Stumbling Our Way to the Mark: Guatemalan Mennonites in the Era of Ríos Montt, 1980-1984

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> "It is better to stumble to the right destination than enjoy smooth sailing and miss the mark."[1]

This paper is dedicated to all those who risked their lives to promote basic human rights in Guatemala. I want to honour those who lost their lives, had to go into exile, and otherwise paid a high personal price for their efforts. Finally, I honour all those who continue to live what it means to be Guatemalan today… .

One morning in 1982, the young Mennonite minister Gilberto Flores was sitting in his office in Guatemala City when a former member of his congregation entered. After exchanging pleasantries for a few moments, the visitor stated his real intentions for the visit. "While I will always respect you as my minister," he began, "I now consider you a guerrilla and I will kill you the next time I have the chance." With this startling statement, General José Efraín Ríos Montt left the office. Gilberto Flores and his family went into hiding that same day and left Guatemala, one family among hundreds of thousands of Guatemalans

exiled, internally displaced or killed during the country's thirty-six year civil war (1960-1996).[2] Like the Flores family, thousands fled to the United States and Canada as political refugees. Following attacks by feared paramilitary special forces, many more were less fortunate and fled north through mountainous jungles into southern Mexico, living precariously off small plots of lands in refugee camps. By the time the peace accords were signed in 1996, more than two million Guatemalans had been internally and externally displaced, 200,000 were dead and 50,000 had been disappeared out of a population of around eight million.[3]

In the midst of this long history of suffering and loss, the Ríos Montt political era became marked for its extraordinary violence and repression. Following a coup d'etat against elected president General Ángel Aníbal Guevara in March 1982, Ríos Montt led the country as de facto president through the bloodiest eighteen months in Guatemalan history, no small feat in a history marked by sustained state sponsored violence. Escalating a chillingly pragmatic program known as the *fusiles y frijoles*, or guns and beans campaign, Ríos Montt authorized a scorched earth policy designed to defeat the guerrilla revolutionary movement embedded within the western highlands.[4] As such, it allowed for no political neutrality. One was either with his government or against it and the measure of its effectiveness was startlingly evident. Within nine months the highland population of mostly indigenous Mayans had been brutally pacified.

As this chilling narrative unfolded during the late 1970s and early 1980s known to Guatemalans as *la violencia* (the violence), an urban Mennonite community was simultaneously taking root in Guatemala City. Consequently this era of socio-political violence is an inextricable element of their formation, theology and institutional trajectory. All those who identified as Mennonite were faced with questions of tremendous theological and social significance, the implications of which led to a profound transformation based upon a deep commitment to Anabaptist theology as an avenue for peace through the socio-political chaos. It is also the story of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) whose initial decision to join reconstruction efforts following the 1976 earthquake facilitated their decision to accompany Guatemalans through the following decade of unfathomable violence. Although the Guatemalan civil war created numbers of casualties that defy imagination and numb our sensibilities, this paper explores the personal experiences of Gilberto Flores, individuals of the MCC and a small group of urban Mennonites in Guatemala City during the early 1980s. The story of these Mennonites, their relationship with Efraín Ríos Montt and their struggle to articulate and live a message of peace and social justice is a complex and courageous one.[5]

Like so many other Guatemalans, urban Mennonites first experienced *la violencia* as victims during the late 1970s when the Lucas García government initiated its repressive counterinsurgency measures against the growing revolutionary movement. The Mennonites' fear shifted to open relief and support with the 1982 coup and presidency of Ríos Montt, an openly evangelical Christian president whose religious rhetoric of personal responsibility resonated assuredly with many urban residents. The deep historic prejudices of *ladinos* (those Guatemalans who speak Spanish and do not identify as indigenous) towards indigenous people along with a vast gulf between urban and rural Guatemalans distanced urban residents from the rural suffering created by the scorched earth policies of the Ríos Montt era. Through the work of MCC which bridged these socio-ethnic fissures, some within the urban Mennonite community began a struggle to create and maintain a non-violent presence to defend the basic rights of all Guatemalans. Through difficult and painful discernment processes, this nascent Mennonite community ultimately drew upon sixteenth century Anabaptist theological tenets to forge a uniquely Guatemalan non-violent path, siding neither with the State nor revolutionary movements. Rather, they sought justice for all participants of the struggle, seeking basic human dignity along with the daily needs of food and shelter within a non-violent context. Their decision to defend their fellow Guatemalans ultimately brought them into a direct collision course with the State power structures.

The experiences of Guatemalans in the capital city during *la violencia* are not particularly well understood. Most scholars have focused on the near genocidal levels of violence experienced by rural and indigenous civilians.[6] With the exception of Virginia Garrard-Burnett's recent analysis on General Ríos Montt in *Terror in the Land of the Holy*, little attention has been given to urban residents and their views of Ríos Montt during this era of violence.[7] This paper reveals how a small group of people chose to interact with a seemingly intractable State apparatus. Their stories defy the established binaries that demanded resistance or cooperation with a State system. Rather, their specific socio-ethnic position as urban Mennonites facilitated a transformation, one that shifted first from being victims of violence to tacit allies of Ríos Montt and his policies, and then to a position of being defenders of the victims of the worst of the human rights abuses. Consequently, their stories also disturb other well established binaries between urban and rural Guatemalans, that is, between *ladino* and indigenous communities. As a result, this paper contributes not only to Guatemalan and global Mennonite histories, but also to Guatemala's historiography of the civil war.

Relationships define this story and remain at the centre of a theological transformation through moments of unspeakable fear. The Mennonite Central Committee's (MCC) foundational model of relationships facilitated transformative moments for themselves and Guatemalans even during periods of political and religious tensions. The relationship developed between MCC country director Rich Sider and Gilberto Flores facilitated the formation of a service committee dedicated to serving their urban and rural neighbours in need. Members of the *Casa Horeb* Mennonite congregation such as Mario Higueros and his wife Francesca supported this vision, risking their lives to hide those fleeing from paramilitary death squads in addition to undertaking more conventional development work.[8] In so doing, both MCC and the local Mennonites were led to a position that bore witness to the violence, rather than one that took sides. Their particular stories of courage, vision and faith highlight individual agency within a socio-political context that revealed the true cost of non-violent discipleship.

Emergence of an Urban Mennonite Community

The urban Mennonite community at the centre of this story emerged during one of the most turbulent and violent periods marked by both natural and human made disasters. On February 4, 1976, the most destructive earthquake in Central American history centered just fifty-four kilometers from Guatemala City in Chimaltenango shattered the lives of hundreds of thousands of people, creating an internal homeless crisis and years of reconstruction efforts. The earthquake exposed the State's façade of socio-political control, energizing a clandestine guerrilla resurgence with the support of an increasingly disaffected rural and indigenous population. These two dramatic events created the backdrop for both the arrival of MCC and the subsequent transformation of the existing Mennonite community.

The 1976 earthquake that struck Guatemala City and the surrounding region remains unparalleled in its destruction of property and people. The initial earthquake along with two powerful aftershocks killed 22,545 in large part due to its occurrence in the middle of the night when most people were asleep in their homes. Many died in their beds as their inadequately built houses collapsed on top of them. More than 74,000 additional people were wounded and more than one million people displaced.[9] Although some distance from its epicenter, the earthquake severely damaged Guatemala City's infrastructure, affecting the electrical grid, water supply and telephone system. Following the earthquake an additional 50,000 people migrated to the

capital swelling the homeless population, already at 300,000, to crisis proportions. Meanwhile, wealthy Guatemalans kept appointments to have their dogs groomed and ordered the latest cocktail, known as the *terremoto* (earthquake). This apparent lack of empathy on the part of the wealthy as well as the earthquake's disproportionate destructive effect on the poor caused some analysts to rename the tragedy a class-quake.[10]

The ensuing tragedy attracted hundreds of faith based relief organizations, including MCC's disaster team. At the vanguard of these organizations were Protestant groups from the United States who saw in the disaster an opportunity to help rebuild Guatemala not only physically, but spiritually.[11] Utilizing a popular form of relief work known to its critics as disaster evangelism, aid was frequently distributed according to the recipients' willingness to join a particular denomination.[12] The dominance of this particular relief model prompted observers to coin the phrase *anima por lamina*, or souls for laminate roofing, a product commonly used in Guatemalan homes.[13] Although the MCC disaster team had hoped to coordinate their efforts with national church groups or local agencies as they frequently did in other countries, the dizzying array of denominational and ideological differences made any joint endeavors impossible.

This particular politico-religious context amidst a myriad of development and religious models required MCC to deliberately distance its mode of operation from its evangelical counterparts. Its work was undergirded by three interrelated concepts that included a specific set of assumptions, a program centered within relationships and the concept of *zusammenarbeit*, or working together. The assumptions under which MCC operated offered a manifesto of human rights for all peoples that included the right to health, food, shelter, employment, civil liberties and knowledge of the abundant life that God offers. MCC's theological foundation held that God's order of things has a special place for the oppressed and dispossessed. These ideals were bound to one another through a commitment to a relationship-centered program undergirded by *zusammenarbeit* between MCC workers and those with whom they served, rather than the hierarchal model prevalent within other evangelical relief organizations. They believed it would be better to stumble to the right destination working with the challenges of various perspectives than to set a clear course without taking their particular social context into account.[14]

The MCC situated itself as an umbrella organization, supporting rather than competing with the efforts of all existing Mennonite denominations. It focused on relationship building between the six distinct denominations and eight mission groups, a particularly challenging task given the diversity of Mennonite groups and the

contemporary socio-political dangers. Where urban residents would have formerly remained isolated from indigenous Maya communities in Alta Verapaz and therefore unaware of the escalating violence, information could be passed through MCC personnel. As such they became a nexus where information and ideas were transmitted from rural to urban areas, indigenous to *ladino*, creating connections where none had previously existed.

MCC's unique model of reconstruction drew the attention of several key figures. The potential long-term benefits of MCC's developmental model became evident to the Guatemalan National Reconstruction Committee (CNR), the national oversight committee to whom all foreign agencies were responsible. The efficiency of the building efforts and community engagement embedded within the MCC program distinguished them from the hundreds of other evangelical groups. Consequently, as they were preparing to withdraw from Guatemala, the CNR invited the MCC to establish a permanent presence.[15] Following careful reflection, they came to an agreement on June 26, 1978. While MCC positioned itself as a politically neutral development agency, impartiality would prove to be an elusive and complex course to follow. The military held jurisdiction over national reconstruction efforts which, as Virginia Garrard-Burnett argues, had two simultaneous objectives. It safeguarded the economic and social interests of the powerful elite class during the reconstruction efforts while simultaneously controlling the mobilization of the progressive social and political movements.[16] The principles around which MCC and the supporting Mennonite communities operated however directly contradicted the Guatemalan State's efforts towards socio-political control in the face of escalating revolutionary movements. Consequently, the powerful State apparatus that invited MCC to Guatemala would come to see its work as a threat.[17]

The nature of MCC's work caught the attention of another group of people as well, namely an urban evangelical congregation and a young minister, Gilberto Flores. Attracted to Anabaptist theology through MCC's relief efforts which addressed the political and economic realities of Guatemalans, Flores began a period of intensive reading and reflection. Supported by relationships with MCC personnel, Gilberto Flores personally converted to a Mennonite theological position.[18] In turn, Flores led his congregation, the *Casa Horeb* church to adopt a Mennonite identity. Born just two years after the earthquake, the *Casa Horeb* congregation found itself learning about a non-violent movement in a context of ever increasing violence. Although Ríos Montt had left his evangelical congregation prior to Flores' conversion, Flores maintained a friendship with the General. Therefore, when MCC country director Rich Sider and Gilberto Flores began collaborating

on projects related to economic development they worked with Ríos Montt whose own evangelical Christian ideals included concern for economic and land reform for Guatemala's poorest citizens. In fact, members of the *Casa Horeb* congregation and MCC had had some preliminary discussions about relocating landless indigenous groups onto land Ríos Montt owned himself in northern Guatemala.[19] When Ríos Montt assumed the presidency following the 1982 coup, Flores and the MCC had access to those in the highest echelon of State power and seized the unique opportunity to advocate on behalf of the victims of State violence.

One of nine Mennonite congregations in Guatemala City, the *Casa Horeb* church lies at the centre of the story of Anabaptist transformation during the Ríos Montt era.[20] Situated in *Colonia Mirador*, *Casa Horeb* was and remains a middle to upper-class congregation, consisting primarily of professionals living in a more affluent part of the city (though some members are from a lower economic class). Most other congregations lie within poorer neighbourhoods and their members are far less affluent. The *Casa Horeb* group also holds a privileged socio-ethnic position as *ladinos* (or *ladinas*, the female designation), thus they speak Spanish rather than an indigenous language, nor do they identify with an indigenous community or wear indigenous clothing known as *traje*.[21] Typically, as Cecilia Menjívar notes in her recent work, the *ladinos* are socially located in between the elite Spanish speaking State and the indigenous communities.[22] Thus, while society's elite discriminate against the *ladino*, the *ladino* in turn discriminate against indigenous groups, thereby belonging to neither group, but also in a way representing both the indigenous and the Spanish within their own country.

While the classification might be difficult to delineate, there are clear social and political implications of this ethnic identity. *Ladinos* continue to occupy a privileged socio-economic position while indigenous people who represent the majority of the population continue to live primarily in impoverished conditions. Compounding the existing racism against indigenous people is a clear divide between rural and urban Guatemalans. Consequently, the *Casa Horeb* congregation has been in a unique position within the small Mennonite community as the "bourgeoisie" within a developing world context. Therefore, as these urban Mennonites were engaged in a radical theological transformation, they were simultaneously undergoing a new self-consciousness of both their social privilege and power. Their willingness not only to identify their own culpability within the ongoing violence, but to risk their very lives to identify with their rural and indigenous fellow Guatemalans, represents a profound conversion on multiple levels for these urban middle-class *ladino* and *ladina* Mennonites.

Urban Mennonites as Victims

In the years following the 1976 earthquake political violence escalated as the fragile status quo between the military government and the resistance movement broke. The protracted struggle had deep social and political roots generally understood to have emerged following the U.S. sponsored overthrow of democratically elected president Jacobo Arbenz in 1954.[23] As the first successful military intervention in Latin America by the United States in the post-World War II era, Guatemala became one of the principle Cold War battlegrounds. Seeing no possible democratic avenue, the political remnants of the Arbenz era reasserted themselves as an insurgency group during the 1960s, a movement that sporadically rose and fell until 1976. In the post-quake era, the guerrilla movement found new allies within the indigenous communities of the western highlands where poverty and social inequality operated most visibly.[24] In response to this revitalization the military governments of Kjell Eugenio Laugerud García (1974-1978) and Fernando Romeo Lucas García (1978-1982) escalated State repression specifically within the capital city against the intellectual and theoretical foundation of the movement, namely students and academics at the University of San Carlos, urban unions and their leaders as well as school teachers. Consequently, violence in both urban and rural areas increased as the fragile status quo between the State and a reinvigorated resistance movement broke in the subsequent years.

The State moved first against the urban opposition, targeting labour union leaders, university faculty and student leaders and then the teaching core in Guatemala City. Paramilitary groups more commonly called "death squads" were responsible for kidnapping, detaining, torturing and killing dozens of people every day. Urban residents woke daily to as many as twenty or thirty bodies dumped on street corners, a stark reminder of what would happen if one acted against State interests.[25] These paramilitary squads frequently picked up the wrong person, torturing and killing them anyway. Professor and poet Julia Esquivel recalled in a conversation how even years later upon her return to Guatemala City, the memory of tortured bodies dumped on street corners was overwhelming.[26] Closely affiliated with the *Casa Horeb* congregation for many years, Esquivel's theological reflections on her experiences with these intense levels of violence eventually led her to a non-violent position. This violence permeated the very fabric of daily life creating unprecedented levels of psychological terror and uncertainty. The message was clear: no one was immune from the possibility of disappearance regardless of ethnicity, class, religious affiliation or political ideology. Although all State leadership

have consistently denied any culpability in these events, the 2005 discovery of the police archives in an abandoned warehouse irrefutably confirmed all anecdotal testimonies collected by scholars and human rights workers.[27]

The intense fear created by an amorphous permeating threat was of course the State's intention. Unpredictable violence of this magnitude was intended to sever bonds between people and to create suspicion within every encounter with neighbour and friend. As Victoria Sanford analyzes it in her 2003 work on massacres in rural Guatemala, "internalization of encounters with terror continues to shape and define individual relationships within families and communities, as well as community relationships with the nation-state."[28] After prolonged periods this terror becomes normalized within all levels of relationships even after the immediate threat has passed. Consequently, in the face of intense violence during the late 1970s, many urban *ladinos/as* including Mennonites chose to remain as quiet as possible. For the urban Mennonite community the traditional theological practices were evangelical and fairly apolitical and the pervasive violence affirmed the continuation of an emphasis on the spiritual realm. Above all, in the midst of uncertainty they believed that political neutrality offered the best protection, supporting neither the State nor the revolutionary movements.[29]

The ensuing violence greatly restricted the quality and quantity of MCC's program. The Appropriate Technology (AT) program was forced to realign its work because of the danger traveling posed to its local promoters.[30] One AT promoter received death threats and as a result left his home with his family. In another community three teachers, friends of a local reconstruction committee, were kidnapped and MCC was forced to withdraw from its work.[31] The danger was further confirmed with the assassination of a conservative Mennonite missionary in 1982 and the military detention of a MCC worker, who subsequently left the country. The uncertainty of the violence meant that daily activities were interrupted and every gathering – even for church events – was suspect by the government. In the midst of this growing uncertainty, the Ríos Montt presidency offered a clear albeit problematic solution to the chaotic situation.

Tensions rose between the workers of MCC and the urban Mennonite church over how to respond to the violence occurring within both urban and, increasingly, rural areas. As MCC country director Rich Sider noted, "any demonstration of love for people across class and political boundaries will likely be seen as being leftist because it threatens the base of this society which is exploitation of the masses for the benefit of the wealthy and powerful."[32] In other words, any activity which included feeding, protecting or economically supporting

those Guatemalans perceived to be enemies of the State would put the Mennonites in danger. Although foreign citizenship had not protected many Catholic priests and other human rights workers from death, Guatemalans were particularly vulnerable. In light of the death threats and murders of several Guatemalans involved in Mennonite programs, MCC moved significant aspects of their program into the capital city, hoping to reduce the danger for rural Guatemalans. Upon reflection MCC leadership concluded that if nothing else, they must remain in Guatemala, simply serving as a ministry of presence. Many of the urban Mennonites however also wanted MCC to limit its work in the capital. For MCC, these tensions reminded them of the political ramifications of their actions on their Guatemalan Mennonite brothers and sisters. The nascent Mennonite congregations in turn were challenged to incorporate a theology of service for one's neighbor.

In the months leading up to the Ríos Montt era, these often difficult conversations led to the development of a service committee within the Spanish Mennonite Churches, focused on providing whatever aid necessary to those Guatemalans experiencing violence and dislocation. The reflections of Rich Sider during this time of intense consideration demonstrate how both the overwhelming tasks facing this small community as well as the hopeful optimism set the stage for the next step in their relationship with the State.

> Will the church have the courage to stand in the face of possible persecution to say to the society, "We will not be brought into the selfish battle for power and wealth but will demonstrate the love of God by ministering to all who have need and by taking a stand against the violence of people." Here in Guatemala that will mean persecution.[33]

Mennonites as State Allies

The military coup d'etat led by General Efraín Ríos Montt on March 23, 1982, created a new and complicated socio-religious terrain for the urban Mennonites. For eighteen months, he led the country as de facto president employing a complex mix of neo-Pentecostal theology and military force to bring about civilian compliance. He openly preached his particular brand of evangelical Christianity combined with a strong anti-communist position. The urban Mennonites were initially encouraged by the presence of a Protestant Christian, particularly as some within the *Casa Horeb* congregation had had a personal relationship with him during the 1970s. Following years of terror by paramilitary groups, Ríos Montt's regime offered a respite from the

incomprehensible violence for urban residents and his rhetoric offered some hope for the cessation of the daily violence. He, in fact, confirmed this hope: within weeks of his announcement, disappearances and public abductions noticeably decreased in the capital city.

As a member of an evangelical Pentecostal church, the *Iglesia del Verbo* Church of the Word, Ríos Montt integrated his religious beliefs into his presidential ideology. Moving away from the familiar Cold War analogies embedded in and integral to the anti-communist rhetoric, Ríos Montt reframed the political discourse. He transformed it into a religious-nationalistic one, urging one and all to bring in a New Guatemala. As Virginia Garrard-Burnett notes in her recent analysis of the era, Ríos Montt told Guatemalans that their country suffered from three fundamental problems: a national lack of responsibility and respect for authority, an absolute lack of morality and an inchoate sense of national identity.[34] Positioning himself as a messenger from God, Ríos Montt preached that Guatemala could be saved through the redemption of the individual. During the first nine months of his leadership, he preached what came to be called a weekly Sunday night "sermon." As he believed that all of the country's problems stemmed from a lack of personal morality, Ríos Montt urged every Guatemalan to search their soul and take personal responsibility for their immoral behavior. Ethnographer Kevin Lewis O'Neill summarizes the significance of Ríos Montt's religious beliefs in this way:

> When the fog of war and genocide's gray zone began to make the civil conflict difficult to assess, the narrative offered two clear-cut sides: God and Satan. And when many felt all but powerless, this discourse placed the means for change in urban believers' hands or, more accurately, between their inter-woven fingers: prayer.[35]

Urban Mennonites were not alone in their support of Ríos Montt's de facto presidency. It is still common to hear positive comments about Ríos Montt's presidency by many Guatemala City residents who remain skeptical as to the veracity of the massacres during his tenure. Analysis of his political life following the era of his de facto presidency reveals a sustained popularity difficult for those outside of Guatemala to understand.[36] For much of the 1990s, his popularity extended well beyond the capital city, even within areas where some of the worst violence had occurred. As historian Garrard-Burnett notes, "If we fail to recognize that Ríos Montt enjoyed genuine support, we find ourselves guilty of the charge levied by the theorists of subaltern studies … failure to take people's words at face value robs them of their agency and renders them silent."[37] Therefore, how urban Mennonites

experienced the Ríos Montt era is critical in understanding their responses to his presidency and to the events in the rural areas.

Support for General Ríos Montt in Guatemala City materialized from several critical factors. First, one of the fundamental changes urban residents experienced was within the nature of the violence itself. Unlike its past capriciousness, the indiscriminate nature of State sponsored violence changed to clear cold logic and predictability effects of which became immediately evident within the capital city. Within days of Ríos Montt's coup, newspapers noted the lack of cadavers in the streets.

> Ríos Montt declares no more cadavers in the streets and he brings an end to urban death squad killings. All of these measures are part of Ríos Montt's effort to restore law and order to Guatemala's major cities, especially the capital … contributing to urban residents' sense of personal safety and thus lending social support to the Ríos Montt regime, especially among the urban middle and upper classes.[38]

By the end of March, the front-page headline of "No Bodies Today" appeared. The change in the nature of the violence was apparent even within the rural areas despite an increase in massacres. As one rural villager explained it, "Under Lucas, people were getting killed for no apparent reason. When Ríos Montt took over, you knew what you needed to do to stay alive."[39] Within the Guatemalan context, this pragmatic approach marked an improvement. Ríos Montt had drawn a line in the sand and his government was no longer responsible for those who stepped across it and paid the price.

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> Poverty and ignorance are the fruits of moral disorder, economics and injustice, of anarchy and oppression. Misery and ignorance are the fruits of this family disequilibrium. Because of this it is important that the struggle against subversion, against ignorance and misery is a must, but it is not a monopoly of the state; it is also your own responsibility and right.[40]

This shift in the nature of the violence and the evangelical nature of his political discourse offered some measure of protection. As

a result, many within the capital city including many Mennonites and particularly those practicing evangelical Protestantism were reassured by Ríos Montt's leadership and his call for spiritual renewal. Consequently, their tacit acceptance of his military regime and in some cases open support aligned urban Mennonites with those in power committing the worst of the abuses.

The third factor in understanding the tacit and sometimes overt support of urban Mennonites to Ríos Montt is a law passed shortly after his rise to power. On April 15, 1982, Executive Decree 9-82 prohibited news of political violence in the Guatemalan media, effectively creating a news blackout for the capital city.[41] As word of atrocities in the countryside began seeping into Guatemala City, Ríos Montt's government could plausibly deny them. The lack of accurate information as to what was occurring in the countryside is where the MCC would play a critical role as they became eyewitnesses to the effects of the violence.

The Mennonites had difficulty situating themselves within Ríos Montt's regime precisely because of its contradictory nature. Ríos Montt's particular religious ideals created concern for a more fair distribution of resources and even went so far as to hint at agrarian reform, offering new opportunities for those Mennonites interested in direct service. He also preached about more active electoral participation, the control of political corruption and expressed concern over the paramilitary groups that operated with impunity. However, Ríos Montt also aggressively engaged in ideological warfare and because of the actions of his fellow evangelicals (his sermons to the nation did not help either) he was accused of doing religious battle. He continued an aggressive anti-subversion campaign that resulted in many civilian deaths and disappearances. As Rich Sider notes in his 1983 annual report, "perhaps most disturbing was his confidence in the traditional military machine as the vehicle capable of bringing stability and justice and his apparent conviction that as a Christian he had a responsibility to seek to eliminate communist infiltration."[42] By September 1982, MCC noted that the urban Mennonite church seemed to have aligned itself very firmly with the government in power.

Following his ascent to power, the capital experienced a reprieve from random violence, as Ríos Montt clearly delineated new rules for survival, but tensions within the Mennonite community emerged quickly over how to respond. First, their affiliation with MCC created suspicion for Guatemalans. MCC's work with internal refugees and the limited development projects they continued within the Alta Verapaz region directly conflicted with the State's attempts to control its citizenry. As an independent service agency from the Spanish Mennonite Church, many of its personnel were foreign and relatively

safe from paramilitary retaliation. However, even modest efforts to bring food and safe passage caught the attention of the authorities putting all Guatemalan Mennonites into potential danger. While not wishing to jeopardize their relationship with Guatemalan Mennonites, MCC attempted to remain consistent in its social justice programs by working quietly and discretely.[43] Many within the Spanish Mennonite Church remained skeptical about participating in any activities perceived to be contradictory to Ríos Montt's policies. "This means that there is some tension between MCC and the Guatemala Mennonite Church particularly over the issues of the relationships to be established with people who favour land reform and who are sympathetic with the Guerrilla forces."[44] The urban Mennonite support for Ríos Montt also created tension between themselves and the Q'eqchi' Mennonites in the Alta Verapaz region who were directly experiencing the military operations of civil patrols and massacres. In the midst of these conflicts, a majority of urban Mennonites chose to align with the State for much of 1982.

Mennonites as Defenders of Human Rights

The transformation that took the urban Mennonite community from their position as tacit allies of an abusive state to open support for a non-violent way was facilitated by the complexity of Ríos Montt's socio-political policies that privileged urban over rural, and *ladino* over indigenous Guatemalans. While those within the capital city experienced a reprieve from the unpredictable violence and terror, the Ríos Montt era for rural and mostly indigenous Guatemalans is synonymous with terror and human rights abuses on an almost unimaginable scale. Determined to defeat the guerrillas, he declared in 1982 that "The guerrilla is the fish. The people are the sea. If you cannot catch the fish, you have to drain the sea." During his first month in office, Ríos Montt's escalation of the scorched earth policy against the guerrilla revolutionary groups and civilians he perceived to be supporting them resulted in a higher number of dead and displaced than at any other time during the thirty-six year war. It stands alone as the deadliest month of the entire civil war era with the murder of 3,330 people at the hands of their own government.[45]

Ríos Montt's scorched earth policy consisted of two specific elements designed to secure political control. The *fusiles y frijoles*, or guns and beans program, targeted villages assumed to be sympathetic or supportive of the guerrillas. The military would occupy and punish the community, either by killing specific individuals or massacring the entire population. Their fields, homes and all their possessions were

systematically destroyed. The beans aspect of the program allowed villagers to seek the protection of the military by voluntarily moving into resettlement villages where they received food and protection.[46] Expanding on another Lucas-era innovation, Ríos Montt instituted the civil patrol in which all eligible men from the highlands served on a rotational basis in local militias. Within months, more than half a million men had been recruited as armed civilians, most of them indigenous.[47]

The terror created by these actions was magnified by the nature of the violence itself. In what became horrifyingly routine, men would be rounded up in villages, tortured and killed in front of their families, sometimes burned alive in churches. Women and children were raped before being killed, babies thrown into the air and caught on the ends of swords or thrown against rocks.[48] Those fortunate to escape the massacres fared little better as they were forced to wander the mountains often for days with little or no food and water. Information about these events was slow to emerge as the majority of witnesses to these events were dead or too traumatized to speak. In addition, the racially polarized nature of Guatemalan society meant that those who did speak about these issues were too frequently simply not believed as the State refused to acknowledge the occurrence of these events.[49]

These devastating policies put rural Mennonites into a particularly difficult position. The civil patrols were designed to remove the guerrillas' popular support base but ultimately created economic and social problems as men were not allowed to work. Anyone who chose not to participate was considered a guerrilla, including Mennonites. As a result, not only did communities face violence from the military but were now required to become agents of the violence themselves as civil patrollers. Although most were forced to collaborate, some of the rural Q'eqchi' Mennonites chose not to use whatever weapons they were issued.[50] Others did participate, which caused theological distress for themselves and their congregations as they struggled to articulate a non-violent position in the midst of institutional violence. The civil patrols also escalated the general level of violence as it allowed people to settle grudges violently.

To make sense of the crisis in which they found themselves, the Guatemalan leadership looked back to the earliest moments of Anabaptist formation for inspiration and guidance. As Mario Higueros recalls from these past reflections, the Mennonite theology brought by North Americans did not adequately address the social and political complexities of the Guatemalan context, compounded by intense poverty and structural inequities and racism. However, Guatemalans did find parallels within the socio-political context in which Anabaptism emerged during the sixteenth century Reformation era.[51] As

they struggled to contextualize Reformation Anabaptist theology, they found commonalities to their Guatemalan experiences. From their analysis, these young Mennonites identified the need for non-violence, social justice, a response to deeply rooted racism along with a new relationship between their church and the state. In the words of other *Casa Horeb* members; "after analyzing our journey and our faith, and in order to reach these objectives, we decided to carry out our community and church work from a more Anabaptist perspective."[52] They determined that faith and personal spirituality were not sufficient without direct action, and moved to actively engage with society in order to bring about peace and social justice. In turn, these Guatemalan Mennonites became living reminders of the strength and prophetic witness of the earliest Anabaptist movement for the North American Mennonite community.[53]

Through this process of reflection, the Mennonites established a new rhetorical framework, essentially shifting the discourse away from the political to the human through an emphasis on the cost of violence. As Virginia Garrard-Burnett notes, the Guatemalan public was accustomed to the State discourse that focused on the civil war as a political struggle, a concept deeply entrenched within Cold War rhetoric. As General Ríos Montt stated to U.S. president Ronald Reagan in 1983, his campaign was not a scorched earth policy but one of scorched communists.[54] Dependent upon the military funding of the United States, Ríos Montt employed inflammatory Cold War discourse to draw attention away from the murderous impact of his policies. Rather than identifying Guatemalans as either enemies or allies, Mennonites re-conceptualized all Guatemalans as human beings with rights to all that God offers, as stated in the MCC manifesto of human rights. Here, they were joined by Catholic bishops who in mid-1982 also issued a condemnation of the effects of the violence they referred to as genocidal.[55] Both Catholic priests and Mennonites who employed this systematic rhetorical revision directly confronted the State's socio-political control.

It is important to remember that this was not merely an exercise in theological praxis. The implications of these decisions were clear in the whispered rumours of massacres and torture chambers. Therefore, the decision to translate their theological ideas into social action quite literally became a life and death decision. One's actions affected not only the individual but also families, as frequently the military would "disappear" loved ones to "teach a lesson" to someone believed to be acting against the state. In other words, those urban Mennonites who began the transformation of a revitalized Anabaptist faith to stand in defense of those in need deliberately chose a social position of insecurity and personal danger.

The new rhetorical framework transformed some within the urban Mennonite community from being tacit supporters of Ríos Montt to becoming activists for human rights. MCC's work throughout the country served as one of the most important vehicles for this change. Ríos Montt's support for relief work within the rural war zones had facilitated MCC's presence there and as a result MCC personnel were among the first eyewitnesses to events in the countryside. MCC seized the opportunity to provide emergency aid and support to victims. In areas previously inaccessible to outsiders, MCC workers witnessed the results of the civil war, most vividly displayed in the faces of the widows and orphans in abandoned homes and fields.[56] As they were allowed access to the devastated rural areas, MCC also took members of the Spanish Mennonite Church to witness the impact of Ríos Montt's policies. Consequently, MCC became a vital instrument in conveying this reality to both urban Guatemalan Mennonites as well as the larger North American Mennonite community.

Collaboration between *Casa Horeb* and MCC resulted in the development of two primary service programs.[57] The first issue confronting the urban Mennonites was the issue of internally displaced persons, which by mid-1982 had reached an estimated 400,000, a majority of whom had fled the rural violence into the capital. The *Casa Horeb* congregation created a committee designed to assist at least some of these many refugees. The *Comite Pro-Ayuda a Desplazados*, or Committee for the Support of Displaced Persons, became an important conduit through which many Guatemalans reached safety, often in Canada, Mexico or the United States. Members of this committee were directly responsible for saving the lives of hundreds under direct threat by the army or paramilitary. Although they could not have foreseen the consequences of their actions, Mario Higueros and his family hid future Nobel Laureate Rigoberta Menchú Tum from security forces and helped her escape from Guatemala. Her story, recorded just a few months later, became one of the first published accounts of what was happening in rural Guatemala.[58] Many of those involved with this work eventually were themselves forced into exile. Such was the case with Mario Higueros and his family who following their support of Rigoberta were forced into exile in Spain, remaining there for the next five years.

The second important program development was the Service Committee. The relationship with MCC initiated a conversation within the Spanish Mennonite Church (SMC) and particularly *Casa Horeb* over concerns of what an Anabaptist witness meant in their violent and impoverished communities. The Service Committee created a forum where Mennonites analyzed their social situation to consider ways in which to apply Anabaptist theological principles related to

development and service work. MCC became a critical instrument for accurate information here. MCC's work with Appropriate Technology in the rural areas and their relationships with other Mennonite institutions in Alta Verapaz facilitated awareness of the rural massacres and dislocations for those in Guatemala City. As their recognition of the crisis increased, members of the *Casa Horeb* congregation began questioning how they could be involved. Ironically, due to Ríos Montt's contradictory ideology, MCC and the Service Committee were able to work openly in the rural areas most affected by conflict responding to the growing demands for appropriate technology such as improved cooking stoves, water storage systems, composting latrines and also credit programs.[59]

The conviction to align themselves with victims rather than the state led the Spanish Service Committee to challenge the very foundations of Guatemala's inequitable power structures. Many rural communities were removed from their land and homes during this period as a direct result of the violence or through evictions by the military. Capitalizing on his relationship with Ríos Montt, Gilberto Flores advocated directly to the president on behalf of a group of rural Q'eqchi Mennonites. Rich Sider recounts one such incident.

> On one such contact with the President's wife, Gilberto invited me to go along … we talked about the problems of this group of Indians (land tenure issues), she phoned a colonel in charge of land questions in that part of the country and he told her the situation was not as the Indians had told us. She hung up the phone and told us to go tell the Indians to stop lying … how can there ever be peace when the leaders have such attitudes? [60]

The decision to directly confront those responsible for the State's actions came at great cost, particularly for Flores and his family. Soon after this meeting they were forced into exile.

The cost of following Anabaptist principles became clear during 1983. First, tensions within the *Casa Horeb* congregation reached a critical point over the issue of work with the social service committee. Not only did many disagree with the committee's work but there was also resistance to the integration of indigenous Maya Q'eqchi' into a service committee being formed in Guatemala City. These tensions could not be resolved and a split occurred between those who wished to translate their Anabaptist convictions into direct social action and those who did not.[61] While this event was difficult for all involved, it allowed the social justice work many believed to be a central tenet of Anabaptism to move forward. This split led to an awakening among the urban Mennonite churches. Through their work with orphans

and other victims of war, along with Biblical reflection, the urban Mennonites developed a deeper commitment to service and a prophetic social stance.[62] In the words of country director Rich Sider,

> 1983 was filled with sadness because there appears no end to violence, to unemployment, to hatred, and to instability. It was also filled with joy because Mennonites became keenly aware of their situation and began to take an active interest in MCC work and in their role as servants and peacemakers. That fact bears witness to God at work within people, which gives hope in the middle of desperation. We are thankful![63]

On August 8, 1983, Ríos Montt was overthrown by other members of the military who were fearful that his religious allegiances were more important to him than were his military ties. Ironically, his abrupt departure made life for many Guatemalans more difficult. MCC reported that once he was out of power, the unpredictable nature of the violence returned. Those who had supported his presidency were also now suspect and became targets of renewed violence. By late 1983, it appeared not only that violence had returned to the 1981 levels, but that the removal of Ríos Montt from political office also closed down the possibility for some land reform and tax programs.[64]

Conclusion

The foundational idea upon which MCC Guatemala ultimately based all of its relationships led them down a path few could have imagined in 1976. Entering Guatemala on the verge of a downward spiral into a vortex of unspeakable horror and violence, MCC carefully chose its programs and directions based on the needs of those with whom its members lived and served. MCC personnel established a model of development and social support based upon mutual respect, listening and learning, ultimately stumbling their way to the mark. The conviction that relationships were the only basis for a common understanding of the other and the path that Jesus would have taken, transformed the lives of all those involved. While these relationships were fraught with difficult choices, theological stalemates and life risking options, the idea that a true Anabaptist community worked together sustained them through years of terror and despair.

The MCC played a critical role as mediators between various Guatemalan groups, becoming the conduit through which urban Mennonites discovered the extent of the violence in the rural areas as they conveyed accurate information to their constituency. Through their

work with Appropriate Technology, health care and the relationship with the Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions in Alta Verapaz, Mennonites from a variety of denominations began to work together more closely and they learned from personal relationships with Q'eqchi' Mennonites of the effects of Ríos Montt's counterinsurgency policies such as the guns and beans program. Consequently, MCC personnel and Guatemalan Mennonites were among the first international voices to bear witness to the growing atrocities in Guatemala during the early 1980s. Their information forced Mennonites in the United States and Canada to evaluate their own roles within the crisis as the U.S. State Department financially supported Ríos Montt's military apparatus.

As a result of their relationship with MCC, the urban Mennonite community in Guatemala played all three roles in the story of human rights in Guatemala. Their particular social and political position as urban *ladinos* and *ladinas* positioned them first as victims and then as tacit allies of the State power. Finally, some within the community emerged as defenders of and advocates for their rural indigenous brothers and sisters through the worst moments of the civil war that cost so many their lives. Simultaneously occupying all three roles at times, some were ultimately transformed by them.

The theology practiced by Mennonites in North America was not always adequate to address the daily realities of life in Guatemala. The complexity of their situation, specifically the incredible levels of violence, caused the Guatemalan Mennonites to search back to the Reformation period for inspiration and direction within their specific context. It called them to live out their Anabaptist faith in much more dramatic ways than their North American counterparts. In so doing, Guatemalan Mennonites became examples of prophetic witnesses for the global Mennonite community. Although the urban *ladino* Mennonites were not directly responsible for the violence perpetuated against their fellow Guatemalans, they benefitted from a system that was highly inequitable and racist. One of the most radical aspects of this story is that a group within the urban Mennonite community became conscious of their social and economic privilege and used it in order to bear witness to the atrocities in their midst.

Finally, in the story of Gilberto Flores and General Ríos Montt, and the sacrifices of those in the *Casa Horeb* congregation, the true cost of discipleship is demonstrated. In spite of tremendous risks, Gilberto's continued relationship with Ríos Montt changed the course of the urban Mennonite community. While some of these individuals no longer live in Guatemala, many remained or have returned following exile. The transformation begun in the country during a period of unspeakable tragedy continues on in the Spanish Mennonite Church and in the lives of those who chose to follow neither State power nor

armed insurrection, but the way of relationship building, non-violence and human dignity.

Notes

1 Mennonite Central Committee Records, Latin America, Summary of 1980 Program, Priorities and Modifications, 13.

2 Personal Interview, Gilberto Flores, March 1993.

3 These numbers are based on generally accepted statistics. Some within Guatemala believe that the numbers might actually be higher.

4 In an attempt to weaken the various revolutionary movements in the countryside, the Guatemalan State tried to remove all civilian communities they perceived to be supporting the guerrillas. However as the literature on the subject has confirmed, indigenous communities played a variety of roles within the conflict. Some of them su pported the guerrillas, some supported the military while many tried to remain neutral within the conflict. There is little evidence to suggest that any of these political positions were safe. By the mid-1980s more than 440 villages were completely destroyed, their population either killed or dispersed.

5 Much of the activities undertaken during this time remain undocumented by the Mennonite Central Committee in order to keep Guatemalans safe. At the time I interviewed Rich Sider and Gilberto Flores for this project, I agreed to keep many names, dates and specific details secret in order to protect the identities of those remaining in Guatemala.

6 For example see, Victor Montejo, *Testimony: Death of a Guatemalan Village* (Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, 1987); Robert M. Carmack, ed. *Harvest of Violence: The Maya Indians and the Guatemala Crisis* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988); Ricardo Falla, *Massacres in the Jungle, Ixcán, Guatemala, 1975-1982* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994); Archbishop Office of the Roman Catholic Church, Guatemala, *Guatemala: Never Again* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999); *Victoria* Sanford, *Buried Secrets: Truth and Human Rights in Guatemala* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); and Daniel Wilkinson, *Silence on the Mountain: Stories of Terror, Betrayal, and Forgetting in Guatemala* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

7 Virginia Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit: Guatemala under General Efraín Ríos Montt, 1982-1983* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). For English sources on Guatemala City see Susanne Jonas, *The Battle for Guatemala: Rebels, Death Squads, and U.S. Power* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991); Deborah Levenson-Estrada, *Trade Unionists Against Terror: Guatemala City, 1954-1985* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994) and Timothy J. Smith & Abigail E. Adams, eds., *After the Coup An Ethnographic Reframing of Guatemala 1954* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011).

8 Much of the information and insight of this paper comes from conversations with Mario Higueros. He graciously shared memories from the Ríos Montt era, his vision for an Anabaptist community and his love for Guatemala. I have been honoured by his friendship.

9 Virginia Garrard-Burnett, "Under God's Thumb: The 1976 Guatemala Earthquake," in Jurgen Buchenau & Lyman L. Johnson, eds. *Aftershocks: Earthquakes and Popular Politics in Latin America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009), 157.

10 Susanne Jonas, 124.

11 Virginia Garrard Burnett, *A History of Protestantism in Guatemala* (Unpublished Dissertation, 1986), 194.

[12] Although the topic of Protestant conversion is beyond the scope of this paper, the post-earthquake period is characterized by the emergence of hundreds of small evangelical Protestant churches. By the late 1980s, there were more than 400 distinct evangelical groups in Guatemala City alone. For further information see David Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant? The Politics of Evangelical Growth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1993); Edward L. Cleary & Hannah Stewart-Gambino, *Power, Politics, and Pentecostals in Latin America* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996) and Virginia Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism in Guatemala: Living in the New Jerusalem* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998).

[13] Virginia Garrard Burnett, *A History of Protestantism in Guatemala*, 194.

[14] Mennonite Central Committee Records, Latin America, Summary of 1980 Program, Priorities and Modifications, 13.

[15] Mennonite Central Committee, *Overseas Services Recommendation* (September 15-16, 1978), 4.

[16] Virginia Garrard-Burnett, "Under God's Thumb," 163.

[17] Virginia Garrard-Burnett, "Under God's Thumb," 165. "Later, in the early 1980s, the CNR would assume the paradoxical role of coordinating government relief to communities that had been destroyed in the government's own counterinsurgency campaigns."

[18] For further information on Gilberto Flores' Anabaptist views, see Dale Schrage & James Juhnke, eds. *In Anabaptist Visions for the New Millennium: A Search for Identity* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 2000), 43-47.

[19] Guatemala Activity Reports, May-July 1980, p. 3-4.

[20] Mennonite Central Committee Records, *Guatemala*, No date and no author given. During the late 1970s, there were nine Spanish Mennonite Churches (SMC) already established by the work of the Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

[21] The Spanish conquest in 1524 of regional groups initiated 500 years of economic, legal and social inequality between Indigenous communities and Spanish speaking peoples. Currently, Guatemala is composed of four peoples who are linguistically, culturally and historically distinct from one another: the Pueblo Maya consisting of at least 20 languages, the *ladino* and *ladina*, the *Garífuna* (descendants of Caribbean slaves, Carib and Arawak peoples) and the *Xinka*. For a discussion of these terms see: Diane M. Nelson, *A Finger in the Wound: Body Politics in Quincentennial Guatemala* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 102; Claudia Dary Fuentes, *Entre el Hogar y la Vega: estudio sobre la participación femenina en la agricultura de el progreso* (Guatemala: FLACSO, 1994), 55-56.

[22] Cecilia Menjívar, *Enduring Violence: Ladina Women's Lives in Guatemala* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 14-16.

[23] For further information, please see Jim Handy, *Gift of the Devil: A History of Guatemala* (Boston: South End Press, 1984); Deborah Levenson-Estrada, *Trade Unionists Against Terror: Guatemala City, 1954-1985* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Greg Grandin, *The Blood of Guatemala: A History of Race and Nation*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000) and *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); and Timothy J. Smith & Abigail E. Adams, eds., *After the Coup: An Ethnographic Reframing of Guatemala 1954* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011).

[24] The first targets in the countryside were community activists and particularly Catholic lay leaders such as catechists who died by the hundreds during the 1970s.

[25] Guatemala City residents have deeply painful memories of this period and the trauma of seeing mutilated bodies every day, sometimes of people they knew, remains evident to this day.

[26] Personal Interview, Julia Esquivel, July 18, 2004.
[27] See forthcoming work by Kirsten Weld, *Paper Cadavers: The Archives of Dictatorship in Guatemala* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).
[28] Victoria Sanford, 123.
[29] A Report from the Mennonite Central Committee archives "Guatemala."
[30] Rich Sider, Country Representative Report, July 1981, 3.
[31] Rich Sider, Country Representative Report, February-April, 1981, p. 1.
[32] Rich Sider, April 1981, 4.
[33] Rich Sider, A Climate of Fear, 1981, 4.
[34] Virginia Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit,* 64.
[35] Kevin Lewis O'Neill, *City of God Christian Citizenship in Postwar Guatemala* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 25.
[36] Virginia Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 10. The extent of his powerful rhetoric concerning personal responsibility and morality and his denial of culpability over the military's excessive violence became clear throughout the following decades. Following his overthrow in August 1983, his influence continued as his political surrogates won the presidential elections in 1990, 1995 and 1999. Although he was constitutionally barred from running for the presidential office, Ríos Montt gained a seat in congress in 2007 which he held until 2012, running for the Guatemalan Republican Front (Frente Republicano Guatemalteco), a party he formed.
[37] Ibid, 13.
[38] Ibid, 19.
[39] Ibid, 60.
[40] Ibid, 65-66. Mensajes del presidente de la república, General José Efraín Rios Montt, "Tenemos que llevar a cabo reconciliación," April 11, 1982.
[41] Ibid, 58.
[42] Mennonite Central Committee, Latin America and the Caribbean Annual Report, 1983, p. 108.
[43] Latin America and the Caribbean Annual Reports, 1982, p. 114.
[44] Mervin Dick, *Trip Report to Guatemala, Honduras & El Salvador*, October 1982, p. 2-3.
[45] Virginia Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit,* 89.
[46] These villages also served to destabilize culture and language as indigenous people from different villages and ethnicities were placed into the same place, thereby forcing them to abandon their language and learn Spanish as the lingua franca.
[47] Virginia Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit, 19*-20.
[48] I first heard these reports from refugees fleeing Guatemala in the mid-1980s and again while visiting refugee camps in Chiapas, Mexico in 1992.
[49] Despite his claims of ignorance of his military's actions, both Efraín Ríos Montt and his Minister of Defense Mauricio Rodriguéz Sanchéz were tried and found guilty in May 2013. For information on this trial, please see www.riosmontt-trial.org
[50] Mennonite Central Committee, Latin America and the Caribbean Annual Reports, 1982, 114.
[51] Conversation with Mario Higueros, no date.
[52] Alba and Rafael Escobar, "Life and Faith in Casa Horeb," in Diether Gotz Lichdi, ed. *Mennonite World Handbook: Mennonites in Global Witness* (Illinois: Mennonite World Conference, 1990), 111.
[53] Personal Interview, John Lapp, April 1, 1993. As Lapp noted in his conversation, the Guatemalans reminded us that we Mennonites had become too accepted, too respected and too wealthy. They became our leaders of what it meant to be Mennonite.
[54] Virginia Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 14.

[55] Ibid.
[56] Mennonite Central Committee, Latin America and the Caribbean, 1983, 111.
[57] Mennonite Central Committee, Quarterly Report-Feb, 1981-April 1981, 3.
[58] Rigoberta Menchú, *I, Rigoberta Menchú* (Verso, 1984).
[59] Mennonite Central Committee, Latin America Report, September 23-24, 1983, 3.
[60] Mennonite Central Committee, Guatemala Report, 1982, 2.
[61] Mennonite Central Committee, Latin America Report, March 25-26, 1983.
[62] Mennonite Central Committee, Latin America and the Caribbean, 1983, 108-109.
[63] Mennonite Central Committee, Latin America and the Caribbean, 1983, 111.
[64] Mennonite Central Committee, Latin America Report, September 23-24, 1983, 3.