine form because, as they unearth memories, women re-work and re-live traumatic events that dramatically changed their lives. Through re-membering like this, women together construct a narrative of the past.

Characteristic of memories of *La Violencia* was the concentration of elements from different periods and the reconstruction and reshaping of events according to hindsight. Such reworking did not only take place on an individual basis: the women, in remembering certain events and recounting them to each other, reconstruct events collectively. They are not necessarily searching for the historicity of their experiences nor the chronology of events (which I tried to establish without much success); they are less concerned with the past than with how this past relates to their present lives. In other words, it was in the context of the present that certain moments of the past were retained, while others were actively forgotten.³¹ Those that were most relevant or perhaps most disturbing to them were worked and reworked.

Halbwachs (1980) contends that memory not only invents the past out of the fluctuating imagery of the mind but also that it clings to its fabrications in the face of changing realities.³² One woman, for example, insisted and retold many times her memory of her son joining village meetings where she said they taught the "word of God" (liberation theology). This story became progressively elaborated with details simultaneously with the stronger accusations that her son had been involved in "delinquent" activities.

I found that in women's conversations, in recounting their memories and in explaining violent events, they corrected each other's views on what actually happened. Together, they produced and altered drafts of the past, discarding one in favour of the other. There was never a final version because they were narrating events of a problematic nature such as unnatural or uncertain death. In normal circumstances, a narrative would be made about the

person's life and their death at their funeral; this would be left behind and then people would begin to talk about the funeral. But no narrative could be made for the war dead and disappeared because the funeral was never performed; memories of the war dead clung tenaciously to the present because of the uncertainty which surrounded them (what actually happened to them, what they had been involved in). It is not surprising that popular memories regarding this aspect of the dead are the most guarded. The effect of such guard seemed to be that the events could not be integrated within their lives and therefore they could not be left behind either.

In the process of retelling, women incorporate into their own memories the details of other people's memories, even those details they may have denied earlier. A woman hearing another's narrative remembered, forgot, transformed and retold it in her turn. Every time a narrative was retold, the possibility existed for a shift of emphasis, sometimes providing new information, sometimes changing a detail. According to Knapp the process of "adjusting the fit is an ongoing one" (1989:5). He argues that people are concerned about the ill fit between what actually happened and received narratives about the past. This may refer to both the official version of the truth but also the discrepancies in stories recounted by different people. Some of the women's images are based on "false recognition, in accordance with others' testimonies and stories" (Halbwachs 1980:71).

Women hear themselves and others and this then feeds back into memory and what really happened becomes mixed up with what they hear themselves and others say. What a woman said was determined by what she could remember, what she felt she could say, who was present (including memories their presence evoked) and her own frame of mind (which was affected by what was going on in her immediate environment). For example, my presence as a powerful person (being white and monied) is a reminder of *Ladinos*; this had a cognitive impact as it could remind them of an encounter with the army and may inhibit them from speaking freely. Sometimes they seemed to forget about my presence completely but they always remained watchful for passing *orejas* (informers); in the middle of conversation, one woman would suddenly step outside to make sure that no-one was listening outside. It seemed that the prior suppression or repression of their memories made them all the more powerful. It created more of a possibility that, if control was relinquished, they could be overwhelmed by them as much as by any prowling adversary.

The retelling of narratives therefore modifies memories of what is being told. Memory, then, is constantly in flux. It is continuously being transformed by changes in identity, social experience and by membership of the group and the narratives produced therein. In turn, memory transforms the narratives and the social experience and possibly even behaviour itself. Halbwachs, appealing less (than, for example, Freud 1949) to the individual psyche and more to a readily identifiable phenomenon of social understanding, states that memories might be better characterized as provisional rather than as fragmented. Memory is not, as Bergson (1986) suggests, only a personal, subjective experience but also a social phenomenon. Memories become whole only in social contexts, taking their shape according to group processes and the conceptual structures of certain groups, be they family, church or communal association (Halbwachs 1980:22-49, 75ff) and the cultural past. The memories and the signification given to them depended to some extent on the widows' needs. New groups of war widows selected different memories and narratives from the flux of images of the past. There is a certain amount of conscious and unconscious teleology involved.

Re-membering for the widows was, among other things, a way of re-living and re-working atrocious events. It was also a way of coming to terms with them and integrating them into their lives. As a process of reminiscence, they went back over their memories, repeating and reworking them in an attempt to understand what exactly happened and why.³³ Memories were retold and reworked perhaps because this was a way of resolving their memories. Rewriting the story gave a boundary to their suffering.

Women were normally fairly dispassionate when relating the most gruesome events but would occasionally cry when retelling stories. It seemed this was determined as much by the context as the memories themselves. Usually the eldest widow, *doña* Eugenia, would set the rest of the women off, perhaps giving them permission to cry. Women cried for each other out of empathy as well as out of their own sadness and frustration. At other times, women recounted memories expressing anger and indignation, ending up fantasizing about the death of the perpetrators. There were also occasions, towards the end of my stay when the guerrillas seemed to be coming back, that women spoke with excitement about some memories as if the fight had not been given up.

In some cases instead of remembering the past - gaining control over it by making an orderly story about it - the remembered self got swallowed up by the narrated self and was compelled to repeat the past. The re-vision of the story in each successive telling can represent the remembered self's attempt to reassert her authority by interpreting instead of repeating what she has repressed. From this perspective, we might expect that later accounts might include versions that were repressed in earlier ones. Then this memory was called up less because it is more comfortable and can be left to one side. One local indigenous Catholic priest seemed to help women with this process (although this may have not been his intention) by speaking of memories of the dead in the same analogous way as he spoke of texts about the Christian saints. He literally told women to leave their thoughts "to one side", which some told me they managed to do.

Memories also changed as the women themselves changed over time as a result of the dramatic changes in their lives and as they learnt to cope with these changes (see Chapter 6). As they changed, they may have needed to render a consistent account of their past and present life. This may have required selective editing and re-editing. I expect that this process may occur all the time but it is perhaps most apparent when people retrospectively edit their past to fit with new meanings, including new ways of perceiving themselves. Thus when *doña* Eugenia reports her confrontation of the *jefes*, this may be seen as a re-writing of history and consequent selective remembering to conform to her new image of herself and of women generally. The present, then, in turn serves to change meanings of occurrences in the past. When suffering is initially caused by meanings, perhaps it is not so surprising that altering meanings can reduce the suffering. By rationalizing or reinterpreting one's inaction during *La Violencia*, one may escape from a sense of guilt about it.

There was also a communal aspect to silence and forgetting. Paradoxically, one of the things that makes memories shared is the fact that they are not said. These can be seen as meta-texts given that there was a tacit agreement about what is remembered and what is forgotten or just not said. For example, a tacit rule of discretion governs relations between female members of a community. One should never know or seek to know what the other's husband was up to during the early 1980's that might have led to his assassination. These are secret matters which are kept concealed. By re-membering some things and by forgetting others, women shared and re-shared experiences.

Women's choice to be silent and hidden can also be seen as a form of resistance, a gesture of solidarity and friendship between them. It should be distinguished from the "secrets" pertaining to the details of their communities which the Quiché have chosen as a strategy of protection of their culture (cf. Burgos-Debray and Menchú 1984:9). These are "largely public 'secrets' known to the Quiché and kept from us as a gesture of self-preservation" (Sommer 1991:33).

MEMORIES OF THE MASSACRE

The Massacre

The village massacre was one of the most significant events of *La Violencia* for Emolians and marked a dramatic change in survivors' lives. It was one of the many incidents which they were told to forget or at least never to mention. However, it was often spoken about or alluded to despite the fact that it was dangerous to do so. This made me question the importance of telling and re-telling memories of traumatic events which have been silenced. I learnt over time that memories of this type of event were not necessarily effaced but protected by a collective secrecy.

Only a few men (and even fewer women and whole families) left Emol in order to avoid taking sides. Some fled because they knew they were suspected of subversive activity and feared lynching and torture by the army. Most returned after an announcement of one of the so-called amnesties, when returnees were promised that they would be incorporated into the patrols. Instead, they were rounded up by the *jefes* and killed.

Before they were assassinated, a few of the men were taken to their houses where they were humiliated before their families. Then they were taken to a ravine and made to dig a large, ominous hole before being led to the village square in front of the church and school. Word spread about the trouble and villagers rushed to the square. Once all the captured men had arrived, the *jefes* forced the patrollers serving that day to beat and "torture"³⁴ the men to the brink of death in front of the crowd which included family and friends. The men, barely able to stand, were then dragged away by the patrollers. The *jefes* allowed no-one to follow. The men were taken to the ravine where they had prepared their own graves and thrown in.

This is the skeleton of a story that I heard many times in private. Although there was considerable uniformity in the widows' accounts of the massacre (and other events), each version varied: in some, the men were beheaded at the grave site; in others, they were buried alive. I shall attempt to explain all the processes of re-membering, forced, chosen and unconscious forgetting, coerced and self-imposed silencing and reconstruction of memories which explain the variations of people's memories regarding this event.

Women's memories of the Massacre

Differences arise in the original memories which are laid down, given that an event such as the massacre will have been named, interpreted and stored as something different by different people. Then when the memory is called up and re-told, the memory may be reinterpreted again in the light of subsequent experiences and information which will change the person and consequently their interpretation of their past. The following conversation between three women shows how, in recounting their memories and interpretations of this massacre, they correct each other's views on what actually happened:

Doña Eugenia:

The men were tied up. They had thrown them on the ground like pigs who are about to be slaughtered.

Doña Candelaria:

They were on the ground with their faces bloodied. Some shouted "please forgive us, forgive us" out of devotion and because they were suffering so much.

Doña Flora:

They asked the patrols to forgive them. Many of the murderers were evangelicals. After the killings they told people that those assassinated had begged them to "ask our pardon and our help to convert to our religion."

Doña Eugenia:

But I know everything that happened and they [the dead men] didn't say anything like that...In fact many didn't even utter a word. They couldn't even if they wanted to because they were hurt so badly that they couldn't talk at all.

Doña Candelaria:

Perhaps a few of them said a few things but nothing about that.

Doña Eugenia:

Only my child said something when they first captured him. He said, "mother, ask the *jefes* of the patrols to get help to free me. Tell him I have not done anything wrong". So I went to Mr. Justice [one of the *jefes*] and I asked him, "what did he do to make you take him? Why not let him go?" But he didn't respond; he just ignored me. I then followed him until we reached the centre of the village. He didn't stop there, he just continued on a path which led to the ravine where they were digging the pits where the men would be buried. This is what happened. And, I tell you, I heard nothing about what you said, about conversion. That's all a big lie...Indeed what they [the *jefes*] shouted was that the men they had rounded up were to be slaughtered because they had left the village and become organized. They accused them of being guerrillas.

Doña Candelaria ends her narrative of the massacre with a remark which prompts the listener to rethink her own interpretation of the event:

Doña Candelaria

We were all there sitting in the school waiting ...And when they had buried them they all returned to the school to threaten all of us. They warned us, "none of you had better utter a word about what you have just seen. And if we should learn that one of you has then what you have just seen will also happen to you and you'll go with them!" ...Because of this I realized that the *jefes* themselves decided to kill the men [she implies that this was not ordered by the army].

Doña Eugenia:

I had not thought of it in this way.

In telling each other stories, women placed order on this traumatic event and normalized their reactions to them. The following conversation between *doña Candelaria* and *doña Ana* illustrates this:

Doña Candelaria:

I do not remember well but they tell me that the first to die was Tin Ros since they thought that he was the *brujo* of the subversives [implying that he was the most dangerous].

Doña Ana:

Ah! he was the first. You see I do not remember because by the time we arrived [at the scene of the massacre] we were no longer people (muj mnak t chic) [this refers to the loss of control that women felt, a condition viewed as non-human].

Doña Candelaria:

Ah Dios! (Oh God!) But who wasn't like that on that day?

In the process of sharing memories women also created a shared identity and a feeling of trust, even with widows from other places who ordinarily would be viewed with some suspicion. The knowledge that their male kin had been killed by the same side contributed to the feeling of camaraderie between them. Even when they had already heard what had happened in another locale, women still engaged in conversations, repeating and reworking the past. *Doña Eugenia* and *doña Flora* came from different *cantones* (hamlets) of Emol and, although their husbands had been involved with the "organization", the two women were not necessarily completely cognizant of events in each other's locale because the *jefes* put considerable effort into trying to keep widows apart:

Doña Eugenia:

They took him [another man in the village] with my son and they killed them both in front of the school...they are both together [buried] in the crevice.

Doña Flora:

There are many [dead men] over there.

Doña Eugenia:

Yes, there were many from our place too, twelve of them.

Doña Flora:

They did the same to us, they kidnapped twelve of them. But they say that one escaped.

Doña Eugenia:

Is that so?

Doña Flora:

Yes, he was a young man. Actually, just now he returned [to the village]. He's just come to pay his turn [in the patrols] from the border of Mexico where he works. I would like to go and ask him about what happened, what he did in order to escape while our husbands perished.

THE STRUGGLE AGAINST A DIMINISHED SELF

Through the vehicle of re-membering, women together recapture a morsel of the dignity destroyed in the public demonstrations of their failure as mothers, wives and daughters as, immobilized, they were forced to witness the slaughter of their menfolk. The "self" and personhood of a parent who sees a child tortured is most profoundly violated; it is an experience which I would say is culturally thin. However, how this is explained and compensated for, how it is expressed, and how people reconstruct themselves in the light of such a violation, is culturally elaborated. Some of the Quiché-Maya Indian women's elaborations were reflected in the narratives presented here.

That women sometimes feel guilty about their inaction is apparent³⁵ in the memories they call up. *Doña Ana*, who witnessed the assassination of her husband, told me:

When they were killing my husband, I was unable to say anything otherwise they would have killed me too. I only said to myself that this would never had happened had we never returned.

Doña Flora and *doña Eugenia* also attempt to resolve their guilt and justify their actions:

Doña Flora:

Because we didn't want to abandon our *cositas* (little things) and our houses they killed all our men. If we would have fled then perhaps our poor men [folk] would have survived.

Doña Eugenia:

If I had fled then perhaps they would have burnt my house because the woman who lives behind the school, she fled and they burnt her house. They burnt everything including her *mazorcas* (corn cobs), her clothes which she left behind, everything. Whereas those of us who didn't leave didn't suffer this. We didn't know this before but my husband didn't want to leave in any case. He said if they kill me, they kill me, I have no crime to my name. So we didn't leave. Anyway where would I have gone? I have my animals, my *mazorcas* and all my possessions and why should I have abandoned them?

Doña Eugenia then spoke of the incident in which both her husband and son were killed and tries to justify why she could not do anything to save her son:

We didn't know what to do...I was able to leave the scene [before the massacre actually began]. But as I was walking I did not know what to do. I asked myself "should I go to the town [to report what was happening]? But what would happen if I did? I could return to bring my son [who was being beaten] a blanket." But they [the *jefes*] were watching me. I was already well on my way when they caught me up. They grabbed me and asked where I was going. I replied, "nowhere" and that I was only looking for my sheep. They took me and locked me in the school with the rest. Then we were unable to do anything.

A certain amount of wandering of memory can be seen in any case with a victim of terror. This is likely to be a way of coping and of avoiding the guilt engendered in certain actions which would otherwise lead to a diminished self; women altered the focus of their memories.³⁶ I also observed women rousing memories among themselves, or telling them to third persons, choosing to contemplate moments of recess and strange, idiosyncratic details. One woman, when recounting the day when everyone from the market place was kidnapped, chose to tell me that dogs went into the houses and ate *tortillas* (corn pancakes) off the griddles. Meanwhile, women dealt with the most painful aspects of the event superficially; they hardly referred to the disappeared or what may have become of them. They avoided elements not called up willingly from the layers of memory and therefore, with time, they tend to take on a more amorphous form. This is because typical memory processes such as condensation and association result in the simplification of memory's records. Others spoke about macabre events in an almost exaggerated form such as throwing their babies ahead of them down the ravines when fleeing.

Sometimes, rather than referring to horrendous facts pertaining to *La Violencia*, women preferred to remember and to speak about how they personally experienced this time.³⁷ By focusing on their feelings of fear, perpetual anxiety, helplessness and loneliness, which has salience in its own right, they deflected attention away from more painful memories.³⁸ Memories sometimes focused on perceptions of their own bodies, which were acutely affected. The pain and the lack of control of their bodies can be seen as metaphorical statements. The focus on the body is reflected by one Emolian woman:

I don't remember when they killed my husband but it was the day when we were putting the cross for my father-in-law. We were all together in the house when they [the army] arrived but I cannot remember the details. I just remembered hearing something and then

suddenly they were in the room. We were all shocked. I felt that I was on the point of dying. But although I was ready to die death did not come. Only my blood moving in my body, *jol, jol, jol, jol, jol*, (the sound of her blood) told me that I was going to disappear from the world.³⁹

Doña Ana witnessed the murder of her son. She became part of a passively complicit audience (in the sense that she did nothing to stop it, notwithstanding the fact that intervention would have led to her own death)⁴⁰ which she and others judged in retrospect. When *doña Flora* remarks that a "good Christian" would have denounced the killings and abductions, which she herself did not do, she is in effect describing her retrospective perception of her own failing. This "self" judgement led to a diminished self-perception with which her memory and her continuing every day "self" must contend. In conversation with *doña Flora*, she refers to her sense of diminished "self" more directly and its affect on her body:

Doña Ana:

You see me as a person but I know longer feel like a person...My milk dried up in *La Violencia*. My breasts were merely skin. I was unable to feed my baby because I was so sad⁴¹...I could only give my child water and because of this she died. My heart was very tired and I was extremely weak. I felt that my heart could tolerate no more. I felt that when I exerted myself the force came from my stomach. We were no longer resilient because of the blows [of fate]. All this has made me forgetful. I am just not involved and I'm very absent-minded.

Doña Flora:

Yes man, we are no longer strong as we used to be because of all the shocks we had during that time. Now we are like a rat that you encounter in your *agujero* (hole) over there.

Women, when recounting their reactions to the atrocities, said that they felt as though they were "no longer human" or "dead":

Doña Ana:

I was so afraid that I was no longer a person [she explained that she was unable to talk or walk upright]...I was unable to think or coordinate actions or understand what was occurring around me.

Doña Eugenia:

They hit them in the mouth and they bashed them in the face. Oh God! Oh God! how they made them suffer...This moment was the most difficult that we lived through...we lost consciousness and it was as if we too had died.

Doña Ana:

I felt as if my feelings and my thoughts had died during this time. You see, not only my husband died but many, many of the members of my family died. First my brother, and then they got my father-in-law; then my daughter and then my mother. OOH! God, no more! no more! I thought. Yes, many were taken in that way. And because of this I felt as though my feelings had died and I lost my memory completely (ch' kil ta chic).⁴² It seemed like *un ataque* (an attack). I did not know what to do and I lost my feelings. It was as if suddenly I was drunk, drunk, drunk!

Doña Ana was recording not only a mental and emotional numbness or the "psychic numbing" (cf. Lifton 1986) endemic to the circumstances and place; nor was she only referring to her impaired thinking because of tremendous grief or the death of a part of herself, her identity, which was abruptly altered during "that time": she was also referring to a totally foreign atmosphere inhospitable to responses which for the Quiché are "the right thing to do", including things that normally define a human being.

The resulting disunity can be understood to have alienated the widows from their own conception and personhood⁴³ as it operates in the present and as it had operated before finding themselves in the midst of *La Violencia*, a time when it was not possible to operate according to known codes of conduct. As Harris writes, "moving through the moral career, the human being may or may not become fully a person. Even if he or she does become a person, personhood may be partly or fully rescinded later. A person's agentive capacities is bestowed or removed, confirmed or disconfirmed, declared or denied" (1989:604). When external events compel one to endure a crumbling milieu, as happens to victims of violence, human personhood must be damaged. Indeed, when Emolian women speak of "not being human", they perhaps refer to the fact that their personhood had broken down.⁴⁴ Perhaps the women's statements that they can no longer keep their animals alive is an allegorical expression of their self-perception as inadequate carers:

Doña Eugenia:

Now my pigs die on me.

Doña Flora:

They don't live any more?

Doña Eugenia:

No, none of my domestic animals do. Only a short while ago I bought four foreign chickens and they have already died.

Doña Flora:

They died?

Doña Eugenia:

Yes, and then I went to buy four more and they died too.

Doña Flora:

Oh my child!...It also seems that we have lost our power (*fuerza*) and our will.

This was a more acceptable allusion to their self perceptions of negligence towards their families which arose from their inability to fulfil the quintessentially feminine function of protection⁴⁵ even though their failure to protect their kin during *La Violencia* was unavoidable. This was also expressed in women's preoccupations about their *corte* (traditional skirt), a metonym for Indian women in shamanic prayers, being violently removed; the implied exposure reflects the public nature of this appalling indignity, the loss of ownership of the status of motherhood. The women's failures are built upon to the present. The woman continues to see herself, in the eyes of her children, her husband and also in the eyes of other bystanders, as continually failing to consolidate her family's lives after a period of national and personal trauma.

I suspect that the Quiché may have considerable difficulty with the failure in fulfilling their legitimate roles in life because they are more clearly prescribed; additionally, they grow up with the notion of service to others. On other hand, this failure is not attributed to some individual failure because it can be attributed to the bad-will of her destiny (see chapter 9).

THE RE-ELABORATION OF MEMORIES AND THE THE CREATION OF FICTITIOUS IDENTITIES

When memory goes out to pick up dead wood, it brings back the faggot that it likes.

(Mossi proverb)

Women constructed a sense of themselves as widows, daughters and mothers of the dead and disappeared through social interaction and the sharing of memories. They constructed a self-image or what Goffman (1955) calls a "face". This can only be constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed socially or inter-subjectively. The widows' self-image was sometimes a fictitious one. It needed to be in order to counter not only the image painted of them by the forces of repression but also their own image of themselves and to create a sense of continuity.⁴⁶

In devastating situations there may be a certain amount of rejection of an intolerable truth and the construction of a different one. The process of re-elaboration of the past overshadows the actual event more than in ordinary situations. Not only is there more likely to be the omission of pertinent detail but also the fragmentation of memory and insertion of fiction. There may also be exaggeration of certain aspects or complete fabrication. This may be because the event had such an extreme emotional impact on an individual that, in memory, the actual event may become exaggerated in its minutiae.

Over time, Quiché women seemed to change their accounts of their lives especially from the time before to the time after *La Violencia*. Previously important family quarrels were now considered trivial and forgotten. In their place women created and re-created other stories⁴⁷ of how they survived in the face of the atrocities and the aftermath of *La Violencia*. They spoke of a heroic quality, usually attributed to the murdered men but now attributed to women. Stories were told by the "heroic" women themselves or by others who marvelled at their acts.⁴⁸ The village massacre was one of the most common themes discussed when they represented themselves this way; for example, *doña* Maria told how she went to uncover the clandestine grave to see if the dead were there a few days after they were buried, saying to herself:

If they speak to me then I know that my days will be numbered and because of this I thought that it was better to go alone.

She returned to tell the others that she had found them and, only one week after the burial, a group of women went to see them.

Similarly, *doña* Eugenia presented herself as taking a leading role in countering the abominations. As a woman and an Indian, she "broke the rules", a fact which provoked a certain amount of horror owing to the danger implied by this, when she stepped forward and offered the assassins money to stop pounding her son. The assassins responded predictably by hitting her with their rifle butts, shouting "XO!" which is how one normally addresses an unruly animal.

This type of oral testimony draws a veil over more tragic elements - the beaten men who were buried alive or chopped up into pieces like a "*chilacayote*" (pumpkin) - and brings out the symbolic and, to some extent, actual overturning of order: it represents an infraction of the upside down code that regulated women's relationships with the male *jefes*. *Doña* Eugenia's symbolic over-turning of order (against local male *jefes* associated with the army and, hence, *Latinos*) in a society oppressive of women and Indians, can be seen as the beginning of the positive reconstruction of an identity for themselves. Part of this was due to radical changes in the women's apperception of both their "selves" and their surroundings,⁴⁹ which in turn created new experiences and interpretations of the past. Women had to react against the situation in order to counter the threat implicit in being labelled "wives of the guerrilla",⁵⁰ a label rejected as harmful to women's sense of "self" as women oriented toward the good fundamental to the Quiché value system. This labelling is important if one considers Parkin's view that, being social, new metaphorical language creates not just new references, but new "forms of life" or "events" (1982:xxxiii). Here, the new language pertains to the woman's "self" definition and the new form of life is her own.

The disruption in the pattern of relationships also created a situation in which women were freer to take up novel positions in relation to others. Perhaps this is where a widow drew most strength.⁵¹ In reformulating her world and establishing a narrative of this version of the "self", she does not seem to be bound by the traditional structure of her society. While

representing herself here as a bit of a rebel, *doña Eugenia* reaffirms that within her family she conformed to Quiché values of working hard and being a good wife,⁵² thus maintaining a sense of continuity within the chaos concerning her own identity. Continuity is also maintained by reference to her life as always having been deprived and arduous. On yet another level, with respect to the village authorities, *doña Eugenia*'s account implies stability for she indicates that she perceives a persisting status quo in the situation which she told me "one must endure" (*tiene que aguantar*). The need to maintain a perception of order within the chaos is also suggested by her divulging that her rebellious streak is consistent with the non-conformist tendencies of her family, particularly her father. Therefore, while the disruption of relationships and the taking on of reconstructed identities is acknowledged, continuity is restored. This is fundamental for "life to go on" (Marris 1975:24).

The re-establishment of continuity was only partial, for women also spoke about a disconcerting sensation of disjunction in their lives. *Doña Josefina*:

The life I lived before and the life I live now are entirely different.

This self-observation not only relates to the different types of action, roles and responsibilities they claimed to, and sometimes did take on during *La Violencia*, but is a comment on the moral space in which they now live. Identity or knowing who you are is "to be oriented in moral space...where questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what not, what has meaning and importance for you and what is trivial and secondary" (Taylor 1989:28). Therefore, the arrival of *La Violencia* needed novel and unconventional definitions of "self" in order for the person to operate at all. Women, for example, could not act according to customary definitions of morality without putting their own lives at risk.⁵³ This pertains to situations where, for example, they did not go in search of their lost kin, including their children. Circumstances and not values determined their behaviour. Values such as parental care lost their relevance in situations which precluded their expression. Therefore the establishment of identity had to find other anchors in the past; only in this way could the discontinuities in their identities be filled in.

Oral testimonies do not always flow between the selves that the women describe. The discontinuities are different from the multiple selves that any person maintains which are

usually integrated although not simultaneously operational in any one context. Women can move between a traumatized self and another self - the woman who stood by and watched her son assassinated and the brave woman who stepped forward to try and prevent the assassination. The resulting disjuncture remains in memory if not in daily fact as desperation, even though such a mental state might not altogether eclipse their present life. This is because the need to work harder than ever may have saved them from the luxury of too much reflection. It was not only *La Violencia* which changed the women's lives; this was only the beginning of the dramatic change, particularly in widow's lives (see chapter 4) following the loss of male kin and the shattering of world views. Because of this disjuncture, the period of *La Violencia* maintains biographical relevance up to the present.

Doña Flora recounts a time when the patrol *jefes* threatened to come to her house:

He (the *jefe*) asked me if I heard that they would come to the houses here. I told him that I had. He threatened me saying that they were in the process of deciding which houses they would visit. I replied "let them come, let them come because here is their father," I said, moving from side to side the *machete* in my hands [in a threatening manner]. You see they got used to killing...they killed our men...now they want to kill us. This is what I said. I was hardly aware of what I was saying [she implies that she could not control herself]. I believe that because of what I said they did not come. But at the time I thought that they might come...Perhaps it would have been possible to injure one of them...If I had been there, when they came, I would have opened the door, quickly, and...

The fact that *doña Flora* fled the village soon after this encounter (which I was never able to ascertain actually took place) is testimony to the fact that accounts of bravery did not necessarily reflect the action which really occurred. The fact is that most people at this time were petrified.⁵⁴ A more characteristic reaction, as in their former lives (before *La Violencia*) was passive endurance. Bettelheim (1986:39) queries the areas of freedom a person retains and questions whether a person "does not adjust but instead manipulates the new environment according to his needs, and to which degree his frozenness prevents him from doing either". *Doña Flora*'s paralysis or the holding on to values and attitudes imprinted in her early life may have made her react at the time as she did. I suspect that the situation of terror in *La Violencia* is anti-creative, that people cling harder than ever to known ways because of the rupturing of their world and the need to attain steadiness. However, later,

doña Flora's analysis reframed the incident in order to maintain or create a certain narrative about the event which allows her to establish and maintain, at least some of the time, a positive image of herself in which her behaviour appears non-conformist and creative.

However, I am not suggesting that women never had the choice to perform heroic acts. In "reality" some did, but only very occasionally. Even in the most extreme conditions, such as Nazi concentration camps, there were examples of heroic acts which prove that apathy could be overcome and irritability suppressed: "Man [and woman] can preserve a vestige of spiritual freedom, of independence of mind, even in such terrible conditions of psychic and physical stress" (Frankl 1964:61). Bettelheim (1986:147) writes survivorship in concentration camps depended on the ability to preserve some area of independent action.⁵⁵ I suspect that this was more important among more individualistic people than among the Quiché. However, it still seemed that it was important for women to maintain their integrity and the perception of autonomous action (such as standing up to the patrols).

The tales of heroism which women recount to one another might be seen as memory, as a social construction or as a re-configuration of the past.⁵⁶ Halbwachs argues (cited in Hutton 1988) that these processes act to form an identity that works against despair and the perception of a diminished "self". The women's self-constructions and re-configurations of themselves work against the diminished identities forged in *La Violencia* due to circumstances, not against Quiché values as they stand at other times. The situation of *La Violencia* did not allow the luxury of doing the "Christian" thing (which is perhaps an ideology rather than a social fact, even in ordinary circumstances). However, this did not prevent women, in their retrospective glances, from condemning others as a way of lifting themselves or, in more candid moments, from condemning themselves directly for not operating according to the morality of better times.

The reconstructed identities can be considered, at some level, as fictional identities in-so-far as they are based more on remembered past actions and future identity claims than on present pursuits. The women are unable to locate themselves in unmitigated reality (the lived present) and can only locate themselves in managed re-presented reality, that is, fiction. Some women even gave me the impression that their sense of themselves was no longer of someone real but of something "other". Not excluding the possibility that this stemmed in

part from the counterfeiting effect of living behind a lie (the official truth) for several years, this feeling may arise with their constructions which protect the "self" at a time of disruption, loss and failure. The issues that people face in these times are a magnification of those which people face in less drastic situations when it is easier to maintain their "ordinary masks" (a term I take from Giddens 1979). That is, the discrepancy between the way one perceives oneself to act and the "reality" is not so great. In dire situations there is an even greater need to protect the "self" by minimizing the need for radical shifts in "self-concept", providing a sense of continuity with the past. There was also a necessity to insulate themselves from the intrusive negative labelling of "outsiders".

Discourses containing fantasy can also simply be a way of covering up terrible events that are extremely painful to the narrator. The widow attempts to protect herself with what Freud (1899) called "cover-memories" not only from the events themselves but also her own retrospective self-criticism for not acting according to pre-existing values. Other war phenomena associated with everyday routine that were rehearsed over and over again, such as the many bodies found daily along the road or fleeing from the army whenever the bells tolled, were more difficult to cloak in this way. Thus the terrorized widow remembers against less than heroic memories of her failures in order to maintain a certain image of herself.⁵⁷ They thus become hidden from themselves and so, in this way, what is public to whom is a vital domain with the potential to open or close.

As a way of dealing with unbearable guilt, shame and anger women also chose, consciously and unconsciously, not to speak and not to remember. Their guilt is a complicated guilt, an ambiguous guilt which is more than that of "survivor guilt".⁵⁸ It is a guilt which arises from the paralysis which prevented parents witnessing the murder of their offspring from acting to protect their children. Most people felt guilty whether they were actively or passively involved and only very, very few people can get out of this by becoming, for example, a Quiché hero such as Tecún Umán.⁵⁹ Unlike "natural" disasters, over which people perceive they have absolutely no possibility of exercising control, the violence unleashed by other human beings specifically against kin is continually exposed to interpretive understanding by the victims who are burdened by the question of their own role in it. Quiché women's guilt and shame is exacerbated by the fact that they could not fulfil

the obligations to the dead. The only way to deal with these intolerable emotions is perhaps by forgetting.

Violence thus forced shared discourses onto the person. People who stood watching and did nothing needed to have a shared discourse in order to remember in a positive way. More often than not, these memories were elaborated; they appeared more uniform and stereotyped than the idiosyncratic, unelaborated memories which an individual did not share with the group. Elaborated memories which attempted to negate guilt had perhaps already been shared and elaborated many times before; they were reconditioned and shaped differently from raw ones which were already conditioned by the cultural and personal history of a woman's experience.

The elaborated narratives and representations I have portrayed here (and there are countless others) serve to lessen the diminished "self" resulting from women's own recollections of the self-assessed "amoral" (but in reality pragmatic) way they were forced to behave during *La Violencia*. In this way, women deal constructively with what happened to them as an inner experience. I shall now turn to examine the re-membering which took place within a national widows' organization in which connections were made with heroines of the past and the experience of widows thereby normalized.

THE CO-INCIDENCE OF CONTINUITY WITH WOMEN IN THE HISTORICAL PAST

So far I have illustrated that identity depends on the memory state, that is, a "self" that remembers its earlier states. Now I shall show how identity also depends on memory, on the narratives that construct (and deconstruct) identities by comparing the "once upon a time" with the "here and now" (Zemon Davis & Starn 1989:2).

In the last couple of years the women's group CONAVIGUA has fostered positive reconstruction of identity through connections with history in the more distant past. One of the founders of group,⁶⁰ Petronila, was a young catechist from Quiché (see Appendix III). Her feminist vision stemmed partly from her childhood when her mother travelled everywhere with her father (a shaman) and the general equality expressed in their relationship. These

ideas were built upon in her catechist training although she said that many male catechists did not put the ideas into practice in their homes. Her ideas of equality grew from the abject poverty in which she grew up while viewing the lives of rich *Latinos* in the town.

In her characteristically quietly spoken but direct manner, Petronila explained that it was not men who sacrificed their lives: "the women were those who made the sacrifices", she told me, "they sacrificed the lives of their men". In the same vein, Gregory and Timmerman write about the strong image of "mothers of the disappeared" in Argentina: "it was this essential relation, that of a mother to her child, that quietly erupted within the space of death as a single most indelible tie of the disappeared ones to society" (1986:71). In Guatemala the group GAM⁶¹ for mothers (and other relatives) of the "disappeared" were, like Argentina's Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo,⁶² major symbols of resistance.

CONAVIGUA found parallels with biblical characters which resonated with rural Indian women (*campesinas*), such as the fact that the Virgin and the *campesina* didn't go to school or speak Spanish. Petronila would go to the villages and address the women in the name of the Virgin, a *campesina* herself. She spoke in the name of "we" in a way that merged the distinction between the women whom she addressed, herself and the historical (biblical) characters who figured in her gentle but charismatic *placticas* (speeches). This way of speaking had the "oracle effect" (Bourdieu 1991) of completely splitting her individual personality, where the ego abolishes itself in favour of a transcendental moral person. She, as an ordinary individual, died in order for the moral person to come into being; it died and became an institution (CONAVIGUA). By coming to speak in the name of the Virgin Mary and Mayan heroines, Petronila's cause was legitimized. She was not speaking for herself but in the name of something which, in the case of the Virgin Mary, is brought into existence by Petronila through her discourse. A whole series of symbolic effects which are exercised every day in politics rest on this sort of usurpatory ventriloquism, which consists of giving voice to those in whose name one is authorized to speak.

When Petronila spoke to the women, who identified with her as the Virgin and recognized themselves in her speech, a side of their personalities already fragmented by the violence clung to the chance to become cleansed. As well as establishing temporal continuity in their narrative, women fought against the symbolic devaluation arising from the negative

labels assigned to them by the authorities. In this way they escaped the verdict of official classification as "wives of the guerrilla".

Petronila would repeat to the women over and over again, on every visit, that they "were like the heroines in the Bible, Ruth, Ester and Judith from the Old Testament and saints such as the Virgin Mary from the New Testament". The "indigenising" of heroines and religious icons extended to these figures by linking them with characters from the Mayan "Counsel Book" Pop Wuj or Popol Vuh (circa 1550) such as the mothers of the twins Hunahpu and Xbalanqué; the book also gives the Quiché creation myth and the history of the world (Wright 1991:185). The Virgin Mary became aj k'aleb, or a girl from the corn fields. In contrast to the women's tendency to idealize⁶³ their dead kin as martyrs (see chapter 9), the women whom Petronila addressed became heroines, celibates and virgins who had sacrificed their sons. Some women portrayed both themselves and their dead kin as heroes which can be seen as another means of countering the negative label of "wife of the guerrilla".⁶⁴ Such women may have derived comfort from the seeing themselves as worthy⁶⁵ and from thinking that their kin did not suffer in the after-life (see Chapter 9).

Biblical contexts were applicable to contemporary struggle in the making of a positive renewal of identity because they furnished the "roots and beginning" of the "continuous history" of what Fiorenza (1983) calls "women as the *ekklesia* [church or holy place] of God". They are a central embodiment and incarnation of the vision of a "new church in solidarity with the oppressed and the 'least' of this world" (ibid:344). But ancient battles were not merely the initial stages of a historical cycle that ends up as something akin to modern feminism (although there was certainly the beginnings of a feminist proclivity to this group).⁶⁶ Those struggles resonated with the present ones facing Quiché women. The critical element, as with women's reaching back into their own personal histories, is the creation of a sense of continuity which links past, present and future via historical sequence and analogy (Knapp 1989:130). By referring to heroines of the past who had sacrificed their men, the killings, public massacres and other atrocities were given more than a very personal significance. This added a converse process whereby these personal disasters are suddenly perceived in all their historic significance.

La Violencia was the beginning of a violence which was not going to stop; in some ways, it was also a reemergence of an old war brought by the Spaniards 500 years ago. The surviving women were suddenly thrown into history and forced intimacy with previously avoidable political realities. It is this that seems to create a turning point. In these processes, the confrontation, reordering and renewal identified by Lifton (1987:67) are clearly observed. There was a confrontation with negative aspects (old fears, guilt feelings and anxieties) of the self; reordering required a re-examination of these aspects; renewal resulted in an increased sense of purpose and responsibility which provides the framework for subsequent action.

The frame for the future for the widows of CONAVIGUA was the perception of the future as a kind of mission because, as survivors, among their hopes was to secure justice for the dead. Their notion of justice began to alter from one implemented by God and/or the ancestors to one which they could effect positively in this world. The joining of past, present and future in this case was through characteristics and events that were shared by both ancient and modern heroines.

It thus seems that women diminish their pain by sharing memories and discourses and relating them to historical characters. These processes of collectivization and universalization through reference to historical figures may put their experiences in context, normalizing both the situation and their actions within it which, in turn, decreases their sense of alienation. Indeed, perhaps in an attempt to achieve synchronic universalization as well, widows were eager to discover whether similar atrocious experiences had also occurred in my country and in my life.

CONCLUSION

There are political, social and psychological reasons for both forgetting and remembering the events of *La Violencia*. Memories have no reality as pure memories; they exist for individuals only to the extent that they resonate within them and can be borne. Memories becomes "real" as social fact only to the extent that they are articulated and disseminated within the group. Therefore, just as there is no pure memory there is no pure recall. Rather, re-membering *La Violencia* is an act of reconstruction, based as much on the memory of narratives of a past event as the past as the event itself. Many questions remain

however, for example, about the narratability of violent events and the ability to recall that which cannot be narrated.

What is re-membered is remembered against conditions set up by "the repression" and its aftermath. Terrorization and the imposition of the official "truth" obliterates or at least distorts memory. Under conditions of terror, the elaboration of an individual's memory cannot be located in the landscape because much evidence of atrocity has been effaced but within the social group; it is a social act that is realized between different groups - in this instance, women.

Memories of atrocious events were not necessarily effaced but protected by a collective secrecy. Therefore, while it may appear that something has been obliterated, it may be that it is not evoked because of the political and/or social context or just not said for fear of the consequences given the ongoing threat of danger.

Women's refusal to accept the official version, which effectively silences them, is to be found in their popular memories, private narratives and "self"-constructions, for example, of themselves as heroines and their dead kin as martyrs.⁶⁷ These behaviours immediately confronted the military government's assumed agenda and thereby turned private thoughts into political acts because these actions were inclined to reinterpret, whatever the person's intentions, the political domain. Knowingly or not, through trying to understand and rework popular memories of atrocity, women employ strategies that can release Guatemalan history from its one-dimensional official definitions, allowing it to become a malleable space of vying interpretations.

The women's statements expose an environment full of arbitrations linking the villagers and military authorities which permit army domination to be simultaneously sanctioned and revised. However, this an unofficial, secret arbitration has serious implications because as long as such acts remain publicly silent, it is responsible for maintaining the impunity of officially protected killers: "...over a period of years, public silence can reshape memory, history and even the notions of right and wrong to the point that might makes right" (Stoll 1992:266). Whilst this does occur, I suggest that there is a limit to this because the public and the private are not entirely distinct and, in fact, the two domains permeate one another.

Quiché widows use marginal space in the same way that artists and writers cultivate the margins of society to question the "natural order of things" proposed by state discourse (in which reality is presented as unitary and self-explanatory). The women's space is more clandestine; their oral discourse is condemned to remain unofficial,⁶⁸ as "public secrets". But perhaps the advantage of oral memories as "public secrets".

over the artist's concretized expressions and even over the official "truth" is that the communicator retains control over the manner of its dispersion - the audience, the site, the particular version.

But the official "truth" continues to harass positive efforts to re-establish an acceptable identity; it hinders attempts to re-establish continuity with the past. The problem of interface remains when the selves of the present cannot access those of the past; the trauma caused considerable alienation from constructions of the "self" which operated up to the time when they were confronted with situations in which they were forced to act according to a different morality, a morality which has been left behind since "that time". Those memories which are connected with those disassociated aspects of the "self", frozen in "that time", are of events that are perhaps memorable in some form but not necessarily accessible or speakable which in the end, can neither be remembered nor truly forgotten.

1. Caution should be exercised in imputing the idea of intentionality to these processes, especially those which are conscious.
2. The army has a G-5 or S-5 system representing the socially conscious side of the army, the civic action (or psychological warfare) branch. It is, no doubt, the intention of political repression in Guatemala and elsewhere that citizens will psychologically repress, that is, not see, atrocious aspects of the government they may observe: should they see, it is better that they do not remember.
3. This term is in common use in psycho-analysis meaning the process whereby inter-subjective relations are transformed into intra-subjective ones (internalization of a conflict, of a prohibition, etc.).
4. According to the Popular Memory Group, the past is produced through private memory, distinguished from dominant memory which is produced through "public representations of history". Both are involved in the "social production of memory" in which "everyone participates, though unequally" (Popular Memory Group 1982:207).

5. Although the distinction between the two is perhaps less than I imply here. As Lévi-Strauss (1966:257) points out these too are human documents which "are no more *given* than any other. It is the historian or the agent of history who constituted them by abstraction and as though under the threat of infinite regress."
6. The separations mentioned here are perhaps merely based on our own constructions. Nevertheless, analytically it is important to separate them when trying to understand the effects of repression on the shaping of memory and history(which are not entirely distinct). I conjecture that in reality they permeate one another, mutually and dynamically, shaping and reshaping the other.
7. While rural massacres were a vital component of Ríos Montt's counterinsurgency programme, the new regime also called for a civic action counterpart to repression. A Swedish representative to the United Nations remarked that this Guatemalan government's rhetoric reminded him of George Orwell's novel, *1984*. "When they mean war they speak of peace," he said "and when they mean repression, they speak of freedom...Guatemala is the same" (Simon 1987:114).
8. Military-commissioned civil authority.
9. For example, in May 1990, a local military commissioner shot and killed a widow who was president of CONAVIGUA in Parraxtut, Sacapulas.
10. Bourdieu (1991) describes symbolic domination as an invisible power which works in a way that those subject to it engage in "a kind of active complicity".
11. George Collier's historical ethnography of a Spanish village shows that families of Socialists massacred during the Spanish Civil War had come to accept Franco-era propaganda vilifying the Socialist movement (1987:216-217).
12. cf. Gregory and Timmerman (1986) for an explanation of the "ritual-like" aspects of torture in Argentina which has its parallels in Guatemala.
13. The hyphen that I have added here is to emphasize the nature of going over and over the different parts of a memory fragmented by violence in order to construct and reconstruct something whole.
14. Francine Masiello describes how the authoritarian Argentinean state articulates a one-dimensional theory of reality according to whose norms all dissent is described in metaphors of illness. The cultural field is then divided between "us" and "others" by

the official discourse which employs the first person plural in an attempt to eliminate the opposition, the sense of otherness and ambiguity of thought (1987:12-13).

15. One might conjecture they were aware of their engagement in what might be construed as a disguised form of resistance.
16. For example, the Quiché have annual memorial services for the dead which can be seen as a way of re-evoking memories of them.
17. This was suggested by John Morton at an LSE Academic seminar April 1992.
18. Photographs are significant markers of personal and collective identity; they are perceived as extensions of the individuals represented in the visual frame. Photos are "pieces of the individual" and salvaging them entailed a form of reconstruction and reintegration of the self. In the hands of the army/*jefes*/tourists, photos became objects with which symbolic violence was expressed towards the individual represented.
19. Not all members of any one group had equal rights to express and elaborate their memories, for relations of power among the group were played out in this context of, *prima facie*, mutuality. This meant that, for example, a daughter-in-law had to defer to her mother-in-law who thus appeared to have greater powers to articulate her memories.
20. On a psychological level one sometimes finds that memories do not allow themselves to be erased. Instead of direct recall, women express themselves in nightmares and in daily anxieties (for which there is still a real external cause) and may later come out as psychosomatic illnesses such as the frequent headaches reported by widows. I believe that some of the pain they experienced in their bodies reflected that they have become the repositories of painful experiences which they have been unable to articulate. This was in part because of having been silenced and also because of the non-narratability of atrocious experiences. On one occasion when I was listening to *doña* Flora speak about her memory of her son confessing the fact that he did not want to live after his father died and his subsequent disappearance, she seemed to reach the limit of her narration. She suddenly stopped and began to speak about the pain in her stomach.
21. The army burned down houses belonging to people who fled because anyone who did so was thought to be a subversive. I was told that the army also fired houses where they suspected subversive meetings were held.
22. See Chapter 8.

23. Emolians' pain of the memories of atrocity conducted by authorities on whom they are dependent may be similar to the effect of serious child abuse perpetrated within families (see Shengold 1989). In cases of this kind, children cannot permit themselves consciously to accept the mistreatment by those upon whom they are dependent. These dependants may engage in numerous processes that interfere with their judgement of reality.
24. Which Wallace calls "mazeways" (1956:266).
25. Scarry (1985) writes that subjectively, the world seems to shrink to the immediate surroundings and the "self" shrinks to the body. It may be possible that in situations where one witnesses unprecedeted violence a complex, symbolic, abstract identity, with various commitments, obligations, loyalties, ideological beliefs, sentiments and ambitions, breaks down. The person, like the widow who does not protect her child, renounces her loyalties because these meanings lose their apparent reality in the face of sufficient pain. The world shrinks to the here and now. The loyal, committed, meaningful "self" disappears, leaving only the body and its suffering (*ibid.*).
26. cf. for example, Poulet (1977).
27. cf. E. Leed (1979).
28. Gestalt theory pertaining to memory suggests that when our surroundings do not change, we lose consciousness of time (Gurwitsch 1966). Therefore, the time spent in the crevices without growing corn and other markers collapses into a single image or brief evaluation - as did the soldiers' time in the trenches during WWI (Rosenthal 1990).
29. Apart from the confusion and perhaps stunning of people's minds during this time, another important factor was that their ordinary time markers were missing. Although most Emolian households have a range of calenders hanging on their walls (given to them by various governmental and non-governmental organizations working in the area), most people are unable to read them. The diurnal marking of time is made with the aid of the sun and the passing of months is marked by the cycle of corn planting, growing and harvesting. If events occurred when people still had corn fields, they would say for example "oh yes, this happened when the corn fields were being weeded", or "It was the time when the corn fields were large" or, relating it to the calender month, "it must have been November as the corn fields were ready for harvesting". Nevertheless, family biography did sometimes structure the sequence of events, selecting what is remembered and putting recollection in order.

30. John Morton (L.S.E. Anthropology Academic Seminar) claims that one's emotional state from one time to another must be the same in order to remember.

31. Beyond the scope of the thesis is discussion of how in the context of a living present the future is constituted by anticipation of other events which are likely to follow (see Hume 1902).

32. He contrasts this to the writing of history as a science built upon durable evidence - a distinction I do not agree with. As Hutton points out, "the historian, like the mnemonist, builds interpretative paradigms, and historical understanding relies heavily on retrospective reconstruction of the past from a present-minded point of view" (1988:317).

33. Parkin writes "there is an endless signification in people's descriptions and references to things" (1991:219). These "things," I suggest, include the events of *La Violencia* and also people's own memories.

34. The word *torturado* (tortured) is another word which has entered the Quiché lexicon along with other words such as "disappeared" which I have mentioned in chapter 9.

35. Osofsky illustrates this extreme indignity suffered by slaves in one of their narratives: "Who can imagine what could be the feeling of a father and mother, when looking upon an infant child whipped and tortured with impunity, and then placed in a situation where they can afford it no protection?" (1969:80-81).

36. It has been noticed, for instance, that many survivors of wars or other complex and traumatic experiences tend unconsciously to filter their memory (Laub 1992).

37. cf. Rothenthal (1990) who writes similarly about the textual features found in the self-presentations of WWI veterans.

38. Interestingly, no woman I asked ever remembered dreaming about the massacres of their menfolk. Bettelheim also writes that none of the many prisoners with whom he spoke had dreamed about what happened in the transport to the concentration camps (1986:128,fn 10).

39. A person's blood is said to "talk". cf. Wilson (1990:170-171) and Nash (1970:147) for more on the blood and diagnosis.

40. cf. Bettelheim (1986) who writes of the complicity of fellow concentration camp inmates.

41. Other women spoke of passing their sadness to their babies via their milk.

42. Literally, this means "I am not sown well". This is also said with reference to the planting of fields.

43. The definition of personhood here is taken from Poole (1982:103): "those attributes, capacities, and signs of "proper" social persons which mark a moral career (and its jural entitlements) in a particular society...Such attributes, capacities, and signs may be imposed upon (or denied to) in whole or in part, not only particular actors but also categories or collectivities of human actors or non-human entities. In sum, personhood involves basic concepts of "human nature" and is fundamentally related to ideas of corporeal (and non-corporeal) capacity, process, and structure as well as notions of gender.

44. Taylor throws some light on the situation here when he writes that "living within such strongly qualified horizons is constitutive of human agency". He continues to say that "stepping outside these limits would be tantamount to stepping outside what we would recognize as integral, that is undamaged personhood" (1989:27).

45. I heard one story of a soldier who witnessed women being forced to strangle their children being haunted by a disturbing memory of a woman strangling a chicken. Later, in analysis, he was able to remember that the woman was actually strangling her baby and not a chicken. After this elucidation, his disturbing memory subsided. This illustrates how repetitive memories reflect that something which is not remembered properly cannot be laid to rest either.

46. Constructing fictional identities protects the ill person by minimising the need for radical shifts in self-concept and by providing a sense of continuity with the past (Charmatz 1992:76). The same may be said of the women who suffer loss during war.

47. Lifton (1967) after Freud, has recognized this concern with the traumatic as the classic syndrome of obsessional review and shown how survivors review the traumatic incidents over and over again, constructing various scenarios in their mind by which the outcome of trauma could have been altered. In the case of Guatemalan women, however, the activity did not appear to have an obsessional quality to it. It was difficult to tell whether this was due to their need to be selective and careful about their reviewing of the situation for reasons of security, or whether the psychological processes were different for a host of other reasons. In any event, it seemed to me that the process they were engaged in with other women was a creative and healing

one rather than pathological. It made the unknown known and less frightening (see Schuetze 1976:159-260).

48. Men also relate memories of incidents of threat and violence where they appear heroic. The occasions upon which they hinge this are different. This is, in part, because the nature of their experiences in *La Violencia* were different. For instance, *don Juan* told me of his return to the village and having to go and face the *jefes*.
49. See chapter 4, where I refer to identity change in the present which resulted from women's adoption of men's tasks. This shows that the earlier stable core and assumed continuity of the self have become unsettled and undermined. Under these conditions, Charmatz writes (with reference to an ill person), re-socialization to a reconstructed self-conception accelerates (1992:74).
50. There have been a number of studies on selfhood and on personal identity which claim that names do more than reflect and classify but also create experiences (eg. Ardener 1975; Gell 1979; Rosaldo 1980; Heelas and Lock 1981).
51. There were variations in women's self portrayal of the "disorderly" woman or the woman "on top" who, in some way, is able to overturn gender roles; this was also illustrated and discussed with reference to biblical characters. Paradoxically, women cultivate that very disorderliness with which the *jefes* tried to taunt them. The importance of their self-representations lies in the symbolic, rather than simply reflective, character of representations and, at the same time, in the recognition of their potential influence on forms of behaviour. Natalie Zemon Davis has hypothesized that "the play with the various images of woman-on-top kept an open alternative way of conceiving family structure" (1975).
52. Sharon MacDonald points out (in relation to WWII women) "Motherhood and family life do, of course, have a very real practical and symbolic importance after a conflict, in that they re-establish stability and promise a future for people" (1987:10).
53. cf. Primo Levi (1988) who writes about his own moral dilemma while an inmate in concentration camps.
54. cf. Bettelheim (1986) for an account of the paralysing effect of anxiety in Germany under National Socialism.
55. The same applies to those patrols *jefes* and commissioners who helped people instead of complying with army orders.

56. Psychiatrist Derek Summerfield told me (personal communication) that hospital patients who have had heart attacks begin to reconstruct a story of their life, retrospectively explaining their heart attack. Their past life is thus reconstructed in the light of this traumatic event.

57. These stories of heroism are different from those told by "heroes" of, for example, WWII where the State labels killings committed by soldiers as heroic and the soldier himself accepts this interpretation. I wonder more about the so-called heroes who, while publicly accepting this label, remain silent about their activities in battle: perhaps their private unspoken memories oppose the State's interpretation but it is not comfortable to reveal these hidden versions. Like the widows, they are haunted by the possibilities of their own role in the violence.

58. Evidence for this kind of guilt was found in women's statements that the order of her own and her men's deaths had been reversed: for example, "if he had not been killed then I would have died before him". Lifton (1967) has referred to this phenomenon as "comparative deaths timing".

59. The last Quiché king to be killed and conquered by Pedro de Alvarado.

60. This group was set up in 1988 following a mass for widows which Petronila had requested from the local priest in Chichicastenango which resulted in his expulsion from the municipality. The existence of this group reflects the slight decrease in impunity in Guatemala which means that there is somewhat more safety for open declarations. Nevertheless, in order to restrict the opening of such spaces, examples are made of members of this group. For example, in May 1990, Maria Mejía, president of CONAVIGUA of Parraxtut in Sacapulas, Quiché, was shot dead in her home by the village military commissioner.

61. *Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo*. A support and Human Rights group set up for families of the disappeared in 1984.

62. These were the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. They were a group of mothers of disappeared persons which formed, like GAM in Guatemala, during the course of their petitioning the authorities for information concerning the whereabouts of missing relatives.

63. This may also be due to the psychological process of idealization of the lost object (person) which is now "within" the survivor in the form of memories (images anecdotes, affective and auditory sensations) (cf. Parkes 1972). The bad object which is "outside" is similarly idealized as the repository of all that is negative. cf. Chapter 10.

64. This may have also been a psychological mechanism which protected women's own integration. In rejecting that their husbands were killed for being subversives, they also rejected the notion that they are "wives of the guerrilla". This could be seen as an attempt to construct a more positive identity about themselves as good. They also wish to render themselves less vulnerable because of the security risks implied by this label. While diminishing their anxiety, thinking that they were selected because of their specialness meant that "like Christ" their suffering protected others. This was not without its consequences in terms of guilt. Their depiction of themselves as heroines may have pacified their guilt to some extent.
65. See Freud's (1923) views on the process of internalization of the lost object.
66. Antonella Fabri (n.d.), in a recent unpublished article, writes that this is part of a larger project of emancipation defined by class liberation or ethnic vitalization.
67. Bettelheim reacted against the proclivity to glorify the victims of the Nazis by calling them martyrs. He believed that we glorify the fate of the victims because "in doing so we cope with our distorted image of what happened, not with the events the way they did happen" (1982:92). Petronila, on the other hand, does not necessarily react against this tendency, but prefers to see the women as martyrs as well. Perhaps her concern is not with the events as they "did happen".
68. cf. Bourdieu (1977).



-Plate 7: Women at clandestine burial site

Chapter 8

The Dead, "The Disappeared ONES" and Clandestine Graves

A funeral rite, is a social rite *par excellence*. Its ostensible object is the dead person, but it benefits not the dead but the living.

(Firth 1951:63)

Once again he sees his companions' face
Livid in the first faint light...
Tinged with death in their uneasy sleep.
"Stand back, leave me alone, submerged people,
Go away. I haven't dispossessed anyone,
Haven't usurped anyone's bread.
No one died in my place. No one.
Go back into your mist.
It's not my fault if I live and breathe,
Eat, drink, sleep and put on clothes."

(The Survivor, Primo Levi 1986)

In this chapter I will describe how Quiché "war" widows were prevented from burying their murdered and abducted relatives. Clandestine burials deprived them of the body of the dead; abductions deprived them of the knowledge that a relative had actually died. They were deprived of a ritual during which private emotions are organized and orchestrated (cf. Hertz 1960), of mourning in the traditional manner which can be seen to have positive forgetting as one of its goals and of the rites of propitiation and that of passage to becoming a widow. These were elements above and beyond those described in previous chapters which left widows feeling separated from society and culture.

In order to understand the repercussions of the "unnatural" treatment of the person during *La Violencia*, one needs to contrast this "normal" circumstances. I shall therefore begin

with a reconstruction of the "normal"¹ course of events pertaining to death, including the funeral and the rituals performed on the Day of the Dead (*Dia de los Difuntos*). For the sake of simple exposition, my descriptions will be of a *Costumbrista* funeral as if these events follow an unchanging routine although they in fact, vary according to the deceased's status, the family's economic status and the emotional involvement of the living. I will also illustrate relevant beliefs about the dead, including "good" and "bad" deaths and the "after-life". I will then describe what happened in the case of "war" deaths and "the disappeared ones" (*desaparecidos*), the disruption of social means of dealing with death and the resulting disorientation and prolonged grief (*duelo/luto*).

In the previous chapter I described how, in private discourse, women unearthed unofficial truths which they feel were more akin to the reality they experienced. This chapter will end by discussing the importance of the un-burial of the physical body as another form of excavation of "truth", reincorporation into the social and release of grief.

1. **THE COSTUMBRISTA DEATH**

(a) **The "good" and "bad" death**

While the Quiché do not make a dichotomy between "good" and "bad" deaths in so many words, their exegesis reveals that they have some notion of the types of death which are safer, or more dangerous, to the living. The "good" death is one which occurs with warning, at home, enabling one to prepare for death with traditional ceremony and allowing the dying person sufficient time to settle their affairs and pay off outstanding debts.

A "bad" death occurs suddenly with little or no time to settle spiritual and temporal accounts; the Quiché believe that a person's spirit will not be free to enter the "after-life" if he dies without resolving matters. The concept refers to a human exit that is ill-timed and so fails to satisfy normal expectations associated with natural death (Metcalf 1982:254-7). "Bad" deaths are those which "most clearly demonstrate the absence of control" and which do not result in regeneration (Thomas 1975, in Bloch and Parry 1982:15). The death passes from human control and cannot therefore be reactivated as new life (ibid:15-18).

It is considered a terrible thing to die away from the home. Dying away from the village is regarded as especially "sad" and the dead or dying are brought back to the village for interment if at all possible.² If a hospital patient is thought to be dying, relatives will smuggle the person out so that s/he can die at home surrounded by family and neighbours. If unable to return to the home for the living to help it on its way to the after-world, the soul will be excluded from the after-world and be condemned to wander the earth as a lonely, malicious ghost haunting the living.

Accidental deaths, despite being ill-timed, are considered in a less negative light than a death which occurs through killing. Both, however, are thought to happen before the person's predestined hour of death. The disordering of time is also transcribed in the non-integration of death within the life cycle. The number of youthful dead and the absence of ritual preparation that accompanies sudden death, are central to the notion of "bad" death.

(b) **The Rituals of Death**

The burial ritual is said to facilitate the journey to the world of the dead. Dying well, like living well, is not a solitary activity: one needs people to help the spirit on its way to the "after-life". The good or bad fate of the deceased's soul is determined by the collective obsequies performed by others after a death rather than the deceased's own actions in life. It is in the survivors' interests to meet their obligations in ensuring that the disembodied spirits of the dead go to their place of repose without delay; restless spirits can bring misfortune to the living. The family is immediately responsible for the well-being of its deceased kinsfolk, who at some undetermined point become assimilated into the general category of ancestors³ to whom the entire community paid homage on the Day of the Dead (Farriss 1984:328). While such assimilation is still believed and spoken of, albeit vaguely, many people now believe or at least hope that the fate of the soul depends on the ancestors' judgement upon death.

When someone dies in Quiché, the news of the death is rapidly disseminated throughout the village and surrounding area. Traditionally, a member of each household has the right to be represented and, conversely, the obligation to attend and contribute (funerals appear to involve village households to a greater degree than ceremonies surrounding

marriage and birth). Nowadays, those attending are blood kin and immediate neighbours; society has become more complex and divided over the years and groupings have become based around kin and membership of political and religious groups.⁴ Close neighbours and authorities such as the village Mayor are routinely invited.⁵ Relatives with different religious affiliations, who would ordinarily be relatively distant from one another, rise above these differences at times of death: these rituals emphasize not only the importance of the house and generational continuity but also village harmony.

If the death was expected, then an aj q'ij will have performed *costumbre* over the sick person, beginning the ritual process. The burial of someone who dies at home takes place the following day. Both men and women share the task of caring for the body. Women wash the dead person's clothes; the head is washed and body clothed⁶ and placed in a coffin bought by surviving male kin. The coffin, which is made to size by the village's coffin maker, is brought to the house with its wood shavings still inside. It became apparent to me that these shavings should not be removed and when I asked why I was told "it is our custom" (*es costumbre*). The men bring the cloths (*pañelos*) to cover the face, light the candles which are left to burn at the body's head and feet (to signal its presence to the ancestors) and arrange flowers. Men collect wood and water and women prepare food.

A night vigil or wake (*velorio*) is held at the deceased's house. Men receive the guests who enter the darkened room where the covered corpse lays in its coffin. After praying over the body, visitors contribute a small amount of money on the metal plate resting on it. They then make conversation with relatives and friends already sitting around the room; women may go directly to join the party of women preparing food in another room or on the patio. Men serve *aguardiente* (rum, literally, burning water) or home brewed kuxa (bootleg rum), which is consumed without songs;⁷ women serve food and *atol* (a non-alcoholic corn beverage). Everyone usually stays awake all night. The atmosphere is usually one of restrained mourning with silent weeping; I saw little crying. Most people end up drunk, *para quitar sus tristezas* (in order to drown their sorrow). An aj q'ij calls upon the spirits of the dead and burns incense over the cadaver throughout the night.

Each visitor brings a token amount of food, such as sugar - not enough to serve a meal to the guests. Generally, food is provided in abundance in the name of the dead person

by his/her relatives; if food is not available, then the ritual will be curtailed. For example, when two people from the same family died on consecutive days, the second corpse was buried without a vigil in order to avoid having to give a second meal to visitors.

During the vigil, people "spend the whole [time] talking about the dead person, about his life, remembering him" (Burgos-Debray and Menchú 1984:202). They construct a narrative about his life and also his death, which helps mourners to integrate the crisis of the person's death into their lives. Family and friends might make comments such as "he encountered a good life here on earth and surely he returns happily". They also "remember", "with sadness," the dead person's distress and failures, expressed in remarks such as "he suffered much in his life and surely he will have returned⁸ sobbing". When someone dies through an accident or homicide, other relatives might talk about similar occurrences. Guests also chat and gossip about other matters.

On the day following the wake, the deceased's mother (or another close relative) advises the elder appointed to care for the body, which clothes the dead person should wear on the journey to the "other world". Wearing appropriate clothing puts one in the form of the ancestors (ka nimal, old person). It is critical that the correct clothes are worn to the grave because without the proper attire, one is said to wander about in the spirit realm void of any form. Other items which are sent include food and the "big plates" on which the person ate daily, which are said to assist the ancestor in determining where a person comes from. Money is also sent, because "the dead may have to buy something upon arrival". Men are buried with their knife and shears; women with their best *huipiles* (traditional woven smock tops), necklaces and comb; and children with their (minimal) toys. Such accoutrements are said to aid the ancestors in assessing what the person did during their life. If the family can afford it, the corpse should have a good pair of new shoes as they "may have to walk far". However, most children go barefoot while alive and they go barefoot to the "world of the dead". A candle is placed in the corpse's right hand to light the way into the "after-world". Finally, a crown and bracelet of flower petals are placed on the corpse's head and wrist so that they will be recognized as newcomers.

It appears that Quiché people are comfortable about the bodies and possessions of the dead; they are able to view and touch them with little or no sign of disgust or fear and seem

neither to be in any hurry to get rid of them nor to want to keep them beyond the time that tradition specifies they should hold onto them.

Once the grave diggers (male kin and friends) finish digging the grave and return from the *campo santo* (cemetery),⁹ every one is served a meal. The coffin¹⁰ is then brought into the courtyard and the top is temporarily nailed shut for the journey to the cemetery. The relatives gouge a little hole in it so that the spirit can escape from the dead body during the burial.

The departure of the coffin for the *campo santo* (cemetery) is signalled to mourners inside the house by people standing in the doorway. Sometimes dramatic scenes occur at this point. At one child's funeral, a sick child inside the house was said to begin to die and the women flew into a flurry of activity to rescue him. They explained that "wind" had entered his heart because of his "sadness" on his sibling's departure. However, I suspect that whilst the child was indeed critically ill, this activity was an expression of the women's panic: it diverted their attention from the pain of separation as the coffin left the house. Relatives' distress is also indicated by the fact that certain relatives will not join the funeral procession to the graveyard because they would not be able to "tolerate it" (*aguantarlo*). For example, the mother of a dead child would remain in the house in the company of others.

While the family mourns the loss of dead kin, they also fear that their spirit will remain in the house to haunt them. Therefore, when the coffin leaves the house, the elder who presided over the body beats the floor and all the corners of every room of the house, the courtyard and the pathway to ensure that the spirit does not linger. Attempts are also made to ensure that the spirit cannot find its way back to the house by rotating the coffin several times in front of the church so "the soul loses its way".

The coffin is lowered into a deep grave which has been dug to a specified depth next to other members of the patrilineage (a widow is always buried near her husband). After placing the last items in the coffin, a bottle of drink (usually coca cola) is opened and put in with the rest before the lid is finally nailed firmly shut. Everyone then contributes to the burial by throwing a fistful of dirt onto the coffin. Men take it in turn to shovel the rest of the earth and other bones and belongings from previous burials. These items are passed

around among those in attendance, inspected, and joked and speculated upon. This stage of the funeral appears to evoke the most laughing and joking although none of it really appears sombre.

When the interment is over, the aj q'ij invokes the dead person's ancestors to tell them that their "child" is coming from this world; he beseeches them to receive its spirit. Meanwhile, relatives and friends remain kneeling until the praying has finished.¹¹ After the burial, many return to the deceased's home and proceed to get very drunk. Eventually, when they are sober enough to walk, the guests make their way home.

The separation of the soul (*alma*) from the body does not take place until the nine day ritual (the *novenario*) is completed (García 1987). During this ritual, people pray rosaries, family and friends continue to visit the house and church to pray and burn candles, particularly on the first day. This is a liminal period when the soul is an undesirable member of the household (ibid:17) having returned to the house at some ill definable point. On the last night, a *petate* (straw mat) is laid, exactly where the person died, for the spirit to sleep on before departing again for the "world of the dead".

This last phase of the funeral is intended to ensure that the spirit does not remain in the house; if it is not performed, then separation from the family is impossible and the spirit will stay and frighten those living in it, appearing in their dreams and so on. However, there is no reassurance that it will not remain (ibid:19). During this phase of the funeral people promise the dead that they will not remember, or cry over, them any longer because it is said that if they do, then the life of the dead in the "after-life" will be painful.

Finally, after nine days (in the case of an adult) or three days (for a child) a small procession, like that of the funeral, goes again to the cemetery to place an uninscribed wooden cross at the head of the burial mound. García (1987:20) writes that the spirit leaves for the cemetery with the cross, although I could not ascertain whether or not the Quiché make this separation. The raising of the cross¹² marks the place of the dead and the end of the funeral.

What was most striking about the funerals I attended was the calmness which enveloped these occasions and the silent weeping. There was little uninhibited expression of grief other than that facilitated by alcohol, when intense grief may be displayed as, for example, at a Catholic funeral for a 22 year old man. The singing of hymns by young men and women alternated with crying and, when the procession left with the coffin for the graveyard, the dead man's mother clung to the coffin and wailed as it was torn away from her.

Although the Quiché generally attempt to avoid experiencing and expressing intense emotions,¹³ wailing and crying are encouraged at funerals because the expression of grief is thought to be beneficial to the bereaved.¹⁴ However, a balance must be reached: a person who does not cry may be susceptible to illness, yet excessive crying is thought to have an injurious effect on one's health and a pernicious effect on the dead (it seems that funeral celebrations are designed to aid the quelling of the dead person's grief at separation from living family members). Drinking alcohol is said to help them to bear (*aguantar*) their grief and to give vent (*deshogar*) to their feelings in a cathartic manner.

Although sorrow may be displayed, the pain of separation seems to be expressed more openly at marriages. At one wedding, the befuddled mother of the bride displayed intense grief, emitting heart rendering sobs; she flung herself against the door from which her daughter and the marriage procession departed for the groom's parents' house. It may be culturally prescribed to show more open grief at the departure of a daughter than the departure of the dead. I was rather surprised to see women crying upon my departure and I assumed that, having spoken a considerable amount about their lost kin, my departure symbolized the re-departure of these apparently unmourned men. This, rather than subsequent funerals which were harder to manage, may have provoked the melting of their frozen grief.

Death rituals operate on different levels: for the village of Emol, death and burial rituals reconcile the separation (and competition) of individual households in other aspects of their daily life. A proper death achieves or maintains kin and other group solidarity. The ritual itself shows the importance of village representation, with several households participating in the loss of a neighbour. On a material level (discussion of which extends beyond the scope of this thesis), there is concern about land inheritance arrangements. The

funeral ritual also provides a mechanism for the expression of grief, not only over the loss of the dead but also for the destruction of a way of life. This can be integrated through constructing a narrative about life and death at the funeral, and the memory of the dead finds a comfortable place in the mourners' lives. In the "private" realm, the body is central to this process. The bereaved speak about the dead and weep over, and in the vicinity of, the body; the elders and kin prepare the body; the aj q'ij carries out rituals around the body. Yet, in the "private" realm death also has a social, religious and political dimension which serves to structure features of human existence other than the physical. The grave itself is also marker, a site where the memory of the lost person converges. For the individual the preoccupation is salvation in the sense of safety (freedom from torment and loneliness as a wandering soul) for without an appropriate interment the living will be bothered by the dead.

All Saints Day (pac q'ij)

While immediate mourning may be brought to a close after nine days, the deceased is still close to the world of the living. The central moment of separation comes in the annual celebration of the feast of *Dia de los difuntos* (All Saints, 1 November), when the *ánimas* (spirits) - including those of all the saints - are said to return to their ancestral place. The merger between the Catholic concept of restless souls in purgatory and Maya notions of the after-life is revealed in the observance of this day when prayers are offered for souls in purgatory. All Saints marks the transition from celebrating the individual spirit (which is welcomed and fed in the house) to a more collective ritual (in the graveyard). People converge from different wards (*cantones*) to pray on the graves in the village cemetery, where souls descend from heaven.

Every household prepares the room containing the family altar to receive their dead ancestors. The path leading to the room is decorated with pine needles; an arch made of yellow flowers "of the dead" marks its entrance. Inside, the family prepares seating arrangements for the dead: chairs for men and a *petate* on the floor for women. They also leave a bowl of water so that the dead may wash their hands before consuming a meal of special *tortillas* made from the first corn of the year (aj wa)¹⁵ and vegetables (pumpkin and *guiskil*) grown in the family garden (the women have spent the day cooling). Plentiful *aguardiente* is an important element of the offering laid out for each of the expected dead.

Candles are lit so that the spirits can see the house; the aj q'ij is called to the house to make an offering to facilitate the spirits' visit. On their way to the house, the dead are said to visit the saint housed in the village church.

In the evening the family goes to the cemetery to clean and decorate the graves. They weed and re-pile the earth mound, re-paint crosses and sprinkle pine leaves and marigold flowers over and around the grave. The men spend the night watching over the grave where, on the following day, the family and the dead share a meal and copious alcohol; the ancestors consume the moral sentiment of the offering, not the food. It is a time when the Quiché celebrate that their dead have returned and are with them momentarily to share the products of their home. *Costumbrista* families will ask an aj q'ij to visit the grave to evoke the spirit of the dead so that it can be offered gifts. Unlike other days when candles are lit as a form of penance, today candles are for gift giving. People who can afford it pay for brass bands to serenade the dead. Celebrations are more obvious in the town than in the poorer villages; gatherings at cemeteries are more like parties.

As recently as fifty years ago, institutionalized interaction between the living and the dead took place daily; all *Costumbristas* burnt incense and prayed in their houses at the family shrine. Now only aj q'ijs and some elders continue to maintain such close contact with the dead. Nevertheless, all Indians (other than Protestants) still communicate with the dead on the Day of the Dead; the emphasis, however, is on appeasing the spirits' malevolent aspects.

The fate of the soul and the afterlife

The Quiché generally appeared diffident when speaking about the spirit's transition from the dead person to the "world of the dead" (*mando/mundt*) although this can only be achieved through the *novenario* conducted by the living.

Responses to my enquiries about what "life" after death is like varied according to people's role in life, religion, education and so on.¹⁶ *Costumbristas*, especially aj q'ijs, had the most elaborate concept of the "after-life" but it was still rather vague. One told me:

We know a bit about what goes on in the other world from those people who die for twenty minutes or half an hour and then when they are resuscitated, they return.¹⁷

Aj q'ijs told me that there are many *mundos* situated "above and below", north and south, east and west as well as in their houses. All of these, including specific sites with precise names, are addressed in aj q'ijs' prayers and offerings. The dead are thought to enter *los mundos* through the *puerta* (door) and *ventana* (window), which are sacred caves at high points on the landscape. One aj q'ij told me:

We are only able to see outside the windows but not inside their world but we know that the ancestors live inside.¹⁸ We know that they are not dead for they are talking and living over there. We are able to call them and we know that their spirits come to the edge of the *mundos* but we are unable to see them.

Sacred "holes", sites or umbilicus where offerings are made to the ancestors are called r'c'u'x (c'u'x means heart¹⁹ or essence). The Spanish term for these, and sacred mountain tops and plains, is *mundo*; its Quiché variation is *mundt*, which Bunzel suggests means "heart of the skies" (1952:264).²⁰ When used by aj q'ijs, the term seemed also to refer to the ancestors.

Some people had a rather idealized image of the "other life", such as "a garden which grows well". Some had a more negative image, as a place where:

You must work hard, even the oldest of people, even the original Mayas, because the *corporal* [overseer] orders you to.

When I asked an aj q'ij for more details of the type of work people performed in the afterlife - do they plant *milpa* (corn fields), he replied:

Who knows what they do... (joking) when you die you had better take a bit of *milpa* (corn field)!

Despite some apparent gaps in Quiché concepts of the "other world", I think it is true to say it is generally believed that the "after life" is a replication of their own world. This also applies to the temporality of events. An aj q'ij said:

I have been told that if one builds a house here then they build one there at the same time.

There are symmetries between the living and the dead, who are even dogged by human-like emotions. Ancestors experience pain, anger, greed and sadness but can also reciprocate human generosity - normally only after their descendants have made copious offerings. Ancestors who have not been properly expelled are said to be most vulnerable and least able to transcend human frailties, remaining susceptible to the actions of the living and loneliness as they wander around in space having been refused entrance into the "world of the dead".

Through consultation with a diviner, a person may discover that, for example, their ancestors are being beaten by the "*corporal* in the sky" because of their own tears. Similarly, the living may discover that their present life is being affected by their ancestor's present "life" in the "other world" or past life in this world. Surviving relatives of assassinated men not only inherit material property and debts but also moral assets and debts. While a son will be the most likely to inherit his father's lands, it seemed to me that it is the widow who is most likely to inherit her husband's moral debts. Relatives of the "war" dead now bear a heavy burden because their dead kin had no time to resolve their affairs before death.

It is said that the dead need the living to "liberate them from jail". Requests by the dead were explained as follows:

Some of them are in pain because they are incarcerated in the other world. This is why they solicit help from their children and grandchildren who are here on their land with their animals. They send messages asking for their help via illnesses or dreams. And the recipient of the message then goes to the aj q'ij to discover its meaning.

Indecorous behaviour on the part of the living may cause problems for the dead. One woman who communicated with her husband's spirit said he complained that every time she cried, he got into trouble with the *corporal* in the "other-world". Ancestors may also be locked up because their own problems (such as marital disharmony) were unresolved before death.

Whatever the cause for their unhappiness, ancestors make problems for the living who remain in the family home. An aj q'ij explained that the living can "cure" problems such as sickness, crop failure and disputes by making offerings; only in this way would the dead leave the living in peace.

The dead may also "help" the living, most importantly by leaving them alone or at least by not judging them too harshly: an ancestor may decide to call the guilty to the "after-life"²¹ for serious sins such as acting "without respect" (*sin respeto*), abuse of women, adultery and feeling too much hatred. Serious, repeated sins can also result in the death of the guilty party's offspring; the child becomes the scapegoat and a substitute for the sinner.

The living need to continually assure the dead that they have not been "forgotten" otherwise various disasters such as death, crop destruction, the occasional earthquake and war may arise (see chapter 9). This does not imply a literal forgetting but the moral sentiment of not forgetting the ways of the ancestors. Descendants should maintain the same moral codes of conduct; they should also lavish appreciation and abundant offerings upon the ancestors. It is not that they should literally be remembered because, in fact, the Quiché people do not easily forget their dead.

LA VIOLENCIA

Burials during *La Violencia*

Sometimes dazed villagers were left to bury their dead in a mass grave which facilitated their "forgetting". *Bomberos voluntarios* (voluntary firemen, an organization especially set up to deal with the volume of corpses) were called to collect bodies from the *municipio* to the departmental capital morgue.²² One ex-fireman said when he arrived at the scene of the massacre, not a villager was in sight. Only officials oversaw the removal of the bodies from the village; relatives were not usually permitted to see the dead after massacres because the murderers feared that they would report the graves as proof of the killings. After the massacre in Emol, bystanders were locked in the local church until the bodies were disposed of.

Holding proper burials for people killed by the military (or the *jefes*) exposed relatives and friends to accusations of subversion especially if they buried their relatives face downwards as is the custom for those who die a violent death. This is done to prevent the malicious spirit from calling the relatives and friends to join them when they return to the spot where the violent death took place. In the light of this the necessity to bury those who were killed is seen as all the more important. However, this previously rare form of burial brings gossip and rumour, drawing attention to the survivors. Relatives have to face dangers from both the *jefes* and the spirits: burying the body the wrong way up brings dangers from the spirits yet burying them face down brings dangers from the *jefes*.

Mainly for security reasons, any interment following a political (or even a non-political) assassination was generally rushed and reduced in size and complexity. People were afraid to host large gatherings at their houses for fear of being accused of holding a subversive meeting. Villagers stopped attending funerals in other villages because passage between them also came to be viewed as seditious. Political killings (and abductions) also spread fear: to have a political death or "disappeared one" in the family was like admitting to a contagious disease. Both were kept hidden and never mentioned (although this of course is easier in the case of abduction).

People became accustomed to "burying the dead from one moment to the other" for fear of being caught by the military. Two widows recount their experiences:

My child died in the afternoon and my husband prepared a little coffin for her. We still managed to hold a night vigil but we were terrified for the army were living in the village. The following day, we rushed to the cemetery, where we "left her" without detaining ourselves.

My mother died "under the mountains" and we buried her the next day. We didn't carry out a night [vigil] in the house because we were in hiding but we managed to hold one under the *champitas* (make-shift shelters). We did it like this in order to hide from the army. The problem was that while we were making the coffin someone shouted that the soldiers were coming and everyone ran for their lives. Once the soldiers withdrew we buried her but without a coffin because we couldn't wait for them to finish making it.

When the first few people were killed in the village, their families attempted to perform appropriate burials. *La Violencia* had not escalated, so conditions were safer; people had not yet fled the village and few had been kidnapped. In fact, more households than usual were represented at these funerals, reflecting the solidarity which grew at the beginning of *La Violencia*. One villager told me how the entire population of the village attended the first burial, regardless of religious or even political affiliation. There was still some semblance of social organization which was threatened by such an atrocious and "bad" death. Everyone was deeply shocked and frightened, but it seems that each subsequent death became less "bad" as, with time, such atrocities came to be expected and "normal". The meaning of what constitutes a "bad" death shifts in a changing context.

The size of gatherings became smaller with each subsequent death as fear grew and the situation in the village became more chaotic. The village's political structure collapsed. Many people left their homes either voluntarily (through flight) or involuntarily (assassination or abduction). Consequently, village solidarity diminished, terror increased and funerals were performed with whoever was around and brave enough to attend.

Funeral groups were kept small to avoid being accused by the army and its collaborators of "organizing" (carrying out seditious activities); only a few people stayed to perform vigils. Necessities such as coffins, incense and food for guests could not be obtained or afforded; aj q'ijs were not available to perform *costumbre*. Because of financial and time restraints, if more than one member of the family was killed simultaneously then coffins, if used, were often shared.

The sheer frequency of death meant that people became desensitized to its potency; with time one atrocity tended to merge all too easily with the next. It can be said that the community during the course of the *La Violencia* was socialized to the repeated occurrence of abrupt violent death.

Among families who had not performed any interments were those who claimed that they did not know the whereabouts of their missing kin or their remains. Many simply did not know; some appeared not to want to know; others had heard that their kin were dead and buried elsewhere. This denial arose not only because of the risks involved through kinship

with the dead and disappeared but also because of people's fears about the imagined state of the remains, whether buried or not. Death is more disturbing when recovered bodies show signs of torture such as missing limbs or genitals. Bodies with objects driven into their orifices were seen to be very dangerous: the *áima* leaves the body through the mouth and objects blocking its path are seen to interfere with this process. *Doña Flora* revealed her disgust when she told me,

It was horrific, they just lay rotting on the earth...or in rivers...and if they were buried clandestinely it was without even a *petate*, in shallow graves.

In conversation with *doña Flora*, *doña Eugenia* spoke of the death and burial of her daughter-in-law's father. She refers to the violation of place,²³ while *doña Flora* expresses her concern over the state of the bodies:

Doña Eugenia:

Among the worse things was the place where they buried him. It was in a *sq'ulbal* (a place of cultivation) and now its a clandestine cemetery. This is really terrible. Now it's wild with only weeds growing there.

Doña Flora:

Yes, that they "did it" in this place is absolutely dreadful...Jesus! if you go there now all you see that little by little they are being excavated and you can see their bones and lots and lots of hair. AEEEH! Its the hair of these "poor people" who remained there without a proper burial.

La Violencia affected time and order. Men died "before their time", that is, before the time laid down by destiny. Women experienced the death of their husbands before them as being the wrong order of events. One woman told me, "if he had not been killed then I would have died before him".

The Quiché normally attempt to remain together before, during, and after death. During *La Violencia*, people were often buried (if they were buried at all) away from their homes. Many people told me how they attempted to collect all the members of their family together under one roof because they thought that "if we have to die then we should die together in the same place".

These violations of the usual treatment of the dead were profoundly disturbing to the Quiché although there is no consistent opinion about their meaning. Some people told me that because of the war conditions of *La Violencia*, there were no detrimental consequences to practising delayed, rushed or abbreviated funerals at an unappointed time without suitable materials or rites. It appears that what mattered was the willingness to perform the rites;²⁴ no rites at all was more problematic than abbreviated rites because this depicted the lack of the important element of moral sentiment. Other people indicated that not burying kin meant their souls were not sent to the divinities of the dead but became restless and vengeful spirits, dangerous to the present; traditional Quiché beliefs have always stressed the existence of *ánimas*, particularly those of victims who have met unexpected deaths and are therefore unable to go onto the after-world or to continue to inhabit this one. People indicated that the unburied or improperly buried dead affected their every day movements. *Doña Josefina* attributed the numerous deaths resulting from the 1990 measles epidemic to all the unburied dead.

The unsettled and suffering spirits pace the crevices where their bodies are buried; people avoid these places which are seen as dangerous spaces where further fatal accidents occur with a frequency heretofore unknown. This is said to be related to encounters which take place there between the living and "spirit beings". One woman told me that people are more afraid than ever to go out at night, not only because of the patrolling *jefes* but also because of the numerous wandering spirits. Here it can be understood that the spirits which appear at the place a person died establish a synchronized continuity of defiled space that collapses diachronic difference.

Through the voice of a medium, not the voice of a grieving spirit or ghost, people were told that their tremendous suffering was brought about by the abandonment of the dead. One woman who consulted an *aj q'ij* was told that her physical pain was caused by her neglect of the dead: her father had "grief in his heart" because he was not "remembered" by her which, together with the "wrong" done to him, made him a vengeful and aggrieved spirit. It was recognized that because he had been left unburied, his spirit would come back; only through offerings and, less commonly, sacrifice, could she relate to him and show him that she did know and recognize him, thus appeasing him but not ridding herself of his tormented

presence. Such messages can be seen as projections of the feelings and experiences of the bereaved, for whom the "certainty of death" has not been established.

Without any ritual to expel death from the village, restless and unhappy spirits are inclined to "bother" the living, particularly their loved ones, through dreams. Several women told me of dreams in which their husbands, sons and/or fathers were present, sometimes crying. Recurrent dreams of the deceased, so much a part of grief work, take on a particular meaning to the Quiché. The men's presence in their dreams indicated to women that their souls were wandering and/or tormented because they had not been allowed entry into the "other-world". The deceased indicates that he is sad or lonely and encourages the relative to carry out protective ceremonies to make themselves less vulnerable to being taken to the "after-life". A woman told me that dreaming of the dead prevented her from sleeping peacefully:

I'm unable to sleep when I go to bed. Then when I finally fall asleep I feel that the bad spirits are disturbing me. These are the people who had been killed during "that time"...Who knows if my father and brother are among them. They come because they are unhappy and lonely.²⁵ They never visit in a pleasant way but are always very bothersome. Because of this I have suffered from *susto*...This fear *pasa una vez y no sale* (never leaves)...

When women question the whereabouts of their dead male kin, they not only question the location of their physical bodies but also of their spirits: it was important for them to know if the spirit had been permitted to enter the after world. Most women had some sense of the Catholic idea of heaven and hell and, through consultation with an aj q'ij, they were able to ascertain whether the "judges" in the after life considered their kin to be someone "who spoke the truth" or a "sinner".

Hertz writes that society is "stricken in the very principle of its life" ([1907] 1960:78) at the time of death. Death ritual can encapsulate those very 'principles' or beliefs and values which are most under threat at this time. The particular way in which the boundary between life and death is managed can therefore be seen as a critical means of fostering a sense of cultural continuity in the face of the loss of society's individual members. It is in the "private" realm that the soul and the social *persona* of the deceased are structured and it is

here that the social consequences of death are organized. But whilst the private world of the bereaved gives emphasis to the non-material features of social being, it is also true to say that the material presence of the corpse frequently provides a unique occasion on which social, religious and political practice can be effectively synchronized so as to refresh and rejuvenate the communal and cultural worlds of the living. Kin relationships, religious beliefs and ritual, political interests and sentiments themselves are almost always reawakened and handled in the presence of death, and nowhere more explicitly than in the funeral practices of the "political dead". Also the division of labour in the roles played by men and women in the work of mourning during normal deaths stretches into the field of political death and makes women special interlocutors between the world of kinship and politics. But what is significant about the funerals for the "political dead" in Guatemala is that they are often prevented from happening at all. In cases of abduction, the aspects of everyday life are not managed at all for the body is appropriated.

The culture of violence has produced what can be seen as a new classification of the dead. If death was confirmed and a body produced, it was often anonymous, mutilated beyond recognition. This in turn structured perceptions of, and responses to, the dead. Classification of the cause of verified deaths was also determined. Through a deletion of human agency, accepted by survivors who feared further deaths, the deaths were garbed in a false cloak of naturalness.

Every death raises the issue of the obligations of the living toward the dead. These obligations can be expressed at the level of ritual, in a well-articulated manner, while at the psychological level the work of mourning allows the living to be sufficiently disengaged from the dead, enabling them to resume the business of life. All the themes of mourning - the loss of a loved object, the desire to regain it, the guilt and the fear - are encountered in the case of violent death in a glaring manner. The question of the obligation of the living toward the dead takes on a new meaning in the context of violent deaths. Due to the complex nature of the events that occurred in this particular case, *doña* Josefina could only frame her obligations to the dead in terms of her response to their call. And it seemed invariable that the heterogeneity of the dead - the difference between the death of a husband and the son and the father - was transformed into a homogeneous community of the dead.

La Violencia and the Day of the Dead

During *La Violencia*, many Catholics and *Costumbristas* converted to protestantism, which does not advocate the performance of rituals for the Day of the Dead. Change in ritual practice has also taken place among non-converted Catholic and *Costumbristas* because of the nature of the deaths during *La Violencia*: families cannot be sure that relatives who met untimely deaths and were not buried "correctly" will return on this day. Even if the spirits do return, they are thought to return to the family house and not the cemetery because, obviously, they are not buried there: such a spirit can rejoin its family but not the rest of the community in the village graveyard.

Doña Josefina made offerings in the local cemetery for her grandmother and child, who died of natural causes and were given a proper burial, but waited in her house for the arrival of the spirits of her murdered husband and abducted mother; after eight years, she was still uncertain of her mother's fate but put out food and *aguardiente* for her in case she was among the dead visitors.²⁶ She said their spirits spent the night in her house and then, because they had not been helped on their way to the afterlife with a proper funeral, proceeded to wander around again whereas her other relatives' spirits returned to their graves in the village cemetery.

The uncertainty of a spirit's return is increased in the case of the "disappeared" whose status is unknown. *Doña Candelaria*, a fairly punctilious Catholic, told me that she had stopped celebrating All Saints Day following the abduction of her husband who she believed had been assassinated. She gave no reason for this although I conjecture that the formal ritual for one dead person reminds her that for her husband and other "war" dead there is no grave or mourning ritual. By not visiting the cemetery on the Day of the Dead, she avoided facing the additional loss of not being able to celebrate the return of the spirits. She thus relinquished this cyclical ritual which forges links between the living and the dead: his abduction was from a different time and a different world.

Cemeteries can be seen as mnemonic devices and *doña Candelaria* preferred to try and forget her family's ordeal. She had no altar table in her house; she said all her photographs of her husband had been taken by the *jefes* so that *brujería* (witchcraft) could be performed

to facilitate her husband's abduction and death. Without such representational objects, into which memories and thoughts about the dead are projected, memories are, perhaps, more fragmented than usual.

THE "DISAPPEARED"

The psychological repercussions of the unburied or missing corpse

I have been unable to locate any anthropological literature about instances in which people are forced to give up their mortuary ritual practices. Moitoza (in Bolton and Camp 1986-1987) found that Portuguese widows who gave up their grief rituals are unsuccessful in their attempts to grieve, resulting in considerable depression and unresolved guilt. Guatemalan widows' feelings of guilt seemed to intensify over the years not only because of the impossibility of performing funerary rituals but because their position own in the social structure impeded their grief in other ways.

There is considerable variation in Quiché people's response to loss. Some appeared stoical and could stare death in the face; others were more emotional and feared that they would be unable to bear facing the improper state in which the dead now lay. Sometimes the Quiché admitted "I can't tolerate the loss of his death" (ncu k'et ranma' la u cämnak). I was told many times that death or madness resulted from intolerable loss. *Doña Candelaria* told me:

A woman I know lost her reason [mind] during this time. Now she just wanders to and fro and does not think.

This, of course, could well have happened but *doña Candelaria*'s relation of the incident may be a projection of her own feelings. I saw very few women who had lost touch with reality.

Grief reactions are also modified by the Quiché cultural idiom for communicating distress. One mode is what is called *el ataque*, a label given to "behaviours" ranging from epileptic type ones to more subtle sensations like the "throat becoming thirsty" (a desire to drink liquor). Regular drinking to escape grief and other suffering was fairly common among

women, despite the fact that it was condemned by Catholics and (especially) Protestants. *Doña Flora* had remained inebriated for a year after her husband's abduction in order to *quitar la tristeza* (take away the sadness). She was ashamed of this and criticized acquaintances who continued to drink for a longer period than she did. I saw several other women who previously had only drunk alcohol on ritual occasions, regularly get so drunk on market days that they collapsed in a stupor on the street.

✓ Women reported that they felt "dirty"²⁷ since *La Violencia*; they were concerned to present themselves well but also showed preoccupation with literally being dirty. Some women who were unable to bury their dead describe themselves as "cemeteries" (cf. Sternbach 1991), as embodying the pollution of the dead bodies. This sentiment was the one most likely to increase with time. The extra anomalousness of the unburied and unmourned "war" dead, compared to the ordinary dead, probably has some bearing on this. Mary Douglas (1966) argues that death is polluting because a corpse, being between distinct classificatory boundaries, is anomalous and hence dangerous or polluting. In this case, the widow, deprived of a funeral and hence the cultural mechanism for mobilizing the expression of grief, has remained with the sensation of pollution and also danger.

✓ Mourning was made difficult not only because funerary ritual could not be performed or the Day of the Dead celebrated but also because survivors could not openly admit to the fact that they had incurred losses: death was denied. Emotions were not articulated and given form over the body and, subsequently, it was difficult to bring out emotions and thus concretize them. Emotional outpourings were mostly confined to hidden spaces, except for the occasional outburst when inebriated when the authorities could attribute the act to the person's altered and unreasonable state.

The lack of funerary ritual was of particular significance to Emolian widows: it provides their only culturally approved opportunity for expressing their grief. Traditionally, when arranged marriages were a matter of course, a young widow's kin expected her to remarry immediately (post *La Violencia*, many young women did just that, to avoid being labelled "wife of the guerrilla"). Elders expected her behavior as if the conjugal relation had been erased; it is almost as if the death of a husband was denied.

Women told me that they felt as though they had "no life force" (*fuerza*) which they referred to as having weak (*debil*) or insufficient (*falta*) blood. The emphasis on "sadness" or loneliness relates to their own loss and may indicate women's perception of their "weak" position in society (emphasized during *La Violencia*) as they realized they had no access to interpretations of events or the possibility to act, which might have saved them. It may also relate to a woman's broken personhood and sense of weakness in the form of helplessness.²⁸

Perhaps it was a disguised blessing that the widow had to direct her immediate attention to reorganizing her family in order for it to survive, often functioning as household head. On another level, women's general ability to establish strong connections with the living also helped them to sever their bonds with the dead. The "disappeared ones" were, however, more problematic. Women sometimes admitted their desperation and one woman confessed that she wished to die, despite the fact that such desires are considered sinful.

Women's ideological commitment was important to the way in which they coped with their losses and resultant troubles they encountered. If women had led their male kin to become involved and they were killed as a result, then, of course, their guilt was greater; however, their losses were easier to bear if they thought involvement in a good cause had led to the deaths. Although a good political cause may not have been their source of justification, a religious one was.

Uncertainty about "the disappeared ones"

...the continuity of life cannot be re-established until the nature of the disruption has been made clear. The loss must be insisted upon, otherwise the value of the lost relationship may seem disparaged, threatening all such relationships which still survive; but it also must be made good, and the bereaved must be led to re-establish themselves within society...for while the dead must be dismissed, the values they represented in all their relationships must be preserved.

(Marris 1975:34-35)

Families of the disappeared came to believe that rumours concerning the abduction of their relative(s) would mean their own death. They often did not search for their abducted kin because they were too afraid to do so. Woman generally did nothing to recover the bodies

of sons, husbands or fathers, even when they knew them to be dead. The common response to my enquiries about this was "*que hacemos?*" (what could we do).²⁹ *Doña Flora* had no "*ideas*" when her husband was abducted and, as her brother advised her to do nothing, she did nothing. The manner of some women's response to my questions about the disappeared indicated that they felt guilty, not only because they did not look for the "disappeared" but that they could neither send them on their way (to the after-life) nor bring them back.

Although women had a somewhat standard response of paralysis arising more from a fairly universal reaction to terror than culturally prescribed rules (owing to the largely unprecedeted state of affairs), a few unusually brave and determined women went in search of their kin. Women accompanied each other even to army barracks and hospital morgues, threats from soldiers, *jefes* and military commissioners notwithstanding. Their descriptions evoke a picture of desperation: combing fields, visiting morgues full of mutilated bodies. Many gave up the search because of their "responsibilities towards their children", implying that they realized the dangers of probing "matters". Equally important was the fact that, ultimately, culture determined their behaviour even (or more so) in this moment of crisis.³⁰ Other families who did nothing at the time of abduction searched for their kin when *La Violencia* abated. One woman explained:

After *La Violencia* we went to look for him where he used to work. The other workers told us that after a year he went elsewhere to look for new employment but some neighbours say that he was taken away in a helicopter.

Doña Lydia, who had lived with her husband in the capital during *La Violencia*, was stupefied with shock for three days following his abduction from his street stall. Then, while still in a state of shock, she took over his *fantasia* (knick-knacks) stall because only by doing this could her children eat. She never searched for him; she didn't know where to go and was too afraid to ask. However, *campesinos* who shared her rented room told her that he had been taken away in a car. She eventually returned to the village to wait for him; when he had not returned after three years, she finally entertained the thought that he may be dead and decided to celebrate a mass for him. With resignation, she told me:

I think that my husband will never return now ...we don't know if he is dead or alive...only God knows...I am sure that he died as I heard

that when they took him away they threw him into a car and *lo aplastaron* (squashed him) with the knees of the *judiciales* (this can mean any section of the security forces who carry out abductions and killings)...he must be dead as they *lo dobraron* (they folded him in half) and tortured him...Who can withstand such torture? Because of this we say he must be dead. And who knows where they left him...At first I thought that he would come back, then one year passed, then two years and they still told me that he would come. I thought that he would come after two to three years but now I think that the *judiciales* killed him as they were mixed up in *La Violencia*.³¹ Now six years have passed and I think it unlikely that he will return.

Although *doña* Lydia had some evidence that her husband was kidnapped, it was still very hard psychologically to mourn without a corpse.³² Death in the abstract can never be as convincing as the body of the dead kin. Where death is witnessed, it becomes a personal reality. An unwitnessed abduction is more complicated still: there is the loss of the body as an object to be mourned. There is a situation of uncertainty: relatives may even have wondered if the missing person decided to leave of their own volition; a wife may have thought that her husband had joined the guerrilla or eloped with another woman. One woman, whose husband was kidnapped, commented:

I would say that they killed him...or perhaps he lives with the military.
I do not know exactly...he could be alive or dead...

The more time passed, the more likely the missing person was to be presumed dead although this progression to certainty was never steady or final: what women thought fluctuated from moment to moment. A woman told me:

Now it has been seven years since they took him away...I think he must be dead...

While on another occasion she said:

My son died in 1983...I mean I don't know if he died but he has not returned since then. When *La Violencia* came he was no longer able to make visits here to his house from his place of work. Since his father was unable to communicate with him so we don't know if he was killed or kidnapped. But we think that he's dead because we went to look for him and couldn't find him and never saw or heard of him again...I simply don't know what happened to him...

Another woman expressed her uncertainty:

Only God knows if my husband lives in the military base or if they were *ejercitando* [this means practising but she uses the word here to mean assassinated, from *el ejercito* (the army)] him...or if he still lives...if he is alive what could they be doing with him?...What I want to know is if he will ever return from the base or not!

Women's belief that their men were dead was sometimes reflected in their beliefs about the form in which the men now existed. One woman told me:

My husband presented himself in my dream and told me he was dead. He also told me who killed him and where he was buried.

She never actually verified whether or not her husband was buried in the place indicated in her dreams but rumours from independent sources suggested that there was a clandestine cemetery there. More typically, women understood that their kin were dead merely from the presence of their spirits in dreams which were interpreted by an aj mes consulted to ascertain the dead's whereabouts:

After a month I went to the aj q'ij to try and find out if my son was alive. The aj q'ij said that he was alive and that he would return. But I was not sure if what he told me was true, I thought only God knows...I thought that the aj q'ij really does know because he is *sabio* (a wise man) and he gets *señas* (signs)...After a week I went back to the aj q'ij who again told me that my husband would return...so I waited...After one month to the day after my husband was "taken" I dreamt that God spoke to him...then I thought that he must be dead...but I still waited...

Other women came to the conclusion that their disappeared male kin were dead by retrospectively reviewing "signs" they had received before their kin went missing. One women said her kin had come to say good-bye; another saw herself alone and in trouble. A few women told me that they began to think that their male kin were dead following some action on the part of a spirit. One widow only realized her husband was dead when a member of her family became ill. The aj q'ij said the illness was sent by her dead husband as a sign that

he should be helped to be "liberated"; she promptly asked the aj q'ij to perform *costumbre* to assist him.

Notwithstanding these signs, events sometimes occurred which threw women into doubt after they had more-or-less accepted that their missing kin were dead. *Doña* Ana had been virtually convinced of her son's death after finding some torn clothes in the village ravines which she thought were his. Then, a year before my arrival in Emol, an incident occurred which made her doubtful again. Two unknown *Ladino* men came to the village in a "big black car", bringing a photograph of her son; they told her he had been working as a nurse in the refugee camps in Mexico. With the photo in her hand, I asked her if she was sure it was him and that the story was true. She replied "saber" (who knows).³³

This perpetual vacillation in beliefs about the fate of "the disappeared ones" leaves the anomalous living kin in perpetual states of liminality (cf. Turner 1969). Their existence is suspended, especially in the beginning, although this state may continue for many years. The unplanned, involuntary, yet uncertain removal of a person is echoed by the lack of certainty of either their return or their death. The liminal state is replete with ambiguity, marked by undefined identity in those transitions, existing and yet not existing as social persons in society.

Women's liminality is exacerbated by their inability to construct a narrative about the life and death of their kin because this has become fraught with uncertainties owing to the official and unofficial versions of the truth (cf. chapter 7). In official discourse, the dead and missing have been marked as "bad" men. In opposition to the official version, women construct their own narrative in which they speak of their dead male kin's innocence. Generally, however, their portrayal of the dead is inconsistent which could merely reflect women's confusion resulting from their ignorance of what exactly their men were up to. So, in several senses, the women perceived themselves to be (and, in a real sense, were) "betwixt and between" social realities.

This open-ended quality compounded the ambiguity of women's lives and identities over time. Some women, although they may covertly feel uncertain about the fate of their husbands, might decide to remarry for economic reasons and in order to resume an acceptable

overt social role. This involved a deep moral dilemma as remarriage was associated with betrayal.

The women were cast into a state which psychologists Stewart and Hodgkinson call the "questioning syndrome". They claim that "in the total absence of the body, there exists for the bereaved a terrible struggle between the need for certainty, to allow an ending, and the inevitable irrational hope" (1988:12). Without seeing the body, doubt exists:

...whereas denial is an unconscious defense which gainsays the facts, doubt has a conscious, logical edge...Doubt is the main element in the difficulty in accepting the reality of the death...this "questioning syndrome" appears to be typical of inhibited grief. (ibid:13)

There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that people who view the bodies of loved ones killed in a disaster have less difficulties in consequent adjustment (ibid:14).³⁴ Knowing the fate of the dead and missing is important because if it is unknown, the trauma increases for the living who need to redefine themselves in the face of these events. As Oliver-Smith notes in relation to the Peruvian landslide disaster "with losses people lose aspects of self, aspects of social and personal identity" (1986:184).

RECLAIMING THE DEAD

Symbolic burials

The process of "grabbing" (abducting) people to be assassinated and clandestinely buried or summarily "disappeared" has been likened to Van Gennep's (1960) first phase of separation (Gregory and Timmerman, 1986). Although it is certainly true that those who are kidnapped are violently taken from their usual contexts of life, an abduction can in no way be considered as a rite of passage in the eyes of the surviving kin. Unlike the mortuary ritual, there was no re-incorporation in the Guatemalan case. And unlike a religious ritual where the actors all know what is going to happen, the "rituals" of abduction and clandestine burial are characterized by uncertainty about the dead. In these cases there is no denial of the ideologically threatening duration accomplished by the "denial of the main discontinuous process in the social group i.e. death", because kidnapping is discontinuity personified.

Because the funeral for the dead and the abducted was denied there was no opportunity to collectively "triumph over death" (Bloch & Parry 1982:4).

After *La Violencia* abated, *doña* Josefina began to perform symbolic, retroactive burials for the missing thus attempting to reincorporate the dead in their proper place in Quiché society. She showed me the importance of the placing of the dead and their belongings by performing these rituals for relatives who were "sad" because they had not had the opportunity to bury their dead or their possessions. In Quiché culture since the dead's belongings are normally buried with the corpse, when mourners keep the dead or abducted relative's possessions, this takes on a special significance; while they do not have the body, they have their clothes and other symbolic bits of the person. *Doña* Candelaria told me with some despair that she still had her husband's clothes and belongings. Even though she had heard he had been killed, she could not quite believe he was dead. She described how his things were kept pretty much as they had been when he was taken in a way reminiscent of Gorer's (1965) concept of "mummification". *Doña* Eugenia reveals the importance of burying the dead symbolically through interring their belongings:

When my husband and only son died I cried for two years. I saw their clothes and could not bring myself to touch them. You see the clothes are usually buried with the person and it was almost as though the corpse was there with the clothes.

Doña Josefina interpreted family illnesses and afflictions as arising from the fact that the dead and their things had never been interred. She went with such families to the calvary (stations of the cross) to call the spirits. The family then prayed for nine days. At the end of "the work", *doña* Josefina advised them to ask the village mayor for permission to bury objects such as clothes, tools and photos of the dead and disappeared and to place a cross bearing their name in the proper burial ground to signal to the "authorities" in both worlds that a particular person had died. It was important, she said, to advise the saints as well as village authorities (especially the *jefes*) about this so that relatives could perform *costumbre*, unfettered, in the cemetery. In this way, *doña* Josefina reversed some of the effects of abduction which "symbolizes and reifies the body of the victim not in physical death but in destruction of the body as an object to be mourned, buried and remembered" (Gregory and Timmerman 1986:68).

Once symbolically buried, the spirit is said to wander no more although I was told that in some cases they still did. It seems that when death breaches all cultural notions about a "good" death, the bereaved cannot simply take refuge in the conventional patterns or rituals of burial and mourning. Nevertheless, through symbolic burials, aj q'ijs such as *doña Josefina* can be seen to aid mourners by providing them with a "language" with which unexpressed and otherwise inexpressible psychic states may be immediately expressed. The importance of the transition to verbal expression has been discussed by Lévi-Strauss (1967:193-194). Here, however, the concretizing of the event in a non-verbal medium (although it is also verbal) is considered to be just as important. Both verbal and non-verbal forms make it possible to "undergo" in an ordered and intelligible form a real experience that would otherwise be "chaotic and inexpressible" (op cit).

Moreover, at a time of chaos and incompleteness, the symbolic manipulation of objects, space and the corpse itself in the symbolic ritual processes of burial, serve to transform the present experience of confusion and loss, placing it within the context of a set of meanings which resonate throughout the entire cultural system. However, this method of reburial tended only to be solicited by families who had no idea about the whereabouts of their kin and not by those who thought that their dead kin lay in specific clandestine graves. Their attempts to rectify matters is the topic of the next section.

Clandestine cemeteries

Doña Eugenia:

Although we knew where they [the deceased] were we could not make this known publicly so mourning became a private affair. In secret we went down to their clandestine grave on the Day of the Dead to perform a *costumbre*. We threatened the killers (the *jefes*) that if they prevented us from going, we would report their sins.

One of the subterranean secrets which pervade the Quiché countryside, as well as the minds of its people, are the clandestine graves buried beneath its surface.³⁵ In a minority of villages, relatives of those buried in such cemeteries have ventured to reveal their presence to a human rights agency³⁶ in the hope of reburying their dead in the correct way; in the majority of villages, however, no one ever refers to these graves unless in the company of close kin or friends with whom they have a relationship of trust.

The women of Emol did not mention clandestine graves in front of me for many months. Some women knew their kin were buried in the deep village ravines; they had gathered this information through rumour or hearsay and, in a few rare instances, from their own investigations. Several years after their kin's abduction, other women continued to obtain further clues from one source or another - such as an article published in the daily press in May 1990 which revealed that 35 clandestine cemeteries had been found in a village in an adjacent *municipio*. I was told that Emolians had already suspected that this was the destination of the trucks into which the army had "thrown" everyone kidnapped from the market place in June, 1982.

One woman indicated that she knew exactly where her son was buried after he was executed by the village *jefes*. Even though her son's grave was adjacent to her land, she had never set foot in its vicinity; like the majority of people who knew the location of clandestine cemeteries, she would not go anywhere near them for fear of punishment. The *jefes* were hypervigilant over the graves, knowing that their discovery could, in theory, result in their conviction and imprisonment.³⁷

Although they had been told never to mention the massacre they witnessed in 1982 or the clandestine cemeteries "or else ...",³⁸ an unusually determined group of Emol women were not deterred by the *jefes*' threats. Four years after the burials, the women admitted to the *jefes* that they knew the location of their relatives' graves. Moreover, taking their lives in their hands, they threatened to report the *jefes* unless they were allowed to visit the graves on the Day of the Dead. They were aware of the risk they had taken and, echoing the words used by their husbands in similar acts of bravery, said, "if they kill us they kill us...". Because they feared the graves would be revealed, the *jefes* were forced to agree although they imposed conditions which were accepted by the widows: they were to be discreet about their visits, tell no one about them, and only go once a year, on the Day of the Dead.

Not all of the women whose kin lay in the clandestine cemeteries went to visit them; some sent their children and grand-children in their place. *Doña Eugenia* no longer went herself because she could not bear the "sadness" stemming from the fact that the dead were not in their place in the village cemetery but set apart.

I accompanied the widows on their third journey down the crevices between the mountains to two clandestine cemeteries, each containing six bodies. The women took all the paraphernalia that Quiché people normally take to grave sites on the Day of the Dead: bundles of pine, yellow flowers of the dead, candles and *aguardiente*. Their children and grandchildren, like themselves, were dressed in their best clothes for the occasion and helped their elders to carry the goods and flowers. Only one man, a widow's new son-in-law, joined the groups of women "for protection".

Once at the graves, which were about 100 yards apart from each other and appeared indistinguishable from the rest of the ravine, the women busied themselves decorating them as though they were "normal" graves in a "normal" cemetery. The atmosphere and conversation did not differ much from that at ordinary graves until a considerable amount of alcohol had been consumed. Only then did women begin to speak about the events which landed their kin in this inappropriate spot, sharing memories about the fatal day of the massacre (see chapter 7). They asked the young man who accompanied them if he knew where other corpses had been buried. One woman, who knew her son to be in the clandestine grave, suddenly plucked up courage and asked:

And my husband, don't you know where they left him?

Young man:

No, I do not remember.

Widow:

And your dead father, where does he remain?

Young man:

Ah! him, the truth is I haven't a clue where he is. I only know that [he said pointing] is the general direction of his whereabouts.

The conversation continued. *Doña* Clara, *doña* Eugenia's daughter-in-law, recalled how young her son had been when the *jefes* made him watch the murder of his father. Then the woman again asked the man accompanying them:

So you never found out where they put your dead father?

Young man:

I remember that it was over there down the crevice. I think it was there that they left him but you see I was not with the others when they came here.

Doña Clara:

Well you know that they say that they divided the dead between these two holes so that there are six here and six over there.

Doña Rosa:

Yes, yes this is what the old one (*el viejo* - a disparaging form of address, in this case applied to a *jefe*) said, they left six in each hole.

Doña Clara:

Yes, he showed no shame in admitting this.

Doña Rosa:

Apparently he was drunk when he said this. Had he not been drunk then perhaps he would have kept quiet about it.

Doña Clara:

Yes if he had not been in such a state I probably would not have learnt where my husband was either for when he was like that he told me, 'Your dead husband is down in the crevice with Diego and Pablo while your child is in the other hole.'

Despite the sombre content of the conversation, the occasion itself was rather jovial.

The women, creating a sense of support and social closeness among themselves, advised one another on how best to lay the flowers, candles and so on. They bemoaned the fact that the *jefes* were likely to steal the metal pots, which they used as make-shift vases; they knew the *jefes* would invade the space and desecrate it, as they had already desecrated their lives. As was often the case, dramatic and painful moments alternated with the comic. One woman made the others laugh:

And the dead would say to them "why are you taking and destroying what does not belong to you?" I am sure they [the *jefes*] would be very frightened.

They continued to joke as they poured *aguardiente* onto the burial mounds which were covered in a luscious blanket of pine leaves, petals and numerous burning candles. As the liquor seeped into the earth, one woman exclaimed, "look, they [the dead] are drinking it!"

When the liquor began to seep more slowly, she continued, "he says that he doesn't want to drink it all". This provoked one woman, becoming serious for a moment, to ask her:³⁹

Is it true that your papa (a way of referring to a husband) has still not returned? Do you think he will return?

No, now he will not return.

Another woman, returning to banter again, speculated about what she would do if the dead did indeed begin to talk to them. Continuing to oscillate, the conversation turned serious again when one woman recounted to the others how she had discovered the site of a clandestine cemetery: she had visited a site and suddenly heard one of the dead saying, "thank you for coming to visit...we are all here in this spot". Another woman began to wave incense over the graves and, pretending to be an aj q'ij, asked the ancestors to pardon the other women's sins. Another woman then related how the *jefes* "ate" (ra're xe wa'ic)⁴⁰ their relatives:

There were so many of them [who were being killed] that I began to ask the *viejos* [the old ones] how they wanted them prepared, fried, or in a sauce!⁴¹

The symbiosis between violence and laughter displayed in women's narratives on this special occasion was also fairly typical of other occasions pertaining to *La Violencia* and other forms of violence.

The conversation turned to gossip which was related to the context in which they found themselves. They gossiped about the death of a woman who had many affairs and had fallen to her death close to where they sat talking. Once their tongues were further loosened by the *aguardiente*, the women's conversation turned to sensitive issues that were otherwise rarely discussed. More than anything else, they wanted to give those inside clandestine graves a proper burial in the village cemetery. They speculated about the number of years which would have to pass before they could exhume the bodies and they decided the time must be about ripe.⁴²

Doña Eugenia had told me on another occasion that it was important to her to give the dead a correct interment before she died so that she could lay beside her dead husband:

What I would like to do more than anything is to exhume their bodies. I wanted to do this last year but some people from the village warned me that if I did this then the assassins would finish me off. I'm afraid that if I should go to report the graves [to GAM] and as a result they [the *jefes*] are jailed then their accomplices would take revenge by killing my grandchildren. So because of the threats I have not done anything yet...

Until recently villagers have been too frightened to avail themselves of their legal right to petition for the exhumation of clandestine cemeteries. Recent moves to press for such exhumations have been obstructed by officialdom; lawyers and forensic scientists, fearing for their personal safety, refuse to act for the petitioners. By law, a petition for an exhumation should be answered in three days but legal delays have meant that the few successful requests for exhumations have taken up to five months to process.⁴³

The suppression of exhumations arose partly from the fact that dead and kidnapped can be used in the acts of political mobilization. Political ideologies can be articulated on the (dead) bodies of past heroes; the elements of a political ideology are structured in terms of both the behaviour and the symbolic force of certain key individuals. The dead can thus be used by both sides to symbolize complex ideological issues.

However, Emol women merely want their dead to rest in their proper place so that they can mourn them and re-enter society as less anomalous beings. How vital these concerns are is indicated by the fact that attempts to unearth clandestine cemeteries entail the risk of being killed by the security forces. Whether or not a woman intends it (some knowingly do and others do not) these exhumations can be seen as an invasion of the space occupied by official history and, in this sense, the un-burial and re-burial of the dead took on political meanings.

CONCLUSION

Prior to *La Violencia*, biological death and its associated rituals held no terrors for the Quiché. However, death, as annihilation, is a denial of the highest and most meaningful functioning which an individual knew.⁴⁴ The denial of a death, or of a funeral where death is confirmed, has profound implications for the Quiché.

The abruptness of assassination distorts the final image of the body; for relatives of the missing, presumed dead, there is no final image. Without a body, the social and psychological processes contingent on death and its expulsion are severely and irreparably disrupted: the individual cannot be placed within the wider, collective tragedy because, owing to the secrecy surrounding the political killings, the timing or even the occurrence of death (or abduction) of relatives is not mentioned. The central values and belief system was no longer experienced as given, unquestionable and enduring (cf. Hertz [1907] 1960) because everything is thrown into question in times of war. Indeed, when Quiché society most needed the power to express and recreate central values, the vehicles to do so were least available.

The assault on the family through killing and abduction followed by the deprivation of funerary ritual can be seen as a "reorganization" of the social landscape through death. Like unforgotten but inaccessible memories, the dead structure what goes on now as a sort of presence *in absentia*. The dead could not be remembered properly; nor could one forget the ineluctable, wandering, malicious spirits. Certain of the army's characteristic practices - defacing corpses - could have the effect of transforming victims into *condenados* (condemned spirits) who, because of the nature of their death or the absence of correct funeral procedures, cannot complete the transition to the next world. The dead were left unmourned and their kin were unable to release their grief. The spirits were left in a liminal state of living death, haunting the living and threatening society with further death.⁴⁵ The victims of state terrorism, having internalized violence, are caught in the ultimate contradiction between life and death, returning to terrorize their own people (see Sallnow 1989:33). The armed forces literally expelled people from the world of the living. However, as death was not expelled, the spirits could not be disposed of - indeed, they can be seen to form a new sort of patrol, becoming another terrifying presence, persecuting the living just like the local *jefes*. The sense of persecution is pervasive.

The intensified presence of the spirits since the advent of *La Violencia* is attributed to the sheer frequency and randomness of violent death within a limited space and time. In folk explanation, spirits are the inevitable excess of the defilement which emerges from the flooding of social space with death and the unburied dead. Local theory assumes that there is a natural balance between the quantity of death and spatial and temporal dimensions: the intensification of death within discrete units of space and time beyond the natural balance transgresses the classificatory order. Transgression is evidenced by the leaking of the future into the present (in the warnings of spirits) and the return of the past in the present: wandering spirits, the dead as ghosts and the reappearance of the Black Man.

1. The data for this comes from my own observations which took place after *La Violencia*. It is difficult to know how much procedures have changed.
2. Even people who have moved to the city semi-permanently will return to be buried. Several families who migrated elsewhere during *La Violencia* return to the village to attend funerals unless they believed this would jeopardize their own lives (some thought that they were still being pursued).
3. The ancestors or guardians: wherever a natural formation or even cultivation has emphasized a geographical spot - a mountain peak, a cluster of trees, a spring or a promontory overlooking a valley - there is likely to be a shrine. Wagley (1949) writes that every mountain is thought to have a Guardian, or owner. The Guardians are generally described as *Ladinos* "with light hair and light skin". Sometimes they wear plumes in their hats and clothes like the "dancers in the Dance of the Conquest". The person contained in episodes of meetings with the guardians were not relegated to the distant past. He or she was always dead for twenty years, "a friend of my father's or my own grandfather" (ibid.:55-64).
4. Over the last decade, these groups include widows belonging to human right groups such as GAM and CONAVIGUA, and patrollers belonging to CERJ.
- 5.a) Since *La Violencia*, the *jefes* and military commissioners were invited in order to avert the possibility of causing them offence.
- b) Bunzel (1952:153) writes that *mayordomos* were invited to the death of important people. However, this did not occur in any of the funerals I attended in Emol. This may be due to the fact that the *cofradía* (brotherhood) system has been disintegrating since the 1950s (due to religious conversion) and has degraded rapidly since *La Violencia*, when it collapsed completely.
6. By the original midwife and/or the child's *madrina* - godmother in the case of a dead Catholic or *Costumbrista* child.

7. Songs are only sung at Catholic and Protestant burials. At Protestant burials, songs are sung to the accompaniment of guitars and accordions. Catholics consume *aguardiente*; Protestants do not.
8. The Quiché believe that the living come from and return to the after world. There is a residual concept of the recycling of souls.
9. Cemeteries are usually located at the village perimeter, to prevent the dead from coming back and frightening the family. In contrast, clandestine graves are scattered throughout the village, hidden in the deep canyons which permeate the area.
10. The possessions of the dead and the cadaver itself were traditionally enclosed in a *petate* (straw mat) but in recent years the Quiché began to bury their dead in coffins. I do not know when this change came about. One informant merely told me that this practice began as the *Ladinos* insisted that the Indian practice of burying without such an enclosure was "unhealthy".
11. I was told that people used to set off fireworks (rockets) to facilitate the spirit's way to the after life but they could no longer afford to do so. Also, there is no-one left in the village who knows how to make fireworks: they had been killed in *La Violencia*.
12. Vogt writes that the ritually important materials are actually the flowers which adorn the cross and that the cross, which was introduced after the Conquest, is of secondary importance (1976:44).
13. A self constantly monitoring its interactions with others was the natural outcome of growing up in the complex behavioral environment of the Quiché family. The prescriptive quality of rules for interaction based on generation, age and sex made it very difficult for a young person to weave spontaneous feelings, hopes, wishes, and decisions into the desire of those in authority. Once the child reached a certain age action, including the expression of emotion, depended upon many considerations: the overt deeds and words of others, the underlying motives and needs that these words and deeds seemed to convey, the ideal action enjoined by group harmony, the personal needs for self-respect, filial obligations to siblings and parents, and the decision on how much to disclose overtly and how much to withhold and deal with internally.
14. This is connected to ideas about "heat" and "coolness". Ordinarily, the expression of "hot" feelings may cause the evil eye in another person, but it is best to release these feelings after being bereaved.
15. The institutionalized "remembrance" of the dead coincides with the harvesting of the first *elotes* (corn ears),
16. Children experience different fate. They are angels chosen by God "especially if they are intelligent". The concept of little angels (*angelitos*) has a closer correspondence

with Christian cosmological themes, perhaps reflecting Western doctrine that only the innocent are assured salvation.

17. This is said to happen because their name was not found on the list of the "judges in the skies".
18. The ancestors are also said to reside within the tujs (*temascales* or *adobe* steam baths) which are built as an integral part of traditional rural Indian households. The significance of the destruction/burning of houses by the military forces should be viewed in the light of this. Cf. Bloch in "The Resurrection of the House" (in press).
19. During *La Violencia*, the destruction of photos facilitated the killing of people as the taking of photos is associated with the stealing of souls (a person's essence) which are then physically located in the photographic image. Photos would disappear from people's houses (PAC *jefes* were said to steal them) and they were given to *brujos* who took them to the cemetery to burn them as part of their witchcraft procedure. Another informant told me that tourists stole souls when they take photos: a bright light shines, signalling the moment when the soul leaves the body. The soulless person was then said to feel poorly and die soon afterwards.
20. Bunzel also found the less common term juyu'-tiqaj (mountain-plain) which appears "sometimes with, sometimes instead of, the more common, *mundo*". She suggests that this "refers not merely to the varied surface of the earth which plays an important part of Quiché ritual, but stands for the concept of the synthesis of opposites in totality which runs through Quiché pantheism" (1952:264). I also found that the aj q'ij used the term, pronounced slightly differently, juyub-taqaj (hill/mountain-coast/plain) and nim juyub, nim taqaj (big mountain, big plain) as well as xa(..)knul juyub (volcano).
21. The Quiché also have an elaborate concept of ancestral authority. An aj q'ij told me "*los mundos* have their hierarchy". Ancestors are said to work in conjunction with a hierarchy of judges assessing the fate of the dead. When the dead enter the "other world" the ancestor hands the judge an account of the sins committed by the person before death. These are records of behaviour which are written down and, I was told, "they cannot be changed".
22. Voluntary firemen were the primary people, if not the only ones, to move the bodies because it was illegal for anyone to move a body before legal permission was obtained from local legal authorities. These authorities, after inspecting the body and making preliminary criminal investigations, would then have the *bomberos* take the bodies away. The national police were said to take over these activities after 1985. However, *bomberos* did continue to take bodies away depending on the location and the political sensitivity corresponding to such discoveries.
23. See Watanabe (1984) for a description of cultivated and wild spaces.

24. This refers to consequences in terms of ancestral wrath. The psychological repercussions may have been more difficult to contend with as the actual carrying out of ritual rather than only the intention is perhaps that which is therapeutic.
25. In contrast to the *jefes* who identified with the "other", the *Ladino* soldier as a person or object of power, the woman identified with the "other's" experience of feeling as is reflected in women's statements regarding the dead's loneliness and so on. Her own feelings resonate with what she imagines is the other's affect, which may be more or less also her own depending on her capacity for separateness. Thus, in opposition to the *jefe* who becomes insensitive, the woman becomes more empathic. Some women are, however, more empathic than others although many indicated that they would have preferred to die in place of their children.
26. The dead are thought of as a collectivity; the fate of specific dead relatives are perhaps more on people's minds if their fate is an uncertain one.
27. Women suffer a contamination of identity that bears curious resemblance to that of the initiate in the transition phase. Turner writes that novices in passage rites are often considered dirty: "...they are allowed to go filthy and identified with the earth, the generalized matter into which every specific individual is rendered down" (Turner 1967:96). Being neither one kind of human nor the logical counterpart, the liminal person is to a certain degree a conceptual anomaly, which calls to mind Mary Douglas' *Purity and Danger* (1966). Briefly, Douglas argues that things that cannot be categorized are often considered to be unclean, polluted and thus subject to taboo.
28. It is hard to say what depression is among the Quiché or if, indeed, it exists at all. It does not exist as a concept for them although a states of fear, anxiety, and sadness do. However, several women told me that they experienced some of the classic symptoms of depression as defined by Westerners including sleeplessness, loss of appetite, headaches and other pains in the body (which could be more to do with hard work), weight loss (which could reflect the inability to generate an income with which to buy food), bad dreams (though this was interpreted as being visited by spirits) and various other physiological "symptoms" which are perpetuated by living in constant anxiety. These tended to last for at least a couple of years after they lost their relatives. Their headaches and other pains in their bodies persist up to the present.
29. Literally, what can we do. The use of the present tense is due to the women's level of proficiency in the Spanish language.
30. In these situations, it was only the unusual woman who, in the heat of the crisis, was not even more conservative than usual. Women who went looking were perhaps rare as they did not act according to their socialization as females which meant that they did not go out of the home on their own.
31. Men from the village were said to have gone to the city and mixed with the police there. In that way, policemen knew the whereabouts and identity of village men in the city. One informant told me: "Our men went to the Guatemala City and became *judiciales* so that they could kill...".

32. There is a large body of literature about the difficulties of mourning without a corpse (e.g., Abdura et al. 1986; Freud 1959:243-258; Kalish 1972; Kordon et al. 1988; Movimiento Solidario de Salud Mental 1987; Nicoletti 1988:57-61; Pincus 1975; Rosenblatt et al 1976).

33. Literally, this means to know.

34. They add that for some, the sight of the body transformed is an important but transitory image which allows an effective internalization of the concept that the familiar, palpably-alive physical presence of the loved one no longer exists in the external world and that memories of this are all that remain. This will be particularly important in the absence of preparation for the death. They suggest that viewing the body in sudden unexpected loss is an important part of establishing the certainty of death.

35. Knowledge of where the bodies are clandestinely buried is actually fairly widespread. Indeed, efforts to locate missing relatives by checking local "body dumps" was so common that when an Amnesty International delegate asked an Indian in a remote area for directions to a hidden burial site, he simply replied, "Oh. Are you looking for relatives?" and gave directions to the nearest site known to him (Amnesty International 1991).

36. Representatives of GAM (*Grupo Apoyo Mutuo*, a human rights agency for relatives of the disappeared) have helped to unearth a tiny proportion of the numerous clandestine graves scattered throughout Indian villages. Usually nothing is found when the graves are uncovered. It is suspected that the guilty parties are forewarned and dispose of the bodies before the authorities arrive to exhume them. Sometimes freshly dug earth and other signs indicate that the graves have recently been tampered with. I was also told that when one clandestine grave was dug up, people stood by mute and did not come forward to identify the dead because, in the end, they were paralysed by fear.

37. The first lawful exhumation was at Chijtinimit, Chichicastenango, El Quiché. Twenty-nine bodies of people reportedly killed by a civil patrol in 1983 were exhumed from a grave in February 1988 following the petition from the father of two of the victims. According to a former civil patroller from the village:

Everyone in the village knew who was dead, where they were buried and who had carried out the killings. But nobody dared to denounce it to the authorities because all of the villagers were threatened by the *jefe* of the civil patrols.

After the 29 bodies were exhumed, two patrol *jefes* were arrested for the murders. The military in the area then reportedly forced all other patrollers in the village to participate in a demonstration demanding that the *jefes* be freed; the father and his family were threatened. In April 1988 the Guatemala press reported that the two arrested men had been amnestied. One reason I was given for this was that, after

being threatened by other villagers who had been involved in the incident, the village went to the mayor en masse to ask for the guilty men's release.

38. The *jefes* threatened to kill the widows' children and grandchildren, knowing that this would be more frightening to the women than threatening to kill them.
39. The need to find relief from the mental strain of exercising self-control found an outlet in the slightest of pretexts and a simple play on words was enough to provoke an outburst of laughter. Laughter expressed in this way can be seen to act as "safety valves for venting secret resentments" and substitutes for protest. One side of this laughter is its function as a symbolic compensation for impotent political status; another of its key characteristics is ambivalence. In the absence of the freedom of expression, there is an increased propensity to grasp double meanings. In accordance with Freud's (1960) thesis on the roots of laughter in compromise - its role, that is, as a permitted form of temporary release from social norms - the excessive care needed to avoid getting into trouble with an authoritarian regime made people more susceptible to laughter.
40. This verb is the one most commonly used to express other notions such as exploitation. It was also used to express betrayal. Here the Quiche's historical preoccupation with food and the accusation of what amounts to savagery and even cannibalism are joined together in a powerful, evocative metaphor.
41. Manrique describes how *brujos* (witches) steal people and make *tamales* with the meat of the abducted person (1967:716).
42. They take considerable risks in appealing to GAM to reveal the cemeteries. One villager indicated that after the exhumation of five bodies in Pacoc, Zacualpa, El Quiché in June 1988, the civil patrol responsible for the killings tried to kidnap the person who instigated this process (cf. Amnesty International 1991).
43. The opposition to the exhumations by the military has been overt. In April 1990 the Guatemalan press reported that Minister of Defence, General Hector Alejandro Gramajo, had publicly labelled people who claimed that clandestine cemeteries existed as "subversives". According to Gramajo, the dead were all buried by the subversives and "that is why they know where the bodies are". At a local level, military commanders have attacked local clergy and human rights workers who have supported peasants' requests; they have organized demonstrations by members of patrol against GAM visits in connection with exhumation petitions. In some of the few instances where bodies have been legally exhumed, civilian officials who played a role in the legal proceedings have received death threats. Local judges who, after prolonged petitioning, finally allowed one exhumation to go ahead in El Quiché later withdrew the case after receiving death threats. A forensic expert present at another exhumation later reportedly resigned her post after receiving similar threats. Little official action has been taken to determine the cause of death of those exhumed or to establish responsibility for their deaths and secret burials. GAM has reported that the few exhumations carried out have not been properly conducted, alleging that during an exhumation in El Quiché, local officials who should have been supervising showed little interest and stood some distance away; firemen, who actually exhumed the

bodies, were said to have laughed and made jokes, and to have used one of the recovered skulls as a football.

44. cf. Radin (1971:68) in Gregory and Timmerman (1896).
45. Wagley writes that certain night spirits called bibinaq are said to frighten people. These are the souls of people who were *mala gente* (bad people) during life and whose souls are not accepted by God. People who have murdered or been murdered become bibinaq. This concept has much in common with that of the Catholic purgatory, though here purgatory is perpetual (1949:64).



314

-Plate 8: *Cofradía* and icon

Chapter 9

Quiché theories of causation and the reconstruction of meaning of *La Violencia*

This chapter is based on the premise that people construct a set of assumptions about the world that make life seem predictable, so that a person can engage in both primary and secondary control, changing the world and changing the self. Gross misfortune violates these assumptions, throwing ontology open to question and rendering one's sense of reality tenuous thereby making one feel vulnerable; a broad feeling of powerlessness may ensue.

Although there had been political violence in El Quiché province in the 1960s and 1970s, the villagers of Emol did not witness any brutalities: to them it was an abstract phenomenon. In most villagers' eyes, *La Violencia* descended with shocking suddenness and called many basic beliefs into question: "How can one explain all the massacres? What happened to our protecting spirits?" (Manz 1988:92). Only by finding meaning in *La Violencia* could the Quiché restore the sense of an orderly world and the belief that one is capable of dealing with it.

Creating meaning out of the events of *La Violencia* was difficult not only because of the inadequacy of known theories but also because the continued violence did not permit the degree of detached sensibility necessary for analysis of their experience. With time, and access to a variety of discourses, a degree of detachment and some cognitive understanding were achieved.

This chapter illustrates Emolians' attempts to set *La Violencia* in an overarching frame in terms of traditional, religious or political concepts. Few people found any one discourse adequate to explain the events of *La Violencia*; most resorted to several discourses to explain both the phenomenon and the events which comprised it, swapping from one discourse to another for a variety of reasons which I describe in the following sections.

I describe the various discourses and their applications as explanatory models for *La Violencia*; I will show that these theories are all means by which the malignancy and contingency of evil can be comprehended and made simultaneously universal and impersonal. The universality of the suffering provided certain guarantees that the crisis was not brought about by any particular failing of the victim but by an impersonal force which is seen as indifferent to whom it hits or spares. In contrast, other explanations relate to particular atrocities within *La Violencia* rather than to *La Violencia* as a general phenomenon.

In conclusion, I discuss Emolians' success, or otherwise, in explaining new experiences in terms of their existing beliefs and how new and old ideas are combined to create a meaningful interpretation of *La Violencia* and the subsequent endemic low level violence.

MAKING SENSE OF LA VIOLENCIA

The tools used to reconstruct past exegeses about violence were facilitated by the reflections of specialists. Meaning was negotiated during visits to the *aj q'ij* (shaman/diviner), Catholic priest, or representatives of organizations such as CUC or CONAVIGUA. Personal and public *imagenes* (saint icons) also act as mediators between people and the ancestors and are instrumental in the process of constructing meaning: they serve as mirrors to reflect unarticulated meanings which, until the moment of "conversation" with the object, had eluded the speaker.

New information from the media (especially radio), activists, the army (either directly or indirectly through the civil patrols) and rumour were incorporated into the structure of meaning. Old information, such as that contained in the 16th century Mayan book "Popul Vuh", has been revived to explain the new. Petronila, the founder of the local CONAVIGUA

group, used images from "Popul Vuh" in order to understand the violence and women's place in it. The book refers to an evil power in the form of gods called Xibalba who reside in the underworld; Petronila believes that evil is "when repression came to the Quiché...the men who did the killing are what we call Xilbabá" (Carmack, 1988:67-68). Indians claim to have learnt about traps from reading "Popol Vuh" (the use of traps also suggests that Indians are aware of the parallels between the Spanish conquest and present day army conquests). An Indian shaman from a community neighbouring Santa Cruz announced that Tecum, the martyred Indian hero of the Spanish conquest, had returned to earth "to bring justice to Guatemala". Tecum is said to have brought two million "warriors" (guerrillas) with him though they are only allowed to enter the fight two or three at a time.¹

In the initial, ambiguous, stages of *La Violencia*, when events were unfamiliar, there was a tendency for equivocal events to be interpreted according to folk descriptions of disasters. An *ajq'ij* contextualized *La Violencia* in cyclical time as only one disaster in a long list of calamities which extends back and projects forward in time: "last time it [yabil² (disaster)] was an earthquake and this time it was *La Violencia*...we'll see what the next one brings".

Once *La Violencia* was upon them, women attempted to understand and assimilate new experiences into what they already knew. Some women told me that once *La Violencia* began, they began to remember what their elders had foretold, or warnings delivered through stories or passages from the Bible:³

It was only when *La Violencia* was upon us that I remembered what my grandmother had spoken about years before. Then she had warned us that "they will eat [kill] among us and we will fight among ourselves. It will be the end of the world."

Recognition occurred in retrospect: women told me that although they had forewarnings of *La Violencia*, they could not understand them because they were obscure and disconnected from the context at the time. For example, women told me of dream-like visions in which they had been visited by their kin before their death or disappearance; the women realized in retrospect that this was a "sign" of their departure from this world. It is possible that the vision, the foretelling, is constructed retroactively and then retrospectively

confirmed. People did not lament their failure to read signs but attempted to gain a sense of mastery by reinterpreting them.

Doña Lopez:

I had no idea that *La Violencia* would transpire before it actually happened. It was only once I saw the burning and smoke that I began to realize what this *violencia* was. Then I said to myself "so this is *La Violencia* that they had been talking about". In retrospect, I realize that when they had spoken of the violence I had not understood anything they said.

Doña Ana:

I wonder, in retrospect, if *La Violencia* was a sign sent to earth [by the ancestors]. It was like other signs of the past only its form was different from previous ones such as earthquakes and floods. This time its form was people's fighting and killing each other with *machetes*.

Women's lack of forewarning of *La Violencia* produced anxiety about the future: the world had become a less predictable and more punitive place. Anxiety was reflected in constant interpretations of present events as signs pertaining to the return of *La Violencia*. However, this was not the only source of women's anxiety: their world had been irretrievably altered by events for which they had been unprepared and did not understand at the time or in retrospect.

It is not that women lived violence-free lives before *La Violencia*; they were well versed in violence on a local scale. As children, they were likely to have witnessed their fathers beating their mothers and drunken brawls in the street; they received abuse themselves from angry grandparents and even the *alcade* (mayor). If they had attended school, which became more common after the 1950s, then they were also likely to have received corporal punishment from the racist *Ladino* teachers (nowadays this is less common). They were also all too conversant with violence in the form of the prevailing climate of poverty and the resultant endemic *envidia* (malicious envy or te tec), illnesses and deaths. From childhood they were also intimately familiar with the exploitation of their parents on the *fincas* where they were robbed of their full salary one way or another. They were also frequently exposed to violence in the form of racial abuse from *Ladinos* in the market; after marriage they were often beaten by their own husbands. These every day forms of violence were incorporated into their worlds; *La Violencia* brought them into contact with the reality of a world for which

their culture had not prepared them. They had neither codes nor categories with which to interpret it or ways of attributing responsibility for its occurrence. This chapter explains the means women adapted and adopted in their search for meaning.

COSTUMBRE

Costumbre (custom) has been in decline since the 1950s (see Chapter 2). The civil-religious hierarchies broke down with the arrival of *Ladino* settlers and the disruptive new plantation economy. The authority system dominated by elders (*principales*) has been supplanted by a more fluid and competitive field of catechists, pastors, health workers and, of course, *jefes* who educate and organize the Quiché in new ways.⁴ Yet many people, including some Catholics and nominal Protestants, still adhere to their beliefs in fate (*suerte*), the fulfilment of prophecy or ancestral retribution (*castigo*) and ideas of evil (*el malo*) perpetrated through malicious envy (*envidia*), of which witchcraft (*brujería*) is the most extreme form, or locally solicited supernatural powers: these were the main exegeses people used to explain *La Violencia* to themselves, other people and to me. These discourses relate to different aspects of Quiché thought, i.e., whether people blame themselves, the supernatural (spirits, ancestors (*dueños*)) or other people (malicious gossip, rumours, witchcraft) for the misfortune which befalls them.

Suerte (Malignant Fate)

Through the overarching cult of the ancestors and the belief in their omnipotent power, a person may be reconciled to a harsh fate. *Suerte* is not so much an abstract, general notion as something which is said to cling to each individual person when s/he passes through the universe. It determines one's day of birth, the length of one's life (death from "natural" causes is normally attributed to *suerte*), occupation, special duties, and so on. *Suerte* has a powerful effect on behaviour yet *doña Josefina* told me that it can be influenced by offering to God and by the way children are disciplined.

Fate is a quality of the nahual/anhual⁵ (alxik/spirit double)⁶ that shares the same life and destiny of its living counterpart (Foster 1944) but it is also anterior to this theme since it is a person's *suerte* to have such and such an anhual. The anhual is the vital part of the

human personality which Bunzel (1952) writes is incorporated in some animal (see appendix IV) or sacred object such as a stone idol. She equates this creature with one's destiny ik'lal (from ik', moon) (ibid:274); Wagley was told "that it is given by God when one is born" (1949:66). Physical violence, for example, is not considered to be inherent to the circumstances in which the *jefes* practised their violence but as a stable personality trait associated with one's anhual.⁷

The theme of *suerte* provides a clue to attitudes towards good and evil. Whether one is good or evil depends on the *suerte* one is born with; sooner or later one's true colours will reveal themselves. In this sense, God is seen to will evil to be done. There is a confusion of world views here: the Christian doctrine of free will states that people can choose between good and evil, irrespective of the *suerte* they are born with, and be judged accordingly by a loving God.⁸ Most people hold a syncretism of both of these views; for example, they say that since *La Violencia* was written in the Bible, it was bound to happen because it was their destiny (*suerte*):

We think that *La Violencia* came because of God...it has been written in the Bible...God wrote that *La Violencia* would come...

The course of *La Violencia* was not necessarily seen to be determined by *suerte* but whether or not a person was assassinated or kidnapped might be. Three widows illustrate the concept of *suerte* and how it is used in relation to *La Violencia*:

Doña Rosaria:

I ask myself whether the people were assassinated by their own neighbours because of their *suerte* ... Was it their destiny to be condemned by their own community? I don't think so for they were young and I'd say it was still their *suerte* to live. Who knows? Perhaps God made their *suerte* this way...

Doña Amelia:

I thought perhaps it was my husband's *suerte* [to die] and my *suerte* to remain a widow...

Doña Lopez:

I thought "if they take me, they take me, and if not, not." You see, I thought, "if they kidnap me there is nothing I can do about it. If my time is up then it's up".

The world is essentially a mystery to the Quiché, with insight granted to only a few. *Suerte*, which can be revealed by aj q'iis (who are the strongest proponents of fatalism), provides people with a self protective mechanism against too much introspection. Aj q'iis, when asked by a client about the fate of the dead or disappeared, would generally reply:

They were killed because their time was up. That is, it was quite simply that their hour of death had arrived and God decided that they should perish in this manner.

Aj q'iis also used the concept of *suerte* when advising people not to investigate a death or look for the disappeared, thus steering them away from the harm which could befall them if they looked into sensitive matters:

You should not do bad things [to try to discover and judge those guilty for your husband's death and take vengeance] but merely respect your mother and father. Only in this way will we improve the face of the earth...

There is an element of prediction in the concept of *suerte*. It can be seen as the process whereby the imagination manufactures the idea of fate in order to protect itself from the ravages of random circumstance. Some people return to what could be called the predictive spirits, a version of common memory that tries to impose meaningful sequence on the details of one's life. Thus, instead of suffering great psychological stress over such circumstances as losing the entire male presence in their family, there seemed to exist a self denial and self-effacement and a kind of resignation to the fate of enormous loss. What befalls a man depends on his *suerte*. This is linked to the attitude of passive resignation of "what comes, comes". This, as well as "only God is in charge", "only God knows" and "if God wishes, God sends it" were stock responses that I heard over and over again. However, people did sometimes communicate immense suffering. I was told many times about people who had died of "sadness". Such comments could also reflect speakers' own experiences of overwhelming distress and their own wish to die, which a few confessed to more directly.

The theme of *suerte* can also be seen to be tied to ignorance and this, in turn, is tied to the precariousness of one's immediate fate. This ignorance is also attached to wider matters: many widows had little access to the media or to information regarding the political motivations for *La Violencia*. Women complain of being treated as "ignorant" or "like an

animal"; this perceived absence of information creates a frame of mind in which it is difficult to expect any national, political or historical contextualization of *La Violencia*. Women were more likely to refer to *suerte* than someone who was *au fait* with the political situation.

Castigo (Ancestral Punishment)

Opinion differed about the degree to which the ancestors were involved in the actual course of *La Violencia*. Some said that its vagaries were independent of, although not unrelated to, the ancestors. An aj q'ij said:

La Violencia was all part of *una violencia* which our ancestors sent.

The ancestors are said to punish people who maintain an anti-social attitude (particularly adulterers) by seizing their spirits. Thus, spirit loss illnesses are engaged as a mechanism of social control (cf. Wilson 1990:169).

Aj q'ijs facilitated the creation of meaning around *La Violencia* as punishment, encompassing it within the notion of yabil (illness) and c'ax (pain/suffering) or c'ax c'ax (extreme pain/suffering). They claim to read the course of both *La Violencia* and illness through their *señas* (signs); whether or not one recovered from either is determined by the *dueño* (spirit) of the illness and *suerte* (fate). The use of the term yabil reflects that the speaker believes the causative agent of *La Violencia* is the same as that for illness: the ancestors/God. Yabil (illness) and its connection to ancestral wrath is, then, a statement about the perceived moral degradation of Quiché society. People said that *La Violencia* was caused by the Quiché's immoral conduct, and that this is what God wants to change via *La Violencia*:

La Violencia happens because we are not loyal to God. People no longer think about [pray to] him nor about their elders.

Doña Flora maintained that women, unlike men, were protected from *La Violencia* because they were morally correct:

Women were not murdered because they are more religious, that is, they are more attentive to the ancestors.

La Violencia in this exegesis is just action on the part of the ancestors on behalf of a society which has gone wrong. It is a discourse from the cultural present where traditional explanations of ethical and unethical conduct prevail:

Because we hate each other *La Violencia* came...it is because of our sins.

The instances of self-blame went far beyond simple errors in judgement or deed which led to being affected by *La Violencia* (such as not fleeing from the army). Rather, these people felt that their lives were not being lived properly and hence they deserved correction from the ancestors.

It [*La Violencia*] was sent by the ancestors who wanted to slaughter the men who fight and those with more than one woman.

Thus yabil, as *La Violencia*, is not the wrong, evil or sin itself, but the result of some other wrong.⁹ *La Violencia*, as yabil, is suffering which has grounds in some other unacceptable behaviour and, as such, can be contrasted with *La Violencia* as the evil itself with its potential for further suffering. Thus, when a person is seriously ill, kin usually attempt to identify his enemies through divination, in the hope of placating or counteracting the evil forces threatening his/her life. When witchcraft causes the death of an adult, it is seen to emanate from specific hatred aroused by the diseased him/herself; it is not necessarily considered to pose any further threat to kin. The death of children is most likely to precipitate direct vengeance sorcery as the act of witchcraft in this case is thought to be aimed directly at the parents.

Yabil (*La Violencia*) and yabil (illness),¹⁰ though both forms of extreme suffering, are not necessarily the same, as I discovered during the measles epidemic in which over a hundred Emol children died. Nevertheless, *La Violencia* is referred to as yabil because it is seen as a form of potentially lethal punishment sent by angry ancestors for the sins of the living.¹¹

The *hermanos* (people of the same religious group) told us that a day would come when the men would kill their fathers and fathers would murder their sons. I suppose it was because of this the violence came.

During consultations with the aj q'ij, people were told that they had "created their own problems"; one aj q'ij told his clients that "our people provoked this situation where there is no respect". Aj q'ijs explained that both *La Violencia* and illnesses occur because of the "abandonment of the our customs" (including respect behaviours, agricultural work and the *Costumbrista* religion). An aj q'ij told me:

The elders say that when we change our *costumbres* (customs), illness, death and even war results for our *costumbres* are something sacred. They are like laws but, in fact, they are even more than this.

Fictions of deservingness are employed in the Quiché victim's construction of an illusion of justification. That the world is just is a generally held belief in Quiché society; justice is seen as the response of a personified, deified agency to an individual's moral conduct and his/her relationships with supernatural powers. These beliefs translate into the idea that people probably get what they deserve: suffering is seen as punishment for one's faults and misdeeds. Patterns of self-blame permit individuals to believe they can avoid further misfortunes if they avoid repetition of the deed. People do not feel morbidly guilty because, although somehow answerable for something going wrong, convention obliges them to perceive misfortune as ultimately stemming from the ancestors. The denial of control removes the connection to current or future suffering and eliminates responsibility. Ancestor-worship provides "an institutionalized scheme of beliefs and practices by means of which men can accept some kind of responsibility for what happens to them and yet feel free of blame for failure to control the vicissitudes of life" (Fortes 1959:29); the belief that ultimately whatever the ancestors proclaim is just also relieves them of some of their anger (cf Fortes 1959:31).

People who visited shamans were fortunate because "they had the immediate relief of knowing which agency caused their troubles and in the case of a supernatural agent, which ritual steps to take" (Fortes 1959:10). These traditionally include visits to the aj q'ij to make offerings and to confess their "sins" (mac). This practice probably developed from Catholic teachings and perhaps from the Mayan religion as well¹² (although I have little data about this). Whole families come to confess¹³ their moral transgressions against other people and the ancestors; during these occasions the aj q'ij elicits their sins directly and also indirectly through the use of *piloys* (divining beans, tz'te). The aj q'ijs, both the aj mac (worker of

sins), and the aj toj (settler of accounts), then decide on an appropriate penalty. Adults may be whipped by the aj q'ij with a spindly branch, mostly a symbolic gesture which inflicts more psychic than "real" pain; they may also pay a *multa* (a fine) or be charged a specific fee - a roban (100 *centavos*) or a mul (25 *centavos*).¹⁴ Other expiating behaviours include traversing the length of the room to the altar on one's knees. Appealing to a diviner is similar to applying to an oracle to discover witchcraft: oracles "do not in fact enable men to master their fate...they merely help to reconcile men to its ineluctability" (Fortes 1959:5). The same can be said of the aj q'ij's divination in relation to the ineluctability of violence perpetrated by the *jefes*.

Thus, instead of feeling overwhelmed with rage about the army assassinations or massacres by the *jefes*, people saw the deaths as retribution by God and the ancestors and merely asked their pardon. However, the matter is not that simple: an aj q'ij, may, for example, tell a person that the problem was due to both ancestral punishment and an attack by a *brujo* (witch) motivated by *envidia* (malicious envy).

Envidia (Malicious Envy)

Envidia (titqil) means "bad feelings which one has for not being equal to another". An elder told me that *envidia* "is created among the poor who have nothing". As I unravelled this concept, the meaning broadened; I found that it reflected related sentiments (such as hate and hostile competitiveness). *Envidia* was the most frequently cited cause of *La Violencia* both as a national, general event and also as a specific event affecting the speaker. Through resorting to this concept, *La Violencia* was represented as an internal matter within society.

It seems that suspicion and envy (envidioso) are characteristic of the Quiché. This is partly due to the fact that they live in a world in which the goods people want exist in limited supply; *La Violencia* occurred in a situation of greater deprivation than the usual conditions of "limited good".¹⁵ The disintegration of the *cargo* system¹⁶ added to village rivalries, resulting not only in increased competition but in the need to gain some sort of power to define one's self merely to have enough to survive.

Envidia seems to pertain to every aspect of Quiché life; the term expresses every day theories of causation of enmity. The common denominator in all instances of *envidia* is its relation to perceived threats to the balance of power. Discrepancies in wealth (or, more accurately, poverty), prestige and popularity are the most frequently cited reasons for *envidia* which is expressed through rumour (*el chisme*) and witchcraft (*brujería*); the threat of both discourages conspicuous display. Post *La Violencia*, *envidia* is also expressed in *calumnias* (false accusations, betrayals).

Envidia expresses something which is not so much a feeling but has more to do with relationships between people and the strong value placed on conformity, so that no one gets ahead of anyone else.¹⁷ *Envidia* was said to be the motivation behind the death of anyone who stood out in Emol, such as *doña Eugenia*'s husband: "they had *envidia* because he was advancing, so they killed him". *Envidia* was the motive for the assassination of a man who had helped to build the village school and, in the face of parental opposition, had encouraged children to attend. Someone else said *envidia* had been aroused because the dead man had been responsible for bringing the road to the village; it had traversed the land of another man, who then decided to *calumniar* (betray) him; one of his sons also attributed his father's death to *envidia* because he had been the village health worker and had made many friends through his work. This man had been involved in evening language classes which were probably popular education classes; he was a wanted man and was killed on his return from hiding. Talk of such men's subversive activities was always mixed in with accounts of *envidia*.

In another instance, the sole operator of the village's only electric corn grinder was killed; again *envidia* was given as the cause. The man's sister said the military commissioners had come for him because he had, they claimed, written a "subversive note" (death threat). However, she claimed other people were after his job:

There was no subversive note, it was something that they did out of *envidia*.

Envidia as a rationalization of killing carried out by fellow villagers illustrates that being nonconformist and non-compliant is considered dangerous. I was never sure whether the men were singled out because of local troubles or because they were on army death lists for their political activities: local events were grafted on to national events by reason of

contiguity. Some women insisted that local competition was of overriding importance. *Doña Candelaria* spoke about the *jefe*'s motivation for killing her husband:

Even if my husband wasn't in the organization they still would have killed him for he was intelligent and he worked for the community.

Envidia as an internal problem arose over other issues such as land rather than a person's activities. *Doña Rosaria* explains:

If you have a large plot of land then they will *envidiar* you by accusing you of being a guerrilla. They want you to die so that they can take over your land.¹⁸ Perhaps they [the military commissioners] thought that when the children of Maria [a woman who was shot dead] die they can appropriate their land...In fact, they even admitted that.

Envidia also seems to revolve around vengeance. The major issues for which revenge are sought are traditional rivalries and discontents. People tried to resolve problems of, say, adultery either by hiring a "gun man" (instead of the traditional *brujo*)¹⁹ to kill the adulterer or their lover or by betraying or denouncing them to the *jefes*; the resulting murder(s) would then be attributed to *envidia*.

The expression of *envidia* probably increased during *La Violencia*. The civil patrol system was also seen to be responsible for exacerbating *envidia*, throwing an idealized past into relief. *Doña Flora* said:

Before they instituted the patrol system there was no *envidia*. Everyone lived in their house safely with a feeling of tranquillity. We all cooperated with one another.

Many people saw *La Violencia* as a continuation of existing enmity within communities, traditionally expressed through *brujería* (witchcraft) which is normally viewed as being motivated by *envidia*.²⁰ The concept of *envidia* is also applied to clashes between groups. *La Violencia* was played out along factions extant both within and between villages, *municipios* and so on. This was reflected in statements such as "the Protestants had *envidia* for the Catholics so they killed them".²¹ In this interpretation, *La Violencia* is seen to be perpetuated on behalf of a whole community even though the perpetrators comprised only a proportion of it or a group.

Several women gave me the impression that it was common to settle old scores during *La Violencia*. *Doña Eugenia* thought her husband was denounced by a "woman who had wanted to marry him many years ago"; *Doña Rosaria* thought personal reasons lay behind the assassination of her father and spoke of the *calumnias* (false charges) which incriminated him:

We tried to find out what inaccurate information they had given about him because we thought that perhaps they deemed him to be a *mala gente* [guerrilla], which was not true. I think they killed him because of this false information.

Many deaths resulted from personal quarrels; one participant would denounce the other as a subversive or army informer. *jefes* also settled old scores of their own; as far as their selective killings were concerned, envy and competition may well have been the motivation. The national evil perpetuated by the army was seen to alternate with, and be grafted onto, local-level enmity, feuds and vendettas expressed as *envidia*.²²

La Violencia and the events which comprise it were often seen as arising from an outside uncontrollable force, from another place, *del otro lado*,²³ whether this was the ancestors or the military. Locals were seen to get caught up in or, worse, take advantage of (*aprovechar de*) this situation in which killing - whether by *jefes*, who were local men, or by villagers in pursuit of some personal grievance - took place with impunity, despite an accumulation of feelings of vengeance. Sometimes it seemed that virtually everyone was settling some old or new score. This impression reflected the deep mistrust which developed within the community after friends and *compañeros* gave the names of supposed collaborators when being tortured or bribed (enticements were said to include taking over land, goods and even the wives of people they denounced). The deteriorating relationships within the village crystallized the meaning of national events for women.

Some women conveyed the sense that almost the entire community was responsible for violence, either directly or indirectly through betrayal; this impression annulled accounts of friends and neighbours' help and protection. Without wishing to gainsay the veracity of these statements, many women suspected that their kin had been betrayed by other villagers.

Positing danger on the outside (a typical 'mythic' explanation) is a traditional means of interpreting danger and distancing oneself from it. However, in Emol since *La Violencia* the boundaries between inside and outside are less constant and can be seen to have shifted closer to the person. This means that blame for atrocities is now often attributed within the community and sometimes even within the family if members are in competition with one another for one reason or another. The result of this is that many are in a perpetual state of paranoia.

At other times, *envidia* was employed as an exegesis in the face of a paucity of other interpretations of *La Violencia*. Sometimes a person would reveal their incomprehension, saying "saber (who knows)...I suppose *envidia*". It appeared to me that women used *envidia* to explain most problems pertaining to violence and resorted to this concept when they had no idea why their male kin were killed or abducted. The concept of *envidia* appears to be used out of habit and the lack of a more satisfactory inference. This is not a new use of the concept: *envidia* is the most common explanation given for more ordinary deaths such as sudden expected death in the night or inexplicable, incurable illnesses; it explains the ills which befall a person and, as with most other acts of aggression between people, *envidia* must also be behind the senseless, evil deeds of *La Violencia*.

It is possible that the application of ordinary language to extraordinary circumstances is a way of rendering the incomprehensible comprehensible. Perhaps, taking this further, the application of this common language allows the person to apperceive aspects of the world of *La Violencia*. The extraordinary experience is thus grasped through this classification by ordinary language, although different people may be more or less convinced.

Attributing events to *envidia* is also a means of masking political experiences, at the same time revealing them to a listener who shares the understanding of the way this term is being employed in the present. This attribution allows a person to speak while using an expression which hides the phenomena they really convey. When I pursued the meaning of *envidia* in instances where the semantic content of this concept appeared flimsy, I found that the speaker thought political motivation was behind the particular violent act:

I think that they [the military commissioners] abducted the men because of *envidia*...

[JZ: What do you mean exactly by *envidia*?]

Well, they had *envidia* for my husband because he went into hiding in *el monte* (the woods)...because of this they were hostile towards him.

[JZ: Why should this make them hostile?]

They suspected that he had gone with the guerrillas in the mountain.

It appears that together with "who knows" and "only God knows", *envidia* is a protective expression of political neutrality. By explaining everything by resorting to *envidia*, the concept becomes meaningless and certainly tells one nothing about the victim's political alignment. In fact, such statements imply that *envidia* was the motivation for army killings (i.e., soldiers suspected that relatives were involved in subversive activity yet these suspicions may have arisen because of personal, non-political affairs). I asked *doña* Rosaria why her father was killed, rather than someone else:

Because the people said that my father was sowing, that is teaching, the violence, or c'ax (suffering), in the communities.

[JZ: Who said it?]

The military did. They accused him of teaching people "bad things" (*malas cosas*). They also did *calumnias* on us because we have land, because we plant onions and we usually have good harvests. This is why the people were against us. This is the main reason that they had *envidia* for my father. Also there was a *Judas* who was a traitor who supplied his name [to the army]. Because of this they killed him because they were told that he was a member of the guerrilla.

[JZ: And was he really one?]

No, they made this up. They accused him because of his land and the fact that he was a worker, so they accused him...

[JZ: Who did?]

Friends, friends accused friends and *compañeros* accused *compañeros*. They did it because they were forced to do it...or who knows. They organized themselves in this community and then another community got involved. And then between the communities they became each other's *hermanos* [literally brothers but meaning fellow guerrillas]. In

other words, when the violence came the guerrillas had already formed groups and so had the army. It was not the guerrillas themselves who came though. They sent their representatives who organized people from the community. So, you see, the community became divided in two. There were some who accepted the side of the guerilla and others who didn't. Among those who didn't were the *orejas* who spied for the army. But my father wouldn't accept either side. He wanted to remain an independent person. This created a problem in the community because most people went with one side or the other; so they got annoyed at him. This became an enormous issue. I can't explain to you just how enormous the problem became...But in any case I tell you that my father did not want to accept either the organization of the guerrilla or the organization of the army, so they killed him.

[JZ: Was it the guerrillas who killed your father then?]

No, it was the army who killed him.

CHRISTIANITY

Our sons and husbands died as Christ did with blood stained faces having been tortured.
(*Doña Eugenia*)

He is a martyr because he did not betray anyone.

(*Doña Flora*)

Some women told me that many of the men killed and kidnapped were victimized because of their own or their relatives' work as catechists or merely because they were active members of Catholic Action groups:

They took them because they were Catholic Action people ...they took them because they spoke about the truth, the truth that people [*Ladinos*] didn't want to hear.

I don't know why [they kidnapped her son], perhaps because of a religious accusation. Actually they wanted to kill the father [who was a catechist] but they killed the boy instead. Those who worked for the struggle (*lucha* - popular movement) when they were kidnapped and asked who his *compañeros* were they didn't tell. Martyrs are those who died without accusing anyone. They are those who were tortured. One of my *compañeros* said "if they kill me they kill me and they did". He is a martyr.

Catholic priests encouraged this view of *La Violencia* and the dead. *Doña Eugenia*'s grief over the deaths of her husband and son diminished after visiting the local priest who had advised her to "put her grief to one side". He had explained:

They killed him like they killed Jesus Christ, for speaking the truth.

Another widow commented on the connection drawn by the priest between the dead and the patron saint, *San Sebastián*, with whom villagers strongly identified:²⁴

The priest helped us so much. He drew parallels between our dead sons and husbands who had given their lives in the word of God, with *San Sebastián*.

The connection in women's minds between the saints and martyred husbands was so strong that at times it was not clear to me whether speakers' statements referred to the saints or their dead kin, as illustrated in the following interchange:

Doña Flora:

Have you seen Saint Sebastián?

[JZ: No].

Doña Flora:

You really should...He is very special. He was an exceptional person but they tortured and killed him.

[JZ: Who killed him?]

Doña Flora:

The soldiers, they shot him.

The innocence of dead male kin is spoken of directly, although infrequently, in women's private discourse;²⁵ they were "the good men", "the good Christians" who were through no fault of their own. But women's explanations and views of their husbands as martyrs were not necessarily consistent; they had ambivalent memories of the dead because they were never grieved (see chapter 8). When in touch with one fragment of herself, a widow may see her husband in an idealized way, as a martyr; when accessing another fragment, she wondered whether he was a sinner (guerrilla):

Doña Josefina:

He [her husband] must have suffered great pains over there [in the after-life]. They told him "you have been called here [to your death] early because you've sinned and now you've abandoned your children". I heard him cry. I also heard them tell him off every time I cried, saying: "You know your wife is unhappy". I know all of this because I went to call him in the ceremony "ptan" (ceremonies to call the spirits of the dead in order to speak with them) with the aj mes.

[JZ: Who is it that tells him off?]

Doña Josefina:

The *áimas* (spirits) of our ancestors, the elders (*principales*) who died before.

[JZ: In what way do they reproach him?]

Doña Josefina:

By making sure that he remembers all of the sins that he committed in his life. I don't know what his sins were but over there they do.

This vacillation was less present over time in *doña Flora*'s view of her son, who she consistently martyred. This was perhaps connected to her feelings of guilt: she had encouraged him to go to "the meetings"; she was the one to blame. She was more ambivalent about her husband who she had also encouraged to attend, but this had more to do with the way he abused her within their marriage.

Many Catholics were more able to accept their misfortunes as having positive value because of the resemblance to the suffering of Christ and various saints. The saints were characterized as "very good people who were tortured and killed for no good reason", thus reflecting the events of the women's recent past.

Martyrdom and sacrifice are perhaps the extreme form of placing positive value on death. The idea of religious martyrdom, in imitation of Christ, has appeal for Christians; political martyrdom appealed to heroes such as Tecum Umán. In this way, death is linked with an undifferentiated time of heroes, origins and myth in order to reinvent tradition, or to connect present events in the past. This connection provides history and hence meaning (cf. chapter 10): if one can see one's suffering as part of a script that has high moral value, it will probably be more tolerable.

Women's views of martyrization persisted beyond the eclipse of Christian doctrines, such as in folk beliefs that sacrifice constitutes the best path to virtue. Women explained that the sins of male kin would be erased because they died for "speaking the truth". The portrayal of self-sacrifice among the dead also led into other areas. For example, *doña* Flora's son returned to the village after her husband was killed (when it was dangerous for him to do so), because he did not want to live without his father.

Comfort was also derived from the thought that oppressors will be penalized by being deprived of salvation or even punished for the sins of the war dead who would then be "liberated²⁶ from any sins" they may have accumulated during life. A widow told me that her son's murderers would take on his sins and their own, thus reflecting her construction of his innocence.

THE ORGANIZATION

As people became politicized, they were more likely to link *La Violencia* to the "organization" (politics) and the armed forces than the ancestors. In this interpretation, *La Violencia* may be seen as resulting from the malevolent effects of greed for *Ladino* resources and the military's assassinations as punishment (*castigo*) for the error of collaborating with so-called subversives.

While some Quiché people began to understand the wider problem through the teachings of popular organizations and the guerrilla, they also saw that it did not get them anywhere but, instead, made trouble for them. In the end they blamed the people who had involved them in "ideas" which only resulted in mass destruction. Their discourses reflect retrospective glances condemning their involvement with the popular organizations. Others still believe in the guerrilla cause but are too afraid to voice their views, let alone act upon them. While perhaps holding newer political explanations in mind at some level, they might yield to more ingrained explanations.

Women were largely excluded from political discourse although there were a few who had "awoken" (*despertada*: become politically aware). It can be assumed that any woman who had a "disappeared" relative had become politicized to some degree. However, women

did not use, for example, Marxist-Leninist ideas to interpret their situation. The closest that many women came to political explanations were quasi-political understandings of current events, reached through biblical analogies:

I think that God allowed this to happen to us because he too gave his spirit and his body and his soul on the cross. They crucified and killed him so that we could stay on this land. Perhaps it is because of this that our relatives suffered in the same way that Christ suffered...They too were like a representative of God. They were tortured and kicked to death too. Their blood poured out from their faces too. Isn't this what they did with the son of God before?...Perhaps God gave our men the idea to work with the people of their community. But it is this that did not go down well with the people. They did not like it when they spoke of equality.

This type of explanation reflects the way in which they heard about *La Violencia* in the first place: through catechists,²⁷ who translated the events of *la lucha* (the struggle) so that they made sense to locals. Women may have also used their own folk descriptions of what was happening: the rich getting richer and the poor poorer, or being "pushed aside" (which would corroborate the solidarity explanation). The ethnocidal aspect of national level violence was dramatized in the transformation they saw in local level relations. The "poor *naturales* (Indians)" were oppressed and abused locally by the *jefes* and nationally by the *Latinos*.

The idea of ancestral condemnation is conflated with political reasons for assassinations, indicating the transition in politicized women's thinking:

Perhaps we were judged [by the ancestors] because we didn't carry out the unity - union. It is true that we organized but we didn't let everyone join and some committed errors [killed, temporarily gave up performing *costumbre*?] when *La Violencia* came. Perhaps because of this *La Violencia* came and affected everyone.

Some women seemed to regret that they did not do more within the popular movements; at times they thought that their failure was not due to the organization itself but to their inability to make it succeed. One woman blamed their lack of success on their forefathers who had not educated them or given them any ideas. *Doña Flora* conjectured:

Perhaps we *Indígenas* (Indians) could not tolerate the things that pertained to "the organization", the fact that they talked in a different way... And because of this *nos quemaron todos* (they burnt us all, meaning, they [the army/*jefes*] tarred us all with the same brush).

I heard several women question the wisdom of having involved themselves with the "organization". Women who accepted the blame cast their way by the army expressed remorse and blamed themselves and their kin for their troubles. Other women, for whom being "organized" meant to speak about issues such as equality, only sometimes blamed themselves or their menfolk: such women never held their husbands responsible for *La Violencia* on these grounds. Women were more likely to blame people who objected to the ideas put forward by the "organized" about improving their lives: such people, they told me, were "lazy people who did not want to improve themselves" and "rich *Latinos*" who had killed in the village.²⁸

Giving involvement in the "organization" as an explanation of a relative's death was very rare. This may reflect reluctance to mention it for reasons of safety, or it may be how the death is actually seen. I tend to think that most women did not know if their husbands were involved with the guerrilla, *per se*; they thought they were involved with the Church and held meetings to discuss issues such as equality. However, the EGP took *sub rosa* advantage of Catholic "popular organization" and it is possible that women had little idea that some of their catechists and health workers were part of a revolutionary network.²⁹ Even the wives of such men may not have been aware of their activities.

However, some women alluded to the "bad" behaviour of their spouses. They made a distinction between their husbands and themselves on moral grounds, thus explaining to themselves why they were protected. *Doña Candelaria* indicates that women's moral behaviour according to Quiché principles may override political activity:

God helped the women and not the men who were annoyed and drunk and who do not pray. We admitted to God that we were "organized" but we also told him that we did not steal and that we always worked to serve the lives of women and men. There were, in fact, many women who were kidnapped during this time but not us because we asked for God's help.

Doña Flora, politicized by her husband's death and her subsequent discussions with the women of CONAVIGUA, questioned *suerte*:

It was ordered by people not by God. If it was an illness then it would be God but since it wasn't, then no it is not because of God...I do not know if it was his [her husband's] *suerte* [to die] or it is simply because they wanted to kill him.

Some people saw *La Violencia* as the violation of one's *suerte* rather than an expression of it:

I had a dream that he had been murdered. I saw him crying and he carried a candle in his hand but I could not unmask what was going on, I could not understand why he cried. Perhaps it is because his time had not come because, you see, he died because of *La Violencia* and not according to his *suerte*.

Women are more likely to blame those immediately and directly responsible for the events: they observed the *jefes* carrying out massacres and therefore blamed them and not the army behind the scenes. This is a strategic choice because it centres directly on those human agents who are feasibly within their range of social action (cf. Scott 1985:182). Women's testimony shows some resistance to army and militia rhetoric and indicates that they thought *La Violencia* stemmed from attempts to counter the villagers' efforts to improve their lives; they were aware of the connection between *La Violencia* and involvement in literacy programmes or revolutionary activity, both of which are referred to as "organizing". The oppression of people was defined as much in ethnic as in class terms:

Doña Candelaria:

The reason for *La Violencia* is that people were asking for their rights.

Doña Flora:

Ladinos and our people, *Indígenas* who are like the *Ladinos* in that they don't want to organize, claim that it was our fault that their husbands died. They say that they died because we were organized. But I think it is because they didn't like what we were talking about...things like equality...You see they wanted to remain rich while the poor continued to eat shit.

The self-blame inherent in the concept of ancestral punishment may have made people more susceptible to blame cast by the military and the *jefes* who manipulated Quiché concepts of sin and their predisposition to hold themselves or their kin responsible for the problems they encounter.

Doña Rosaria:

My brother was kidnapped because they [the army/ *jefes*] told us that we were itzel winak (dirty [bad] people, i.e., guerrillas).

Doña Flora:

Some say that it is our fault that they killed their husbands because we were "organized".

In this scenario, the military and their accomplices are the omnipotent authorities, deciding where blame lay and sending punishment (*castigo*). The army and authorities indoctrinated people to believe that their kin were guerrillas and their pursuits immoral; only the army could save the community. Many people told me that the army and local *jefes* did the killing, but the guerrillas were responsible because "if the guerrilla had never come, then the army would not have come to kill". *Doña Helena* (Nebaj) echoed the army:

It was our fault that we suffered from *La Violencia* because we allowed the guerrillas to enter the village. If the whole world had refused to speak to the guerrilla then all the problems that we have lived through would not have arisen...

This statement was typical of many I heard. It may reflect women's tendency to communicate in terms of ancestral anger and sadness rather than their own bad feelings. This rage was viewed as a "punishment for the living", in this case for the women's bad thoughts and actions. At times women conveyed a sense of overwhelming badness, that is, they saw the atrocities arising with *La Violencia* as an affliction in response to their own evilness.

Many of these women had not seen their relatives' bodies at death. They may have dealt with the overwhelming experiences of loss by a magical mode of thinking in which they blame themselves for the deaths. This was not necessarily a consistent feeling and was often countered with an self-image of heroism. Given the fragmentation of their selves, the tendency to go from one mode of thinking to another is perhaps more intense than at other times. It is as though the battle going on outside in a divisive community also goes on within

themselves. They have most probably internalized the repression in their every-day lives which indicates that the inside of the person is split and even turned against his/her own self. Only here, one half of the self is manifested as the ancestor, the *brujo* or other authority.

INTERPRETING LA VIOLENCIA

People's explanations about the causes of *La Violencia* were not static but operated according to several exegeses simultaneously with one interpretation not necessarily being more accurate, complete or final than another; each could be a version of the truth as understood at the time. Several currents flow at different depths in Quiché statements, as they invariably do in anyone's statements. What at times appeared to me to be a reduction of exegeses and confusion might have been partly due to Quiché tolerance for alternative explanations; it was also partly due to the fact that every event at the national level is also an event at the local level and frequently seen as a supernatural event as well. Apparent inconsistencies also reflected the need to negotiate and renegotiate the meaning of *La Violencia*; the grafting of several levels onto each other allowed women to constitute an event in terms of several categories.

People varied their exegeses of the same phenomenon depending on context, to whom they were speaking, the level at which they chose to pitch their interpretation, and which part of the process I punctuated by my questions. Explanations depended on changeable aspects such as a person's mood, whether they were afraid or what was happening in their lives at the time (for example, another death, a clandestine grave exhumed). Exegeses also depend on the speaker's psychological state; a woman will resort to different exegeses to explain *La Violencia* and her dead relative's part in it depending on the point she has reached within the grieving process. The category of the perpetrator and that of the victim also affected exegeses. Attributed meanings also depended on the nature of the specific event: an unwitnessed abduction was more likely to leave relatives uncertain about the reason for the disappearance³⁰ yet they felt more free to speculate about alternatives and to project their worst fears into empty space.

My understanding of their definitions also depended to some extent on the source and destination of the current I pursued at any one moment. It also appertained to their

assumptions about who I was and what I was trying to pursue. When I tried to elicit more specific explanations, I found that people who had, say, given political interpretations would resort to a different discourse, such as supernatural causes, which was not necessarily contradictory to the first. Explanations were not necessarily distinct; they operated simultaneously at different levels.

The holding of a satisfactory interpretation (or not) was not an absolute occurrence; it was not that one person held a full explanation and another had none. Exegeses were generally partial. Several women, for example, seemed to have a partial understanding of *La Violencia* as a general phenomenon as well as others pertaining to specific incidents. They offered several possibilities in one breath regarding the murder or abduction of their male kin: they might have realized, say, that their kin had been targeted because they had held "meetings" (which may or may not have been political) or were involved in literacy programmes, yet a certain amount of vacillation and confusion sometimes arose when trying to explain why a particular person was victimized.

A person's experience of, or identification with, the events comprising *La Violencia* also resulted in divergent explanations. Exegeses were readily available according to the source of the derived meaning of events. People resorted to alternative modes of explanation, depending on cultural meaning which, in turn, depended on factors such as a person's political affiliation, religion, gender, monolingualism, and other internal issues such as the capacity to mourn. People involved in religious or political activities (there were surprisingly few of the latter) related to and interpreted incidents differently from uninvolved, conservative members of society. For example, when a married couple "disappeared", their brother-in-law, an aj q'ij, told me that this had happened because they fought excessively and the ancestors had therefore decided to bring them to the afterlife; however, a neighbour and the *jefe* both explained the event as part of the army's campaign to rid the community of guerrillas.

Vested interests also affected interpretation of events. Some people attempted to cast themselves in a good light and the "other", including the dead, in a negative one. I was told of an army teacher³¹ who "taught" children who had returned from the mountains that guerrillas, and not the army, had murdered their parents in order to take over their land. The

military's general repetition of exegeses may have persuaded people through indoctrination rather than logical persuasion.

People also had a vested interest in interpreting the death or disappearance of family members: the cause of, and responsibility for, a death could affect land inheritance. On another level, women also had a vested interest in maintaining certain images of their kin for their own peace of mind. They might take comfort in thinking that their husbands died as martyrs rather than as the result of ancestral reproof. The way that women understood the innocence of their dead affected their own identity: they could be the widow of a martyr or the widow of a sinner (guerrilla). However, in reality, women felt that the dead were innocent one moment and guilty the next, because women's feelings towards their dead kin were often ambivalent, particularly towards their husbands who were no longer there to protect them or to beat them.

Moreover, at different times people perceived the situation and those present (including myself) as threatening. The Quiché deftly employ deflective devices and tend to be reticent about explaining *La Violencia*. At times people feigned ignorance, answering my questions with "saber" (who knows);³² at other times, people felt compelled to give me some kind of answer for fear that I might suspect they were hiding something. "Saber" is the safest answer to give an interlocutor who is either not clearly marked politically or viewed with some suspicion. This response can reflect the wish to minimize the risk of being perceived as sympathetic to one side or the other. Rather than reflecting a vacuum of meaning, "saber" may simply be a statement of neutrality.

"Saber" can equally reflect a deeply discouraged view of things, expressed as an abnegation of responsibility: who knows when this took place, who knows when this began, who knows what is true and untrue. "Saber" is also the least presumptions answer; for the Quiché, presuming to know such answers is like playing God. Only God knows what is true and just; only he can act; only he knows what is going to happen, "solo Dios...solo Dios". Here, God tends to be very distant from the person.

Other factors which might also have had a bearing on this response were the proliferation of both army and guerrilla propaganda and rapid religious conversion.³³

Exposure to different ideologies resulted in conflicting explanatory frameworks. Indeed, some people saw the vacillation itself as an explanation for the degradation of moral values which led to confusion and, ultimately, to killing.

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF MEANING

Quiché people explain *La Violencia* by means of a variety of categories of causation, most of which are employed for explaining why things happen in normal times. Through *La Violencia*, the military have come to be included with "other worldly" institutions such as ancestors and *jefes* with local level figures such as *brujos* and ordinary villagers.

Interpretations became guiding forces to action: people who believed in God's and/or the ancestors' anger or their protective powers firmly believed that prayers saved them and they prayed morning and night; those who believed that they were afflicted by witchcraft and ancestral wrath visited the *aj q'ij* to solicit protection and appeasement respectively; people behaved as modestly as possible to avoid *envidia* and *el calumnia* and tended to trust very few people with important information about themselves. Belief in *suerte* led to little positive action though it may have stopped a person from fleeing or dancing to the tune of intimidating forces as one's time of death is predetermined.

Employing familiar exegeses which obscure what "really" happened sets the experience in a familiar context. However, exegeses of "normal" causation erase the violent intent of the military forces and attribute a knowable cause of death, placing social action (assassination/abduction) in parentheses. The garbing of murders and other atrocities in a false cloak of naturalness may make them manageable to some extent, although the causal accounts of death are unsatisfactory attempts to come to terms with the uncontrollable, violent, relatively unknowable aspects of human agency. All these explanations preserve the status quo by obscuring substantial political/economic and historical issues. I suggest that the very inappropriateness of these exegeses to describe political killings underlines, in part, the difficulty of finding a vocabulary of comparison for incomparable atrocity. On the other hand, their use reflects people's need to protect themselves from further atrocity.

Some comfort was derived in the repudiation of responsibility by thinking that everything was in the hands of God/the ancestors. However, it did not afford the benefits of a sense of empowerment afforded by exegeses containing at least the remnants of political causation for *La Violencia*. Enlightenment at this level was helpful even though the same people who acquired this new understanding continued to resort to supernatural explanations depending on which level their explanations were pitched.

These transformations of reality allow the experience to be assimilated in a way which is perhaps less possible for those who do not adapt known interpretations of causation. Perhaps the least fortunate were people who were unable to incorporate *La Violencia* into old explanatory frameworks or to create satisfactory new ones. Some people lost their religious faith; their exegeses about God were appropriate for normal times but broke down in extreme disaster. They saw that God did not protect them and that their corn still grew when they could not perform their rituals.

People who lost faith in the ancestors were unlikely to continue consulting aj q'ijs which would have allowed them to establish whether death was due to *suerte*, ancestral punishment or *envidia* or a combination of these. Such consultation was important for it helped to establish the innocence of the dead in the eyes of the living. Perhaps the fact that *envidia* was the most common response among those who lost faith was a reflection of survivors' belief in their dead kin's innocence. However, people tended to vacillate in their judgement and often displayed much uncertainty, which may have its roots in psychological processes. Given that the dead were never mourned, ambivalence about a missing person was exacerbated above and beyond that pertaining to the death of a person who is buried and whose loss is grieved.

People who suffered from a loss of meaning also lost the sense that the world was a predictable place. Some of these were left with a profound insecurity and sensed that *La Violencia* could suddenly return at any moment (which was a real threat). They attributed causation of *La Violencia* to contiguous events (such as the clergy leaving Quiché in the early 1980s) and, when similar events occurred in the present (when a priest had to flee one *municipio* in 1988), they were afraid that *La Violencia* was about to return.

Among those left without an adequate way of explaining the loss of their dead kin were those who were forced to forget, as advocated by the military forces and their local vigilantes. People whose explanations were inadequate (or non-existent) for them to assimilate the experiences brought by *La Violencia* were left with a separation between agency and event, between the loss of a husband or son and assigning responsibility. For some, that loss was a source of lasting confusion - "my own fault, or it was by God's will...saber".

Individuals who were unable, finally, to escape suffering were isolated within their own physical and emotional conditions, having been deprived of any vehicle through which their experience may be made meaningful and, therefore, sufferable. One might expect that the grief experienced by people who cannot explain an ordeal to be more intense than that of others who were able to explain and thus integrate their past. One may expect a resolution of grief when the cause of death makes sense to the bereaved and when they can have peace of mind about the event (Eisenbruch 1984:331). Geertz points out the insufficiency of commonsensical systems of thought, like those which inform "medical civilization", arguing that "...the events through which we live are forever outrunning the power of our ordinary, everyday moral, emotional, and intellectual concepts to construe them, leaving, as a Javanese image has it, like water buffalos listening to an orchestra" (1968:101). In the case of drastic changes brought about by *La Violencia* the Quiché's experience of the situation was perhaps even less comprehensible.

1. The guerrillas have also taken note of the parallel.
2. Yabil is ancestral retribution in the form of misfortune, disaster or illness (see below).
3. Wilson writes that the bible is still used as a means of warning people of dangers; eg, the army is denounced through reference to Roman soldiers (1990:295).
4. In Quiché, the first of these was Catholic Action, a pastoral movement started by Spanish priests to bring Mayan Indians to orthodox catholicism. After the army disrupted the Catholic Action network in the early 1980's, two other kinds of group proliferated (often lead by former catechists): evangelical protestantism and charismatic renewal which is ostensibly Catholic but evidences strong protestant influence.

5. Called *nagualismo* (the phenomenon of "transforming witches" or "wizards"). See appendix IV.
6. cf. Burgos-Debray and Menchú 1984:39. According to Ruth Bunzel, the Quiché word for this is ixkib but this means menstruation according to the people I spoke to.
7. Alternatively, violence is considered an invasion by bad spirits and is viewed as a more temporary state.
8. Some Protestant sects emphasize predestination (which can be seen as akin to *suerte*) rather than free-will. However, because of the political situation, I was unable to ascertain the prevalence of this belief among Quiché sects.
9. cf. Landa (1975:78) who recorded that in the sixteenth century the Maya believed that all sickness, afflictions and death were caused by sin.
10. Wagley found that Guatemalans also made a distinction between some diseases, especially smallpox and typhus, which were thought to be sent by the Guardians, and chronic diseases and general misfortune which were punishments from God (*mande de Dios, juicio de Dios* or, more commonly, *Il de Dios*). Such punishments are sent to people who commit any one of a multitude of sins, or even to their descendants to the second generation (1949:76) if they do not demonstrate appropriate corrective action.
11. The tendency to feel that disaster is a punishment is perhaps not specific to the Quichés nor, indeed, may it need the endorsement of the aj q'iis to be felt. Psychologist Wolfenstein (1957) showed in her study of natural disasters that in the moment of being struck by an overpowering force there seems often to be the feeling of an agency that acts with intent. There is a desire to detect moral agency in nonhuman causes. Victims tend to react to disaster as if it were a punishment. She makes a connection to the behaviour observed among victims of terrorism, referring to the feelings of eastern European Jews about their persecutions by the Nazis.
12. Newer religions such as *La Renovación*, a controversial new wing of the Catholic Church, also deliver messages of repentance.
13. A priest told me that the *Costumbrista* confession is more effective than the one-to-one Catholic confession after which a person may go home and carry on as before because the rest of the family has not heard the confession.

14. The aj q'ij uses some of this money to buy candles and incense which is offered to the ancestors/god.
15. According to Foster and Rubenstein's model, peasants view their total environment as one in which all the desired things in life exist in limited supply and in which "there is no way directly within peasant power to increase available quantities" (1965:296). Thus, advancement in an individual's or family's situation can be realized only at the expense of others, making one person's fortune a threat to everyone around him. This is reflected by the Quiché to whom the good person is someone who is satisfied his lot and lacks ambition.
16. Some write that the civil-religious hierarchy (see e.g., Wagley 1949, Nash 1958) was also a powerful levelling institution because the large expenditures associated with office kept families roughly equivalent from generation to generation (Carmack 1983:230). Nash (1957) writes that the offices were unpaid and, in fact, required the outlay of cash and food by office holders.
17. However, other women proposed that it was because people had less money and not more that they were targets of killing in the village. The motivation in this case was not reflected as one of *envidia* but as fear of *Ladinos* and Ladinization of certain members of the community including the *jefes* and the better off who wanted to kill off the poor. This reflected a political rather than a local explanation. For example, *doña Josefina* explained to me:

Mario killed them because he had a bit of money and because of this he didn't want to accept the other type of poor. This is what he did not want.
18. *Doña Rosaria* explained the problem as perpetuated by locals and this was the reason she also gave for not going into hiding:

It is not the army that kill, it is the very same people from our community who go and bring the army and after they say that it was the army. This is a lie. We don't know what these people want from us, perhaps they want us to leave our lands free so that they can take over our land. I do not know what they want. But we have to remain firm and not leave our lands and that they can do what they want to do.
19. To take revenge, people would rather go to the *jefe* (the mediator of the military), than take the traditional approach of going to a *brujo* (the mediator of the devil).
20. There is a similarity in the notions of *suerte* and *brujería*: both are forces beyond the control of the individual and both can only be known in retrospect. Unlike ancestral reproof, *brujería* is unjust: it can cause the death of an innocent person. Cf. Wagley (1949) for a similar phenomenon among Chimaltecos.

21. Stoll writes that the Cotzaleños blamed themselves for *La Violencia*, attributing it to political rivalries. This sent one of the town's factions to the Ixcán Jungle for the first alliance between Ixils and the Guerrilla Army of the Poor. Stoll suggests that there is a regional difference, as the Chajuleños and Nebajefños did not blame themselves in this way (1992:9). However, I found that within one region some people blamed themselves and some blamed a variety of others.
22. This primarily personal interpretation was largely confined to the Quiché.
23. cf. Edmund Leach's (1977) discussion of violence perpetrated by terrorists in a society and the society's leaders (authorities) noting that in a crucial sense both may be regarded as "outsiders" competing to impose their will on the populace at large. The two sides, locked in battle represent the other's violent acts of as savage but deems its own as heroic.
24. *San Sebastián* is generally depicted at the moment of execution, tied to a tree with his hands above his head and a quiverful of arrows embedded in his naked chest. It is possible that Indians see parallels between this popular saint and their own situation (tied to the land, perpetually attacked, etc).
25. In contrast to women's private discourses referring to the moral behaviour of the dead, there is a tendency for men to refer to the wider, national, political, historical scene. It is possible that men who were actively involved (and especially those who joined from ideological commitment), experienced and identified with the events which comprise *La Violencia* differently from women and uninvolved, conservative members of society.
26. The incentive of subordinates (e.g., slaves and prisoners) to act compliantly in the face of a vision of their own liberation has been observed, for example by Patterson (1982). The difference among the widows is that their vision involves the liberation of the dead and not themselves. This may be a phenomenon which is connected to the fact that they are female, which is other-oriented in their culture. It may also be a sort of psychological compensation due to their guilt for surviving.
27. Catholic Action members of these communities did play a major role in organizing the Committee for Peasant Unity (CUC) and were perhaps involved in establishing links with the Guerrilla Army for the Poor. Arias (1990) writes that the Catholic Church did join the guerrilla movement in the late 1970s.
28. The *jefes*, despite being Indians, were spoken about in this way because of their association with the *Ladino* army and wealth. See chapter 5.

29. cf Stoll 1992.
30. Stoll writes that when Ixils from the north of El Quiché province (which was under government control), use the indefinite "they" to assign responsibility for killing, further acquaintance and conversation usually reveals that they are referring to government security forces. Yet when Ixils blame guerrillas, they do not hesitate to say so. Where Ixils seem genuinely uncertain is in regard to individual homicides for which witnesses are lacking (1992:115,fn31).
31. I assume that she was part of the S-5 or G-5, the civic action (or psychological warfare) branch of the army.
32. The literal translation of this is "to know".
Hobsbawm suggests that this type of veiling among peasants is a form of class struggle (1973:13). In the Guatemalan case it may also be seen as a form of resistance.
33. Evangelicals tended to deny "real" events and emphasize the hoped-for better after-life. Conversion took place among people who wanted to save their skins because Catholics and *Costumbristas* were more likely to be killed or disappeared. Evangelical sects also included those whose faith had already vacillated for other reasons such as the expense of consultations with an aj q'ij and the wish to escape (psychologically) from the intolerable events all around them.



-Plate 9: *Reservistas* (army reserves)

Chapter 10

The cultural construction and reconstruction of danger

"Caslic?" (still alive?)

"Mi xej awb" (that fear should not be with you)

Common Quiché greetings

In this chapter I explain Quiché cultural constructions of danger; I then examine how cultural conceptions of the most common dangers resonated with new perils which arose with *La Violencia*. This reverberation coloured ways of perceiving where danger lay and, in turn, changed the reality of threats in Quiché existence. My interest here is in examining Quiché symbols of authority and danger, how they have been manipulated and how they change with time. I will demonstrate that the reconceptualization of danger is not necessarily complete, uniform or fixed and that this serves to fragment community response.

Prior to *La Violencia*, the Quiché lived in a decipherable, if ambiguous world: people held common beliefs in *communitas* (Turner 1969:96), yet were riven by fears of witchcraft.¹ However, "we" (inside) was separated by clearly defined frontiers from the enemy (outside). My aim is to show how army rhetoric worked on this model, resulting not only in a proliferation of frontiers between "we" and the enemy, but a redefinition of the enemy itself (devil, subversive, thief, non-patroller, member of a human rights group).

A sense of community, frustrated by the proliferation of boundaries, accompanying terror, upheaval and rapid social change, was made possible in this instance through belief in the "Black Man". He is essentially a prankster²/scapegoat figure and represents a means of interpreting and expressing new dangers in terms of old familiar fears.

SOCIALIZATION AND THE PREPARATION FOR THE RECOGNITION OF DANGER

Perceiving and understanding dangers requires both learning and a complex process of assimilating and integrating knowledge. This process extends far beyond any inborn predisposition towards fearing certain aspects of the environment. Through inculcating appropriate behaviours, the Quiché together construct the meaning of dangerous agents, their socialization practices, and their fear. As a result, the cultural communication of a sense of what is dangerous becomes all the more crucial for defending a person from both palpable and impalpable threats. This process takes place in the socialization of the vulnerable infant and child and, to some extent, in the re-socialization of the adult.

The preparation for scenarios of danger normally begins among the Quiché in parent/child interactions where a spirit such as the q'ol q'ol³ is invoked to frighten a child. Then, as a preliminary to the moral lesson of respect, children are encouraged to fear unfamiliar villagers and strangers who approach their homes. Showing respect to elders and significant others is one of a parent's first expectations of a child; also stressed is the importance of greeting everyone they meet. Both can be seen as anti-conflict devices⁴ and children are socialized into performing them from an early age.⁵ Advice, rather than, say, physical punishment, is the main means of socialising correct behaviour in children within the family.

Advice can be seen as a potent check on Quiché behaviour; people are accustomed to receiving advice from others well into adult life, especially from shamans and elders who are said to "orientate" them in terms of the correct behaviour for different circumstances. The need for orientation is understandably heightened in unknown situations where values have been violated. In the face of the demoralization of the old power structures, the army and local *jefes*⁶ prescribe and proscribe correct behaviours: one does not, for example, offer food and clothing to the guerrillas if one wishes to stay alive.⁷

In developing a sense of fear, Quiché elders attempt to engineer desired behaviours. Fear, respect and shame are what a "good" person feels. To be fearful is to acknowledge others' anger, that one's behaviour is unacceptable - in a small, almost face-to-face

community, actions can soon become "common knowledge"; yet disapprobation of another's behaviour normally takes indirect forms. Ironically, such obliqueness leaves the Quiché uncertain of others' evaluation of their behaviour, resulting not only in great individual concern with an appearance of personal correctness but also in considerable preoccupation with others' real or imaginary responses. This insecurity often translates into suspicions that others harbour envy against them.

To say that someone "*no tiene miedo*" (is fearless)⁸ usually refers to some violation in social relationships rather than an individual's personal qualities. Such reprehensible behaviour may cause the ancestors to call a person to the afterlife.

THE THINGS MOST FEARED ...

Quiché people fear socially empty space, which they associate with night. People will avoid being on their own (referred to as a "sad" situation), even in their own homes; they will avoid going anywhere alone, particularly to other *municipios* (traditionally viewed with hostility and suspicion); and they will avoid being out at night for fear of encountering spirits. This all-pervasive notion is also reflected in attitudes towards incoming strangers, ideas and things.

Strange people, places and things; neighbours

Fear of others' (malevolent) intentions can splinter social life, causing neighbour to avoid neighbour; close neighbours are considered more dangerous than more distant ones because of boundary disputes. Merely being observed by one's neighbours can be threatening; they may spread rumours of illicit activities or subversion which may end in death. After many instances of betrayal during *La Violencia*, the Quiché are even less sure about others' intentions and thoughts. This alienation is frequently expressed in the phrase "every head is a different world" (*cada cabeza es otro mundo*).

A stranger who intrudes on known territory is considered dangerous. Every villager keeps a scrawny dog with a vicious sounding bark and a bite to match; when it barks, a child is usually sent to investigate. Hoping to reassure those inside, the visitor calls out, "Don't

be afraid" (mix nxbij). Nowadays, instead of consulting a shaman about an unfamiliar visitor's intentions, the hosts themselves ask, "What will happen to me if I speak to you?" or "How do I know if you have come with good intentions?" A straightforward answer is rarely completely accepted and hidden agendas are usually suspected.

To counter potentially malevolent intentions and create a sense of intimacy, a visitor is invariably asked to share food. The recipient often feels apprehensive about accepting; people are discouraged from eating food which is *ajenas* (from outside), as it may be poisoned. The food is therefore offered with many assurances "to eat with confidence". A visitor's apparent reluctance to eat is seen by the host as a welcome sign of respect and good manners (outright refusal indicates mistrust or displeasure and can be dangerous). The visitor, knowing how sensitive the host is likely to be to any sign that his offering (a symbol of non aggression) is unacceptable, repeatedly thanks the giver throughout the meal. However, the Quiché are conventionally reserved and may become suspicious of an over-complimentary guest.

Apparently, people have "never" really appreciated unexpected visits because, to the Quiché, and especially to women, the house is their haven.⁹ Unfamiliar visitors, or those who are known but feared or disliked, are usually addressed at some distance from the house, across the cornfields, in the courtyard.¹⁰ Even in heavy rain, guests are seated under the veranda. One reason for this is that people fear exposure to envy should others see their possessions, even though goods of any value are stored inside the house, covered with *pañuelos* (cloths).

Fear of the presence of others increases when someone comes to stay for an extended period through marriage, adoption, or, in the case of the anthropologist, prolonged squatting! Apprehension is felt both by the inhabitants of a home and the newcomer, who will be expected to conform to the household's ways; they have to achieve a delicate balance between trust and respect which is renegotiated as they become more familiar.

Unclassifiable outsiders, such as the anthropologist, inspire some of the most dramatic proclamations of all types of fear. In an attempt to make the unknown more familiar, people would classify me within some known category. These included *gringa*, *Ladina*, *guerrilla*,

canche and army spy (*oreja*).¹¹ I was jokingly called a c'u'xnelita (literally, person of essences, meaning little person eater) by my adoptive family, who laughed when I referred to myself in the same way; however, I felt there was a certain amount of fear behind it. Fear is sometimes expressed in a playful, amusing and inventive manner, even in the presence of the anxiety provoking agent. It seems that while people may be terrified of the deadly effects of the worst kinds of evil, at other times they can joke about it and make humorous parallels.

After centuries of oppression, villagers have a pathological mistrust of foreigners, *Latinos* and any outside authority. *Latinos* (mo's)¹² frighten the Quiché, who shoulder the brunt of their racist attitudes and actions. *Latinos* are associated both with army and guerrilla organizations; the expression r'mos (*Ladino*) is used to refer to the army "because the commanders of the army are *Latinos*".

Gringos (who may also be referred to as mo's) are also considered dangerous: at best, they are thought to have little "respect"; at worst, they are believed to abduct children, cut off their genitals and turn them into curative medicines. Tourists are thought to kill people by stealing their souls with a flash of their cameras.

Being friendly with a *Ladino* can be dangerous for an Indian, arousing suspicion and envy among those who suspect that they are getting something from the *Ladino* in a dishonourable fashion. Indians aspire to raising their standard of living but acquiring wealth through immoral means is reprehensible.

Many women told me of their frightening dreams of *Latinos* and foreigners which reflected their ambivalent attitudes towards these categories of people. *Doña Josefina* told me of a dream in which she had been seduced by a *rubio* (blond) *Ladino*. In *Doña Ana*'s dream, she was killed by a *Ladino* with a *machete* (knife) and then resurrected as a *Ladino*.

Cross-gender relationships also give rise to fear. The opposite sex is a relatively unknown quantity because it is considered dangerous to violate the traditional taboos which separate the sexes. Girls are socialized into being "ashamed" in front of groups of boys and will usually rush past them in a group, covering their mouths with their *rebosas* (shawls),

giggling nervously. Women fear men's authority and potential violence. Wife beating is not uncommon and recently women have also had to contend with various types of abuse by the *jefes* and military commissioners.

Women often speak of being afraid when they venture to unknown places beyond the village perimeter. When passing unfamiliar places, people fear becoming the object of malicious envy (*envidia*), gossip and rumour (*el chisme*). Here, too, they are more likely to meet someone's fearful, malevolent or critical gaze: criticism can endanger one's public image or lead to *brujería* (witchcraft). Fear increases if the other person is thought to be angry, drunk or menstruating; such people are said to have "strong blood",¹³ which enables them to give the evil eye (*malo ojo/rawinak*),¹⁴ harming plants and animals and causing illness and sometimes a child's death.

Other fears of contact with people outside the village relate to racism. This may be expressed in the idiom of dress, which is bound up with a woman's ethnic identity. A widow, confronted with the possibility of going beyond the town, asked me, "will they tear off my *corte* (skirt) when they see me?"

Steep, inaccessible areas beyond the cultivated fields¹⁵ are considered frightening and remote from daily life. The relative location and boundaries of these spaces remains constant, although the cultural meanings associated with them vary according to the time of day.

Night transforms the local landscape into a different world in which the strange and uncanny prowl the familiar village streets. Like the wilds of the remote mountaintops,¹⁶ each with its *dueño* (a supernatural owner or guardian),¹⁷ night holds unknown possibilities for the Quiché. Few people stay up late and no one leaves the village after nightfall; to be up and out after dark gives rise to suspicion. Traditionally, night is when *brujería* is performed; more recently it is the time when people "organize" or disappear. At night, spirits leave the remote, liminal areas where they reside during the day and wander around the houses. More recent demarcations of dangerous space include the civil patrol and army bases which, though located on the village perimeter, are considered to be "outside".

Fears of the "outside" were revealed in women's comments about what they imagined appeared on the TV recently brought into the village.¹⁸ *Doña Flora* once told me that "they show the raping of women and the killing of children in Guatemala City" on television. Another woman merely exclaimed, "it's all very frightening!"¹⁹

So-called progress, particularly that introduced from the outside, is also associated with danger. Electric light is implicated in human deaths because human heads are said to be needed to generate electricity. The motorized corn grinder (*el molino*) is said to "kill" the maize, making those who eat it vulnerable to illness. In contrast, hand ground maize remains "alive" and the people who eat it stay healthy.

Drunkenness, verbal and physical abuse

Violence is almost always preceded by the consumption of alcohol. Though the Quiché are more prone to tears than anger when drunk, brawls do break out: men swing punches at each other, women pull hair and hurl insults. Such outbursts, especially in public domains, were traditionally referred to the village *alcalde* (mayor). The most common form of interpersonal violence is wife beating by drunken husbands.

The strict norms of respect which operate to maintain harmonious social relations can dissolve when people are drunk, leading to potentially explosive situations. This is a particular risk at *fiestas* when many normally reserved villagers get drunk, becoming assertive and even abusive as they express their grief.

Drunks are feared because they are not afraid (*no tiene miedo*) and have no shame (*no tiene avergüenza*). Their lack of fear can have serious repercussions for others: a drunk may admit to his own or someone else's activities; he may become explicit about community tensions; he is likely to avenge a previous insult aggressively; he may even break the silence which *jefes* have imposed regarding their atrocities.

As mentioned, since *La Violencia*, drunkenness among women has become less rare. Women have been known to take verbal revenge when drunk: *Doña Josefina* told me she chased the *jefe* who had killed her husband "all the way to his house. I was shouting at him

'murderer!...assassin!'" It is possible that women seize the opportunity to make accusations in the belief that their actions will be attributed to their drunken state. Sober spectators may, however, fear for her life; relatives also fear for their own.

Sober men are portrayed by both genders as the protectors of women and children should violence break out. Women are anxious when men are absent, even temporarily, from the household; they fear confrontation at night by drunken *jefes* and commissioners in combative or amorous mood; assaults on women are now more common than they were in the past. Direct violence between sober people, especially kin and neighbours, though rare, is nevertheless seen as a worrying possibility.

Verbal violence, particularly if vociferous, is perceived as sinful. It usually only occurs when the offender can avoid retaliation from the living. One Quiché woman, Teresa, the vice president of her village CONAVIGUA group, had fled when her friend, the president of CONAVIGUA, was shot dead by the village military commissioner. On her return a few weeks later, most of the villagers turned out to jeer at her, accusing her of having "stuck her ass" (fornicated) with the human rights procurator. There was nothing she could do to defend her reputation.²⁰

Verbal judgement is more likely to be made obliquely, as a joke or through "indirect words" (sarcasm). One woman, whose in-laws had been looking after her son since he fled the village during *La Violencia*, explained:

When I am reminded that it was their fault but they refuse to tell me what happened I become drunk, drunk with resentment. That is when I hurl indirect words at them.

In a village that lacks newspapers and has few radios, gossip networks are powerful: they can influence an individual's standing in the village or even cause his/her death; there is little a victim can do to prevent it (though they may attempt immediate corrective action).²¹ To be seen gossiping²² is just as dangerous as being gossiped about: both can bring vengeful actions. It is also believed that informers have been planted to report on *los chismes* reflecting alignment. Recently, villagers have become more wary of both gossip and

rumours; "not to tell tales" is now the most important advice given to children. Nevertheless, both rumours and gossip are said to be increasing.

La Violencia took shape through gossip and rumour (*el chisme*). In this chaotic and life threatening situation, information was either non-existent or ambiguous: rumour and gossip may have been the only source of news of events in the extra-local world. As *La Violencia* increasingly disrupted the everyday order of Quiché life, fear and rumours came to dominate people's perceptions of the world; gossip arises "when order gives way to confusion and incoherence" (Haviland 1977:180). Politically charged rumour came to be seen as autonomous and volatile, able to spark off violent acts; eventually, the rumour or gossip itself came to be seen as dangerous. *Doña Lydia* lamented:

The problem with people is that we have become accustomed to gossiping, rumours, and the lies (*mentiras*)...

Hot tempered and envious people inspire fear in others because, as well as giving the evil eye, they are the most likely people to gossip.

Spirits, spooks and demons

The drama of the spirits in Quiché has historically communicated that the anger of others, whether spirit or human, should produce fear. The spirit domain can represent both the danger of problems, such as illness, as well as its eradication. Spirits embody the contradiction between nearby frequented and known space and the socially dormant night. The saints, like living Quiché, apparently leave the night to the unseen denizens who know it best. As the spooks and demons retire at dawn, the realm of the saints comes to life once again, reestablishing the proper relationship between spatial categories, supernatural domains, and human experience and knowledge.

Generally, spirits are simply the "souls of the dead" who roam the wilds and haunt the deserted parts of the village; some are poltergeists who throw stones or call out to passers by on lonely paths; at other times, spirits are disembodied voices, weeping inconsolably.²³

Tales about spirits refer to the dangers inherent in certain social situations. Themes include unfulfilled family obligations, husbandless households, deceit, adultery, temptation and being alone, particularly at night when spirits are especially prevalent.

Spirits differ from humans primarily in their power and intentions, but may share their motivation and traits.²⁴ They can be angry, lustful, lonely, compassionate or benevolent but are generally viewed as mischievous, malevolent and more likely than humans to intend harm or cause fright.

People are not hostile to the spirits although they fear them; they will attempt to minimize contact (by avoiding liminal places, never being alone or venturing out at night) and will flee from those they see. Spirits are omnipresent, unlike people (such as foreigners) or events (such as earthquakes). They have innumerable faces and are therefore perfect objects to house and express the plethora of Quiché fears; they can be seen as multi-functional, operating on several levels simultaneously.

Spirits personify danger; they replace the image of other dangers which are intangible or too dangerous to acknowledge openly (it is safer to advise someone not to go out at night because of the spirits than to warn them of possible army or guerrilla attack); they can be seen as the targets of Quiché anguish caused by their helplessness after being subjected to one source of aggression or manipulation after another.

The most malicious spirit is the devil, *el malo*, or *remalo* or *itzel*, evil,²⁵ who, though categorized as ambivalent, is nevertheless considered to be unwaveringly malevolent. Other malicious spirits are those who wander around after a "bad" death (see Chapter 8). Particularly dangerous are homicide victims who disturb surviving kin, perhaps causing further deaths. Traditionally, these sad and unhappy spirits are one of the prominent dangers in Quiché life and are currently are a major preoccupation because of the numerous recent murders.

A *llorona* is a dangerous, silent spirit which appears late at night on deserted paths, wearing Quiché women's dress but with loose, unplatted hair. An encounter with a *llorona* invariably presages bad luck. One man told me that he saw a *llorona* shortly before his wife

died. Another man, after an evening's drinking with friends, followed a *llorona*, thinking it was an ordinary woman: one of his *comadres* died shortly afterwards.²⁶

Spirits cause terrifying dreams and omens which leave the dreamer afraid for some time afterwards. As the domains of illness and dreams are not enclosed within the self, spirits can enter these arenas freely and influence the course of events.

Dreams are seen as portents of the future. *Doña Flora* told me how one villager's dream had saved him from the army:²⁷

There was a man, José, who they abducted along with my son, Juan. They took them both to the army base in Quiché but unlike my son, José managed to escape. When the time came he bolted. He ran for the road and he jumped over the *tunas* (cactuses). He ran and ran, like a plane, faster than the cars. And when night fell the rain poured in buckets drenching him. Then when midnight came he felt very sleepy. José wanted to go on but he didn't know which way to go. He just decided to go one way and eventually he came to a ravine. Then he changed directions and came to another one. He was stuck. Suddenly his eyelids began to droop and an elder in white trousers appeared. He said, "look José, here is the path". And when José woke there was the path before him which led him back to safety.

Sometimes spirits let the dreamer know what the future holds for them. One villager told me that his uncle, a shaman,²⁸ had a dream where he saw "the situation" (*La Violencia*) unfold before his eyes. He went blind and died shortly afterwards. Many widows told me they had been forewarned of *La Violencia*²⁹ in dreams. On the basis of dreams, husbands informed their wives of their imminent death and instructed them on what they must do, and not do, once they were gone. More recently, widows' dreams have been frequented by the spirits of their lost kin who are "sad and lonely".

Birds such as the *tecolote* (eagle-owl) are sometimes "sent" as omens of death. Cats also bode ill if they cry near someone's house at night. The recipient of these signs becomes frightened because these nighttime creatures' activities indicate that they are emissaries of the devil. Nevertheless, people are also grateful for these warnings, for they give them the opportunity to settle their affairs before death (see chapter 8).

Witchcraft and *El Bin*

Quiché culture is infused with fears of *brujeria* (witchcraft) which, like the malevolent spirits, can harm, kill, and "disappear" people. Until recently, *brujeria* has been the most popular and common form of premeditated aggression. It represents an alternative to direct violence and is believed to be just as harmful: some people even suggest that certain forms of direct violence are empowered by *brujeria*.³⁰

People make surreptitious visits to *brujos* (witches) to solicit their help. They travel far in order to escape detection, especially by the intended victim (*brujeria* can rebound on the sender). At shrines, also visited by shamans, they work with the witch to concretize their revenge in the form of *brujeria* or the evil eye, using a variety of objects such as dead toads, black or blue candles and objects belonging to the victim.

Brujeria is usually aimed at non-kin although members of the same family may plot to kill each other through this medium. I was told of a young man who thought his brother had received a bigger share of their father's land; he was said to have killed his brother through *brujeria* and taken over his land. In another case, a man fell in love with his female cousin and, when she rejected him, was said to have killed her in the same way.

Although shamans have largely fallen into disrepute in Quiché, *brujos* are still seen, even by sceptics of the old *creencias* (beliefs), to wield hidden influences. Even Catholic and Protestant converts may resort, usually surreptitiously, to a shaman, if they believe that they have been harmed by *brujeria*.

Sometimes witches are invisible and operate through other beings - usually animals:

One day my brother in-law got drunk in the presence of a *brujo* at a *cofradía*'s house. My brother-in-law began to mistreat the people there so the *brujo* warned him that he should be careful or something bad would happen to him. But he didn't take heed. Then, exact on the spot where he had misbehaved, a snake came and bit him. He fell on the floor in a stupor.

*El Bin*³¹ is a type of *brujo* which is purported to come from *el maligno* (evil). They look like ordinary people, although there is usually something aberrant about their appearance: a female *bin*, for example, will wrap her skirt (*corte*) the wrong way round; they may be extraordinarily beautiful but walk with their heads cast down; their heads may be twisted or missing altogether. Their behaviour, too, is odd: they do not, for example, greet people they meet. They are said to be rather "timid", "unintelligent" and unintelligible ("speak ugly").

El bin have the ability to transform themselves.³² After somersaulting in the air three times,³³ the *alma* (soul) abandons the human body, usually taking on the form of an animal which also has something amiss about its appearance. As animals, *los bines* perform evil deeds at night, such as stealing livestock and children, cutting off men's genitals and raping women.³⁴ Meanwhile their human body remains motionless in the place where their soul converts, until the spirit reenters it again; re-entry can only be prevented³⁵ by pouring *cal*³⁶ into its orifices. This renders the malevolent spirit impotent and leaves the *brujo* in animal form for ever. Attacking the animal form also affects the *brujo*: if it is killed, the human *brujo* also dies.³⁷

THE MANIPULATION OF CONCEPTS OF DANGER

The Quiché have experienced conflict and its associated problems for centuries. However, *La Violencia* is different from previous conflicts not only because of its severity but because it is intra-communal rather than inter-communal. "Outside" dangers became indistinguishable from those within: both "outside" forces (the army, who wanted to control the population) and "inside" forces (villagers who wanted to settle personal scores) operated through local civil patrols and *brujos*.

Guerrilla Devils

Military tactics have a psychological proclivity to involve the reconceptualization of the nature of danger. For the army, the enemy/outsider was the guerrilla/subversive /communist/human rights worker. These were not only new words for monolingual Quiché speakers (which included most women) but also new concepts for the non-politicized (which again included most women). Most villagers were therefore unable to assimilate these new

but fearsome agents; the words themselves came to be seen as dangerous and their use avoided for fear of giving the impression that the speaker had knowledge of these matters.³⁸ As their insecurity increased, so did their suggestibility to new information.

With the help of the army, the unknown was made known through slotting the new concept of "guerrilla" into a series of familiar categories: other/outside = guerrilla = devil = evil³⁹ = danger. The rarely seen guerrilla was spoken of in terms of the familiar, malevolent spirits: as an unknown, invisible, powerful, evil, all-pervasive force, superhumanly cunning and cruel, living in dangerous places and operating at night. The Quiché have no concrete evidence with which to refute the army's linkage of the spirits with the guerrilla yet the combination of invisibility, ambiguity and danger is, I suggest, all the more fear provoking.⁴⁰

More readily understood was the army's order to the civil patrols to attack any foreign elements in the community, which resonated with Quiché notions of the dangerous stranger. Making analogies between new concepts and established, fear provoking concepts is an efficacious means of instilling fear of the unknown, which becomes known in the process. The fear evoked is thus a deeply instilled one.

Analogy were made through the telling and retelling of stories in which the malevolent spirit was simply replaced by a guerrilla. As Bruner points out "narrative structures serve as interpretive guides...that transform the alien to the familiar" (1986:147) and sense is made of a situation which initially presents itself as a constellation of "signifiers" (Barthes 1973). In the following narrative, similarities can be seen with *el bin*. A young man who worked in the city recounted a story told to him by his ladinized friends (who were army sympathizers) to explain guerrilla actions:

At night unbeknown to her husband, a woman got up and went outside. There, somersaulting three times, she transformed herself into an animal, like a coyote.⁴¹ Her human body remained motionless in the place where she converted herself. As a coyote she went from house to house, killing the sheep and eating the meat.⁴² Once her belly was full, she did not return home. She went to a house which had been abandoned, and there other *mala gente* (guerrilla) awaited her visit. She climbed a ladder to a secret hide-out in the attic. Then she spewed out the meat. Her *compañeros* were well pleased because they ate well

that night. The coyote then returned home before dawn and, somersaulting three times again, she reentered her human form. She got back into bed with her husband who remained fast asleep and completely unaware of her actions.

The army depicted guerrillas as devils disguised as angels, wandering between angels/saints and men, befriending people and enticing them into sinful acts (such as becoming a guerrilla), thus causing their souls to be invaded by the devil. Allegories were made of wolves (guerrillas) befriending humble people only to steal their chickens. In short, guerrillas were described as immoral beings whose behaviour was contrary to Quiché social norms: they were violent, deceitful, lazy, thieving atheists who lived like animals in the forests and mountains.

When setting up patrols and, later, when attempting to keep the system active, the army tried to convince villagers that guerrillas were lurking in every corner and that neighbours and family members had double lives, one of which could be a guerrilla. Like *el bin*, the guerrilla seems like an ordinary villager in "real life". The army constantly warned villagers to protect themselves from these perilous villains who had the potential to take over the village and its inhabitants, an idea which resonated with Quiché ideas of being taken over by spirits unless one was constantly on one's guard.⁴³

Acting on army orders, the *jefes* portrayed guerrillas as non-humans and devils who lived in the underground worlds (crevices and caves) scattered throughout the village. The mayor of the local town, a *Ladino* Christian Democrat who collaborated with the army in intimidating villagers, also tried to convince people that guerrillas permeated the countryside. One occasion in 1990,⁴⁴ he announced that underground caverns, still warm from guerrilla occupation, had been found in the village.

Soldier saints

Apart from "playing God" by deciding who lived and who died, soldiers attempted to become "saint-like" by associating themselves in the most concrete way with objects the Quiché view as representations of the saints.⁴⁵ Having equated the guerrilla with the devil, the army represented itself as friend and "provider"⁴⁶ (although these days, the military

competes with NGOs to appear as the best provider and a potential source of progress) and even saviour/saint/God. This is particularly clear in the flyers distributed throughout Quiché,⁴⁷ in which the army was associated with the divine who protected people and the church⁴⁸ from the guerrillas (the devil personified) via the civil patrols (see figure 2). Their success is shown by the fact that some people now approach the army rather than the saints for favours and advice.

To the Quiché, God is concrete and speaks; he is something palpable; he can be touched. Some say that saints are mediators or bridges between people and God, a concept which has its roots in Catholic doctrine; others say that, for the Maya, the saints are a pure representation of God. Nevertheless, saints are the most sacred personages in Quiché life, by virtue of their assumed proximity and their ritual accessibility; they are considered to participate directly in the Quichés' daily affairs.⁴⁹

Literally, the saints are wooden images kept in Catholic churches.⁵⁰ In many parts of the highlands, these images are bedecked in the local Indian dress which constitutes an obvious and important marker of ethnic identity. That Indians identify strongly with these icons is shown by the comment that the images "look just like an X".⁵¹ The saints are also place markers: each of Emol's *cantones* has a named patron saint who is an intimate member of the community. The patron saint presides over the congregation in church and over the whole community when it sallies forth during religious processions to survey the boundaries of its domain. Nowadays, processions are accompanied by the armed civil patrol.

As putative social beings, these personages demand that the Quiché relate to them in certain ways. These conventions also articulate Quiché concepts of the sociality that links not only mortals with gods but also mortals with mortals (Watanabe 1989:80). Saints can be viewed as the conventional embodiment of unquestioned authority sanctifying the propriety of local social relations. Appropriate behaviour accounts for one's closeness to the saint and, consequently, for one's true membership in the community. Failure to conform to local conventions engenders the social and ethnic distance epitomized by the physical remoteness of the devil (or *dueño*) and by the amoral behaviour of outsiders.

Indian people display some of their most expressive behaviour before icons. Sometimes, in drunken states,⁵² they converse with them warmly and familiarly, gesturing, appealing, even crying, and listening as though they were real people. During one procession, I noticed that the patron saint's nose was broken; the account of the accident was related to me as if the saint had experienced human emotions at the time.⁵³ The Quiché show their devotion to the saints, both in *cofradía* houses and the church, by traversing the length of the room towards the icon on their knees.

Interactions with icons are two way: Quiché not only project their thoughts and feelings onto the icons but also internalize what they hear is said to them. As the psychotherapy client accepts what the authoritative voice of the therapist tells them about themselves and mirrors the postures and jargons (which are salient to them), so the Indian does the same with the powerful and guiding saint.⁵⁴ They internalize the physical and behavioural qualities they perceive in the images. Villagers told me that the icon of Jesus of Nazareth, which shows Jesus hanging his head forlornly, is aj bis, the worker of sadness; I saw Quiché people imitate this posture when pensive during church services or when praying in front of this icon. A priest working in Quiché told me:

Indians pay more attention to the gestures of the saints than their histories as written in the bible. They will often not know the characteristic of a particular saint, when he died and so on, and they might not even know its name. This is because the saints are something palpable for the Indian; they are something they can touch.⁵⁵

Against this background, at the height of the military's control of the countryside, the army dressed the icons (*imagenes*) in the churches in their uniform⁵⁶ in order to create a positive association between themselves and the saints. By doing this, they army hoped to harness the power of these revered authorities, thereby penetrating the community, winning Quiché hearts and obtaining omnipotent control over the people.

The usurpation of indigenous symbols can be seen as part of a process of undermining Indian morale and rebuilding a new consciousness in which people identify themselves, the army and the saints in the same image. This process also has the effect of manipulating

Quiché sites of memory: the army breaks the bond of identity with the ancestors (saints/God) and locates itself in its place.

Dressing icons in army uniform not only associated the saint with the army in Quiché eyes: it also associated the Quiché with that which the army represented to them and also that which these authorities attribute to them.⁵⁷ However, a saint dressed in army fatigues will not have the same associations for everyone. While the army may have had one idea in mind, the Quiché may have had another.⁵⁸ The Indians' own agenda meant that icons may have become something other than that intended by the army, or they may have become both what the army intended and also something else.⁵⁹ This depended in part on the person, the particular time and context.⁶⁰

The icons have since been reclad in Indian or Ladino dress. Nowadays, khaki or camouflage material is seen more commonly on people; even women wear civil patrol hats.

Icons have their own personal significance; one saint is not miraculous in the same way for everyone. People have their own icons, with their own individualized names, on their personal altars in their homes. They are named according to personal associations or for the tasks they are seen to perform.⁶¹ Personal icons are considered to be members of Quiché households: once, when I asked a woman the names of her children, while sitting adjacent to her altar, she retorted:

You ask me the name of my children but not the name of my saint.

Icons are passed down from generation to generation. As Wagley (1949:53) observed among the Chimaltecos, the "saints are imbued with human attributes and human faults",⁶² although they do not share all the qualities of living members of the household. Perhaps they can be seen to be akin to the ancestors: *doña* Eugenia once told me about the icon (*imagen*) of the Black Christ of Esquipulas⁶³ on her altar which she had inherited from her late in-laws. She told me, "he is a *Costumbrista* and able to perform miracles, therefore we have corn" (*Es de Costumbrismo...es miligroso...por el tenemos maíz*).

Both the saints and the army are ambivalent. In Quiché eyes, both have the potential to be malevolent and benevolent; the saints grant fertility to the earth,⁶⁴ the smooth running of a business and so on. However, both saint and army are perceived as capricious and able to wield power to harm, the saint by "sending" illness and crop failure and the army by destroying villages. Thus, by associating themselves with the saints/mountain spirits,⁶⁵ the soldiers were more likely to have Indians internalize their demands, not through love, but through respect and fear.⁶⁶

The army used both sides of the historical figures of devil and saints or *dueños*. They also employed the sentiment of antagonism between local residents and outsiders to express, in comprehensible forms, their own position in the Indian experiential world. The manipulation of this conventionalized dichotomy dictated what the Quiché could expect, not only from their "saints" (now the army), but also how they should relate to one another and to outsiders (guerrilla-devils).

An effective area in which one can gain control over a person is that of confessional space. Here the person becomes vulnerable; they are in a liminal state and hence more susceptible to the power of the figure to whom confession is made,⁶⁷ be it shaman, saint image, idol of a deity, psychiatrist. These powerful, ambivalent, figures are likely to become the focus of competing interest groups who try to manipulate them or their practices in a way that will find resonance in the object of manipulation.

THE RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF DANGER

The militarization of the countryside, the institution of the civil patrols and the army's attempts to "get closer to the Indians",⁶⁸ all contributed to Indians' reconceptualization of danger. The army's task was facilitated by its power to commit horrendous atrocities: villagers soon discovered that denying army authority was likely to result in numerous deaths. The sense of danger built upon and altered existing Quiché fears.

It seemed that the Quiché did not necessarily assimilate the army's message as they were intended to;⁶⁹ thus, while all villagers feared being killed or kidnapped, not everyone feared that they would suffer this fate at the hands of the same agent.⁷⁰ I expect that the

apparent "resistance" to army manipulation was perhaps conscious. The extent of people's receptiveness to the army's message depended on several factors, including their own agendas, preconceived notions of agents of evil, suggestibility and the amount of exposure to propaganda, army rhetoric and consciousness raising. People attended to different aspects of the discourses and thus made idiosyncratic sense of them. Manipulation was therefore only successful to the degree in which particular resonance was actually achieved.

Most women were shielded from direct indoctrination not only because of language barriers (most soldiers spoke Spanish) but because they tend to be confined to the home; they were usually the last to receive indoctrination. Army rhetoric often reached them through gossip⁷¹ or a series of rumours,⁷² like chinese whispers, the original message is likely to become distorted. Women are, on the whole, more conservative and less willing to be persuaded by novel rhetoric.

The agent of evil was perceived differently, not only among people throughout the countryside, but also in the same village and perhaps even within the same family. Indeed, even the same person may conceive of the danger in different ways according to his subject position and hence identity at the time s/he thinks about danger.

Members of popular organizations or guerrilla groups would necessarily have a different, and more positive, image of "evil" (as defined by the military) than press-ganged army recruits. Men generally had a clearer view of the wider political situation⁷³ than women, who had less opportunity to attend "organized" meetings.

Some women who had been shielded from guerrilla teachings and hence might be thought more "neutral", held negative views of the army which stemmed from the suffering they experienced at the army's hands. The women were impervious to the army's cover-up of their crimes, perhaps because of their partial success in not having their memories eradicated (see chapter 7).

People often made parallels between the army and known frightening spirits. The military, who had arrived in the village with a death list and carted people off, were likened to devils leading condemned souls to hell. One village woman told me:

During *La Violencia* the soldiers took the place of the [malevolent] spirits. They were the ones who killed. At times they found children who had been left in their hammocks when their mothers fled out of the house to hide and, without shame, they smashed their heads or they simply left them hanging in a noose from a tree...

Another woman simply said, "previously we had the [bad] spirits, now we have the army". Women told me stories in which the army, like the spirits, are seen to appear in liminal areas such as rivers. One man who told me a fairly well known legend in which a spirit, the saq'xol, appears dressed in Mexican clothes, dances around and then throws itself into the river and disappears, went on to tell me:

My brother told me about a man whose wife instructed him to go and work in the cornfields which were very large. So he went and there he encountered the soldiers who had appeared from the river-side. They took away his hoe and took him away.

Quiché anger and anxiety is often deflected and projected on to the spirit world; talk of the increase in spirit numbers and unhappiness, which reflects insurmountable fear of the army, is projected on to this more acceptable target. Talk of spirit violence has a psychological function, helping to avoid the real possibility of intra-communal violence (some villagers are looking for an excuse to avenge their dead and abducted kin).

People feel more vulnerable to unpredictable, inimical, forces since *La Violencia* because of the conflation of fears of the army/*jefes* and the spirits. This is exacerbated by the fact that people's ways of dealing with death, and hence also the spirits, have been hampered. The appropriate rituals are difficult to perform during *La Violencia*: many shamans gave up their practices because of fear;⁷⁴ many others were killed. It was, and still is, dangerous to visit the sacred sites where many ceremonies are performed at night, as one ran the risk of being accused of subversion. The performance of these rituals was reduced for other reasons: Protestant converts stopped practising them; other people said they no longer believed in them because "innocent people were not protected by the ancestors" during *La Violencia*. This shattering of Quiché world views about protection left people with a profound sense of insecurity at a time when they were still afraid of the potential dangers of both supernatural and military forces. For some, only frequent praying served to allay some of these fears.

The *jefes* were seen by some as the devil personified. *Doña Candelaria* said:

Now the devil [the *jefes*]⁷⁵ is constantly bringing evil and we are constantly suffering from it...They wanted to eat my husband alive⁷⁶...they wanted to kill him little by little so that he would feel it...they have the soul of a pure devil.

Jefes were also associated with *brujos*⁷⁷ and functionally replaced them: both had the capacity to inflict damage "invisibly" and both played dumb to any consequence of their evil actions.⁷⁸ If a villager had an axe to grind, instead of going to the *brujo* to request that evil befall someone, s/he would go to a *jefe*, point out a local "enemy" as a guerrilla collaborator, thereby ensuring a prompt death. Perhaps the traditional proclivity to intend harm via *brujería* made people more liable to denounce a threatening neighbour to the *jefe*; the sentiment is similar in both cases.

The difference between traditional and non-traditional dangers is in the directness of the violence. Bullets are more predictably fatal than the implements of *brujería*. The *jefes* are endowed with special powers, not because of their destiny but because of their less than imaginary guns.⁷⁹ However, some people conflate the powers of bullets and witchcraft; they think the *jefe*'s gun is empowered by *brujería* or the devil:

If someone wants to do harm then they enter the patrols where the devil goes and then they call the devil to do the bad things that God does not allow.

Nevertheless, the practice of *brujería* was seen to be as widespread but more terrifying than before. Many people felt more vulnerable to it; fewer shamans were willing to offer rituals of protection. Some *brujería* clients lost faith in the ancestors themselves; without belief in their protection, the life of every innocent man or woman is seen to be at risk.

Other people no longer place much faith in *brujería* which is bound up with the equivocal forces of nature; they believe that they would be less likely to experience retaliation after soliciting a *jefe*'s "help" than a *brujo*'s; a person who solicits a *jefe*'s help is more likely to keep his/her identity secret. The *jefe* and hit-men, unlike the *brujos*, are also protected, because even known murderers are rarely prosecuted.

Other villagers, while appearing to have been taken in by army rhetoric, viewed the *jefes* and the army itself to be the real danger. People feared the *jefes*, who were said "to hold the law" and to "make their own justice"; their "justice" was seen to contrast to the "real" laws of the ancestors and those written in the constitution.⁸⁰

Doña Josefina:

The *jefes* have been given the law...they call us subversives...meanwhile after killing they then go around raping women and stealing land and trees.

Doña Flora:

Before the patrols we were in safe in our houses and there was no *envidia*, we were peaceful in our homes and we collaborated with one another. But then the patrols started. With guns in their hands they felt taller and above the rest of the people and they wanted to kill.

So, contrary to the military's objectives, it is not necessarily the guerrillas but the *jefes* who are perceived as murderous, betrayers and dangerous. *Doña Josefina*:

The way that Mario [the *jefe*] did the *calumnias* (betrayals), was by accusing ordinary people of being subversive.

The *jefes* were also equated with general delinquency and given ironic titles, such as "the criminal *don Justicia* (Mr. Justice)".⁸¹

Some villagers were not taken in by either army or guerrilla propaganda. They felt caught in the middle and were fearful of both aggressors, regardless of whether or not they associated either or both armed forces with supernatural forces. Villagers' statements highlight their fears:

One thing is for sure and that is that we always feel afraid because the guerrillas killed and so did the soldiers.

The truth is we are afraid of the guerrillas and those who are trying to make us turn against them [the army/*jefes*]. Neither the soldiers nor the guerrillas are in our favour... because whatever happens, something always happens to us.

One man claimed that "both sides came to kill" though the vast majority of the killing was carried out by the army which committed massacres and mass kidnappings, including

those of women and children.⁸² Others claimed that the army blamed their own crimes onto the guerrillas: for instance, the government blamed a Jesuit priest who had joined the guerrillas for the massacre of Indians in the 1980 Spanish Embassy Massacre (for which the army was responsible). Informants (who were more likely to be army sympathizers) told me that it was the guerrillas who carried out selective killings; others reported that *desconocidos* (unknown people) came to kill and that the army blamed the guerrillas. Perpetrators of killings and disappearances were not always easily identified:

Soldiers came to the village and stole people's clothes. They removed their own uniforms and donned the peasants clothes instead. They pretended to be the guerrillas and asked villagers for the names of the religious people who they subsequently killed.

It seems that guerrillas and the army were variously named by people depending on where their sympathies lay and how they wanted to present themselves to those with whom they were conversing.

THE REPERCUSSIONS OF THE PROLIFERATION OF DANGER

The army associated the dangers of guerrillas with communists and Catholics and, in recent years, with villagers who no longer comply with the patrol system.⁸³ In fact, the proliferation of "the enemy" became endless and eventually included virtually the entire Indian population. This, together with increasing mistrust among villagers, resulted in a situation where everyone feared the potential enemy in everyone else. The Indian was left with a feeling of being totally surrounded from outside and within. Moreover, the real potential of being afflicted through vengeance or *envidia* - of which fear of witchcraft is only an extreme expression - has increased through the degradation of the ideals of self-restraint and non-violence which has resulted from a combination of army indoctrination and the establishment of different norms and values in order to survive in a hopeless situation. Recent violations of cultural norms have left people unsure of what is permissible behaviour on both moral and legal grounds.

The objects of fear have multiplied in everyday life and fear has become more intense. People feel there is no escape from the violence owing to the disintegration of spaces within

the community which had been relatively safe.⁸⁴ A lack of consensus about where danger lies has led to the inclusion of family and neighbours in perceptions of the dangerous "other".⁸⁵ In the circumstances, it is not hard to imagine that rumour and fear were able to dominate people's perception of the world.⁸⁶ The rumours were revealing for they clearly expressed partly developed but usually unacknowledged collective fears. In their rapid development and dissemination, they seem to represent a kind of instant mythologizing in which terrifying new experiences were reinterpreted in terms of more familiar constructs.

THE BLACK MAN (TOSLEL)

What frightens people now-a-days is not the patrols or even the army but the nude black bearded men who go around looking for heads to eat.⁸⁷ At first people thought that these men were the army in disguise but then the army themselves tried to shoot them. Their bullets did not leave from the barrels of their guns so some began to wonder if they are the wandering spirits of the dead.

(Quiché Widow)

Some people did not talk much about the dangers associated with guerrillas or the army, but told me "the real danger these days is the Black Man".

The image of the Black Man took shape in rumours which obviously drew on an elaborate cultural repertoire of ideas about violence and otherness. The myths are not new; they initially arose in response to the conquest and colonialism and reappear now because of the invasion by new aggressors.⁸⁸ Central to the Black Man stories was how fact was rearranged in combination with other signs to index most of the symbolic dynamics of the situation in which the Quiché find themselves. The Black Man, a figure of opposition, multiple meanings and ambiguity, can be considered the personification of the aggressions of transgressive others, a crystallization of a tangible terror around arbitrary victims, and as a central consolidating myth of reversible violence and defiled space; he was a signifier of random violence that gravitated to token victims and locales, raising these units of transcription and substitution to illusory intensities. The Black Man tales are considered as a reworking of violent agencies and their cultural effects and conceal a thick snarl of political meanings.

Black Men appear nude and bearded and

After nightfall go running around in the country-side or they hang around *marimbas*,⁸⁹ as that is where people congregate, in order to encounter their prey - they are after human heads which they collect in sacks which they carry with them.⁹⁰

The characterizing "blackness" and collection of human heads associates the Black Man historically with the Spaniards' black slaves who executed Indians in the eighteenth century.⁹¹ It also associates them with more recent phenomena such as paratroopers' grease-blackened faces and the black hoods of kidnappers.

Black Men are depicted as figures of aggression, butchering dogs,⁹² raping women, and frightening people. Sometimes there is only one Black Man; other testimony asserts that there were several.

The Black Men is both elusive and indestructible. As the object of collective violence in other narratives, he is feared and hunted but never killed. He is subjected to attacks by both the army and the guerrilla, but bullets either don't leave the gun barrel or pass through him;⁹³ though chased away, he always returns. The Black Man's invulnerability to army bullets links him to the imagery of guerrilla evasion. His banishment is a symbolic rehearsal, a substitute for the more problematic departure of both the guerrilla and the army.

The Black Man's hoe associates him with the Indian agri-culturalist, the victim of violence; yet he uses that hoe to assault women in the street prior to raping them. The Black Man's nudity also associates him with the victims of violence: men were often pulled naked from their beds. But foremost he is explicitly associated with the sacrificial dynamics of arbitrary victimage⁹⁴ through killing animals and raping women, entities without any political status.

Associations can also be made between the Black Man and the spirits and witchcraft, particularly *el bin*. The Black Man runs through the corn fields and other darkened areas that are the typical vicinities for acts of clandestine violence; he visits the houses of those killed in *La Violencia* and is thus linked to "bad deaths".

At times the Black Man is a figure of sin, sacrificing the innocent; at other times he is the object of scapegoating violence. The Black Man is a divided figure, linked to the sacrifice of surrogate victims, but is also the object of violence himself.⁹⁵ The fact that he is shot at but not killed indicates that he performs a ritual function. As an operator of sacrificial connotations, he is a necessary presence. He participates both in the imagery of guerrilla violence and military counterinsurgency. He is victimizer and victim. He is essentially a prankster -scapegoat who has his own multiple relations to violence and orders a collective insight into the reversible and imitative character of local violence. His equivocal relation to the guerrilla and the army, and his unstable shifts back and forth from agent of violence to object of violence, indicate that he mediates enemies and polarized positions of people. In his ordering of imitative and reversible sacrifice, the Black Man can be viewed as a theatre of mirror effects that reduces all the forms, agencies, and objects of violence to similar relations and equivalent values.

CONCLUSION

The shift of evil from *brujos* to the *jefes* and to every villager who might be an army spy⁹⁶ and from "outsider" to "insider", reflects transformation in the cultural construction of danger and the advent of new uses and styles of violent performance.

The stories of *el bin* and the Black Man have particular resonance in a community where people live together and are of shared substance but feared others' concealed interests.⁹⁷ The implication of the proliferation of the internal enemy is that the need for community, in times of upheaval and rapid social change, is frustrated. The sense of community which may have been reinforced in previous wars by a combination of reference to external enemies (the *Latinos*) and internal conspiracies (among all members of the village), would be impossible were it not for the Black Man. Without him, community could conceivably have broken down. This, together with the breaking down of old local political structures means that old resentments are more likely to surface and one villager becomes more dangerous to the other.

La Violencia was not the point of origin for clashes of interest or *envidia*, lack of support between villagers or some people's ability of some to transform themselves into

malevolent forms. But this as well as other recent social changes created massive tensions which intensified and channelled conflict as well as altering the directions and patterns of violence. It brought the coercive powers of the state and its political opposition - expressed in the capricious powers of particular soldiers, spies, and guerrillas - into everyday life. Internal violence erupted across wards and religious/political factions and raised the stakes of social criticism and political action.

The Black Man is a figure which is simultaneously many agents. He is the same as an Indian - the "other", a degraded being; he is a runaway slave from the plantations; a spirit; the army and the guerrilla. He provides a means through which to individualize betrayal and the potentially destructive, collective impulses of existing village factions. In the realm of representation, he is the factor which tempered the internalization of violence in Quiché.

However, several years on, the elaboration of the Black Man as an outside agency of danger has become not only something around which to crystallize tangible fears but also an alternative "other" around which some sense of community could be formed. However, comments such as "you can't do anything" are indicative of thwarted communal efforts to survive.

1. To some extent, the Quiché were already politically incapacitated because of the endemic mistrust generated by the prevalent use of *brujería* (itzel/witchcraft) as a means of attack, settling disputes or stopping others from getting ahead.
2. There are associations with the commonly known Mesoamerican trickster (coyote).
3. A q'ol q'ol is a person who at night can transform him/herself into an animal and "eat" (kill) children, among other things.
4. The Quiché are forever monitoring their behaviour because they live not only with the expectation that someone will take offence, but with the fear of the consequences of that offence. People will go to great lengths to avoid giving offence and will apologise and quickly compensate for unforeseen problems or accidents.
5. Children undergo certain rites to purify their hands so that they may never rob, that is, take from the community (cf. Burgos-Debray and Menchú 1984:32). This also carries the message that the possibility of pilferage is a real one. Wagley writes that children are warned against stealing or lying before they begin to talk. They are also

told that the night, the cemetery and places like rivers are full of murderers and spirits (1949:30).

6. The situation in Guatemala, where "legitimacy" was initially gained through brute force, is contrasted to David Lan's (1985) description of the situation in Zimbabwe where legitimacy was gained firstly by the guerrillas (and later by the State) through association with spirit mediums.
7. People seen to collaborate in any way with the guerrillas are labelled "subversives" by the army; the guerrillas deemed anyone who did not cooperate with them "army collaborators". This put villagers in a precarious position; either label carried the risk of death.
8. Being without respect carries similar connotations.
9. cf. Franco, 1985.
10. In the town, houses are sealed from the outside by high walls and doors. A visitor's identity is checked before the door is opened and the guest addressed from the courtyard. Familiar guests are shown to a room where they can wait for the person they want to see.
11. The concept of spying is not new: *brujos* are said to transform themselves in order to spy on people (cf. Madsen 1967:630).
12. Xñorá for females, from *señora*. Mo's for males; sometimes a general category without gender.
13. cf. the concept of "hot people". These seem to be in the same category as those who give the evil eye, especially to children (Wilson 1990:169).
14. It is the person's *nahual* (see appendix IV) which gives the evil eye to the person thus causing them to be sick (Tranfo 1974:232).
15. Watanabe writes that "Chimaltecos associated socially empty or unfamiliar space with distant quotidian time - that is, with the dormant period of night - regardless of the absolute location or relative distance from the *pueblo*" (1984:73).

16. According to local conventions, the more unfamiliar, less-frequented the landscape, the more potentially menacing its landlords become.
17. Saints and bad spirits/devil are also referred to also as *dueños*, a synonym for the (ambivalent) ancestors. In Quiché thought, *dueños*, whether saints or ancestors, serve the spirits and the devil and execute their orders.
18. They told me that they had never actually seen it.
19. There is some reality in these comments, given that there are many movies about Vietnam and dramatic TV *novellas*.
20. The vice-president, *doña* Teresa, who fled the village after this incident occurred in May 1990 told me that when she returned to the village to visit her mother the whole village was forced to turn out to jeer at her. Among the crowd were former members of CONAVIGUA who joined in the mocking of Teresa. Later these women came to her in private to tell her that they had to comply with the hated commissioners and *jefe*'s demands for they were afraid.
21. One woman told me that when she heard that her cow had eaten corn from a neighbour's field, she immediately went to find out how much compensation she had to pay for the damage.
22. A more recent fear is that spies (*orejas*, ears) will accuse one of "organising" (being involved in guerrilla activity).
23. "As voices without bodies and bodies without voices" (Watanabe 1984:79).
24. People project into the spirits those malevolent traits which they know best because they exist in themselves (cf. Bettelheim 1986).
25. "Evil" is a generic term for bad spirits.
26. The *llorona* is clearly anomalous and therefore symbolically appropriate as a mediator between cultural categories, in this case, categories of space (cf. Douglas 1966:34-60).
27. Richard Wilson reports that the Q'eqchi' received similar aid from the mountain spirit Tzuultaq'a. "The Tzuultaq'a helped us in the mountains. He came to me in my sleep - a man all dressed in white. He told me of a place that would be safe and showed

me how to get there. The next day we went to that spot and stayed there for two years with no soldiers, no problems..." (1990:45).

28. Spirits and deities traditionally communicate with elders through dreams. In these nocturnal encounters, the super-natural beings appear as white-skinned figures and are often compared to nineteenth century German plantation owners. In Guatemala, mountain spirits have often been reported as foreigners or fair-skinned *Latinos*. See Adams (1952:31), Oakes (1951:93) and Siegel (1941:67).
29. Not all dreams are thought to be caused by spirits; nor are all themes related to them. Some women recounted frightening dreams about the army in which there were no signs of spirits. These were, nevertheless, viewed as premonitory.
30. Soldiers were afraid not only of the guerrillas, but also of *brujos*. Given that the lower echelons of the army is comprised of Indians, it is perhaps not surprising that some soldiers believed that *brujería* enabled killing to take place.
31. In the Quiché town of Santiago el Palmar, the witch/*brujo* is called a "win" (Saler 1969). Two types of witches were described to Watanabe (1984:198): the xhwiin and ky'aawil.
32. There is a hierarchy of *brujos* who are said to have different powers, including the ability to transform themselves. These beliefs about the nature of the self are variations on a common Mesoamerican theme; the capacity for humans to convert themselves or to have spiritual counterparts is basic to ancient as well as contemporary Mesoamerican "mythohistories" and religions (Tedlock 1985, Erice 1985, Musgrave-Portilla 1982). In some cases, everyone is believed to possess the power to take the shape of their animal counterpart (Kaplan 1956:365-367). Scholars have traced these beliefs to pre-conquest cultures in Central Mexico and to the interplay of Mesoamerican and Spanish understandings of indigenous cultures (Foster 1944; Tranfo 1979).
33. Redfield and Villa Rojas also writes about the phenomenon of somersaulting (nine times backwards) to facilitate transformation of *brujos* in the Maya village of Chan Kom (1962:179).
34. cf. Saler 1969:25.
35. In other areas, the same effect is achieved by putting salt on the head (Redfield 1934:179) and burning clothes left behind by the transforming person (Oakes 1951:174).

36. Limestone which is boiled with dried corn to soften it.
37. Tranfo (1974:239) recounts a similar belief.
38. Euphemisms were used instead. See chapter 4.
39. The distortion of pre-Hispanic morality enabled this association to be made most effectively. Before the Catholic Church's introduction of the idea of the dichotomy between good and evil, native deities were neutral or ambivalent (Hunt 1977:248).
40. The enemy's invisibility was a particular cause of neurotic reactions in soldiers in WWI. cf. Maxwell (1923). The unknown that threatens our lives is much more frightening, and haunts us more, than the known, even if the known is horrendous: "we cannot forget it, so it dominates our mental life as conscious or unconscious terror" (Bettelheim 1986: 230).
41. The name of the Mesoamerican god Huehuecoyotl means "the old coyote, the *nahualli* of this particular god". Like the transforming *brujo*, this and other Mesoamerican gods transform themselves, taking on the disguise of their special or other *nahualli* (Musgrave-Portilla 1982:6-9).
42. Oakes describes how a shepherd who lost many sheep to coyotes climbed a tree to guard his flock and from that vantage point, watched a family of Indians remove their clothes and turn into coyotes (1951:173).
43. This belief may account for the noticeable lack of antipathy towards off-duty patrollers. Blame for local atrocities is placed on the local *jefe*.
44. At a time when several civil patrol groups no longer wanted to serve in the patrols.
45. See Wilson (1990:78-9) for the relationship between Christian saints and mountain spirits.
46. Especially during and since the "guns and beans" policy: if people obeyed, they were given beans; if not, they were killed. Later, food was given to those who came down from the mountains; people who resisted were shot or starved.

47. Flyers were handed out by soldiers even to children in schools. This was only one of the many ways that children were organized to mediate information. Soldiers also interrogated children about their parents' whereabouts and warned them not to become "subversives" too. See Timmerman (1981:149) regarding the use of children in the reproduction of terror.
48. This process of associating the army with the saints is even more significant given the danger associated with being a Catholic during (and since) *La Violencia*. On these grounds alone one might be labelled a subversive - many catechists (teachers of the bible) and some priests were army targets during this time.
49. Referring to the images of the saints, one Q'eqchi' catechist said that the elders "believe more in what's here on earth than what is in the sky" (Wilson 1990:199). In Quiché, elders and other Catholics also revere the images.
50. The church has taken over from the cave as the main focus of prayer and sacrifice, at least for Catholics; cf. Wilson (1990:236), who found the same vis-a-vis catechists. This can be contrasted with *dueños* (mountains and distant volcanoes) which literally and figuratively dominate the community.
51. The Quiché do not see any Spanish connection to the icons which are viewed as the same as the Mayan idols; they are viewed as *naturales* like themselves.
52. Allen (1988) and Harvey (1991) discuss the way in which alcohol brings people into communication with spiritual beings.
53. Icons' human qualities are also illustrated by the answer given to an anthropologist (David Stoll) who had asked why two soldier figurines flanked an icon in the main church. The reply was "otherwise he would run away".
54. I make this analogy because I think that the saints are like psychotherapists for the Quiché. In neither case does the person emulate these aspects as they "are" but as they are perceived (ie. through the meaning attributed to them by culture). This, in turn, changes the icons themselves in the eyes of the Quiché and so on.
55. Farriss, writing about old Mayan Gods in new Catholic guises during the conquest, makes a remark which may well be applied to the present situation: "we can only guess at the disorientation the Maya must have suffered as the first shock of the conquest became deepened by the friars' assault on their deities, indeed on their whole world order. One assumes that their earliest reactions were what has been termed 'culture shock,' or loss of "plausibility structure"..." (1984:312).

56. Villa Rojas writes that during the 1850s the dressing of Catholic icons in indigenous clothing was one of the main features of the War of the Castes in the Yucatan (1978:100).

In some areas of El Quiché it is said that the patron saints gave the people their unique costume and language and a number of myths show how clothing functions as a symbol for its wearer and the community. In fact, ceremonial clothing is often used in myths for the power which it symbolizes, implying that the power of the civil-religious office is vested in clothing, rather than the office holder.

57. The army's treatment of these icons can be contrasted with the way that Indians treated them after *La Violencia*, which suggests that the army was not altogether successful. For instance, a town in north Quiché was severely hit and virtually evacuated; when it was repopulated some years later, the broken icons were lined up along a wall like refugees. People said the icons had been maimed and tortured. In the village where I worked, the principal saint, *Sebastián*, was said to have given his life for the "truth" just like the women's husbands, sons and fathers. In villagers' eyes, the saints have shared their experience; however, people acknowledge the saints' anger while repressing their own.

58. According to Sallnow (1987:267), sacred landscapes are a means to legitimate domination (for the army, German landowners), and a means to resist it (for the indigenous person).

59. In highland Chiapas, the Mayas assert one vision of God, the *Ladino* state another; through the emergence of an indigenous Christ, "Christ became the personal protector of the Indians instead of the symbol of the oppressors" (Bricker 1981:161). Similarly, the army would have the Tzuultaq'a be the symbol of the oppressors, but for some Q'eqchi' refugees, the mountain spirit remained their protector" [Wilson 1990]. In Quiché however, the army did not attempt to change the concept of God or the saints with whom they attempted to associate themselves.

60. The saints are different things to different people at different times; how people relate to them also varies. Sometimes they will relate to them as intermediaries and at other times as the saint or deity itself. It is even possible that in the same "conversation" with the saint, a person may go from one mode of relating to another.

61. Ingham (1986:99), writing about a Nahuatl village in Mexico, recounts how certain saints are imbued with powers over specific crops and phases of growth.

62. One Chimalteco explained to Wagley that the image of *Santa Ana* was the wife of the image of *Santiago* (the village patron saint) who she stood next to on the church altar. A well known story indicated that she once had an illicit affair with *San Sebastián*.

When her infidelity was discovered, *Santiago* beat her and threw her in jail and ever since then he watched her closely - "for like all women she is very loose" (1949:53).

63. One of the most common images of Christ on home altars - a less common one in local churches.
64. Wilson writes that during planting, the Q'eqchi' petition all the gods who might help them, including the saints. He suggests that the aims of the Q'eqchi' are the same as those suggested by Hocart (1970:245), viz: that this is done not so much to propitiate fearsome powers but is a practical activity to ensure life, and that these aims are not mutually exclusive (1990:127).
65. Wilson writes (1990:284) that the army has appropriated the symbolism of these powers, particularly of the Tzuultaq'as.
66. Watanabe wrote of the transformation of Catholic saints into Indian Guardians: "If Indians did not at first accept the saints out of love, perhaps they learned to do so out of fear - or desperation [caused by the havoc wreaked on Indian populations by epidemic diseases during the colonial period]" (1984:90fn.8).
67. cf. Franco 1985.
68. By trying to communicate with them in their own languages and not negating the existence God. Earlier on, villagers had been told, "There is no God: there is only the army".
69. I do not wish to over stress the intentional aspect because I believe that the army's actions were not necessarily always conscious.
70. However, villagers are more likely to be frightened of guerrillas than the army because of the latter's constant pressure to guard their village against guerrilla attack. The army warned villagers: "Don't let the communist thieves into your village". All men were obliged to "protect" their village against the unknown enemy and, after wearing this mask, the question is raised as to what degree they may have internalized it (cf. Scott 1985). See chapter 5.
71. I am not suggesting here that gossip is any less influential than direct communication from the authorities. In fact, given that gossip may be spread by people who are trusted, it may have even more of an influence on women's thinking and behaviour.

72. The army tried to reach women through dropping flyers in the villages by helicopter. These bore pictures with which they hoped Indian women would identify (see figure 1).

73. It is not only the military who are perceived as dangerous but also the state as a whole. Some realize that the army is still the real power; others remember the unfulfilled promises of President Cerezo (to end extrajudicial killings, etc.); others are merely conscious of their marginalization from the benefits that many *Ladinos* enjoy.

74. The civil patrollers, made to search every corner of the village for guerrillas, curtailed shamans' activities. Shamans, who often went out alone at night to the sacred mountains to perform *costumbre*, were warned not to do so. In continuing to do so, they risked not only encountering the guerrillas but also being mistaken for one and shot.

75. Watanabe (1984:85) observed that elements of the witz (*dueño*) persist in the very real - but more generalized - figure of the Devil, a symbolic transformation noted by Wagley (1949: 56) who noted that "increased contact with the Ladino world has also led Chimaltecos to transfer characteristics once ascribed to the witz (*dueños*) to actual human beings, both Ladinos and Indians".

76. Several sources mention *brujos*' predilection for eating human meat (eg., Redfield 1934:179).

77. It seemed that in the minds of some of the women, *brujos* were associated with the army/*jefes* and shamans with anti-state activities. The analogy made between *brujos* and *jefes* by women can be contrasted with that made between *brujos*/devils and subversives by the army.

78. Both also lived in fear that they might suffer revenge: the *brujo* because witchcraft can rebound on the sender, and the *jefes* by being killed or arrested.

79. I am not suggesting that people do not continue to fear *brujos*; even *jefes* are afraid of them. Generally guerrillas do not fight in their own area as local knowledge is offset by the danger of being recognized and therefore susceptible to *brujería*.

80. The existence of which is only known to a minority.

81. This name was given to one of the most dangerous *jefes*.

82. For instance, one market day in Chichicastenango, hooded men pointed out Emolians to the plain clothed army man who accompanied them, saying, there's a "bad person". The selected victims were thrown into trucks; when a truck was full, it was driven to the jail, where people were kept until the next day. None of the identified people was ever seen again. On the following market day in Emol, the army rolled up with several trucks. Everyone attending the market and living in the houses surrounding the square was thrown into the vehicles and driven away. Over a hundred people disappeared.

83. During *La Violencia*, Emol's small jails were filled with men who refused to carry out patrol duty. Common criminals were ignored.

84. This space was instrumentalized by both guerrilla and paramilitary organizations. The guerrilla converted some houses into look-out posts and operational bases. Chronic military violence eventually played an essential role in the disintegration of community space in general, as well as the home in particular, as a sanctuary (cf. Franco 1985).

85. The proclivity to view even one's own family as dangerous comes from the nature of *La Violencia*, in which "us" versus "them" was not differentiated along territorial or lineage lines. Even if members of a family were not on opposing sides, fear was still engendered by the fact that one could be identified as having a particular political affiliation through association along familial or friendship lines.

86. Marwick suggests that "rapid social changes are likely to cause an increased preoccupation with beliefs in sorcery and witchcraft ... this is because one of the effects of social change is to bring new values and norms into conflict with indigenous ones. Another reason is the creation of new relationships and the fundamental modification of old ones" (1965:247-8).

87. The act of spirit seizure is sometimes referred to as the Tzuultaq'a (a mountain spirit) "eating" the person (see Wilson 1990:168).

88. Pierre Nora writes that "Memory is life...It remains in permanent evolution...susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived" (1989:8). That the connection between appearance and reality was never transparent for the Quiché was only heightened by the political violence of 1978-1985 (Montejo 1987; Burgos-Debray and Menchú 1984; Carmack 1988; Manz 1988).

89. (Traditional instrument rather like) a wooden xylophone.

90. Wagley (1949:58-9) writes that killers, called choolil in the Mam language, trade victims' heads to witz [*dueños* more recently associated with the Devil] in return for large sums of money. More recently the Black Man has been associated with the perceived negative aspects of progress; electricity production, for example, is said to require human heads.

91. The Spaniards' black slaves flogged and sometimes executed Indian victims in the village squares (Cortés and Larraz 1958:102). This reference refers to a time around 1770 although this type of treatment of the Indians by *Alcaldes Mayores* is a general one throughout colonial times.

92. The most brutal of army ranks, called *kaibiles*, were said to be given a puppy at the commencement of their training. The final rite of passage was said to entail killing their dog and eating its heart. I was told that the local army reserves (village men) did the same. Senseless arcane atrocities committed against animals are powerful illustrations of the surrogate. They are in place, or anticipation, of human victims. These acts incorporate the explicitly apolitical domain of nature into the political. The entanglement of nature with the violent political life of men is a profound confirmation of boundary collapse and deterritorialization. In turn, domination of the animal body is a metonym for the politicization of the human body and its unfixing from all customary social reference by political violence.

93. Lewis writes that the transforming witch (nanahualtin) cannot be wounded by a knife or gun, or be hit by stones thrown at them, because of their secret defensive power (1951:280).

94. The army is seen by some to commit arbitrary violence just for entertainment value. I was told by an Indian human rights worker that in the army bases the soldiers play Russian roulette, making vows on the lives of the leaders of the human rights organizations.

95. However, the Black Man never changes his gender or his chauvinistic attitude towards women.

96. In contrast, before *La Violencia* any villager could potentially solicit *brujería* or (some more than others) give the evil eye.

97. They also deal with the matter of women's subversion of male authority and other aspects of gender relations but discussion of this exceeds the scope of this chapter.



-Plate 10: Demonstration in Santa Cruz del Quiché



MUERTE	MUERTE	(Death)
DESTRUCCION	DESTRUCCION	(Destruction)
TERROR	TERROR	(Terror)
TRAICION	TRAICION	(Graecery)
ENGAÑO	ENGAÑO	(Deception)



Figure 2. Fliers distributed in Quiché villages

Chapter 11

Conclusion

This thesis has dealt with the way that Guatemalan Indians from a village which I have called Emol cope in a rapidly and violently changing world. Its main concern centres on the way that Quiché-Maya war widows attempt to comprehend the incomprehensible. The research is based on women's own accounts and my own impressions and observations collected during participant observation. It therefore accounts for the subjective perceptions of actors in process of every day life post *La Violencia* as well as the outsider's view. One of the objectives of the thesis has been to give a voice to Guatemalan Indian women who have been silenced and to resuscitate their own version of history. However, fulfilment of these goals has been limited in three main ways: firstly, the topic chosen is inherently non-narratable; secondly, women only speak through my ethnography (meaning that they exist only as my representations of them over which they have no control); and thirdly, related to this, ethnographic revelations have been constrained by the persistent situation of terror and impunity in Guatemala.

The thesis describes the practices of physical, structural and psychological violence endured by women for over a decade. These were concomitants of being caught in the middle of a conflict between the guerrillas and the military whose ideologies most women were not even clear about. They also resulted from the playing out of violence locally for personal reasons, often by men whose power accrued by virtue of their position as appendages of the army.

The research examines the effects of these violent practices, the less tangible ideational manifestations of these and women's ways of trying to recuperate from violence while it's still going on. I have shown how women have coped with the violence in diverse ways, albeit within a cultural repertoire; they have not been rendered totally inert by Guatemala's ongoing terror. The thesis concludes that notwithstanding women's regrouping via organizations such as CONAVIGUA, their ability to fathom the past and to reconstruct their lives remains thwarted. The lack of comprehensibility is partially due to the relative lack of precedence in their experience of extreme violence: their culture has not prepared them for it. It is also caused by the present harassment by military forces which continues to splinter women's lives and prevents them from resolving past violations.

Despite the fact that the widows represented here are among the most resourceful rural Indian women, it has been shown that the events and their shattered lives lack coherence up to the present day. This has not only arisen from the physical destruction brought about by *La Violencia* but also the social transformation which resulted from (or was stimulated by) the war including changes in religious practice, the disintegration of community ties, the destruction of collective memory, the taking on of *Ladino* military values among village authorities and the creation of a culturally destabilized space. The disappeared, the mutilated bodies, the family scattered and missing, the burned out houses left on the landscape, all bequeath a void of socio-cultural processes and conception that horrifies by its senselessness as much as its brutality. The significance of these and other changes beyond material destruction is that if the foundations of culture are jolted by terror, ontology is open to question and this may render a person's sense of reality tenuous.

I have demonstrated that while there are various institutional and symbolic processes through which re-victimization of the Indian woman takes place, it would be a mistake to see the surviving widow as a passive being, completely controlled and moulded by these processes. While vulnerable, the widow was not so defenceless. Women took decisions in an ever-changing environment: the decisions they took during the height of *La Violencia* (such as the need for a safe place to hide) differed from both those taken during its immediate aftermath (the re-organization of economic life) and, chronic ongoing conflict (acting in the "external" political world).

La Violencia and the losses incurred during and subsequent to it meant that the family has had to make many adjustments within its own internal structure. A striking feature of similarity in the women's narratives is the decisive role that they played in giving direction to this reorganization. This is important when one considers that the family, as a unit, reconstructs reality. Widows came to play an important role. Some of the few widows who learnt to speak Spanish and also about human rights began to negotiate with the outside world, procuring help from aid organizations and trying to procure justice.

Much of this thesis has been about this loss of meaning which results from the repercussions of the conflict and women's attempts to construct and to reconstruct it. I have demonstrated that the violence and terror that arose with *La Violencia* must yield meaning in a close analysis of the idioms of local understandings. The meaning of *La Violencia* for the Emolian widow was also personalized. A common theme across most cultural perceptions of violence e.g., those involving the spirits, was that women consider themselves and their families to be victims and not perpetrators of violence. This may reflect the different experience of colonial and neocolonial dominations to which Guatemalan Indians have been submitted.

The thesis has dealt less with the impact on the woman herself, both physically and psychologically, than with ways women have coped and perhaps underemphasized the toll that the war, its aftermath and the structural violence has had on their bodies and their psychological states.

La Violencia brought a drastic change in the experiences of individuals already socialized into the previously existing society. Attitudes towards social changes (and their regulation) are constantly in a process of formulation; emotions too are consequently in flux. Both are constantly in a process of cultural construction and reconstruction. The flux became more extreme with the traumatic and rapid change resulting from the events of *La Violencia*. As a result, affective responses (anger, fear, sadness, horror and guilt) increased; there was also a new awareness among survivors of their vulnerability.¹ Anger arose not only from the atrocities they suffered and the fact that they had not properly mourned the dead and disappeared, but also from their impotence. Being a passive people who have been subordinated to *Ladinos* for centuries, they were ill equipped to counter the violence in which

they were embroiled. A cultural definition of anger as a moral signal which clearly functions as a form of social control in Quiché may degenerate in this and other situations in which consensus on values falls apart. Moreover, the degree to which enduring cultural values can be translated into social practice is problematic in conditions complicated by rapid social change. The situation was one over which people had little control, they all became victims of violence in one way or the other. Men who escaped death and disappearance were grabbed to serve in the army and obligated to serve as militiamen in their own villages. Women could effect their immediate lives by becoming more self sufficient economically, but this brought them further intimidation from their assailants who feared the women would report their crimes.

Women were angry about the *jefe*'s presence in the village. The more they realized the illegitimacy of the *jefe*'s power, the more they were forced to comply. They had to be mute and deferential in the face of threats made by the *jefes* during everyday interactions; worse still, they were forced to pay respect to the *jefes* who had murdered their kin. This made women furious. The *jefes* also exploited women's labour, insisting that they provide them with sexual favours and food. These and other forms of extraction were very humiliating for the women. Women's anger was also fomented by observing that those who sided with the army thrived while they lived in poverty.² Women's resentment and anger had built up over the years.

Women's anger is typically manifest in a deterioration of health, confirmed in research on victims of violence elsewhere (Cliff and Noormahomed 1988, Diekstra 1988); psychic pain is often somatized in cultures in which expression of emotional distress in a psychological idiom is traditionally inhibited (Lipowski 1988). However, in the Quiché case, this may be exacerbated by the imposed silence and by the interrupted mourning of the dead and especially the disappeared. Notwithstanding, my analysis of the Quiché language indicates relatively fewer emotional expressions than the English language. The difference in experience of emotional distress may also relate to the absence of a verb for "being/essence" (equivalent to the Spanish *ser*); there is only a verb for "to be located in place" (are' or c'o). One does not ask "how are you" but rather "are you here?" (c'o waral) or asks utz awach³ (literally, whether one's face is good). One does not ask whether one is worried but whether "care or sight has entered" (oc il).⁴ Issues of location and the size of things are more frequently

discussed than the nature of being. Only further studies could begin to relate how this might effect the impact of intense and violent change on the person.⁵ This brings me back to one of the issues raised in the introduction of the thesis: how culture affects responses to the various consequences of war such as loss. Further research is needed on how different psychological make-up of individuals in a society articulates with their responses to violence. Fascinating work on Asian Indian society (e.g., Roland 1988, Kurtz 1992) indicates that child rearing practices may call for a revision of psychoanalytic theory itself. The material in this thesis suggests that caution should be exercised when applying western psychological theories to non-western societies. Future research needs to compare socialization practices of different cultures and examine how this impinges on the impact of war.

The widows represented in this thesis, despite their unusual degree of resilience, were forced to forget the episodes of violence and to repress the pain caused by their losses: the pain reemerged in different forms in their bodies. They complained of a general body ache and more localized pains (ca'x), mostly in the stomach⁶ (pam/c'u'x)⁷ and the head (jolom). Metaphors used also included the swelling of organs. They also suffered from rashes and other symptoms which were hard to attribute solely to the violence, given their inadequate diets. They suffered a loss of appetite and weight loss which they often attributed to sadness (bis). The Quiché attribute facial hyper pigmentation, associated with liver problems, to an accumulation of anger. Women refer to blood loss, the weakening and cooling of blood, which is associated with soul loss and eventual death and attribute these phenomena to their experiences during *La Violencia*. It was not always clear if these sensations were caused by "magical" or "real" fright. Explanations of soul loss caused by "magical fright" (Gillin 1948:198) need not refer immediately to social or psychological causes (cf. Rubel 1964:280; Uzzel 1974:372-3). These are important but such contingent factors must also be related to local theories of disease etiology as well as the cultural forms they take. Psychological causes may be more important when *susto* and death are spoken of in relation to "real" fright as in instances when running from the army. Real fright may be unrelated to "magical" fright however, given that when fleeing the army people often ran to liminal areas where encounters with spirits were more likely than when living in ordinary everyday contexts.

The intensity of some women's emotions was conveyed in their reports that many people had died of sadness and anger (emotions which are more commonly attributed to men

and women respectively) as well as fear which occurred among both women and men. Unlike men, women generally speak more readily about their sadness (*bis*) and pain (*c'ax*) than their anger, perhaps because anger has to do with issues of dominance and submission. The experience and expression of sadness is said to have similar consequences to that of anger and, like anger, draws attention to the fact that an event has occurred which harms them or a significant other, that is, a behaviour which violates some norm or code or morality. However, it is an emotion which implies a different reaction which is perhaps less threatening to the community. Anger is more likely to elicit some sort of vengeful action against the offender by, for example, soliciting the help of a *brujo*: it engenders conflict. Sadness, on the other hand, is unlikely to lead to such action. Instead, a person's sadness is said to create compassion in others and this is reflected in their expressions of consolation: kapax nu c'u'x chawe (my heart breaks for you), meaning that one feels compassion; kax nu c'u'x chawe (there is pain in my heart for you), meaning that one feels remorseful for not being able to arrange to make something better; kin kuba' nu c'u'x chkij (I felt my heart on their backs [referring to those who help and thereby console]). This does not mean that sadness should not be restrained, because too much sadness, like too much anger, may still bring harm. But in this instance, the harm is inflicted by the dead who mirror the living (see chapter 8) and suffer when the living suffer.

The expression of sadness and anger is normally deprecated among Quiché and is thought to have negative repercussions on the person giving vent to them and his/her present, future and past (dead) family. But given their extreme experiences and the continuing threat under which they lived, women could not control themselves to the degree needed to contain, for example, their feelings of anger. Thus, despite the ideology of control within what can be called an "anger diverting society",⁸ and given the situation of disaster, a situation was created in which no one is expected to have control. Although women may appear to control their anger, their rage was generally just below the surface.

Women's anger would not have been expressed directly nor given blatant expression in any form if the self-censorship which had become part of their 'habitus' as children was unchanged and in full operation, and had their anger not mounted to the level of fury. Quiché socialization of emotions could not contain the intensity of emotions evoked by the largely unprecedented situation of *La Violencia*; therefore a new threshold of expression of emotion

was called for. Transformational processes occurred, such as the undoing of repression of suppressed emotions and the alteration of formerly functioning dispositions which called for a socialization of the released emotions. Thus, within limits, it would seem that a woman's 'habitus' was altered.⁹

Some aspects of national legal codes have been effectively suspended for some time giving some powerful parties licence to commit crimes with impunity. The lack of a fully operating legal code brings emotional/moral discourse to the fore in a manner reminiscent of traditional discourse. One could imagine that there would be greater need to resort to the traditional practice of consulting shamans to discover how to act, because the traditional definition of anger as dangerous means that angry thoughts and behaviour must be contained and only revealed in "safe" environments. One of a shaman's roles is to provide an environment in which anger can be and indeed should be expressed without retaliation from the spirits or community members, an environment which diffuses, contains and gives meaning to anger engendering events. The shamans' practice can be seen, on different levels, as both therapeutic and ideological. However, many shamans were killed during *La Violencia* and many people, including widows, appeared to have lost their faith in shamans' powers and/or converted to protestantism.

Other "safe" spaces were needed where women could safely express their anger, particularly given that they had to cope with an intensification of this feeling. Women's groups such as CONAVIGUA provided one context for the resocialization and resolution of women's feelings. Within the clandestine spaces created by this group, women imposed a framework on the articulation of their emotions which while based on traditional Quiché norms, goes beyond them. Through sharing, bitter individuals socialized their anger in such contexts. Women's anger over what had happened to them was acknowledged and shaped within these circles. Moreover, language was imposed on unarticulated feelings. Common emotions, such as resentment (*remordimiento*) arising from repressed feelings of hatred and revenge, could be externalized and affirmed in social spaces created by women.

Women's emotions received genuine socialization within women's groups. Emotions were articulated and given form beyond the Quiché cultural framework; their embryonic form, even though rarely communicated between women, has already been shaped by the cultural

history of their experience. In organizations such as CONAVIGUA, emotions take on a collective, cultural form and are acted out; widows come to see their emotions and actions as normal. Public representations are then worked out and incorporated into a collective identity, sought in terms of CONAVIGUA. Through a process of historicization, women also created a mythology of events which occurred during *La Violencia* and its aftermath.

CONAVIGUA meetings created a process where women's minds and bodies were relatively less constrained than in other contexts to express themselves. These followed on from the spectacular demonstration of this phenomena at the mass in Chichicastenango (see Appendix IV) which led to the group's inception. It was here that they realized that their claims and their anger were shared by other women with whom they had not been in direct touch. Before they grouped together, the effective social reach of women's silenced narratives might not have extended much beyond the village, a particular church, a small gathering of widows or perhaps merely a few members of one household.

New ideas, initially formulated by small groups of women within a village and with a few others in the market place, emerged as widely shared beliefs. This sharing first occurred among the hundreds of women gathered at the church and the much larger public listening over the radio. Later, this sharing continued among members of CONAVIGUA, reinforcing the process. However, this learning did not comprise new ideas so much as the realization that other women had similar experiences and silent ideas.

In the group, women's veil of obsequiousness, deference, and symbolic compliance before their assailants could be revoked. Their surface representations of the *jefes*, such as Mario, as figures of authority gave way to a verbal performance which revealed the undercurrents of distrust, resentment and contempt towards them. Through anonymous gossip,¹⁰ for example, women diabolized the local perpetrators of violence. Women's gossip sometimes turned into fantasies of retaliation and revenge against the murderers of their kin. Ideas of revenge are also connected with the recovery of the bodies of their kin. The exchange of malicious gossip and rumours (*el chisme*), as a process, is both recuperative and therapeutic, despite the fact that it always remained in the closet. As Freud (1945) commented, "Language serves as a substitute for action; by its help, an affect can be 'abreacted'¹¹ almost as effectively". This perhaps goes some way to explain the sense of

release women experienced (although one might conjecture that language is action), despite the fact that the *jefe* may never have learnt about what was being said. Moreover, through gossiping (sharing and confirming), individuals articulate their anger as something socialized. Indeed it becomes sociality in itself.

Most women walk on a knife's edge between more subtle forms of aggression, such as between malicious gossip and public insult. They also operated within the dialectic of speech and silence (or women's oral narratives), often consciously or unconsciously negotiating a compromise between revelation and concealment of the forbidden, through oral and other forms of behavioural disguise. In private meetings or disguised open narratives, women articulated aggression and hostility towards their persecutors; open retaliation was thwarted. In this way, the "self", which was forced to submit, symbolically reasserted itself. There were at least two objectives in this exercise: firstly, to reassert themselves symbolically before those who humiliated them and, secondly, to regain esteem in the eyes of their contemporaries who had witnessed and passively participated in the same scenario. Women were also likely to benefit from catharsis within these groups. In short, the process of malicious gossip was both recuperative and therapeutic; women exchanged painful stories, enabling them to reenact and reexperience their pain and this had a liberating effect. The women also felt that, in the present, they were achieving, or at least attempting to achieve, their own emancipation.

CONAVIGUA facilitated the liberation of human expression. Women experienced the demonstration at the church and the subsequent meetings as personal authentication. The change brought about by these experiences was irrevocable; it restored a sense of self-respect and personhood. Within this group, women experienced a psychological shift which contributed to women "waking up" to their increased awareness of how historical forces affect the lives of one's own family members, of their position in society and how it might be altered.¹² This added further to the courage, resources and sense of personal efficacy women had gained from the knowledge that they had coped for several years without adult male complementary help. Women thus acquire a way of seeing new possibilities in the world in terms of potential for action and their position in society. This is the precursor to their taking resistant actions which, in fact, they really cannot do in this context without risking further danger.

Political implications are also attached to the processes which transpired within CONAVIGUA's meetings, if one considers that the analyses of the self and other representation lies in their recognition of the symbolic, rather than the simply reflective, character of representation. However, the process which takes place in women's groups in Guatemala has close parallels with "epistemic violence" (Spivak 1988:281-283) which alludes to the colonial constitution of the "other", of the subaltern, that is, the infeasibility of self-representation of the subaltern. Within other Guatemalan organizations which focus on women's issues, women are permitted to communicate only through authorized male and/or *Ladino* voices. Women represent the subaltern within a subordinate group and their position as such is continuously recreated. The formation of organizations of women might be interpreted both as a space of resistance appropriated by women or, paradoxically, as the formation of an "event" which designates the woman as the body upon which practices of domination are inscribed. From the silence imposed through violence, the body becomes a new terrain for the struggles of power.

The *jefes'* response to the formation of CONAVIGUA and other groups women belonged to (GAM, for example) was the application of more coercion, threats and defamation to frighten widows. They attempted to censor them through actions which they hoped would demoralize and discredit them. The *jefes'* explicit prohibitions increased as women appeared less willing to keep silent and appeared to engage in discourses incompatible with the *jefes'* objectives. They were most suspicious of Catholic widows and CONAVIGUA members who they suspected of fomenting sedition; surveillance was therefore intensified around any group activity in which these women engaged. *Jefes* insinuated that the women's meetings were infiltrated by informers; the importance of these insinuations lay not so much in the threat of betrayal than in the invasion of a possible realm of autonomous discourse. Attempts were also made to discredit CONAVIGUA via the media.

However, Guatemalan Indian women already stand on the outside of state convention and common, state imposed, opinion. Since becoming widows, they have become more marginal according to the State's definition; they are on the bottom rung of the ladder in the social hierarchy and have little to lose in terms of descent to further depths. Women can be seen to form what Max Weber calls the "pariah-intelligentsia" (1978). Unlike those *jefes* and patrollers who willingly volunteered to participate in the system, women maintain a critical

distance from the state's values. This arises out of their marginality and their distance from the main stream, Spanish language and so on. This is especially important if one considers that the analyses of the self and other re-presentation lies in their recognition of the symbolic, rather than the simply reflective, character of representations and in the recognition of their potential influence on forms of behaviour.

On some levels, women had an increasing advantage the more the authorities repressed them. Paradoxically, the further women were marginalized, the more free they were to stand outside convention and, hence, the freer to risk criticising it.¹³ The less bound they were by social customs, the more women were capable of creating original meaning around their common experiences. Thus, the marginalized position into which they were increasingly pushed by the *jefes* may have, in fact, enlarged the space for redefinition of their selves and the *jefes* and for the reframing of "an-other" version of knowledge.

CONAVIGUA has enhanced Indian women's proclivity towards non-violence. Women maintain some sense of community by extending their communication links counteracting the impact of widespread terror which undermines trust in one's own relatives and neighbours. Moreover, CONAVIGUA creates an identification of Indian women with its particular portrayal of historical/biblical figures as peace loving. Women thus integrate the theatrically transforming experience of the massacre and other violent acts into continuous narratives of themselves throughout their lives. Thus what Guatemalan Indian women are looking for is what they have recognized as justice. They are not looking to avenge their violent losses in a violent form but are waiting for the time when the perpetrators of the brutal violence will not go unpunished.

While the thesis has as its central concern the subjective experience of violence in the everyday life of Quiché war widows, I also set out to investigate how communities cope with violence. This situation produces, to a certain extent, a history of fragmentation and realignment. According to people who have had long experience in Quiché (e.g., missionaries), violence appears to have gravely damaged traditional forms of solidarity. One cannot negate the tendency to hark back to a golden age of the past during times of struggle; however it seems that women's lamentations about the disintegration of their extended families are valid. In their place is a new emphasis on the nuclear family, if not isolated

individuals with personal links. "Trust" has even been eroded within the immediate family. The sense of solidarity has broken down, with one member of the family joining the guerrillas and another conscripted by the army. Likewise, as different members of the family join different religious groups, in part a spin off of *La Violencia*, the feeling of solidarity is degraded further. Women and other villagers complained that Protestants were less willing to participate in community tasks. Social erosion could, of course, be interpreted as stemming from a greater sense of self-sufficiency as women feel more efficacious on their own. However, I observed that this did not make women individual isolates because they did not necessarily yield to the impositions of the state which fosters a sense of nationalism. Nor did they necessarily adhere to or support groups such as the patrols which created a new solidarity across villages, partially destroying the sense of a solidarity within. Rather, they created a sense of solidarity and sisterhood among themselves, often according to family ties (to the extent that they had not been split or eradicated) and religious affiliation. Solidarity also extended to women from other places through women's membership of groups such as CONAVIGUA.

Although intense violence in the form of ideational manifestation never ceased for women, the concrete violence did abate somewhat in the mid 1980s. However it began to escalate again in the late 1980s: a new wave of ever increasing killings and disappearances began. The widows' achievements in surviving *La Violencia* and its aftermath, regrouping their families and gaining economic independence hold them in good stead in this renewed terror. However, their achievements also mark them out for individual attack. In fact the gender differential in victimage is likely to be reduced as more women are being killed. This is partly due to the fact that the widows, though socially isolated within their village and forcibly separated from their extended family networks, conform neither to the state's vision of the future (in which traditional loyalties are replaced by individual loyalty to the nation state which is fostered by protestantism) nor to still persisting traditional ideas of the appropriate way to live. Another factor is that the widows are the living testimony to the state's atrocities and their very survival is a constant reproach to the military's powers which still control Guatemala behind the facade provided by a civilian president.

While the present study focused on Guatemala, one third of the world's countries are presently engaged in war, and two thirds regularly practise human rights abuses in order to control their populations. Therefore it is evident that social scientists, no matter what their

field of study, will in all likelihood confront some instance of socio-political violence in the field. Researchers who choose to focus on socio-political violence in any of its guises in other areas of the world need viable field methods and theoretical frameworks. The approach and questions raised in my thesis encourage a basic rethinking of the conceptual foundations that surround socio-political violence and the way it is played out in areas of the world beyond Guatemala. It represents an initial step in designing theoretical frameworks for studying violence which elucidate the lived realities and thereby enhance knowledge of its effects.

1. Psychiatrist Robert Lifton suggests that it is not the repression of personal hurts, those experiences of "separation, annihilation, and stasis" that he calls "death equivalents" (Lifton 1983), but rather the processes of confrontation, reordering and renewal that can produce a "deepened general awareness" of the dangers we all face and a desire to act (ibid:391-394).
2. The restrictions on residence, land availability, division of labour, employment and remarriage, examined in the previous sections, initially put widows in a situation of extreme poverty. We know far more about the cultural meaning of poverty once we know that the widow is particularly in despair because she cannot afford to feed her guests attending a funeral (see Chapter 8). Other meanings include the following: wealthy *Ladinos* pass her on the path without greeting her, that she cannot bury her dead properly, that her sons must leave her without protection in order to work in the capital and that she must humble herself and her daughters - often to no avail - to look for work as servants in the town with richer Indian families. To know the cultural meaning of this poverty, is to learn the shape of her indignity and, hence, to calculate the content of a widow's anger.
3. La would be added as a spoken question mark.
4. Oc also means to become.
5. Vogt observes for a Maya community in Chiapas, "The ethnographer in Zinacatan soon learns that the most important interaction going on in the universe is not between persons nor between persons and material objects, but rather between souls inside these persons and material objects" (1969:371). Whether the same hold in the context of a rapidly changing violent world needs to be investigated.
6. The stomach area is seen as the region of the body most affected by strong negative emotions.
7. C'u'x and wanma' both refer to the heart, which is regarded as the strongest organ of the body; wanma' refers only to the physical organ, whereas c'u'x is associated with the essential nature of the individual. The location of c'u'x was sometimes said to be in the region of the stomach. This concept is closely linked to, if not indeed the same as, what the Quiché call ánima or spirit; it is the place from which life emanates.

C'u'x also refers the essential part or centre of an ear of corn as well as the essence of tz'te, the divining beans of the shaman; c'u'x uleuw is the centre of town and r'c'u'x, the umbilicus, literally hole or site where offerings are given to the ancestors.

8. This is how it was when I was there; given the atrocities which one villager perpetrated against another during *La Violencia*, it is likely that the need to divert anger is paramount. I cannot say how Quiché was before this time.
9. This exposes one of the problems of Bourdieu's (1977) concept of habitus which is said to be fixed in childhood and to be unchangeable thereafter.
10. Other manifestations of Quiché women's objection to the authority imposed on them took the form of coded language, jokes, rumours (*chismes*), denunciations (*calumnias*), gestures and, probably, ritual aggression via witchcraft. There were also other phenomena such as relabelling and, more recently, anonymous protest as part of human right demonstrations (in which only a minority had the courage to participate). Practices such as spirit possession may be interpreted as forms of protest (e.g. Lewis 1971), which may increase in contexts which impose discipline, similar to those which deny history as referred to in chapter 7.
11. Abreaction is the emotional discharge whereby the subject liberates himself from the affect attached to the memory of a traumatic event, in such a way that this affect is not able to become (or to remain) pathogenic. Abreaction may come about spontaneously, either a short or a long interval after the original trauma.
12. This presents quite a different view of the inexorable reproduction of the 'culture of poverty' put forth by Oscar Lewis (1966) with reference to the Mexican peasant.
13. On the other hand, they impose a limit on themselves, for the more they try to create a space and re-enter the system, the less free they become to criticise the system which oppresses them.

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Acronyms

CERJ	<i>Comité de los Étnias, Runujel Junam</i> (Council of Ethnic Communities "We are all Equal"). Established 1988.
CONAVIGUA	<i>Coordinación Nacional de Viudas Guatemaltecos</i> (National Coordination of Guatemalan Widows). Established 1988.
CONDEG	Council of Displaced Guatemalans
CVDC	<i>Comité Voluntarios de Defensa Civil</i> . Name changed from PAC in 1988.
CUC	<i>Comité de Unidad Campesina</i>
EGP	<i>Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres</i> (the Guerrilla Army of the Poor)
FAR	Rebel Armed Forces
FMLN	<i>Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación</i> (El Salvador)
GAM	<i>Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo</i> (Group for Mutual Support); support group for families of the disappeared. Established 1984
ORPA	<i>Organización Revolucionaria del Pueblo en Armas</i> (Revolutionary Organization of People in Arms)
PAC	<i>Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil</i> (Self-Defence Civil Patrols) see CVDC
PGT	Guatemalan Workers Party
URNG	<i>Unión Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca</i> (National Revolutionary Union of Guatemala)

Appendix I

The Widows

Doña Eugenia

Doña Eugenia is a 68 year old Catholic with *Costumbrista* sympathies; her husband and son were killed in a village massacre.

Doña Eugenia was born about 1920; births were not registered in those days and the date of birth given on her *cedulas* (papers) is some clerk's estimate. She neither knew nor cared how old she was. She described her life as always having been arduous.

She was one of four children born to a respected *Costumbrista* family; her father was descended from one of Emol's founding families. He was an outspoken man (a bit of a rebel, according to *doña* Eugenia) who played an important role in village affairs; he also drank. The combination of these factors drove the family to move to the coast for eleven years; *doña* Eugenia said they went

because my father was very poor. Because he was a heavy drinker we never had money for anything including maize. We did not have enough land and had to buy our maize and this is why we went to the coast.

The family worked on the coffee and sugar plantations (*fincas*); *doña* Eugenia had to earn her keep from a very young age, grinding corn and helping her mother make *tortillas* (corn pancakes) for the labourers. She never went to school but managed to learn a little Spanish; she understood a good deal. The family returned to Emol at the instigation of her brother, who was now a young man. Her other siblings died on the coast of malnutrition and malaria.

When she was twenty years old, *doña* Eugenia "united" with a landless *comerciante* (pedlar)/musician who came to live with her in her parents' house. She bore him two sons, leaving them with her mother while she returned to the *finca* with her husband; her father's land was insufficient to support them all and plantation work was the only available source of earned income. Her children died of measles, for which she blamed herself (for leaving them) and not her mother who, she said, had not realised they were ill because she was so busy herself. After her children's death, her husband abandoned her for another woman. *Doña* Eugenia returned to Emol.

Life improved when her husband returned to her. They left her family home and began living in a house in the centre of the village (where *doña* Eugenia still lives). Although they now had a little piece of land, they continued working as seasonal labour migrants on the *fincas* because they needed the money to buy maize: corn yields were low before the

introduction of fertilizer in the 1960s. Two more children were born; one, a daughter, died of malaria as a child.

Doña Eugenia's husband was widely known locally because he was frequently invited by neighbouring *municipios* to play his *chirima* (doubled reeded wind instrument) at village fiestas. His pioneering role in introducing catholicism in Emol in the 1950s was more controversial, bringing him friends and foes. *Doña* Eugenia converted to catholicism but bemoaned the time when the priests forced the villagers to throw their idols and divining beans into the ravines. Shamans were surreptitiously invited to her house to perform the occasional ceremony. On one occasion I was surprised to see that the invited shaman was one of men who had taken part in a village massacre, decapitating men, including *doña* Eugenia's kin, who were buried clandestinely in the village.

Eventually *doña* Eugenia's husband and son became two of the most active and respected leaders in the village. Her son worked for an NGO which had trained him as a health worker; he was president of the village Improvement Committee (*Comité de Promoción*); he was involved in the establishment of the village school and instrumental in building the road leading to the village (whilst most people welcomed the road, it trespassed the land of another man and gave rise to disputes).

The men went into hiding during *La Violencia*, only returning following the 1982 amnesty which accompanied the introduction of the patrol system. However, together with most of the men who held positions of prestige and authority in Emol, *doña* Eugenia's husband and son were killed in a village massacre which she was forced to witness. Like many women in her situation, *Doña* Eugenia had many hypotheses about the cause of their deaths but did not really know why they had been selected. She knew that they had been involved in consciousness raising but no more than that.

Following the deaths of her husband and son, *doña* Eugenia invited her daughter in law and her three children to live with her; unlike some women whose sons were killed, she wanted her only son's wife to stay. Her daughter in law, who took to alcohol when her husband died, agreed to come and they share the house to this day. Somewhat unusually, another widow (who was not a relative) was also invited, with her two children, to sleep in *doña* Eugenia's already full house because she was afraid to stay in her own home after her husband was killed.

Despite reduced movement between and among houses since the village massacres, *doña* Eugenia's full and busy house is still a meeting point for women although this is largely due to the fact that (until May 1990) she owned the only electric corn grinder in the village (then the Christian Democrats donated another one just before the national elections; the charge for using this was lower than *doña* Eugenia's, which caused some animosity).

The other drawing factor of the house was that the spirits of her pioneering husband and son still lingered. One of her grandsons, Saturnino, who was exceptionally intelligent and had been to school, became the village's health promoter. However, Saturnino resisted taking up any leadership role in the village until 1990, when, against his mother's wishes, he finally agreed to become the Secretary of the Betterment Committee. This had been dormant since *La Violencia* because people were too afraid to fill the shoes of previous members, most of whom had been killed or disappeared. Saturnino also began working in the same NGO his

father had, which enabled him to work closer to home instead of travelling to the capital where he periodically worked as a tailor. He accepted this position with trepidation; his mother feared for his life. She continued to discourage her children from taking up leadership roles and, it seemed, with good reason: shortly after Saturnino took up these leadership roles, some people in the village began to speak in a threatening way about him, saying that he was going the same way as his father (meaning he was on the path to becoming a subversive).

Doña Eugenia was elected a director of the widows' group formed by the NGO that her grandson worked for; she was also elected to a position of leadership in the catholic church. More recently she has become involved with CONAVIGUA which began working in the village shortly before my departure.

Doña Eugenia was small, plump and arthritic; she had a lively and forceful character. She described herself as being "like a child", as she made little financial or physical contribution to the household because of her age but was provided for instead. Nevertheless, in accordance with Quiché custom, being an elder, she remained the holder of power when it came to decision-making in the family. She was also a respected elder of the village.

She lacked the usual reserve of the majority of indigenous people, which was partly due to her age. At times, she commanded that she be listened to; for example, she had recently berated one of the village's evangelical churches for insulting the Catholics in one of their services. Like all religious services, the sermon had been broadcast through loudspeakers attached to the church roof and had been heard in every corner of the village. Owing to *doña* Eugenia's outspoken but kindly nature she was feared and disliked by some but loved by others who would seek advice and refuge from her.

Doña Josefina

Doña Josefina was in her mid fifties and a *Costumbrista*. Her grandmother vanished in the market day round up; her husband was abducted from their home.

Doña Josefina was born in the mid-1930s. When she was quite young, her father left for another woman (he still lives in Emol but *doña* Josefina is estranged from him) and her mother remarried. *Doña* Josefina and her brother were brought up by their grand-parents. Her grandmother taught her to do everything including making *trensas* (platted cane leaf fronds), household chores, grinding *xilote* (corn husk) for the pigs, looking for herbs for the cows, pasturing, etc. When *doña* Josefina was twelve years old, her grandparents took her to live on the coast. Initially she worked weeding coffee and cutting cotton; a little later, she worked preparing food for labourers.

Doña Josefina's grandparents did not encourage her to go to school; nor did they want her to marry young because she was the only girl in the household and they relied on her help. However, *doña* Josefina eloped when she was thirteen years old and went to live with her husband, who died three years later. Her grand-parents accepted her back into their home. She remarried at seventeen; this time her husband, a woodcutter and roofer, came to live with her. She lives in her grandfather's house to this day.

Doña Josefina gave birth to six children; the first three died before the age of eighteen months and a fourth died when she was ten years old. She has two young sons (who were only babies when their father was killed). *Doña* Josefina said that, generally, she and her husband "lived well"; he only became abusive when he was drunk, which was rarely.

Doña Josefina's grandmother was kidnapped from the village square together with everyone else at the market that day. Her grandfather is a now a feeble old man who is drunk most of the time. *Doña* Josefina developed an alcohol problem of her own following her husband's abduction in October 1982. She told me "he did not tell me what he did", which I felt referred more to his political activities than his means of earning a living. He had just returned home after completing his 24 hour patrol duty when "they" (who were never clearly specified) came to take him and he was never seen again. She made no attempt to find out what happened to her husband. Some time later "they" told her where they had killed and buried him. She did not know why they killed him but thought that someone had informed on him. After they took him, no one wanted to talk about it.

During *La Violencia*, *doña* Josefina adopted a friend's son; the friend was widowed by the violence and asked *doña* Josefina to look after her son when she remarried. He worked in the capital, generally visiting every few weeks to make a contribution to the household; he would come more frequently when work needed to be done in the cornfields. He married while I was in the field, leaving his bride with *doña* Josefina, whereupon he would make more frequent visits.

Doña Josefina became a shaman (*aj q'ij*) and midwife during *La Violencia* after another shaman interpreted one of her dreams to mean that it was her destiny to become one. The shaman told her that if she did not follow her destiny, she would have more of these dreams and that she would become poorly and she could die. However, she did not want to begin working as a shaman, so she did not follow his advice. Then she began to suffer "*trastornos mentales*" (madness). She fell ill with a fever that rose so high that she lost all notion of time and of people. Because of this she decided go to another a shaman who did the special work of *ptan* (to enable her to speak with the spirits of the world). She told them that it would be alright for them to take her spirit and that she was ready to die rather than practice as a shaman. But her grandfather convinced her that she should take up her service. It was a big expense for them, costing 75 quetzales (almost £10.00) each time she went to learn from another shaman, an older man who taught her how to be a curer, midwife and shaman. Her madness then disappeared. On another occasion, she told me that she had already been practising before *La Violencia* but that she had stopped her work during this time because she was "seriously affected" herself by what was going on; she told me that was not in a position to think nor to help others for about three years. Her work as a shaman gave *doña* Josefina a leadership position in the village, albeit restricted to the *Costumbristas*.

Despite having to stay out at all hours, *Doña* Josefina liked being a shaman because she was able to serve others. Although she did not mention the minimal financial rewards of this work, she was more privileged than the majority of other widows who survived by plaiting *trenzas*: unlike other widows without elder sons, she did not have to travel to the coast to look for work or to earn an income labouring in other people's fields.

Doña Josefina was elected vice president of the local widows' group of which *doña* Eugenia was a director (although *doña* Josefina and *doña* Eugenia came from adjacent

hamlets (*aldeas*), the two women hardly knew one another prior to their involvement with this group). She was also a member of the literacy group (*educación extrascolar*) but, like the majority, had little time to attend the classes, and had not yet learnt to sign her own name. She already knew a little Spanish.

At first, *Doña Josefina* was reserved in her conversations with me, but she became the most affectionate and humorous of all the widows I knew. She said that at first she wondered if I had come to harm her; later she wondered if I came from a place similar to hers. She then began to worry about my safety; she would have dreams about me which she interpreted as warnings and passed on to me (such as the dream in which I was being pursued by animals with horns (the civil patrols?)). She was also the only person with whom I felt able to broach the subject of sex. When I expressed interest in this subject, she exclaimed "Oh, if you want to know about, that ask Mario!"

Being an emotional woman, it seemed to me that *doña Josefina* suffered a great deal from the violence. She expressed considerable guilt and suffered from innumerable physical ailments including a terrible skin rash. She seemed to anaesthetise herself with alcohol and was often found in a drunken stupor on her floor. Her work probably contributed to her alcohol problem as clients often give *aguardiente* as part of their offerings. *Doña Josefina* did not understand why *La Violencia* happened; she said that the *creyentes* (Catholics and Protestants) had told her that it was written in the bible but she was not sure herself, since she was illiterate.

Doña Flora

Doña Flora was approximately fifty years old, a devout (Charismatic) Catholic with Catholic Action sympathies. Her husband was the first man to be kidnapped in Emol; her only (adopted) son was abducted and killed later.

Doña Flora was born in the late 1930s. Her life was difficult from the start. Her father brewed *cuxa* (bootleg liquor) and spent most of the time drunk; he had little concern for his family's financial well-being. Her father frequently beat his wife, who worked as a midwife, because she did not always have his meals ready on time.

There was an unusually high proportion of *ladino* families in *doña Flora*'s natal village. She learnt to speak Spanish from serving them in the local shop and also from her mother, who had picked some knowledge of the language from her *Ladina* clients. She did not go to school.

Doña Flora's mother was cruel to her, taunting her that she would never marry because she was ugly. She did not allow *doña Flora* to marry the man she fell in love with because he had been married before. Eventually, *doña Flora* married an older man who had been living with his landless parents in the town. He bought land for their house in a nearby village.

Soon after their marriage, *doña Flora*'s husband began to brew *cuxa* for his own consumption and, when drunk, he would beat her. The beatings intensified with the realisation that they could not have children. He would beat her until she collapsed on the floor and then he would kick her, calling her a whore. *Doña Flora* was an incredibly

accepting person who frequently reminded me, when speaking about her hardships, that "*tenemos que aguantar*" (we have to tolerate it); she considered herself lucky as her husband allowed her to leave the house and to go about freely.

After a few years of marriage, *doña* Flora consulted a doctor who told her that her husband was sterile; he advised to find her another man who could give her a child. However, being a deeply religious person, she would not countenance the idea and, instead, adopted a baby boy who she grew to love for his "hard working, honourable and respectful" nature. The women in the village did not deride her for not bearing her own child.

Her son married when he was young, after falling in love with a girl at school when he was fifteen years old. *Doña* Flora had not wanted her son to marry so young but gave her consent when he threatened to "steal" (elope with) his bride. The girl's parents, *doña* Flora and her husband, also gave their consent and the girl came to live with *doña* Josefina.

A couple of years after his marriage, he was captured by the army and forced to do two years military service. *Doña* Flora would travel for a day on the buses to visit him in another province. She told me how she and her son would sit together and cry during her visits. She said her son was opposed to killing alongside regular soldiers. He returned to the village when he was released from the army.

Unusually, it was *doña* Flora who incited her husband and son to join what I assume to be the popular movement. She indicated to me that she had watched people meeting together for some time before speaking to her menfolk about her wish to join them. She went along to see what was happening because her curiosity was aroused. She told me that the people were speaking about inequality, how the rich were living off the poor; she was reminded of the priests who had spoken about injustice. Because the people in the meetings were talking about the same theme, she thought that it was probably something good. Besides, she herself had noted the truth in what they had said. She decided to go along and convinced her husband and son to join her. There was a good feeling of togetherness in the group. They were trained to be strong, to walk long distances but, as far as she knew, nobody received firearms training.

Then *La Violencia* began, with the killing of a village official. *Doña* Flora's husband was the first to be kidnapped. He was taken naked from his bed one night and never seen again. Her son said that he could not live without his father and wanted to join him [to die]. Then he too was kidnapped.

When she first met me, *doña* Flora told me that she suspected that he had been killed; many months later, when she trusted me, she told me that she knew where he was buried. She had been too afraid to visit the site or to report the murder or clandestine grave (however, in a later conversation with some other widows who knew the where their menfolk were buried, she damned them for not being "good christians" and reporting the site). Her brother dissuaded her from going to the military bases (or anywhere else for that matter) to make enquiries about her son, so she let the matter drop.

Doña Flora turned to drink instead and, she told me, "I did not feel anything for a year". She sold her animals and some of her land at a very cheap rate and returned to her mother's house in another village. She remained there for a year before going to live in a

nearby town. Her eldest grandson accompanied her everywhere while her two younger grandchildren, one new born, remained with her daughter-in-law, Samantha, who returned to her parental home.

Two years later, *doña* Flora returned to the village as she still had some land there. She was joined by her daughter-in-law and two young children. The two adult women and the three young children continued to live there together.

Doña Flora was a very religious Catholic turned Charismatic (after *La Violencia*); she was a co-ordinator of the Charismatic Church although she told me she was still a member of Catholic Action. She made many comments about other people's moral behaviour although she was also very self critical and often referred with embarrassment to her phase of drunkenness after her husband was killed.

Doña Flora was tall and elegant and, despite her years and her hard life, was still a good-looking woman; she had an air of serenity and benevolence about her. She had many friends. Like all Quiché village women, she had long dark hair which was often plaited into one or two braids with an enormous ribbon at the end. She was better dressed than most women from her village as the nuns sometimes gave her their clothes and her brother, a cobbler in the town, sometimes provided her with shoes his customers failed to collect.

Doña Flora spoke Spanish and was therefore more confident than the average Quiché woman. She was also more of a free-thinker than most women I knew. When I knew her, she was the president of the local widows' group. She was the woman to whom some of the village authorities would appeal when they wanted the cooperation of other village women; for example, when the Christian Democrats wanted to secure the widows' votes, they asked *doña* Flora to tell the women to meet in a certain place so they could be taken to town by coach to vote for the Christian Democrats.

Doña Candelaria

Doña Candelaria, who was in her forties, was a lapsed Catholic. Her husband was abducted and killed.

Doña Candelaria was an exuberant mother of ten who was openly expressive with her grandchildren, frequently clutching them to her and kissing them. She would sometimes break down in floods of tears when talking about her husband who was taken away with her young son to another village where he was shot. I had the feeling that there was an unusual amount affection between her and her husband who was obviously a much liked and valued member of the community.

Doña Candelaria was Catholic although she had given up most catholic rituals since her husband's death. She worked as a midwife to earn an income after her husband died, but gave this up during the course of my fieldwork, claiming that her sons did not want her to continue visiting other people's houses lest something happen to her. It was unclear whether they were referring to potential abuse from men or whether, as the political situation deteriorated, they were afraid that she would be suspected of being "organized" because of her frequent visits to other people's houses. However, although she had stopped her work as

a midwife, she was still called to heal children during the measles epidemic which hit the village in 1990.

Doña Candelaria's sons' fears for her safety coincided with her activities in the village's newly formed CONAVIGUA group (she had been a *vocal* (speaker) for the local NGO supported widows' group since its inception). She was one of the very few Emolian women I knew who went on their courses and joined their demonstrations. She also went to a CERJ meeting with the daughter of another Emolian widow who taught the village's *extrascolar* Spanish classes. All of these activities were viewed as subversive by the army and, therefore, by the civil patrol *jefes*. She told me that she participated in these events in order to receive financial help with clothes and schooling for her children. While it was true that she was among the widows who seemed most concerned that their children (even their daughters) should receive a good education, I also wondered if she declined to mention her struggle in connection with human rights.

Doña Candelaria was left with ten children when her husband was kidnapped. He was the president of the Action Catholic group when he was abducted from the town. The fate of the kidnapped man was reported to the family by the son who witnessed his father's death. The son, who was eight years old at the time, had been sent home by the one of the village authorities, the protestant president of the Improvement Committee (*Comité de Promejoramiento*) who was also his uncle (*doña* Candelaria's brother). Because he had to work closely with the civil patrol *jefes*, this man was never really trusted by the rest of the family (who wondered about his involvement in the village massacres) although he was invited to all family functions such as weddings and naming ceremonies.

Following his father's death, an older son who was studying to be a teacher had to give up his education and in order to support the family. He went to the city where he worked on the street, making plastic covers for official documents. He attempted to return to teacher training some years later but was forced to serve in the military reserves where he learnt to handle a gun. Later, he took the short course to become a policeman. A friend commented to me on the fact that his father had been killed by the army and now the son was entering an institution which had collaborated with the military during *La Violencia*. However, it did not appear that he identified with military's values, for he even encouraged his mothers' participation in widows' groups.

Doña Candelaria was distantly related to the leaders of the village widows' group, including *doña* Eugenia. Together they were a force to be reckoned with. Although they were related, they would not visit each other's houses unless there was an occasion such as a baptism, marriage or death. Other members of *Doña* Candelaria's extended family show a pattern of migration not untypical for Emolian families. Her sister and brother in law moved to the town during *La Violencia*. Another sister moved to a town outside Guatemala City.

APPENDIX II

Examples of residence

Doña Flora

Like most women, *doña* Flora was reluctant to leave her husband's house. She did not move after her husband was kidnapped but, after her son was killed, she responded to her brother's advice to move in with his family in the town. Her married son had been living with her at the time he was killed. She fled because the violence in the village had intensified and she feared that she would be the next to be killed. One reason why she agreed to abandon the home was that her daughter-in-law, Samantha, was able to return to her parental home nearby and could keep an eye on the house and the lands. *Doña* Flora took the eldest of her three grand-children, Thomas, and all her movable goods (including the roofing of her house) with her to the town. She lived with her brother for a few months and then returned to her natal village to live with her mother for two more years. She returned to her husband's house when "amnesty" was announced. Her daughter-in-law and her children also returned so that they could all live together. The family thus comprised two mutually dependent, adult women and three children all under the ages of ten.

Doña Eugenia

In contrast to *doña* Flora, *doña* Eugenia refused to leave the village or her husband's home at any point during *La Violencia*. Echoing her husband, she said, "if they kill me they kill me, I will not leave my home". This was partly because she suspected that "they" were trying to force her to leave so that they could steal her husband's lands. Unlike *doña* Flora whose husband had purchased land upon marriage, *doña* Eugenia's land had been owned by the family for generations and it is therefore likely that she felt a stronger attachment to it. She also had a very determined personality and may have been more resistant to leaving, despite her fear; she also had less option to move elsewhere. Like *doña* Flora, *doña* Eugenia's son was also killed, in this case, together with her husband; however, *doña* Eugenia stayed put with her daughter in law and her four children.

Juanita

Juanita had moved to her husband's home in the Capital when she married. When her father was killed, she returned to the village to live with her mother while her husband continued to work in "Guate" (Guatemala City). He came to the village to visit his wife and to plant his mother-in-law's *milpa*. After the army gang raped Juanita making her pregnant, her husband abandoned her. She continued to live in her mother's house, travelling to and from the capital to earn money making *tortillas* as she had done when living there with her husband. After two years, she resumed relations with her husband who lived with her and her mother in the village when he was not working. By then the patrols had been set up and they tried to force him to participate; he refused and returned to "Guate", taking Juanita with him. They returned to the village when her mother needed help with the land and her husband was killed by the patrol on one of these visits. Juanita, who was pregnant again, returned to the village to live permanently in her mother's home.

Doña Christina

Doña Christina returned to her father's house after her husband was kidnapped. When her father was killed, she left the village and went to live in the town where she worked as a laundress. Her neighbours began to accuse her of being a prostitute which, she told me, forced her quickly into remarriage. She returned with her children and her second husband to her first husband's home. Her second husband was an alcoholic who frequently beat her and gave her little for her *gastos* (household expenses). She left him and returned to the town where she and her mother rented a house. When she returned to visit her first husband's land, she was stoned by her male cousins. She was in the process of obtaining legal help without which she felt she unable to return at all.

APPENDIX III

CONAVIGUA

CONAVIGUA, the National Coordination of Widows of Guatemala, is a widow's self help organization. Petronila, the vice president of the group, explained to me how the group was formed and how it functioned in the present. She is a quietly spoken young woman, who has a quiet confidence about her; she is unusually direct for an indigenous woman. When I first met her she was on sabbatical from her work in CONAVIGUA; she had become ill with *ataques de nervios* (nervous attacks), burning sensations in her body and was suffering from exhaustion.

CONAVIGUA grew spontaneously from an incident in 1988. Petronila, then a member of the local catechist "reflection" (bible study) group, asked the young radical Quiché Mayan Catholic priest, Ventura Lux Herrera, to hold a mass on the Day of the Virgin (14 May) for women whose relatives had been murdered or "disappeared". The priest, who had already been accused of being "subversive" for reintroducing Mayan customs, music and dancing into church services, agreed that this would be a good way to "lift the women's spirits".

The mass was advertised over Radio Quiché and through the catechist networks. Nevertheless, Father Ventura did not expect many women to attend because of the pervasive reluctance to be identified as widows or relatives of the "war" dead. In the event, 1,800 women flocked to the church from all over Quiché and beyond; some walked for days to get there. The women spilled out of the church, down the steps and into the market place. The unexpected size of the crowd highlights the women's continuing faith in the Catholic Church and the strength of the catechist network, factors which militate against the prevailing atomization of Quiché life.

Yet as far as I could gather, no widows from Emol attended the mass though they had heard about it; they were too scared to go because they were aware of the allegations against the young priest and were afraid that the army would lock them in the church, perhaps killing or disappearing them (a tactic used many times by the military). I suspect that most widows experienced similar feelings of fear; perhaps women living further afield were less aware of the army's railings against the priest.

Father Ventura told me that during the service some women spoke openly over the microphone about the atrocities committed in their villages. They did not call for action against the army or patrols, he said, but merely wanted to share their experiences. The mass was broadcast over Radio Quiché as usual; no one had anticipated what the women would reveal. Expecting repercussions, his catechists and friends advised Father Ventura to flee the town, but he refused to leave.

The following morning a mob of patrollers tried to force their way into the church, intending to kill Father Ventura. On the day preceding his next intended mass on St. Christopher's Day (27 July 1988), a demonstration was staged in front of the church with the object of violently removing the priest from it. The army had purportedly paid and forced

people to participate in the demonstration. The patrol *jefes*, military commissioners and evangelical sects obligated 3,000 local villagers to take part. Some arrived with banners bearing messages such as "*Padre en lugar de predicar el Evangelio nos está inculcando el comunismo*" (Father, instead of teaching us the bible you are indoctrinating us about communism and encouraging widows to join the guerrillas). Finally, the death threats forced the priest into hiding. He never returned to the *municipio* alive; he was brought back in his coffin in 1992 after a supposed car accident. What was left in his place was the foundation of CONAVIGUA.

When the women spoke in this mass there was an immense outpouring of speech about the public massacres and other experiences of atrocity. In the process, women felt that their minds and bodies were freed, that it was almost as if they were in direct touch with one another and, I imagine, with their inner "selves" as well. It was only when this open declaration occurred that women fully recognized the extent to which their claims and their anger were shared by other women. The mutual recognition afforded by this public action involved an intense learning experience which was shared not only by the women in the church but by a much wider public listening over the radio (see Zolberg 1972).

However, this learning did not consist so much of new ideas as the realization that other women, hundreds if not thousands of them, had similar experiences and silent ideas. These "new" beliefs, expressed in a new language of resistance, became anchored in a new network of relationships which are rapidly constituted during such periods of intense activity. Factions gave way to personal networks which were to form the foundation of the women's group CONAVIGUA. This group, in turn, was to facilitate the liberation of human expression.

The mass on the Day of the Virgin (who Petronila taught was a *campesina* like themselves) was an irrevocable experience of personal authentication for war widows, restoring a sense of self-respect and personhood. The fact that this bold step could not be undone caused it to have even more of an impact, both on women themselves and on the patrollers and those behind them (the army). It seems that all the women who experienced this event, whether directly or vicariously, experienced a dramatic episode in which a psychological shift occurred which contributed to women "waking up" to their position in society and how it might be altered.

CONAVIGUA began as a small group of women who joined together after the mass in Chichicastenango to help indigenous widows to support themselves and obtain basic necessities. At first, the group operated only within the Chichicastenango *municipio*; it then spread to other areas of the department as more women became interested joining the organization. Eventually, two women (Petronila and Rosaria) decided to work towards creating a national women's group. Rosaria, who was from Chimaltenango, had been widowed twice by the security forces; after losing her second husband, she had become involved in organising women in her department. Unlike the women for whom she works so hard, Petronila is unmarried and has not lost a male member of her family to the violence. She arrived via a different route. She converted to Catholicism at the age of 13 and was encouraged in her ambition to become a catechist by a male catechist who arrived in her village when she was 16 years old. However, despite the Church's teachings on equality, her community banned her from working locally because of her gender. Her mentor was denounced as a "subversive" and assassinated during *La Violencia*. Petronila returned from

the coast where her father had taken the family when *La Violencia* began and again attempted to work as a catechist. In 1987 she began to receive the support of Father Ventura Lux Herrera.

CONAVIGUA's eight woman directorate was elected at the organization's first assembly. This articulates with the department directorate which meets with the municipal directorate every fifteen days. These in turn articulate with village representatives and local groups. Directors at all levels of the organization are elected by village representatives; decisions are taken on the basis of group votes: as a whole, the organization is egalitarian in the way it functions. Membership in the organization is completely voluntary.

The first CONAVIGUA meeting in Emol was held in 1989. Negotiations were conducted an Emolian man who was involved in another popular organization; he had frequent contact with a man who had lived in Guatemala City since *La Violencia* and who came into frequent contact with the directorate of CONAVIGUA through his participation in CONDEG (Council of Displaced Guatemalans). The widows who gathered to meet Petronila were all members of the NGO though not all members of the NGO turned up, having been warned by patrollers and other villagers that CONAVIGUA was a subversive organization. Nevertheless, it seems that participation in this NGO was a precursor to joining human rights groups such as CONAVIGUA. The NGO's work not only raised women's consciousness but led to women's greater self sufficiency and self-esteem (participation in literacy classes sometimes has the same effect). Participation in NGO health and development projects gave women another venue in which to plan and resolve practical matters; they also learnt to negotiate with the male *promotores* of these organizations.

According to women's reports, open, if sometimes subtle, displays of dissent became more common. Women's expression of forbidden opinions within groups of women, and then within CONAVIGUA, gave them the moral courage to make public displays of resistance. Women's confidence was built up and tested within the group; they became aware of affinities across time and space with others in similar circumstances. They became aware of the concept of human rights and realized that theirs had been violated. Members of CONAVIGUA attend courses on human rights given by CERJ, an organization with which it is closely associated.

Popular movements are not new in Guatemala but their liberating discourses have not been race or gender free. Political and grassroots organizations are generally coordinated by men and often *Ladino* men at that; Indians are unable to gain the same position of power and women are still assigned the most servile tasks. However, new features have developed since the mid-1980s, which CONAVIGUA illustrates: firstly, the centrality of the Indian and, secondly, the protagonism of women. In rural areas, women have found organizations based on Indian traditions (like CONAVIGUA) much more accessible than western-style political parties. Women have been excluded from traditional politics in Guatemala and from leadership of any kind: women account for only 30% of the electorate and hold only 2.5% of elected offices (74 of 3,000 posts) elected offices are held by women.

Organizations composed exclusively of women posit women's struggle for their rights within a wider context of human rights. CONAVIGUA has created a space for Indian women and attempts to prevent that space from being invaded by struggles and claims which unify the victims of terror of both genders in ethnicity so as not to obscure some of the politics of

domination which it tries to erase. Their concerns are feminist, yet this is subsumed within a loftier ambition of emancipation defined by class liberation and ethnic revitalization. However, women's participation in activities which work towards these goals are limited by traditional problems of discrimination and illiteracy and by the ongoing need for clandestineness.

By 1993 CONAVIGUA had 13,000 members many of whom joined through the campaign on the exhumation of clandestine cemeteries.

APPENDIX IV

NAHUALES

title
as per I+II

That individuals have companion animals (or, as Pitt-Rivers (1970) aptly put it, "animal co-essences") is a common theme in Mesoamerica which has been discussed by many anthropologists as part of a system of "multiple souls". There is much emphasis in the literature on *nahuales* by various authors who all spell it differently (e.g., it is often spelt *nagual*). The *nahual* is generally considered to be a companion animal and stress has been placed on these animals as representations of social hierarchies, relative powers, life spans and personality characteristics (cf. Gossen, 1975; Musgrave-Portilla, 1982; Pitt-Rivers, 1970).

Animal co-essences generally live parallel lives to their human counterparts and share their fate in life and death (Vogt 1970). Their forms may be divined shortly after birth, become clear in dreams, or never known to the individual (Gossen 1975). In some areas, part of a person's inner soul is deemed to wander from its human body at night - during sleep, when a person is sick, has sexual intercourse, feels strong emotions, or dies. In other communities, the ancestors can punish individuals by knocking out part of an individual's inner soul and letting their animal counterparts free from the safety of their special sanctuaries (Vogt 1970). In other places, only powerful elders and healers have animal spirits which they may use to bring disease to individuals as a punishment for social transgressions (Villa Rojas 1947). Watanabe (1989) explores distinctive constructions of the inner "soul" for Santiago Chimaltenango, Guatemala, and finds it an important aspect of communality and ethnicity.

In the Quiché, one will see certain vestiges of the indigenous nahualism referred to in the ancient Mayan book "Popol Vuh". Only aj q'ijs were able to tell me anything about companion animals (called anhual among the Quiché); the general population seemed to know nothing about it although aj q'ijs say that people are nevertheless controlled by their anhual.

Doña Josefina told me that the *nahual/anhual* is an animal which protects the individual and is also a vital part of one's personality. The anhual one is born with determines one's character: whether a person will be angry and aggressive, a womanizer or seductress, a good worker, a person-eater (killer), is strong or has a small heart (is weak), unstable and so on.

A person's anhual depends on his/her day of birth: every day has a name and there is a anhual for each of the twenty days of the Mayan month. Thus although fate (*suerte*) is a quality of the anhual, obviously it is also a person's fate to have such and such an anhual otherwise "fate" would have decreed that a person be born on a more auspicious day. Anhuales are animals (cow, goat, pig, dog, cat, chicken, tiger, coyote, horse, mule, deer, armadillo, squirrel and rabbit); birds (dove, parrot, tz'nun, ch'og, tzanate (birds for which I do not know the English names)); amphibians (e.g., frog); insects (e.g., scorpion). Anhuales are also inanimate objects such as air, fire, the sun, stars. Different anhuales are sometimes

indicative of professions: for example, nine stars are said to be the anhual of someone destined to be a midwife; air is that of an aj q'ij.

The anhual is born with the person, leaving the mother's womb through the vagina and escaping in that instant so that it can not be known. Moreover, it is still wrapped in the placenta. I received two consistent reports on where the anhual resided: in the air or under the breastbone near the heart, ie, in the same general location as one's essence (c'ux). C'ux is associated with the essential nature of a person and is sometimes said to be located in the region of the stomach. The concept of c'ux is linked to, if not the same as, what the Quiché call the *anima* or spirit; it is the place from whence life emanates.

Among the Quiché, one can have occasion to know one's anhual in adulthood. This is said to happen if one is confronted with a saq' xol (spirit which has the potential to kill). The nahual can leave one's body to confront the saq' xol, who is then carried off by the wind. However, it is more common that a person's anhual will be divined by a shaman (aj q'ij) whom the individual had consulted about some problem or another. The shaman will tell his client that it is necessary to feed this spirit so that it does not bother you or manifest itself as illness. Like the ancestors, it does not want to be forgotten.

The concept of animal essences is echoed in Quiché beliefs concerning people who can transform themselves into animals, usually at night and for nefarious purposes. This concept is still prevalent in Quiché in connection with negative forces such as *el bin*, or the *q'ol q'ol* and, as such, is exploited by the military who ascribe guerrillas and guerrilla sympathizers with transforming qualities. The link, now probably forgotten by Emolians, is provided by the fact that Mesoamerican gods were attributed with this ability to transform themselves: for example, the name of the god Huehuecoytl means "the old coyote, the *nahuali* of this particular god" (Musgrave-Portillo 1982:6-9); in other words, this god transforms itself into the body form of its animal essence, its *nahual*. Doubtless, these transforming entities were not always viewed as being solely negative; however, the only remaining transformable being which is viewed in any other way is the Black Man, a transforming spirit entity of multiple, ambivalent interpretation.

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