

DAY FOUR

*On Thursday, May 29, **Domingo L.** gave his testimony. Domingo was born in the Cantón Xecnub, in the municipality of Joyabaj, department of Quiché. One of seven children, he grew up learning to farm with his father and brothers. The massacres arrived in his village in 1981; for two years his family ran from community to community, trying to escape the violence. Domingo lost his parents and five of his siblings as a result of the conflict. Later he would become a member and organizer in the Comité de Unidad Campesina (Committee of Campesino Unity—CUC).*

We lived near Joyabaj, in the Quiché. Before, we had a better life – it was a difficult one because we had to work on the coast every year picking coffee, but it was peaceful. In August 1981 the trouble began. During a fiesta, 5 or 6 persons were kidnapped and found dead later. We didn't know why. But that's where it began.

On 24 December the Army arrived in Xecnub and started to kill people. My mother and father lived in that place – we were eight people. The army was killing us. We got together and fled to the mountain. We went back down to try to get our things later but found everything gone and burned. Everything was burned. So we never went back to live in that house.

We hid as refugees in another place, in Alta Verapaz. One of my sisters lived there, recently married. We thought, Oh in 10 or 15 days this problem will be over. But no, it lasted for much longer. More and more people left their villages and went into the mountains. While we were there the army attacked the people and about 80 people were killed in the mountains.

The Xecnub civil defense patrol worked with the soldiers. They chased us no matter where we went, hunting down all the people from Xecnub so that no one could work or return home. We moved on to Churexa to escape them.

In May 1982 my father and two brothers and I left the hamlet to plant our crops. We were sowing our field for three days. We came back to our house and found that the rest of the family was gone. Five people from my family were kidnapped and taken away: my mother, three of my sisters and a niece. I learned later from two patrollers that they were killed. We don't know where they are buried; some people say the cemetery, some the military barracks. So there were only four of us left. We stayed alone, fleeing the patrollers.

In August there was nothing left to do in this area. The patrollers were well organized in the two cantons to hunt and kill the people. So, in this month all of us who were left in the area fled together to find another place to hide, in Zacualpa. We were there for three days. But the patrollers and army chased us, and they grabbed us one day by surprise. They killed about 60 people – men, women and children. I was together with my papa and two brothers. We were able to run away more quickly because we were men, but the women and small children lagged behind and they were killed. We snuck back after we were sure the soldiers were gone. We saw the dead people. Some of them had no heads, others lay there with their throats cut.

In April 1983, soldiers and patrollers surrounded and attacked Xolbalchaj, where we had gone to hide and live. They took everyone in that area away and killed them. About 45 people died in

that action. In the morning before they came we had heard that there would be an army sweep. My father went to investigate but I stayed working in the field. Then I saw around 100 patrollers approaching, and I immediately hid under a pile of leaves. Five minutes later I heard the sound of the patrollers shouting and feet running. They killed my father and one of my brothers, then my other brother. So only my sister and I were left from a family of nine.

Before, there was no military base in Joyabaj. But when the troubles began they created this army base in Joyabaj. In the Cantón Xeabaj there was a base for the patrollers. In every place the patrollers had the bases. The patrollers would threaten us all the time. They would say, "You are bad people. You are going to die."

We never found out where they took my mother. My father's body and one brother were exhumed in the place where 45 people died and we reburied them.

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Beatriz Manz spoke after Domingo. Manz is a professor of Geography and Ethnic Studies at the University of California Berkeley whose research has focused on Mayan communities in rural Guatemala. Her first book, Refugees of a Hidden War: The Aftermath of Counterinsurgency in Guatemala (State University of New York Press, 1988), examined the human rights abuses committed by the military against indigenous rural communities, and the resulting mass displacement that affected over a million Guatemalans. Her most recent book, Paradise in Ashes: A Guatemalan Journey of Terror, Courage and Hope (University of California Press, 2004), recounts the experiences of one village deep in the heart of the rainforest in northern Guatemala, near the Mexican border. Included in the summary of her testimony, below, are photographs taken by Manz during her field work in Guatemala in the early 1980s that she gave to Judge Pedraz at the time of her declaration in Madrid.

I am here to speak about my work as an anthropologist in Guatemala and in the refugee camps in Mexico.

The army's counterinsurgency campaign caused massacres. According to the Catholic Church, some one and a half million people were displaced. The army pursued and persecuted the displaced people, capturing or killing them, destroying their fields, their trees, and fruits. The constant persecution created insupportable conditions that caused the deaths of many more people, especially children. The constant surveillance of the displaced people by airplane also created terrible conditions for them. They had to cook in the middle of night. They had to wear wet clothes because they couldn't wait for them to dry after a rain; they had to kill their dogs so they wouldn't bark, and silence their own children. When they couldn't bear it any more, they crossed into Mexico.

The first time I learned about the massacres was when I was in Mexican camps. I had read something about them in the press in 1981, but it wasn't until I was conducting interviews in the camps in 1982 that I realized the immensity of these massacres. In the 1970s the government had carried out selective persecution targeting certain sectors, such as activist

Catholics, teachers, union leaders. But the people did not flee the areas where they lived, they stayed in their villages.



Above, 1982 refugee camp Puerto Rico in the Chiapas Lacandon forest of Mexico;
Below, poor conditions of refugees arriving in Mexico.

In 1982, what the refugees described was a much higher level of persecution. It was something completely different. I carried out about 100 interviews with them. When I got to the Puerto Rico refugee camp, people were pouring over the border – in one day some 600-800 came in.

It's difficult to describe the conditions in which these people arrived. To get to the camp you had to walk through the dense jungle. Their physical condition when they arrived was very poor: some had no shoes, they arrived in a state of malnutrition, sick, cold, etc. They had only herbs in the forest to eat, with very little water. Several women gave birth in the forest.



Already in 1982 we were hearing about many deaths. Those who left were the ones who were able to escape the army's attacks. It was hard to get from the Altiplano to Mexico. They left from all over that area: from Huehuetenango, the Petén, Ixcán. They told similar stories. The army surrounded an aldea. If they found people there, they killed them and then they destroyed the village: burned the houses, killed the

animals, and destroyed the crops. The people who managed to hide fled to the jungle and lived in horrible conditions, and those that survived displacement fled to Mexico.

The people would hide deep, deep in the jungle and the patrollers would chase them. They would find their little milpas inside the jungle, small and dispersed so they couldn't be found by air. When the soldiers destroyed those, the people would lose hope.



Above, Mandatory Civil Patrols (PACs); Below, Military take over Catholic Church buildings in the Quiché, 1983.

Sometimes 6 or 7 families would hide together, sometimes huge groups of 700 people. It was much more difficult to survive that way. They couldn't walk on the paths together. They had to move toward the border in the north by cutting a path through the dense jungle in the middle of the night. During the day they had to stop and be silent. If they were a big group it was even more complicated – hundreds of people trying to walk through the dense jungle.

The army's goal was to clean the region. The soldiers were responding to orders to control everything and everyone in the zone of Ixcán. "Plan Victoria 82" was focused on total victory--which meant control by the military of the area – not only about control of the guerrillas or of persecution of certain activist Catholics. The army took over the churches, the schools. Never before did the Catholic Church have to shut down an entire diocese, as they did in El Quiché. But that wasn't sufficient. That wasn't enough. The army had to continue with their campaign to control everything and everyone, alive or dead.



In Mexico, the government created COMAR (the Mexican Commission for Refugees). The UN agency to aid refugees, ACNUR, opened offices in Mexico also – it was a recognition of the disaster of refugees from Guatemala. These new institutions helped address the crisis. Nevertheless, the incursions of the Guatemalan army into Mexico created panic among the refugees in the camp. The incursions had to be very small; the Guatemalans knew they were violating the sovereignty of the Mexican government. I remember one incident in particular when 7 people were killed by Guatemalan soldiers. So they were able to get in and attack people.



Above, 1982 refugee camp Puerto Rico in the Chiapas Lacandon forest of Mexico;
Below, Model village of Acul near Nebaj, highlands of Guatemala, 1983

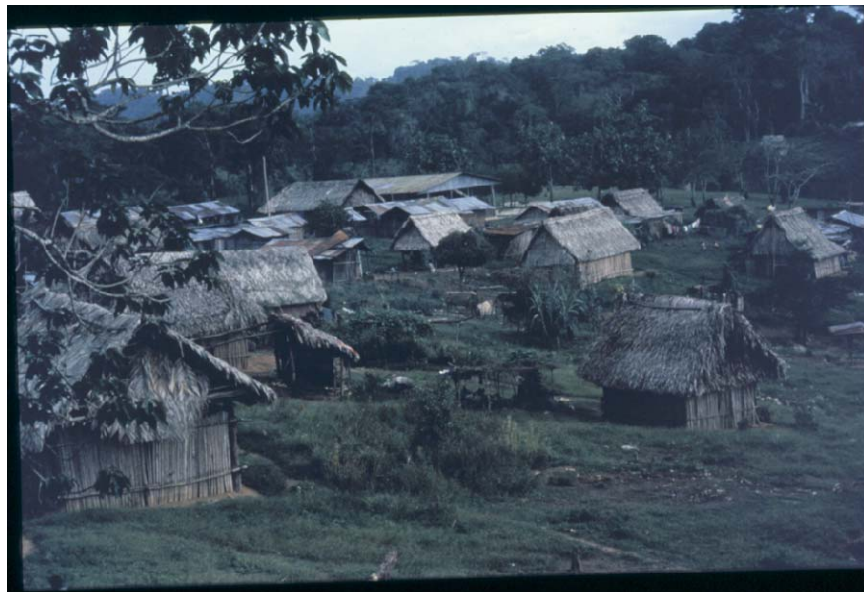
Before all this happened, the people of Ixcán were well organized by the Maryknolls and the diocese of El Quiche to settle in the area. They belonged to cooperatives, took classes, it was a democratic organization of the *aldeas*. When the villages were destroyed and people displaced, the villagers maintained this level of organization. And it was an important form of survival. In the refugee camps, the leaders of communities would go from house to house and make sure everyone had a tarp over their family's head, that they knew where to get food, how to build a place to cook, and so on. Of course, the conditions in the camp were terrible. These people were already poor campesinos. Now they had to live in awful conditions, and many people died as a result.

In 1983, I went into Guatemala to see what was happening in the Altiplano. I went into the model villages, where the population that had been captured or turned over to the army now lived. The way the army talked about the civilians was to turn them into prisoners, criminals. They “captured” them, they “detained” them, they “interrogated” them, and



they talked of “pardoning” them. They tortured them so that the people had to say something, “accuse” others. They had to turn others in, give names; it was not possible to be silent. The Army would take groups of people, prisoners they had interrogated, away from the large army base in Playa Grande in trucks. The trucks would leave the base, and would come back empty. Everyone left in the army base was apprehensive that they would be put in those trucks and also be taken away to be killed. You didn’t have to tell the interrogators the names of guerrilla collaborators – they knew. They knew which person’s brother was involved in the guerrilla. But they interrogated everyone anyhow to see if they would be willing to cooperate with the army and accuse others. It was a way of involving the population psychologically in a very difficult situation. They created a terrible feeling of guilt among the people.

In the first phase of army counterinsurgency sweeps, they would kill everyone. Later the tactics changed, and they would kill those who fled but the ones who stayed would be rounded up and taken to the military base. They were interrogated there and eventually taken to model villages.



Militarized village of Santa María Tzeja, where houses were all crowded into the former small “village center” for better control by army.

The village I knew best, since 1973, was Santa María Tzejá, which became a model village. The model villages represented a new organization of space, so that army could control the people better. New residents who had been brought in by the army changed the village as well. Originally, the people who came to Ixcán were Catholics, and in Santa María Tzejá they were all from El Quiche and K’iche’ speakers. But when Santa María Tzeja became a “model village” the army brought in evangelicals and people from different parts of country. So in Sta. María Tzeja, for example, there were 116 families and they spoke 7 languages. The army’s strategic plan was to mix the people that way so that it would be impossible for the people to unify themselves.

In the villages, the army carried out re-education programs. After the horrors these people had seen, the people were more vulnerable to psychological pressure from the army. The army would say: this is the Guatemalan flag! You have to honor it! You are manipulated by

foreigners! So the ideological re-education was intense. “You are bad people, with bad ideas, but we pardon you.”

International groups would send food to be distributed (presumably by civilians) to the people. But the army would always distribute the food and the medical assistance. The community leaders would be named by the army. How many tortillas you were allowed to carry, how much salt, it was all controlled by army. You couldn't just come and go as you pleased, all movements were controlled by army. If a man wanted to leave and miss his patrol service, he had to pay a replacement. You had to show your *cédula* (ID card) everywhere. The military took down all of this in their notebooks by hand. If you lost your *cédula*, you were in trouble.



Above, in the rural areas, people could not move freely; permission was required to leave one's village; Below, a soldier in the countryside.

The Army is very hierarchal and very disciplined. The officers were well trained, often in United States. The idea that a group of low-ranking soldiers would arrive in a village and commit a massacre based on their own decision was not sustainable, not possible. They always had lists of suspects by names when they arrived. Their level of control and the organization of their campaign were such that it was clearly designed by superiors.

The consequences of the massacres are very long term: first, many people were left with deep psychological problems and social problems. Second, the deep fear caused by the military violence, the mayhem, and the destruction of the economy has produced waves of illegal immigrants over US border. Third, the economic setback in the rural areas, already dismally poor, is and will continue to have deep consequences.



No one has reimbursed the campesino families for the land they lost, for their houses, their animals. So if they were poor to begin with, imagine their condition now. Fourth, in the past farmers in the Ixcán for example, were well organized in cooperatives. Now everyone is isolated – you plant your little plot of cardamom or whatever you are growing and sell it on your own. Finally Guatemala is faced with the legacy of the brutal violence, the lynching – adults and young people alike only know violence. There were and are no laws. There is chaos. The people are very apathetic. Why should they act? They know the

consequences. This combination of malaise is not a recipe for success, for social and economic development. How can you have social progress when you have a society that is pessimistic about the future because of what they experienced in the past, and have no reason or assurance that what happened will not reoccur again?

We realize that the dead will not come back to us. The disappeared will never return. I will not see my colleague Myrna Mack, who was killed by the army for her work, again. But the world needs to render a judgment. To judge those responsible! In the 21st century we cannot continue to keep these horrors hidden, we cannot continue being silent about what happened in Guatemala. At least through this case, the world will hear, the world will know, and the Guatemalan society, especially the survivors, will know that it was judged to have been a crime against humanity. So that this damaged society can become a dignified society again.

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