

The Paradox of Trans-American Solidarity

Gender, Race, and Representation in the
Guatemalan Refugee Camps of Mexico,
1980–1990

❖ Molly Todd

In December 1983 the U.S. office of the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission (Comisión de Derechos Humanos de Guatemala, CDHG/USA) published its eighteenth *Information Bulletin*. The cover boasts a drawing of a woman wearing Mayan *traje* and carrying an infant on her back. The woman's face, partially covered by a woven *manta*, is turned down and away from the observer as she dabs her eyes with a kerchief. On the ground behind her, a man lies face down, arms flung above his head, mouth opening into a river of blood. The baby, tucked tightly against mother's back, stares beseechingly at the reader. The text alongside this drawing explains that among the Guatemalans who most suffered from the civil war were the "near 100 thousand refugees and exiles in other countries."¹

At the time this publication appeared, Central America was mired in conflict, with civil and dirty wars raging and the numbers of dead and disappeared reaching into the millions. In Guatemala the U.S.-backed military government confronted armed revolutionaries with counterinsurgency tactics that resulted in the razing of hundreds of rural villages and the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people. In addition, nearly 2 million people fled their homes, seeking safety in the relative anonymity of urban areas, in the mountainous jungles of northwestern Guatemala, or across international borders.²

1. Comisión de Derechos Humanos de Guatemala/USA (CDHG/USA), *Information Bulletin*, No. 18 (29 December 1983), p. 1, in North American Congress on Latin America Archive on Latin Americana-Guatemala (NACLA Archive), File 71. The same image also appears in issues 3, 12, and 13 of the *Bulletin*.

2. In addition to the sources listed elsewhere in this article, consider the following on the Guatemalan war: Robert M. Carmack, ed., *Harvest of Violence: The Maya Indians and the Guatemalan Crisis* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988); Diane M. Nelson, *Reckoning: The Ends of*

Such a grand expulsion of citizens must be understood as a deliberate strategy, a component of the Guatemalan state's Cold War counterinsurgency program. By the early 1980s, human rights monitors began systematically focusing attention on the suffering and needs of displaced populations, and legal scholars offered insights through the lens of U.S. immigration policy. In the late 1990s Guatemala's own Historical Clarification Commission (*Comisión de Esclarecimiento Histórico*, CEH) devoted an entire chapter of its final report (along with four appendices) to the topic of the displaced. The commission concluded that the displacement of 500,000 to a million Guatemalans was intentional, "a direct consequence of the military campaign plans and operations developed by the Army to regain control over the civilian population in areas of conflict."³ Using similarly strong language, the Recovery of Historical Memory (*Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica*, REMHI) project of the Human Rights Office of the Archdiocese of Guatemala concluded that displacing the civilian population in Guatemala was "a counterinsurgency objective rather than simply a collateral effect of the violence, particularly in highly conflictive areas with guerrilla presence or influence."⁴

Forced displacement was not a new phenomenon in late-twentieth-century Guatemala. As Mario Sznajder and Luis Roniger have pointed out, "practices of displacement" have a centuries-long history in Latin America and have served as "a major regulatory mechanism of political action." Yet these scholars also argue that the twentieth century brought major changes

War in Guatemala (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); Victor Perera, *Unfinished Conquest: The Guatemalan Tragedy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Jennifer Schirmer, *The Guatemalan Military Project: A Violence Called Democracy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998); and Victoria Sanford, *Buried Secrets: Truth and Human Rights in Guatemala* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). For a general overview of Guatemalan displacement in the broader Central American context, see Sergio Aguayo Quezada, "Los aspectos políticos del éxodo centroamericano," in *La protección internacional de los refugiados en América Central, México y Panamá: Problemas jurídicos y humanitarios; memorias del Coloquio en Cartagena de Indias* (Cartagena, Colombia: UNHCR, Centro Regional de Estudios del Tercer Mundo, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 1984), pp. 117–131; *El éxodo centroamericano: Consecuencias de un conflicto* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1985); Aristide Zolberg, Astri Suhrke, and Sergio Aguayo, *Escape from Violence: Conflict and the Refugee Crisis in the Developing World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); and María Cristina García, *Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States and Canada* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006). For details of U.S. involvement in Guatemala, see National Security Archive, *Death Squads, Guerrilla War, Covert Operations, and Genocide: Guatemala and the United States, 1954–1999* (Washington, DC: National Security Archive, ca. 1999).

3. Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico, "Guatemala, Memoria del Silencio: Informe de la Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico" (Guatemala City: UNOPS, 1999), pp. 211–212.

4. Recovery of Historical Memory Project, *Guatemala: Never Again! The Official Report of the Human Rights Office of the Archdiocese of Guatemala*, trans. by Gretta Tovar Siebentritt (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), p. 56.

to the practices of displacement, including its “massification.”⁵ This was clearly visible in the Guatemalan case, especially in the northern highlands, which were hard-hit by the state’s counterinsurgency campaigns of the 1980s. Government-directed violence displaced up to 80 percent of the population at times from areas of Huehuetenango, Quiché, Alta and Baja Verapaz, and Chimaltenango departments.⁶ Some 200,000 people from the north crossed the border to settle in Mexico. Although the majority of them remained undocumented, 42,000 legally recognized refugees were residing in 89 camps in Mexico’s southern state of Chiapas by February 1984.⁷ By the end of the decade, 46,000 legally recognized refugees were in Mexico; 26,000 of them remained in Chiapas, and the remainder had relocated to sites in the states of Campeche and Quintana Roo.⁸

Throughout the decade, refugees received support from the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), various Mexican government ministries, dozens of humanitarian aid agencies, and dozens more solidarity organizations. This essay focuses on the latter groups and, specifically, the politics—and paradox—of solidarity.

An important component of ongoing reassessments of the Cold War has been the “decentering” of the literature. By shifting attention away from the bipolar Big History of the United States and Soviet Union, we are beginning to see Latin America as more than “America’s backyard.” Rather than “occlude the human beings caught up in the messy process of history,” to use Gilbert Joseph’s phrasing, this revisionist history uncovers the experiences of ordinary people and reveals the roles that Latin Americans had in determining how the Cold War played out on multiple stages.⁹

5. Mario Sznajder and Luis Roniger, *The Politics of Exile in Latin America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 8.

6. Recovery of Historical Memory Project, *Guatemala*, pp. 55–56.

7. Identifying the number of refugees is notoriously difficult, so figures always vary widely. Estimates here are culled from Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a los Refugiados (hereinafter COMAR), “Discurso sobre la primera reunión ordinaria de la Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados,” ca. 13 February 1984, in Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores de México Acervo Histórico Diplomático (SRE), Ser. 40196, Leg. III-6885-1, 2a parte; Humberto Ferro Salazar to C. Gustavo Iruegas, SRE, Ser. 40196, Leg. III-6884-1, 2a parte; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Refugiados*, No. 8 (August 1985), p. 24; and Sergio Aguayo Quezada et al., *Social and Cultural Conditions and Prospects of Guatemalan Refugees in Mexico* (Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 1987), pp. 70–71.

8. Graciela Freyermuth Enciso and Rosalva Aída Hernández Castillo, *Los refugiados guatemaltecos y los derechos humanos: Cuaderno para refugiados guatemaltecos* (San Cristóbal de las Casas: Gobierno del Estado de Chiapas/Instituto Chiapaneco de Cultura, 1991), pp. 34–35.

9. Introduction to Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniela Spenser, eds., *In from the Cold: Latin America’s New Encounter with the Cold War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 29. Also consider Greg

Paralleling this new Cold War history is the emergence of critical studies in human rights and humanitarianism. In general the literature has moved away from purely romantic notions of these themes with recent studies that examine their inherent tensions and contradictions, as well as their unintended consequences. Although scholars continue to recognize the transcendent components of human rights, they also reveal how “the universal” plays out in different ways depending on specific locale, people, and context. Relatedly, several recent studies point out how the unique context of the 1970s prompted a sort of turning point in human rights. New languages and practices emerged, propelling the human rights movement onto the global stage as a key force for the first time.¹⁰

Closely connected to this literature of humanitarianism and human rights is the emerging field of solidarity studies. Solidarity, like human rights, is not a new concept. Scholars have traced its roots through ancient Greek philosophy, Jewish and Catholic social teachings, the French Revolution, and Marxist labor movements.¹¹ The Cold War and Latin American roots of solidarity, however, have remained largely “unknown” in part because, as Margaret Power and Julie Charlip argue, they represent a “radical challenge” to U.S. hegemony in the Americas and beyond.¹² Recently, however, scholars have begun to shift

Grandin and Gilbert Joseph, eds., *A Century of Revolution: Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence During Latin America's Long Cold War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Hal Brands, *Latin America's Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012); and Stephen Rabe, *The Killing Zone: The United States Wages Cold War in Latin America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

10. Consider Fiona Terry, *Condemned to Repeat? The Paradox of Humanitarian Action* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002); Sarah Kenyon Lischer, *Dangerous Sanctuaries: Refugee Camps, Civil War and the Dilemmas of Humanitarian Aid* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005); Betty Plewes and Rieky Stuart, “The Pornography of Poverty: A Cautionary Fundraising Tale,” in Daniel A. Bell and Jean-Marc Coicaud, eds., *Ethics in Action: The Ethical Challenges of International Human Rights Nongovernmental Organizations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 23–37; Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss, eds., *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008); Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011); Aryeh Neier, *The International Human Rights Movement: A History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012); Steve J. Stern and Scott Straus, eds., *The Human Rights Paradox: Universality and Its Discontents* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014); and the contributions in Jan Eckel and Samuel Moyn, eds., *The Breakthrough: Human Rights in the 1970s* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

11. See, for example, Steinar Stjernø, *Solidarity in Europe: The History of an Idea* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Hauke Brunkhorst, *Solidarity: From Civic Friendship to a Global Legal Community* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005); and Sally J. Scholz, *Political Solidarity* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008).

12. Margaret Power and Julie A. Charlip, “On Solidarity,” *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 36, No. 6 (November 2009), p. 6.

critical attention to “the activist workshop of the Americas.”¹³ Many studies continue to emphasize solidarity as a project for change, for the building of a new utopia, and for the application of universal morals and rights, but many challenge such heroic narratives by revealing the complex internal politics, the different “wings” and layers of commitment, and the uneven power relations inherent in solidarity movements. New studies also are beginning to illustrate the importance of local actors in specific contexts and the role of Latin Americans themselves in motivating and maintaining sentiments of solidarity among transnational activists.¹⁴

This study on solidarity with Guatemalan refugees in the 1980s contributes to these discussions in a variety of ways. First, it introduces what might be called the “community councils” of solidarity. To date, most scholars have focused on the “king” humanitarian organizations, including the UNHCR and other multilateral organizations, along with international non-governmental entities such as Amnesty International, Médecins sans Frontières (MSF, Doctors without Borders), and the Red Cross.¹⁵ A handful of

13. Patrick William Kelly, “The 1973 Chilean Coup and the Origins of Transnational Human Rights Activism,” *Journal of Global History*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (2013), p. 168. See also James Green, *We Cannot Remain Silent: Opposition to the Brazilian Military Dictatorship in the United States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

14. Van Gosse, “‘El Salvador Is Spanish for Vietnam’: A New Immigrant Left and the Politics of Solidarity,” in Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas, eds., *The Immigrant Left in the United States* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp. 302–329; Héctor Perla, Jr., “Si Nicaragua Venció, El Salvador Vencerá: Central American Agency in the Creation of the U.S.–Central American Peace and Solidarity Movement,” *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (2008), pp. 136–158; Thomas Olesen, *International Zapatismo: The Construction of Solidarity in the Age of Globalization* (London: Zed Books, 2004); Leigh Binford, “Reply: Solidarity,” *Dialectical Anthropology*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (2008), pp. 177–182; Green, *We Cannot Remain Silent*; Lina Penna Sattamini and James N. Green, eds., *A Mother’s Cry: A Memoir of Politics, Prison, and Torture under the Brazilian Military Dictatorship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Nelson, *Reckoning*; Lesley Gill, “The Limits of Solidarity: Labor and Transnational Organizing against Coca-Cola,” *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (November 2009), pp. 667–680; Margaret Power and Julie A. Charlip, eds., special issue on solidarity, *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 36, No. 6 (2009); and Jessica Sites Mor, ed., *Human Rights and Transnational Solidarity in Cold War Latin America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013).

15. Consider Simone Baglioni, “Solidarity Movement Organizations: Toward an Active Global Consciousness?” in Marco Giugni and Florence Passy, eds., *Political Altruism? Solidarity Movements in International Perspective* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), pp. 217–234; Erin K. Baines, *Vulnerable Bodies: Gender, the UN and the Global Refugee Crisis* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004); Michael Barnett, “Humanitarianism with a Sovereign Face: UNHCR in the Global Undertow,” *International Migration Review*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Spring 2001), pp. 244–277; Michael Barnett, “Humanitarianism, Paternalism, and the UNHCR,” in Alexander Betts and Gil Loescher, eds., *Refugees in International Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 105–132; Barnett, *Empire of Humanity*; Anne Hammerstad, *The Rise and Decline of a Global Security Actor: UNHCR, Refugee Protection, and Security* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Jennifer Hyndman, *Managing Displacement: Refugees and the Politics of Humanitarianism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Kelly, “The 1973 Chilean Coup”; Gil Loescher, *Beyond Charity: International Cooperation and*

national-level efforts also have received attention, particularly the U.S. and Canadian Sanctuary movements and the U.S.-based Witness for Peace.¹⁶ Taken together, these studies of high-profile humanitarian and solidarity groups offer crucial insights into the myriad ways people and groups have adopted human rights banners and how rhetoric and praxis have evolved over time and space.

Yet this body of literature fails to consider the great number of comparatively low-profile groups that emerged out of North American civil societies during the Cold War. Dozens of such groups formed in response to the displacement of Guatemalans in the early 1980s. These included the Canadian Committee of Solidarity with Central America, Mexico's Support Committee for Guatemalan Refugees (Comité de Apoyo a los Refugiados Guatemaltecos, CARGUA), and the U.S.-based Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA) and South Texas Aid to Refugees (STAR). These I refer to as "community councils," for they were grassroots initiatives driven primarily by volunteer labor and small donations from average citizens. Indeed,

the Global Refugee Crisis (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Terry, *Condemned to Repeat?*; and Thomas G. Weiss, "Principles, Politics, and Humanitarian Action," *Ethics and International Affairs*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (March 1999), pp. 1–22.

16. Some examples include Kathryn Anderson, *Weaving Relationships: Canada-Guatemala Solidarity* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2003); Patrick Coy, "Cooperative Accompaniment and Peace Brigades International in Sri Lanka," in Jackie Smith, Charles Chatfield, and Ron Pagnucco, eds., *Transnational Social Movements and Global Politics: Solidarity beyond the State* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997), pp. 81–100; Victoria L. Henderson, "Citizenship in the Line of Fire: Protective Accompaniment, Proxy Citizenship, and Pathways for Transnational Solidarity in Guatemala," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 99, No. 5 (2009), pp. 969–976; Christian Smith, *Resisting Reagan: The U.S. Central America Peace Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Virginia S. Williams, "Grassroots Movements and Witnesses for Peace: Challenging U.S. Policies in Latin America in the Post-Cold War Era," *Peace and Change*, Vol. 29, No. 3/4 (July 2004), pp. 419–430; Sharon Erickson Nepstad, *Convictions of the Soul: Religion, Culture, and Agency in the Central America Solidarity Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Perla, Jr., "Si Nicaragua Venció"; Héctor Perla, Jr., "Heirs of Sandino: The Nicaraguan Revolution and the U.S.-Nicaragua Solidarity Movement," *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 36, No. 6 (November 2009), pp. 80–100; and Clare Weber, *Visions of Solidarity: U.S. Peace Activists in Nicaragua from War to Women's Activism and Globalization* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006). On Sanctuary in particular, see Mike Bothwell, "Facing God or the Government—United States v. Aguilar: A Big Step for Big Brother," *Brigham Young University Law Review*, No. 3 (September 1990); Hillary Cunningham, *God and Caesar at the Rio Grande: Sanctuary and the Politics of Religion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); Lane Van Ham, "Sanctuary Revisited: Central American Refugee Assistance in the History of Church-Based Immigrant Advocacy," *Political Theology*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (2009), pp. 621–645; Susan Bibler Coutin, *The Culture of Protest: Religious Activism and the U.S. Sanctuary Movement* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993); Randy K. Lippert, *Sanctuary, Sovereignty, Sacrifice: Canadian Sanctuary Incidents, Power, and Law* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005); Héctor Perla, Jr., and Susan Bibler Coutin, "Legacies and Origins of the 1980s US–Central American Sanctuary Movement," *Refugee*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2009), pp. 7–19; and Norma Stoltz Chinchilla, Nora Hamilton, and James Loucky, "The Sanctuary Movement and Central American Activism in Los Angeles," *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 36, No. 6 (November 2009), pp. 101–113.

it may be a stretch to refer to these councils as “organizations” at all, so home-spun were they that, at times, they lacked identifiable structures and hierarchies, stable leadership, or sources of funding. Despite their lower profile, these solidarity councils—and the transnational networks or webs they formed—contributed to shifting the ground of international relations in the waning years of the Cold War. For this, they deserve attention.¹⁷

A second contribution of this essay is that it offers a genuinely transnational—or more specifically trans-American—examination of solidarity. Many studies that claim the “transnational” label are, in fact, binational; they examine how an organization based in the United States (or elsewhere) cooperated or worked in solidarity with a Latin American entity. These studies certainly offer insights into specific organizations and cross-border networks—their inspirations and actions, as well as some of the challenges they encountered along the way. Yet they have failed to link U.S. solidarity efforts with those of other countries. This essay, in contrast, examines North American solidarity with Guatemalan refugees. By this I mean geographical North America: Canada, the United States, and Mexico. I place “community councils” from these three countries side by side to reveal how, despite their different geopolitical positions, they shared a common language, promoted the same objectives, and adopted similar methods.

This trans-American approach leads to a third contribution of the article: Rather than offering *either* a heroic narrative *or* a critical narrative of solidarity, it addresses both narratives at once, as two sides of the same coin. The North American solidarists examined here—like many others who rallied around issues and causes during the mid-twentieth century—found great hope and promise in the “new social order.”¹⁸ They perceived this new order of peace, justice, and equality to be on the near horizon and believed that their actions would help to bring the utopian dream to fruition.

Yet these solidarists also operated within unique national environments that limited their capacities to build something entirely new. Mexicans, for example, walked a fine line between, on the one hand, the need to protect their country from violent spillover from the Central American wars and, on the other hand, the desire to stay true to their country’s reputation as a welcome asylum for those fleeing persecution. Refugee assistance, moreover,

17. Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink illustrate that international networks like these can be significant players in prompting change. See their *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

18. Throughout this article I use the term “solidarist” to signify a person who participates in solidarity-related activities and “solidary” as an adjective relating to the sentiments of community interests and responsibilities shared by solidarists.

required significant financial commitments, posing challenges for Mexican government ministries and non-state solidarity organizations alike. Whereas Canadians were further removed in terms of both geography and national foreign policy, solidarity activists from the United States operated from within the heart of “the Empire.” Although this latter position certainly could facilitate direct critiques of U.S. foreign policy, it also posed serious existential problems. Government agencies hounded Central American solidarity activists and their councils throughout the 1980s. Efforts included covert infiltration of local councils, repeated audits by the U.S. Internal Revenue Service, aggressive interrogations upon returning from travel abroad, office sackings and the confiscation of organizational records and solidarity materials, and highly publicized arrests and trials. To be sure, such harassment did not stop solidarity work, and, indeed, many participants in solidarity campaigns may have been unaware of government targeting. Yet, in some instances this attention had a significant “chilling effect,” and many council leaders, aware of the possible risks associated with solidarity activities, integrated precautionary security measures into their work.¹⁹

Regardless of the differences in their national-level realities, solidarists from across North America shared one crucial trait: They all operated within a hemisphere dominated by the United States and its Cold War–inspired anti-Communist worldview. Thus, even as they may have sought to challenge U.S. hegemony in some ways, they unintentionally reproduced many of the cultural assumptions and power relations inherent in hegemony.²⁰ In short, this case study examines how a solidarist can be both a hero (by challenging structures perceived as unjust) and a villain (by reproducing those very structures and consequently delegitimizing “the Other”).

19. On “chilling effect,” see Bothwell, “Facing God or the Government.” A closer examination of the interactions between government offices and solidarity activists is beyond the scope of this article, yet deserves attention. The targeting of U.S. activists—particularly those associated with the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES) and Sanctuary—has received some attention. See U.S. House of Representatives, Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, *The FBI Investigation of CISPES: Hearing before the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, House of Representatives, One Hundredth Congress, Second Session, 29 September 1988* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989); U.S. Senate, Select Committee on Intelligence, *The FBI and CISPES* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990); Ross Gelbspan, *Break-Ins, Death Threats and the FBI: The Covert War against the Central America Movement* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1991); and Cunningham, *God and Caesar*, esp. ch. 3. On Sanctuary in a broader context, see Lippert, *Sanctuary, Sovereignty, Sacrifice*; and García, *Seeking Refuge*.

20. This calls to mind the concept of “symbolic violence.” See Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), esp. chs. 2–5. Two studies that address “the imperialist within” are Weber, *Visions of Solidarity*; and Sara Koopman, “The Imperialism Within: Can the Master’s Tools Bring Down Empire?” *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2008), pp. 283–307.

The bulk of this article focuses on the representational practices of North American solidarity groups vis-à-vis refugees from Guatemala residing in UN-sponsored camps in Mexico in the 1980s. These organizations produced a wide range of materials, from newsletters and delegation reports, to emergency action alerts and congressional petitions, to promotional materials for teach-ins and other events. Today, much of this documentation remains hidden from public view. Few solidarity organizations have succeeded in archiving their materials where scholars can easily see and make use of them. Fortunately, the U.S.-based North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA), an independent organization founded in 1966 with the intention of providing “reliable information and analysis on Latin America that could be of use to activists,” has begun to preserve and make available many such materials through its Archive of Latin Americana project.²¹ Among the more than two decades’ worth of microfilmed documents are the working papers, newsletters, and other communications from several Canadian, U.S., and Mexican community solidarity councils. Close examination of NACLA Archive materials, along with the peace and social justice holdings of the Wisconsin Historical Society, offers a new window onto Cold War-era solidarity efforts.

The CDHG/USA, whose *Information Bulletin* opened this article, introduces the paradox. When traveling in Guatemala in the 1970s, founder Sister Alice Zachmann “was struck by the incredible levels of poverty and discrimination among Guatemala’s peoples.” The need inspired her to leave her parish ministry in St. Paul, Minnesota, and to establish the Guatemala Human Rights Commission. The *Information Bulletin*, along with the organization’s other early efforts, sought “to document and report on the situation on-the-ground, as well as advocate for victims of the repression to both the American public and the US government.” Thus, CDHG/USA began because a small group of U.S. citizens felt “compelled to help” people in a distant land whom they perceived to be victims.²²

Yet, even as CDHG/USA sought to break old patterns of injustice by documenting and reporting on human rights violations, advocating for victims, and working to influence U.S. policy toward Guatemala, the organization continued other long-standing patterns. The *Bulletin*’s December 1983 front-page drawing of the Mayan woman and child illustrates one of the most prevalent of these patterns. Across the board, North American solidarity council

21. NACLA, “History,” <http://nacla.org/history>.

22. Guatemala Human Rights Commission, “History and Timeline,” <http://www.ghrc-usa.org/about/history/>.

publications portrayed Guatemalan refugees as a quintessential Other: They were silent victims, they were Indian, and they were women.

The Promise of Solidarity

The refugees from Guatemala who crossed the border into Mexico received aid from a variety of groups, each of which had its own strategies and objectives. Although all groups highlighted their work as humanitarian in nature and motive, political interests and concerns undergirded refugee aid endeavors. Initially, local *campesinos* and landowners offered support and then called on Catholic diocesan offices and service groups for assistance.²³ In 1982, the UNHCR, in conjunction with the newly formed Mexican Refugee Aid Commission (*Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a los Refugiados*, COMAR), began coordinating efforts to aid refugees and drew on the skills and expertise of state entities, including the Comitán Hospital and the Campesino Ecology and Health Training Center (*Centro de Capacitación en Ecología y Salud para Campesinos*, CCESC). Before long, refugee relief efforts involved dozens of organizations—global and local, public and private, religious and secular. Some representatives lived in or near the refugee camps, worked intimately with both refugees and Mexican officials, and supported a myriad of programs in the areas of medicine and health, food and nutrition, construction, agriculture, and education. Other groups worked from a distance. In their home communities in Canada or the United States, for example, they collected clothing, medical materials, and school supplies for use in the refugee camps and raised funds to pass along to organizations working most directly with refugees.

Each of these organizations spoke a different dialect of humanitarianism. Entities linked to the Mexican state struggled to balance the political and economic needs of their country and its citizens against Mexico's long history of providing asylum to strangers fleeing persecution. Although Mexican officials continually touted their humanitarian objectives in dealing with refugees from Guatemala, political interests helped to define policies. Many authorities feared, for example, that the neighboring country's war would spill over into Mexican territory and further rile up already frustrated citizens in

23. In this article I mostly rely on the term "peasant," which can be used interchangeably with "campesino." Both terms are problematic and have been the subject of scholarly debate for decades. There is no need to take up that debate here. Suffice to say that the refugees highlighted in this article were poor rural dwellers whose livelihoods depended primarily on agricultural activities.

the poor southern state of Chiapas. There, peasant and indigenous communities were pressuring the Mexican government on issues ranging from land distribution and agricultural credits to indigenous autonomy, and in January 1994 the Zapatista National Liberation Army (*Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*, EZLN) launched its now well-known rebellion. Throughout the preceding decade, Mexican officials' concerns about the Guatemalan refugees' effects on local unrest combined with pressures from the U.S. government, the UNHCR, and other international interests to place further strains on state leaders. This variety of influences contributed to tensions among Mexican government agencies and frequent shifts in policy and practice toward Guatemalan refugees.²⁴

Some organizations, including the UNHCR, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and MSF, went even further than the Mexican state in emphasizing their purely humanitarian objectives. These groups highlighted the emergency nature of their efforts. They argued that they saved lives simply by providing humanitarian aid. Key to their approach was an intentional "hands-off attitude toward politics" and the espousing of the classic humanitarian principles of impartiality and neutrality.²⁵ The statute of the UNHCR states this explicitly: "The work of the High Commissioner shall be of an entirely non-political character; it shall be humanitarian and social."²⁶

Despite such lofty rhetoric, the UNHCR and other emergency aid groups were and are not immune to politics. As Michael Barnett explains, they practice "a particular brand of politics . . . a politics of resistance, of humanity, of protest against an international sacrificial order that sacrifices so many in the name of justice, of life." That is, emergency humanitarians "work to maintain the appearance of being apolitical because it helps them practice their kind of

24. Concerns about unrest in Chiapas and internal tensions are visible in the documentation from various Mexican ministries. See, in particular, the records of COMAR, held at SRE; and Sec Gob IPS, Caja 1702-A, Exp. 5, 22 enero 1982–10 octubre 1982, Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), Mexico City. On currents in Chiapas relating to the EZLN, consider Neil Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion: The Struggle for Land and Democracy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998); Shannan L. Mattiace, *To See with Two Eyes: Peasant Activism and Indian Autonomy in Chiapas, Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003); Shannon Speed, *Rights in Rebellion: Indigenous Struggle and Human Rights in Chiapas* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007); and Heidi Moksnes, *Maya Exodus: Indigenous Struggle for Citizenship in Chiapas* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012).

25. Whereas Barnett refers to this as the "emergency" branch of humanitarianism (*Empire of Humanity*, p. 37), Weiss refers to it as the "classicist" model whose practitioners "believe that humanitarian action can and should be completely insulated from politics" ("Principles, Politics, and Humanitarian Action," p. 2).

26. UNHCR, *General Assembly Resolution 428 (v) of 14 December 1950, Statute of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2010), p. 6.

politics.”²⁷ Equally noteworthy is the fact that many of these organizations are highly dependent on states. The UNHCR, for example, depends on states for the bulk of its operating budget. All organizations working with refugees in Mexico depended on the Mexican state for authorization to enter and work in the country. Thus, even as the UNHCR, MSF, and others proclaimed a separation between their own humanitarian actions and the politics of states, political interests infused their humanitarianism.

Still other individuals and groups willingly eschewed neutrality and impartiality in their work with refugees. Rather than focus only on relieving the symptoms of suffering, these humanitarians and solidarists also spent energy “addressing the root causes of suffering,” which inevitably led them into political spheres. As a result, this branch “treat[ed] politics as a necessary and at times even welcome feature of humanitarian action.”²⁸ Critics have argued that some entities take their politics too far, resulting in the use of humanitarian aid as a tool of war, the transformation of refugees into political pawns, and the development of refugee-warrior communities.²⁹

The community solidarity councils examined in this article inhabited a sort of middle ground between these extremes. They were independent, non-governmental organizations composed of average citizens from civil society: nurses and doctors, teachers, priests and nuns, and other professionals. These were, for the most part, middle-class volunteers who donated time, money, materials, and skills to help staff offices and carry out projects close to home. They brought with them a variety of backgrounds, experiences, and ideologies and, as a result, offered a wide range of commitment levels. The lowest common denominator among them was the desire to relieve the suffering of the Guatemalans who were living in Mexico. Thus, much of their energy as individuals and as organizations focused on providing basic humanitarian assistance. Some individual participants chose to engage only on the level of emergency relief. Yet as organizations they did not shy away from politics. Although they were not extremist in any sense of the word, these community solidarity councils willingly engaged in political discussions about the “root causes” of the Guatemalan conflict and, often, their own governments’

27. Barnett, *Empire of Humanity*, pp. 38–39.

28. Barnett refers to this as the “alchemical” branch of humanitarianism (*Empire of Humanity*, p. 39), while for Weiss, these are the “political humanitarians” and “solidarists” (“Principles, Politics, and Humanitarian Action,” p. 3).

29. See Terry, *Condemned to Repeat?*; Lischer, *Dangerous Sanctuaries*; Kelly Greenhill, *Weapons of Mass Migration: Forced Displacement, Coercion, and Foreign Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010); and Stephen John Stedman and Fred Tanner, eds., *Refugee Manipulation: War, Politics, and the Abuse of Human Suffering* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003).

policies toward Guatemala and its refugees. Moreover, like the UNHCR and other avowedly “non-political” entities, these solidarity organizations practiced “a particular brand of politics.” Through their various projects and publications, they engaged in the politics of solidarity.

Advocacy was key. On one level, solidarists advocated for the protection of refugees in Mexico. This entailed helping to fulfill their basic needs—food, clothing, shelter, and medical assistance—as well as protecting them from the many threats to their physical safety, including incursions into the camps by Guatemalan security forces, arrest, and involuntary repatriation. As part of their protection efforts, many groups adopted the solidarity philosophies of “accompaniment” and “witnessing.” Sometimes this meant sending volunteers directly to the refugee camps on short-term delegations or for longer stays where they essentially served as “unarmed bodyguards.” When violent incidents occurred, these witnesses exposed abuses by providing information to the media and other outlets. Over time, the very presence of international solidarity workers in the camps—with their cameras, tape recorders, and contacts at home—helped to deter abuses. Like their counterparts with Witness for Peace and other organizations in Nicaragua and El Salvador, solidarists in the refugee camps in Mexico “represent[ed] the threat of international political action against any violence that they may witness.”³⁰

On another level, solidarists advocated on behalf of Guatemalan refugees within their local environments—at schools and community centers, before city councils and state legislators, among families and coworkers, and within faith communities. Canadian and U.S. citizens who spent time in the camps of Mexico had a special role. By sharing their experiences with their home communities, they brought a much-needed personal connection to a distant crisis and helped to “keep the issue alive.”³¹ On a more general level, solidarity organizations sought to educate their home populations. The U.S.-based Guatemala Support Network, for example, sought “to provide [the public] with information” not only about “issues of concern to Guatemalan refugees” but also “about important happenings in Guatemala.”³² In a similar vein,

30. Liam Mahony and Luis Enrique Eguren, *Unarmed Bodyguards: International Accompaniment for the Protection of Human Rights* (West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press, 1997); and Weber, *Visions of Solidarity*, p. 43. See also Williams, “Grassroots Movements and Witnesses for Peace”; Van Gosse, “‘The North American Front’: Central American Solidarity in the Reagan Era,” in Mike Davis and Michael Sprinker, eds., *Reshaping the U.S. Left: Popular Struggles in the 1980s* (London: Verso, 1988), pp. 11–50; and Gretchen Alther, “Colombian Peace Communities: The Role of NGOs in Supporting Resistance to Violence and Oppression,” *Development in Practice*, Vol. 16, No. 3/4 (June 2006), pp. 278–291.

31. Williams, “Grassroots Movements and Witnesses for Peace,” p. 421.

32. Guatemala Support Network, *Newsletter “Antanasio Tzul,”* ca. 1992, in NACLA Archive, File 57.

coordinators for the Network in Solidarity with Guatemala explained that “Being part of NISGUA means that you are part of a national effort to educate people here [in the United States] about the situation in Guatemala.”³³ The very names of organizations often underscored this educational goal. Consider, for example, the Program for Emergency Assistance, Cooperation, and Education (PEACE); the Atanco Tzul Guatemalan Education Center; and the Central American Resource Center (CARECEN).

For most organizations, what mattered was not just the provision of information or even the amount of data; rather, what mattered most was the *kind* of information. As affiliates of STAR explained, it was critical that the organization’s newsletter “act as an alternative source of *reliable information*.”³⁴ According to this perspective, the mainstream news media coverage and government statements about the Guatemalan war and its consequences at best were not enough; at worst, they were inaccurate. Solidarity activism challenged these inadequacies. As Larry Reid explains of the Canadian case, high levels of solidarity engagement “meant that External Affairs could no longer claim to be the ‘expert’ on Central America. Solidarity groups had their own people on the ground reporting what was happening there.”³⁵ By contradicting official versions of events with “alternative” and “reliable” accounts, solidarists intended to raise political awareness, which would, in turn, lead others to take action. In short, the right kind of information could help “raise money/raise hell,” as a NISGUA affiliate put it.³⁶

One of the main objectives of advocacy, then, was to prompt others to take actions that would help alleviate the symptoms of suffering and remove the causes of that suffering. Volunteers who visited the camps demanded that Mexican and Guatemalan security forces curb their abuse of refugees. Fundraising campaigns pressed community members to donate money and materials to address the most urgent needs of the refugees. Reliable information shared through publications, presentations, and lobbying encouraged reformulation of the policies and actions of the region’s ruling regimes.³⁷ Toronto’s Committee of Solidarity with Central America, for example, sought

33. NISGUA, Letter to Friends, June 1982, in NACLA Archive, File 56.

34. STAR, *Newsletter*, No. 18 (October 1985), pp. 6, 14, in NACLA Archive, File 80; emphasis in original.

35. Larry Reid, “Menchú Tum, Stoll, and Martyrs of Solidarity,” *Development in Practice*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (February 2001), p. 79.

36. NISGUA, internal report, March 1984, in Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison (WHS), Community Action on Latin America (CALA) records, Box 6, File 13.

37. Barnett (*Empire of Humanity*, p. 41) writes: “It is because of the tireless lobbying, pleading, cajoling, and shaming on the part of humanitarian organizations that, on occasion, states have responded

to build “a broad movement of public opinion” in order to “rais[e] the political price” for Guatemalan military officials who committed or tolerated massacres and other abuses.³⁸ In the United States, NISGUA worked on “building a broad and united movement to . . . oppose U.S. intervention” in Guatemala and Central America more broadly, and, in a similar vein, Witness for Peace worked “to mobilize public opinion and help change U.S. foreign policy to one which fosters justice, peace, and friendship.”³⁹

Thus, solidarity advocacy was counter-hegemonic. When citizens found themselves dissatisfied with official perspectives, policies, and behaviors, they opted to challenge them by joining solidarity groups and participating in solidarity action. In effect, solidarity was a politics of resistance against perceived injustices.

What motivated these solidarists into action? Despite a wide range of individual circumstances and inspirations, some commonalities existed. Solidarists tended to believe profoundly in the standard of human rights. People possessed certain inalienable rights, and if nation-states failed as guarantors of their own citizens’ rights, then it fell to the international community to step in as a “higher authority” rooted in both morality and law.⁴⁰

Of course, “human rights” was not a new concept in the early 1980s when the Central American solidarity movements flourished. But the context of the 1980s was unique and thus contributed to new applications of an old concept. Recent scholarship points to the 1970s as a breakthrough moment during which a global human rights consciousness took shape and a broad-based movement coalesced for the first time. Samuel Moyn refers to human rights in this era as a sort of end point—“the last utopia”—that emerged as a reaction to the crumbling of the major utopias of Communism and anti-colonialist nationalism. Yet scholars of Latin America would suggest otherwise. Patrick Kelly contends that Central and South America rather than Europe (Moyn’s main focus) was “where much of the language of global human rights talk and practice was forged” during the 1970s.⁴¹

Much of the language of human rights was reactive, a response to the wave of authoritarian regimes that had rolled across Latin America. But human

to the tragedies around the world, adopted more progressive foreign policies, and harnessed their considerable power for good. Advocacy is politics by another name.”

38. *News from Guatemala*, Vol. 4, No. 5/6 (July/August 1982), p. 2, in NACLA Archive, File 69.

39. Gail S. Phares (NISGUA), letter to friends, 25 November 1981, in NACLA Archive, File 56; and Ed Griffin-Nolan in Williams, “Grassroots Movements and Witnesses for Peace,” p. 421.

40. Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007); Keck and Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders*; and Moyn, *The Last Utopia*.

41. Kelly, “The 1973 Chilean Coup,” p. 168. See also Green, *We Cannot Remain Silent*.

rights talk and practice were also constructivist. When viewed from the Americas—and Central America and Guatemala in particular—human rights was not necessarily a *minor* utopia in 1980. Utopian visions there in many ways were still in ascendance, despite the prevalence of authoritarian hardliners in Brazil, Chile, and elsewhere. The Cuban revolution still stood for many as a positive example of a new and more progressive social order, and in Nicaragua the Sandinistas had only just toppled Anastasio Somoza's dictatorship and begun to implement reforms. Many hoped and believed that the revolutionary struggles in Guatemala and El Salvador would follow suit and that the overturning of old regimes there would prompt the implementation of new and more just orders. In the words of one Guatemalan solidarist, the 1980s was "a time of high hopes that the power of the elite . . . could be challenged."⁴²

In light of the constructivist motivations of solidarity work, many councils and their supporters maintained ties with Guatemala's progressive and revolutionary left.⁴³ Although scholars have not yet fully examined this phenomenon, it is clear that ties to indigenous leftists—and the era's revolutionary currents in general—influenced solidarity rhetoric. Although some individual activists may have adopted the fiery rhetoric of revolutionary groups—espousing orthodox Marxism or the violent takeover of government power, for example—most activists and their councils adapted more mainstream lexicons to their struggles. Specifically, they framed their objectives within the context of democracy, linking their work with universally recognized democratic values including equality, citizenship, liberty, and self-governance. To that end, solidarity councils peppered their publications with declarations of support not only for the refugees, but also for Guatemala's popular movement.

42. Cathy Blacklock and Alison Crosby, "The Sounds of Silence: Feminist Research across Time in Guatemala," in Wenona Giles and Jennifer Hyndman, eds., *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), p. 54. On hope and solidarity, see also Scholz, *Political Solidarity*; and Michael Walzer, *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994).

43. These complicated and shifting links have yet to be studied in detail, despite the sustained attention given to the Rigoberta Menchú–David Stoll controversy. For brief insights into NISGUA, the Guatemala Scholars' Network, and the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca, URNG), see Norma Stoltz Chinchilla, "Of Straw Men and Stereotypes: Why Guatemalan Rocks Don't Talk," *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 26, No. 6 (November 1999), pp. 29–37; and Arturo Arias, "After the Rigoberta Menchú Controversy: Lessons Learned about the Nature of Subalternity and the Specifics of the Indigenous Subject," *MLN*, Vol. 117, No. 2 (March 2002), pp. 481–505. Scholars have offered only slightly more attention to relations between solidarity councils and the Salvadoran and Nicaraguan leftists. See, for example, Gosse, "'The North American Front'"; and Molly Todd, "'We Were Part of the Revolutionary Movement There': Wisconsin Peace Progressives and Solidarity with El Salvador in the Reagan Era," *Journal of Civil and Human Rights*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Spring/Summer 2017), pp. 1–56.

In May 1983, for instance, NISGUA declared support for the Guatemalans' "right to determine their own future and organize their society in a manner that best serves their needs, desires and rights."⁴⁴ A couple of years later, NISGUA painted the end point of that self-determination process in utopian colors: the building of a "new society . . . of free men and women," where "[t]he old religious divisions no longer exist" and where "everyone can realize their full potential."⁴⁵ In similar fashion the Guatemala Support Network announced that members were "committed to assisting Guatemalan refugees to organize and build self-empowering communities as well as to supporting the empowerment efforts of Guatemalans in Guatemala as they struggle for peace and justice."⁴⁶

If solidarists found inspiration in the concept of human rights and the design of utopian projects, they also were motivated into action by pure emotion—and anger was one of the strongest motivating emotions. Citizens of the United States who spent time in Central America, for example, often "came back disillusioned with the Reagan stance," as Ben explained. "They came back with a different analysis and truly believed that our government was lying." Linda, who led delegations to Central America during the 1980s, agreed. "Reagan generated a lot of his own opposition," she said. "We owe him a lot for the strength of the movements [because] his rhetoric was just so infuriating."⁴⁷

Solidarity organizations intentionally cultivated strong emotions in order to channel them into action. Canadian groups examined by Larry Reid, for instance, strategically utilized Central American martyr stories; heart-wrenching accounts of death, torture, and other forms of extreme suffering were "an important part of [the organizations'] awareness and lobbying campaigns."⁴⁸ Indeed, groups across North America employed refugees as martyr figures, asking them to share their stories of suffering both at home and in their host countries. Carl recalled that when he heard testimony directly from refugees, "I became aware of this cognitive dissonance [and] wondered, why is [the U.S.] government sending all this money to a place where people were being

44. NISGUA, *Guatemala Network News: Organizing for Solidarity*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (20 May 1983), in NACLA Archive, File 56. See also NISGUA national coordinators, letter to friends, June 1982, in NACLA Archive, File 56.

45. NISGUA, *Guatemala Network News: Organizing for Solidarity*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (July/August 1985): pp. 8, 13, 9, in WHS, CALA records, Box 8, Folder 1; and Secretaría de Ayuda a Refugiados Guatemaltecos (SARG), *Boletín*, No. 18 (September 1988), p. 8, in NACLA Archive, File 79.

46. Guatemala Support Network, *Newsletter "Antanasio Tzul,"* ca. 1992.

47. Nepstad, *Convictions of the Soul*, p. 121.

48. Reid, "Menchú Tum, Stoll, and Martyrs of Solidarity," p. 79.

slaughtered?” Others heard testimonies that “revealed the contradiction between the US government’s official asylum policy and its treatment of Salvadorans and Guatemalans.”⁴⁹ Such dissonance and contradiction combined with the life-and-death portrayal of the refugees’ situation to produce a sense of moral outrage. When politics became personal, when people felt implicated in the suffering, they “felt a greater urgency to act.”⁵⁰

Viewed from this angle, solidarity action became part of a process of atonement for many participants. As Michael Barnett explains, a key feature of atonement is the “recognition that a sin has been committed [and] the consequence is that a relationship has been broken and must be repaired.”⁵¹ Solidarists considered violations of Guatemalans’ human rights as grave wrongs that must be righted. Hence, they demanded accountability—from political and military leaders in Guatemala, from Mexican officials working with refugees, and from Canadian and U.S. governments whose policies not only contributed to producing refugee flows but also hindered solutions to the problem.

Another possible layer of atonement, one deep-seated in regional and global histories, might have remained largely hidden even from the solidarists themselves. Solidarity with Guatemalan refugees occurred against the backdrop of mass murder: As early as 1980, people of conscience around the world had begun to condemn the Guatemalan government for the violence perpetrated against Mayans. Solidarists participated wholeheartedly in this condemnation. As the CDHG/USA declared in a 1982 open letter to General Efraín Ríos Montt, president of Guatemala, “You are guilty of GENOCIDE.”⁵² Newsletters carried repeated references to “extermination” of the “Indian race,” along with detailed descriptions of attacks, forced relocations, and other “horrors of the regime.” According to this view, the root of “the refugee phenomenon” in Mexico was the Guatemalan state’s “genocidal policy.”⁵³

49. Nepstad, *Convictions of the Soul*, pp. 132–133.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 122. The *testimonio* genre reached key heights in the 1980s as part of solidarists’ efforts to induce anger and other action-motivating emotions.

51. Barnett, *Empire of Humanity*, pp. 26–28.

52. Adrian Sandoval and Marcel Gaytan (CDHG/USA), open letter to Gen. Efraín Ríos Montt, Mexico, 1 July 1982, in NACLA Archive, File 70; emphasis in original.

53. *News from Guatemala* (Toronto), Vol. 3, No. 10 (November 1981), p. 8, in NACLA Archive, File 69; CDHG/USA, *Report on the Human Rights Situation in Guatemala*, July 1983, pp. 24–27, in NACLA Archive, File 70; and GARG, *El refugiado (xre vaj ri)*, No. 2 (April–June 1983), p. 5, in NACLA Archive, File 78.

At the time of these declarations, genocide was still a somewhat new concept in international law, having come into being in the 1940s following the Holocaust and the Nuremberg trials.⁵⁴ By 1980 the term had been applied retrospectively to the treatment of native people by the European conquerors and settlers who had begun arriving in the Americas in the 1490s. Although explicit extermination policies no longer predominated in the late twentieth century, indigenous people and communities continued to be subjected to a variety of other forms of violence in Canada, the United States, and Mexico. Despite this, in a decade's worth of documentation from dozens of organizations, one finds only a few spare references to this regional history or the contemporary legacies of conquest and settlement. Typically, such references appeared only when solidarists cited Guatemalan popular movement activists or revolutionary groups. For example, in late 1980 *News from Guatemala* included a communiqué signed by "the Native peoples of Totonicapan organized in CUC [Comité de Unidad Campesina, or Campesino Unity Committee]" which drew strong connections between past and present. "Our ancestors struggled against the injustices committed by the Spanish," the communiqué explained, and today "we continue to fight" because Guatemala is in the hands of "the wealthy descendants of the thieves and assassins who governed during colonial times."⁵⁵

Solidarists made occasional references like this to genocide, always in the context of the Spanish conquest. They made not one reference to British or French conquest and settlement of points farther north. Although this is understandable given their focus on Guatemala, it is also worth exploring for what it might say about the worldview of solidarity activists, particularly the typical white, middle-class activists from the United States. They easily condemned Rios Montt and his predecessors back to the 1500s, while also implicating past and present U.S. leaders in the genocide of Guatemala's Mayan people. Guatemala and the United States were "intricately related," NISGUA explained. "Historically the major obstacle in the Guatemalan people's path to justice has been the U.S. [and it] is our government which bears a great deal of the responsibility for the genocide which is presently occurring."⁵⁶

54. The first international legal definition appeared with the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, adopted in 1948.

55. *News from Guatemala*, Vol. 2, No. 9 (October 1980), in NACLA Archive, File 69.

56. NISGUA, *Guatemala Network News: Organizing for Solidarity*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (20 May 1983).

Because of this, U.S. citizens had “a particular responsibility” toward Guatemalans. Yet, in these kinds of public pronouncements solidarists chose not to draw connections to the genocide of American Indians or the ongoing internal colonialism within their own country’s borders. Some analysts have critiqued other U.S.-based Central American solidarity councils for a similar lack of broader analysis and failure to connect global and domestic struggles.⁵⁷ Although this may indeed have limited NISGUA’s and other groups’ long-term viability, recent critical work in anthropology offers another, more nuanced explanation. “In spite of genocide’s shadowy presence,” Audra Simpson posits, “the practice of formal, state-sanctioned killing is never temporally or geographically imagined as immediate—it is the terrible thing (like colonialism) that happened elsewhere.” Viewed with a wider lens, then, the special responsibility that drove much solidarity activism becomes part of a much deeper and more intimate process of atonement. Solidarists acted to make amends not solely for what their government had done “over there” but also for what had happened “here.” Solidarity thus became a spectacle like the film *Avatar* analyzed by Simpson, offering “a representative foil for the guilt, shame, horror, and hope that gets shuttled someplace else when the matters of settlement and genocide are contemplated.”⁵⁸

Whether functioning as a foil for white guilt, a form of reparation (never again!), or a means of promoting human rights or utopian projects, solidarity with Guatemalan refugees entailed a politics of resistance, of protest, and of hope. As is true with all politics, solidarity was rife with conflict. The north-south direction of solidarity relations carried with it enormous inequalities, and many tensions existed between various northern councils as well as the individuals involved. To move beyond the often-divisive minutiae of political and religious views, aid philosophies, and personalities, solidarity organizations “essentialized.” That is, they “claim[ed] fixed, shared, and enduring identities that may differ significantly from people’s daily experiences and beliefs.” As Jeffrey Rubin argues, essentializing is a “central characteristic” of social movements, and although such uniform representations are problematic in many ways, they are “useful as mobilizational tools for outside consumption.” Indeed, Rubin argues, groups and movements “must essentialize, in

57. See Weber, *Visions of Solidarity*; and Gosse, “The North American Front.”

58. Audra Simpson, “Settlement’s Secret,” *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (2011), p. 206. Orin Starn refers to this as “a wistful imperial nostalgia,” a sharpened “sense of white guilt for the conquest’s brutal savagery and an incalculable debt to the survivors.” Orin Starn, “Here Come the Anthros (Again): The Strange Marriage of Anthropology and Native America,” *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (2011), p. 187. The topic merits much deeper investigation.

order to represent, in both the cultural and political senses, in order to make a comprehensible number of claims on behalf of large numbers of people.”⁵⁹

Faith-based solidarists working in the United States often framed their work in a way that moved beyond Ronald Reagan’s extreme rhetoric. They appealed to others, as Sharon Nepstad explains, “in terms that reflected biblical themes, church teachings, and Christian identity. That is, they used framing techniques to generate sympathy and concern for the poor.” The process of framing, she continues, entailed “assigning meaning to events and conditions in a way that creates support for movement goals within a designated population. Leaders appeal to potential recruits by interpreting situations in a manner that indicates how movement aims are congruent with the targeted audience’s values and moral commitments.”⁶⁰ Secular solidarists also used essentializing framing strategies to generate support for projects. Through the languages of human rights, humanitarianism, and democracy, they emphasized broad moral and ethical arguments.

Solidarists also essentialized their objects of compassion, the Guatemalan refugees. In solidarity publications, the people who fled Guatemala appeared not as individuals and collectives struggling for self-determination and recognition of their rights as citizens of Guatemala but as “products of the war” in a “desperate plight.”⁶¹ Driven from their homes and country by violent military sweeps, they arrived in Mexico injured, exhausted, hungry, and traumatized. Even as they slowly recuperated in Mexico’s camps, they continued to suffer: from diseases such as cholera and typhoid, which ran rampant through the densely populated camps; from malnutrition and dehydration; from *susto* and other mental health ailments; and from abuse by Guatemalan and Mexican authorities. Solidarity publications mobilized visceral stories and images of human suffering to emphasize “the drama that the refugees live.”⁶² Moreover, these victim portrayals were highly racialized and gendered.

59. Jeffrey W. Rubin, “Meanings and Mobilizations: A Cultural Politics Approach to Social Movements and States,” *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (October 2004), pp. 25–26. For more on “deception” and “silencing” as related to essentializing, consider Sidney Tarrow and Doug McAdam, “Scale Shift in Transnational Contention,” in Donatella della Porta and Sidney Tarrow, eds., *Transnational Protest and Global Activism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), pp. 121–147; and James Green, “(Homo)Sexuality, Human Rights, and Revolution in Latin America,” in Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom et al., eds., *Human Rights and Revolutions* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), pp. 139–153.

60. Nepstad, *Convictions of the Soul*, p. 77.

61. CDHG/USA, *Information Bulletin*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (March 1990), p. 3, in NACLA Archive, File 70; and *News from Guatemala* (Toronto), Vol. 4, No. 5/6 (July/August 1982), p. 11, in NACLA Archive, File 69.

62. GARG, *El Refugiado (xre vaj ri)*, No. 3 (July/August 1983), p. 3, in NACLA Archive, File 78; my translation.

Perils of Representation: The Tragedy of Indians, the Suffering of Women

A summer 1982 issue of *News from Guatemala* reported that “the vast majority” of Guatemala’s refugees were “full-blooded Indians.”⁶³ Other solidarity publications followed suit, reporting on the Guatemalan military’s counterinsurgency operations in the “highly indigenous” northern zones of the country and the resulting “barbarous destruction of native peoples.”⁶⁴ As a man who had fled across the border explained in a CARG report, “they pursue us because we are poor and indigenous.”⁶⁵ With such comments, solidarity organizations framed displacement as a “tragedy [of] Indians.”⁶⁶

Although to some degree this was true, the reality was far more complex. Official data from 1985 reveal that only 20 percent of the refugees were *ladino*, whereas the remaining 80 percent were indigenous. The data, reported by the Mexican government, went further, however, distinguishing not only between *ladino* and indigenous but also among the indigenous. The study indicates that the indigenous refugees came predominantly from eight Mayan ethnic/linguistic groups: Mam, Kanjobal, Quiché, Chuj, Jacalteco, Cakchiquel, Kekchí, and Chol-Lacandón.⁶⁷ Sergio Aguayo and his colleagues further explained how each of these groups “seem[ed] to have a clear concept of itself as distinctly different from other Indians as well as from the Ladinos. . . . Language and dress made such distinctions directly noticeable.”⁶⁸ These and other government, United Nations, and academic studies offered similar information about the variety of places from which refugees fled, the economic valences between refugees, and the multitude of political, religious, and social beliefs among them. In short, these sources revealed a complex refugee population.

Despite this, solidarity publications tended to subsume all differences into one category, *the Indian*, and their essentialized representations of Indians were often contradictory. On one level solidarists celebrated the Indians—specifically, their “classic” heritage. Sometimes this reached into the deep past.

63. *News from Guatemala*, Vol. 4, No. 5/6 (July/August 1982), pp. 11, 13.

64. *News from Guatemala*, Vol. 4, No. 7 (September 1982), p. 2, in NACLA Archive, File 69.

65. GARG, *El Refugiado (sre vaj ri)*, No. 7 (April/May 1984), p. 9, in NACLA Archive, File 78; my translation.

66. CARGUA, *Boletín*, April 1983, p. 2, in NACLA Archive, File 77.

67. Secretaría de Gobernación-México, “Los Refugiados Guatemaltecos en México,” September 1985, in AGN, Fondo Presidencia de la República/Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado, Ser. Acuerdos MMH/SG, Leg. 183.1-3.

68. Aguayo Quezada et al., *Social and Cultural Conditions*, p. 36.

The CDHG/USA, for example, explained to its newsletter readers that “[t]he Maya, Guatemala’s indigenous people, are the direct descendants of the Maya architects of the great ‘lost’ cities in the jungles of Central America, builders of a classical civilization.”⁶⁹ In a similar vein, the *News from Guatemala* header featured ancient glyph-like images, including the stylized profile of a Mayan warrior. At other times, the celebratory representations emphasized idyllic cultural attributes. Publications frequently noted the “traditional family organization” of Mayas, how Indians “traditionally lived and worked on a communal basis,” and the way communities lived “in harmony with nature.”⁷⁰ They were peaceful people, as evidenced by the fact that, as a Canadian publication noted, native languages “had no direct translation for massacre, machine-gunning, bombardment, or other such violent things.”⁷¹ They were also very spiritual people who maintained “sacred places” and relationships with ancestors.⁷²

Even as the solidarity activists pointed to the Indians’ peaceful nature, they also noted their long history of resistance. In this realm, solidarists drew direct links between the conquest-era Indian and the Indian refugee of the 1980s. Whereas the former struggled against the armed Spanish invaders, the latter confronted Guatemala’s armed forces and the Mexican government’s militarization of its southern border. The CDHG/USA, for example, described Quetzaltenango as having “a long tradition of rebellion and pride when faced with abuses of power. This stems [from] their Quiche Indian origins. (In one of the villages of the county, ‘La Urbina,’ the last battle of the Indian hero, TecunUman, against the Spanish invaders took place in the 16th century.)”⁷³

Solidarity council publications sometimes used this long tradition of resistance to help explain the Mexican government’s policies and practices in the present. This was especially prevalent as officials devised and carried out

69. CDHG/USA, *Information Bulletin*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (April/May 1990), p. 4, in NACLA Archive, File 71.

70. CDHG/USA, “Report to the Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and the Protection of Minorities of the United Nations, on the Human Rights Situation of the Guatemalan Indigenous Population,” August 1984, pp. 9–10, in NACLA Archive, File 70.

71. *News from Guatemala*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (February 1981), p. 8, in NACLA Archive, File 69.

72. CDHG/USA, “Report to the Sub-Commission,” pp. 9–10.

73. CDHG/USA, “Cantel,” June 1984, p. 2, in NACLA Archive, File 70. This practice parallels the work of early anthropologists critiqued by Orin Starn and Audra Simpson. Many solidarity councils practiced a sort of “ethnographic taxidermy” through which they froze refugees as Mayans in pre-conquest form, as the “Timeless Native Other.” Starn, “Here Come the Anthros (Again),” p. 182; and Simpson, “Settlement’s Secret.” This past-present nexus picked up pace in solidarity publications around the 1992 quincentennial of Christopher Columbus’s landing in the Americas.

programs to relocate refugees from Chiapas to other states farther from the border—a move condemned by refugee supporters as well as many of the refugees themselves. According to materials from Wisconsin-based Community Action on Latin America, for example, the Mayan refugees prompted “the fear of widespread unrest” in Mexico.⁷⁴ “The Indians of Chiapas and the refugees share a strong cultural affinity and marginal economic status,” explained an informational flier. “The possibility of the two groups uniting to redress their common grievances is a spectre Mexico would like to avoid.”⁷⁵ According to this view, to avoid “importing a revolution,” Mexican officials organized the relocation program, forcing tens of thousands of refugees to leave Chiapas and move into camps in the states of Campeche and Quintana Roo.⁷⁶ This relocation was “an imperative,” Mexico’s Aid Group for Guatemalan Refugees (*Grupo de Apoyo a los Refugiados Guatemaltecos*, GARG) explained, because the Indian-refugees in the southern border region “put in danger [*exponían*] . . . the country’s internal security.”⁷⁷

Although the tropes of Indian resistance, heritage, and culture were celebratory on one level, on another they were constraining and limiting. Guatemalan refugees often were portrayed as disconnected from (modern) civilization. According to CARGUA, they needed government assistance that “helps them emerge from the backwardness and misery in which they now find themselves.”⁷⁸ An issue of *El refugiado* reported that “the embassy’s press attaché, Julio Drago, severely criticized the actions of the refugee aid organizations, ‘to whom they speak as if they were before a group of university students, when the Guatemalan Indians don’t even speak Spanish.’”⁷⁹ In a similar vein, STAR cited a missionary in Guatemala who said “he thought the Indians’ lives weren’t disrupted much by working one day per week for the army because ‘*they don’t have much of anything to do anyway.*’”⁸⁰

To be sure, these latter two statements likely were intended as critiques of the press attaché and the “young, harsh minded missionary,” yet solidarists themselves often denied agency to the refugees, focusing instead—sometimes

74. “Refugees Moved to Campeche: Haven or Quarantine?” ca. June 1984, p. 6, in WHS CALA records, Box 6, Folder 13.

75. *Ibid.*

76. David Beers, “Indian Refugees Caught in Limbo,” *In These Times*, 8–14 February 1984, p. 7, in WHS, CALA records, Box 6, Folder 14.

77. GARG, *El Refugiado (xre vaj ri)*, No. 8 (June–September 1984), p. 16, in NACLA Archive, File 78; my translation.

78. CARGUA, *Boletín*, April 1983, p. 2.

79. GARG, *El Refugiado (xre vaj ri)*, No. 8 (June–September 1984), p. 15; my translation.

80. STAR, *Newsletter*, No. 17 (June 1985), p. 4, in NACLA Archive, File 80; emphasis in original.

exclusively—on their victimization.⁸¹ Solidarity publications commonly highlighted the violence suffered at the hands of the Guatemalan military. Magazines and newsletters typically included pages-long calendars and lists of specific incidents, including bombings and razing of villages, massacres, and incursions into refugee camps. Although the same publications sometimes noted abuses by Mexican immigration authorities and landowners, they more frequently emphasized “the deplorable conditions” in which the Guatemalans found themselves in the refugee camps, where people arrived malnourished, ill, wounded, and traumatized, then suffered inadequate shelter, food, and medical care.⁸² Such a narrow focus on the horrific impacts of state violence and war, though understandable, further disconnected Guatemalan refugees from modern civilization and politics. Solidarity publications usually shied away from acknowledging the political activism or agency of the Indian-refugee community as a whole, rendering them a mass of passive victims suffering at the hands of oppressors and passive recipients of aid from international donors and solidarists.⁸³

Detached from an active role in politics, victimized by their own government, and without Spanish-language fluency, the Indian-refugees’ voices sometimes could not even stand on their own merit. Solidarity councils usually followed the mainstream media’s lead in this regard. When using direct quotations, interviews, and testimonies, writers often implied that their subjects were not fully reliable. A 1982 issue of *News from Guatemala*, for example, reprinted an article from the *Toronto Globe and Mail* that described the “repeated tales of death, torture and terrorism” that prompted thousands of Indians to cross the border into Mexico. The author did not take the Indian-refugees’ “tales” at face value, however. Even though “the stories could be cross-checked among several different narrators,” he sought verification from more elite people. “The truth of the accounts,” he assured, “was confirmed by Mexican priests working in the frontier zone and by Mexican relief officials.”⁸⁴

81. *Ibid.* p. 3.

82. CARGUA, *Boletín*, April 1983, p. 2. In that same *Boletín*, see also “Report from Chajul, February 2, 1983,” pp. 6–7, and “Medical Report, April 6, 1983,” p. 8. For an example of an interview with leading questions emphasizing victimhood, see GARG, *El Refugiado (xre vaj ri)*, No. 4 (1983), pp. 11–12, in NACLA Archive, File 78. For an example of a detailed massacre report, see *News from Guatemala*, Vol. 3, No. 8 (September 1981), p. 1. Round condemnation of Mexican officials, especially COMAR, was more common in U.S. solidarity publications. See, for example, STAR *Newsletter*, No. 13 (7 September 1984), in NACLA Archive, File 80.

83. This victim approach intentionally provided a stark contrast to Guatemalan government and mainstream media representations of the refugees as Communist subversives.

84. *News from Guatemala*, Vol. 4, No. 5/6 (July/August 1982), pp. 11, 13.

STAR went beyond confirming to correct Indian-refugee voices. One of the highlights of the October 1985 *Newsletter* was a nearly four-page interview with “a native Guatemalan Indian who now lives in the U.S.” After several general questions about Guatemala, the interviewer asks, “Aren’t the guerrillas Indians?” “I don’t know,” the Indian responds. “I’ve heard that.” He then briefly describes the guerrillas’ midnight forced recruitment campaigns. An “Editor’s Note” immediately follows:

Although we have not heard before that guerillas [*sic*] have kidnapped men for their army . . . [w]e do have several reports and testimonials from Indians, many substantiated by Amenestry [*sic*] International, that Guatemalan ARMY soldiers have dressed up as guerillas [*sic*] and attacked villages and Indians in apparent hopes that the guerrillas would be blamed for these acts.⁸⁵

With this intervention, the editor dismisses the Indian’s account as inaccurate and corrects it with accounts from other Indians—which were then, perhaps not surprisingly, confirmed by a high-profile international organization.

Although this is an egregious example, it illustrates the broader pattern of solidarity councils’ essentialized representations of Indian-refugees. Councils employed fact checking and confirmations as strategies to convince skeptical North American audiences. The Indian-refugee-as-victim trope was strategic, designed to generate empathy for the refugees’ plight, which would in turn lead to material aid and other forms of support. Yet, the pattern also served to reify unequal power relations, further marginalizing the impoverished Indian refugee.

Although solidarity publications generally deemphasized the agency of the Indian-refugee community as a whole, they did allow the men a measure of protagonism in both historical and contemporary times. For example, the Guatemala Relief Project and *News from Guatemala* featured an ancient Mayan male figure as their organizational “brand” or symbol. In a similar vein, the Guatemala Support Network named its newsletter after the Maya hero Antanasio Tzul. Just as men like Tzul had threatened the progress of Spanish invaders centuries ago, male Indians of the 1980s posed a threat to the Guatemalan government’s authoritarian rule and genocidal policies.

But although solidarists portrayed native men as political figures, they relegated native women to the private sphere and “traditional” roles as re-producers and bearers of children and “repositories of ethnic culture and

85. STAR, *Newsletter*, No. 18 (October 1985), p. 3.

heritage.”⁸⁶ Of particular interest to solidarity organizations were motherhood and the weaving of textiles. Mexico’s Secretaría de Ayuda a los Refugiados de Guatemala (SARG), for example, highlighted both of these in a two-page spread in their September 1988 magazine. Alongside a drawing of a woman in *huipil* and *corte*, weaving on a backstrap loom, SARG explained, “the art of weaving is a fundamental activity in the Indian’s daily life. They are obliged to transmit to their children from birth the customs, traditions and secrets of their ancestors. This they do through their daily life. From a very young age, girls are taught to weave and it is part of their daily life.”⁸⁷

Solidarity’s gendered representational practices did not focus solely on specifically Indian characteristics. Representations of the displaced were highly gendered in general. At the most basic level, observers tended to paint the refugee as Vulnerable Woman. But it was not women alone who embodied refugee vulnerability; that role fell to “womenandchildren.” As Cynthia Enloe explains,

In the torrents of media images that accompany an international crisis, women are typically made visible as symbols, victims, or dependents. “Womenandchildren” rolls easily off network tongues because in network minds women are family members rather than independent actors, presumed to be almost child-like in their innocence about international realpolitik. Rarely do journalists look to women to reveal any of the basic structures of a dangerous confrontation.⁸⁸

The Central American refugee crisis was no different. Media, politicians, humanitarian aid groups, and solidarity organizations all willingly adopted the “womenandchildren” rhetoric.

Solidarity groups manipulated statistics to foreground refugee women and their children. A common refrain when introducing Guatemalan refugees was to note that “80 percent are women and children” or “the vast majority are women and children.”⁸⁹ This unbalanced gender accounting remained the norm even though data collected from the refugee camps painted a much more balanced picture: In 1987, females constituted 49.4 percent of the population of the camps in Campeche and 48.5 percent of those in Quintana

86. Wenona Giles, “Gendered Violence in War: Reflections on Transnationalist and Comparative Frameworks in Militarized Conflict Zones,” in Doreen Indra, ed., *Engendering Forced Migration: Theory and Practice* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), p. 91.

87. SARG, *Boletín*, No. 18 (September 1988), pp. 59–60; my translation.

88. Cynthia Enloe, *The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the End of the Cold War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 166.

89. Beers, “Indian refugees caught in limbo.” See also James C. Stephens, Jr., “The Current Situation of Guatemalan Refugees,” report prepared for PEACE for Guatemala, June 1983, p. 13, in WHS CALA records, Box 8, Folder 15.

Roo, and a few years later females accounted for 49.6 percent of the refugees in the Chiapas camps.⁹⁰ Such balance persisted across camps and across all age groups.

In addition, photographs and drawings of women with children appeared approximately ten times more often than those of men in solidarity publications during the 1980s. As might be expected, these images followed certain patterns. Most commonly, they depicted women standing slightly turned away from the reader, peering back over their shoulders, small children on their backs. Photographs often showed elderly women with multiple children (usually naked, with distended bellies) lined up before the camera as if on display. Only rarely were women at work, weaving or making tortillas. In contrast, the few images of men always showed them (in “Western” clothing) at work, swinging their *corvos* in the fields or participating in meetings. Even more intriguing is that men appeared either with smiles or with open mouths. Photographs (very rarely drawings) captured them in action, celebrating a good harvest of corn or expressing opinions at meetings. Women, on the other hand, appeared as still lifes: Mayan *traje*, braided hair, straight faced, immobile.

As part of their foregrounding of refugee women, solidarists emphasized above all else the violence suffered by these women. Physical violence literally inscribed itself onto their bodies. First, they were the victims of massacres. Nearly every publication included reports of mass killings with frequent refrains such as “Fifteen of the victims were women, four of them pregnant” and “The victims . . . are not adult or young men, but children, women—even pregnant women.”⁹¹ Other accounts offered more detail on the women’s ordeals. During a 1982 attack in the area of Concepción, Sololá, for example, “the army kidnapped 10 women, whom they took to two houses, along with their children. They forced the women to prepare food for the troops.” Afterward the soldiers shot them all to death and set fire to the house.⁹²

Those who escaped the massacres then suffered physical hardship during flights to Mexico. Solidarists described how people fled from troops combing

90. Estimates drawn from Sergio Aguayo Quezada et al., *Social and Cultural Conditions*, pp. 70–71; Deborah Lynn Billings, “Identities, Consciousness, and Organizing in Exile: Guatemalan Refugee Women in the Camps of Southern Mexico,” Ph.D. Diss., University of Michigan, 1995, appendices; and Mexican government documents, including Luis Ortiz Monasterio, “Los Refugiados Guatemaltecos en México,” report to COMAR, 29 November 1990, in SRE, Ser. 40196, Leg. III-6887-1, 80 parte.

91. CDHG/USA, *Bulletin*, No. 3, ca. February 1983, p. 6, in NACLA Archive, File 71; and *News from Guatemala*, Vol. 4, No. 7 (September 1982), p. 1, in NACLA Archive, File 69.

92. *News from Guatemala*, Vol. 4, No. 5 (June 1982), p. 2, in NACLA Archive, File 69.

the mountains and helicopters raining bombs. Among those who fled a December 1981 attack on Cantón Chunima, Chichicastenango, “were mothers with children in their arms, wounded during the retreat.”⁹³ After days, weeks, and even months eking out an existence in the mountains, refugees arrived at the Mexican border camps in “appalling” conditions. In reference to the refugees’ extreme malnutrition, Toronto’s Guatemala Solidarity Committee exclaimed, “Their blood is almost water!”⁹⁴

The violence against women was often sexualized. Although it is no secret that women are targeted with rape and other sexual violence during times of war, solidarity organizations gave tremendous space to details of such incidents. A CARGUA *Boletín* described an attack during which women were “locked into the courtroom, the school, and the chapel, where they were raped. Those that ‘didn’t fuck,’ as the captain said, were shot by the civil patrol under the eyes of the army.”⁹⁵ Solidarists also noted that the “booty principle” operated beyond the physical act of rape.⁹⁶ As *News from Guatemala* explained, the Guatemalan military forced men into civil patrols through direct violence as well as bribes, offering “land, crops, belongings and *even the wives of the massacred peasants* to those who join the patrols.”⁹⁷ In the refugee camps of Mexico, thousands of women, “because they are refugees[,] are at risk of being blackmailed by traffickers who threaten to denounce them to the migration authorities and force them into prostitution.”⁹⁸

In addition to rape, publications included graphic descriptions of other forms of physical violence committed against women’s bodies, with special attention given to their wombs and breasts. The most common atrocity recounted was the disemboweling of pregnant women. A STAR newsletter offered a particularly vivid account: “There were several pregnant ladies and [soldiers] took their bayonets and split up their abdomens and took the fetus and yanked it off and stepped on it.”⁹⁹

93. *News from Guatemala*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (February 1982), p. 2, in NACLA Archive, File 69.

94. Toronto Guatemala Solidarity Committee to friends, spring 1983, in NACLA Archive, File 54.

95. CARGUA, *Boletín*, April 1983, p. 8.

96. Cynthia Cockburn, “The Continuum of Violence: A Gender Perspective on War and Peace,” in Giles and Hyndman, eds., *Sites of Violence*, p. 36.

97. *News from Guatemala*, Vol. 4, No. 5 (June 1982), p. 3; emphasis added.

98. GARG, *El refugiado (xre vaj ri)*, No. 4 (September–November 1983), p. 5; my translation. For more on the gendered implications of rape during wartime, see Cockburn, “The Continuum of Violence”; Enloe, *The Morning After*; and Giles, “Gendered Violence in War.”

99. STAR, *Newsletter*, No. 19 (30 November 1985), pp. 5–6, in NACLA Archive, File 80. See also *News from Guatemala*, Vol. 4, No. 5/6 (July/August 1982), p. 13; and *News from Guatemala*, Vol. 4, No. 7 (September 1982), p. 1, in NACLA Archive, File 69.

To be sure, there were male refugees, and they, too, suffered violence. Occasionally, solidarists reported attacks against men, such as a 1984 incident at Xeatzan, Chimaltenango, when soldiers captured ten peasants, “cut out their eyes and tongue[s], cut off their testicles, covered them with gasoline, then set them on fire.”¹⁰⁰ In general, however, solidarists devoted little energy to the details of assaults on men.

If solidarists downplayed men’s physical suffering, they spotlighted men in other ways. Male refugees suffered from labor exploitation in Mexico, for example. Observers noted how refugee men “are allowed to work for only the *figueros* [*finqueros*]—large land owners—designated by Migración. Refugees say that their pay rarely tops . . . one-tenth of Mexico’s minimum wage.”¹⁰¹ In addition to the low pay, landowners provided insufficient food and inadequate housing; then, at the end of the six-week coffee harvest, the refugees “are returned . . . without having paid them a cent.”¹⁰² Occasionally, observers explicitly recognized racialized labor exploitation. For example, CARGUA reported that labor recruiters (*enganchadores*) received 450 pesos for placing a Tzotzil Indian from Chiapas into a position; a Guatemalan Indian, in contrast, was worth just 50–80 pesos.¹⁰³

Men also suffered in other ways. Of special interest to solidarists was coercion into civil defense patrols. Some groups emphasized physical aspects (e.g., lack of payment), whereas others focused on moral angles. Refugee men described to CARGUA the degradation they endured, how soldiers questioned patrollers’ manhood, yelling things like “Do you have any balls? . . . Touch them! . . . Now you’ll show me if you have any; you’re going to kill all of those guerrillas.”¹⁰⁴ Here, too, solidarists occasionally noted a racial or cultural component to the exploitation and degradation. For example, STAR reported that patrollers were “forced to comb the mountainsides nearby for corn planted by refugees hiding from the army, so that it may be burned, or if ready for harvest, carried down to Nebaj. This is a substantial burden of guilt. . . . Within

100. CDHG/USA, press release, 7 February 1985, in NACLA Archive, File 70. Bilingual version in WHS, CALA Records, Box 6, Folder 18.

101. “The Relocation of the Guatemalan Refugee Camps in Chiapas: Mexico’s Complicity with United States Intervention in Central America,” ca. June 1984, in WHS, CALA records, Box 6, Folder 13. See also CARG, *Report on Refugees*, October/November 1985, pp. 9–10, in WHS, CALA Records, Box 8, Folder 14.

102. GARG, *El refugiado (xre vaj ri)*, No. 5 (December 1983/January 1984), p. 4, in NACLA Archive, File 78; my translation.

103. *Ibid.*

104. CARGUA, *Boletín*, April 1983, p. 8. See also CARGUA, “Update: The Guatemalan Refugees in Chiapas,” December 1983, p. 3, in WHS, CALA Records, Box 8, Folder 14.

the context of Mayan culture, they are being forced to steal the most precious of the Gods' gifts from people who have virtually nothing."¹⁰⁵

Thus, although solidarity publications noted that refugee men suffered from direct physical violence, they far more commonly highlighted more indirect violence, such as labor abuse and moral or cultural degradation. Regardless of the form of suffering, solidarists typically named male victims and identified them as individuals with active and varied social roles and relations. Women, in contrast, remained anonymous. One example of this followed a series of Guatemalan army incursions into refugee camps in Chiapas in 1984. At the Santiago el Vertice refugee camp, according to a CDHG/USA press release, "two Guatemalan citizens were assassinated: Pascual Tadeo Pérez and José Jorge (after they were violently taken from the camp). José Jorge was 31 yrs. old, married with 8 children; Pascual Tadeo Pérez was 23 years old, married, with 5 children." Attacks at La Sombra and La Hamaca camps resulted in

3 assassinated refugees; Tomas Pascual—50 yrs. old; Juan López, 60 yrs. old; and Felipe Tomas, 30 yrs. old who leaves behind 4 children, the smallest being 1 month old. During this incursion the group tried to abduct the wife of Felipe Tomas, who was beaten and left in serious condition when she offered resistance.¹⁰⁶

Here, the men have names, ages, families, even national citizenship. The woman is identified only as "the wife." In other instances, solidarists identified men by their names, ages, and lines of work (e.g., peasant, laborer), while women remained unnamed and without age, identifiable only as mothers.

In a similar vein, these publications highlighted men's agency and resilience. Men refused to submit, insisted on retaining their dignity. *News from Guatemala* reported that when the army "came to massacre . . . we said that we weren't shameless, that we were peasants but we worked, we had our hands. . . . [W]e weren't 'lost men', we worked for a living. . . . We were peasants, sure, but hard workers."¹⁰⁷ Men provided for their families' subsistence needs, decided when "the need to save the lives of our children, wives, parents" merited cross-border flight, took responsibility for widows and orphans.¹⁰⁸ In

105. STAR, *Newsletter*, No. 17 (June 1985), p. 3.

106. CDHG/USA, "Report on the Human Rights Situation in Guatemala," July 1983, p. 28, in NACLA Archive, File 70.

107. *News from Guatemala*, Vol. 4, No. 8 (October 1982), pp. 7–8, in NACLA Archive, File 69.

108. GARG, *El refugiado (xre vaj ri)*, No. 8 (June–September 1984), p. 3; and GARG, *El refugiado (xre vaj ri)*, No. 7 (April–May 1984), p. 3; my translation.

Mexico, men were the camp leaders, engaging with state and international figures. Solidarists cited these representatives and reprinted letters they had directed to the presidents of Guatemala and Mexico, UNHCR officials, and supporters. Even “the refugees’ demands,” so celebrated by international solidarity, were gendered male (e.g., land titles and labor reforms).

Male voices dominated solidarity publications. Whereas male refugees provided lengthy testimonies and interviews for nearly every issue, there was no comparable appearance by a refugee woman. The only female refugee’s voice to appear was that of an unnamed “Indian girl” who described in detail her beating and rape by Guatemalan soldiers.¹⁰⁹ Even though refugee women dominated the imagery, they remained silent.

For the most part, females were relegated to the private-sphere roles of mother and Indian culture-bearer. On occasion, however, women appeared in the public sphere—as political tools of men, not as political beings themselves. This was especially visible in two realms. First, they were invoked to counter the charge that the refugees were “subversives.” Throughout the 1980s, Guatemalan officials claimed that refugee camps were “the bases of operation of subversives” and “guerrilla camps.”¹¹⁰ The implication was that “the Indians” residing in the camps “weren’t innocent. They had sold out to subversion” and, because of their “collaborating with the guerrillas, [they] ought to be eliminated.”¹¹¹ Although many Guatemalan refugees were sympathetic to the revolutionaries’ goals or had ties to the URNG and other groups, the refugees and their supporters denied such charges, explaining how “it is impossible that the refugees are guerrillas. Eighty percent of them are women and children.”¹¹² The foundation of this argument was biological. Women could not be guerrillas (and, by extension, political beings) precisely because they

109. *News from Guatemala*, Vol. 4, No. 8 (October 1982), p. 10; and CARGUA, *Boletín*, April 1983, pp. 6–7. Interviews with “rebel” women (Rigoberta Menchú and two who had joined the Comunidades de Población en Resistencia) appeared on two other occasions.

110. Francisco Edgar Djalma Domínguez (spokesman for the Guatemalan army), Major Roberto López (chief of army intelligence in Huehuetenango), and Coronel Roberto Mata, cited in GARG, *El Refugiado (xre vaj ri)*, No. 6 (February/March 1984), p. 8; and GARG, *El Refugiado (xre vaj ri)*, No. 3 (July/August 1983), p. 2; my translation.

111. Francisco Bianchi (press secretary to Rios Montt), cited in *News from Guatemala*, Vol. 4, No. 7 (September 1982), p. 1; and CDHG/USA, “Report to the Sub-Commission,” pp. 9–10.

112. UNHCR representative Pierre Jambor, cited in GARG, *El Refugiado (xre vaj ri)*, No. 3 (July/August 1983), p. 3. See also GARG, *El Refugiado (xre vaj ri)*, No. 2 (April–June 1983); my translation. Although the relationship between refugees and the revolutionary movement in Guatemala has not yet received sustained attention, it deserves consideration for what it can reveal about the complexity of the country’s revolutionary era as well as the changing nature of citizenship and state sovereignty in an increasingly globalized world.

were female. Solidarists, by reiterating such denials, further delinked women from the public sphere and political agency.

Women also appeared as objects in the renderings of the refugees' struggles against relocation. Following the April 1984 Guatemalan military attacks on the Chupadero camp, which left six dead and many more injured, the Mexican government began to move refugees (often forcibly) out of Chiapas and to new camps in Campeche and Quintana Roo. As solidarity publications denounced this campaign and explained the refugees' resistance to it, they emphasized the impact on women in particular. Before the relocation began, they argued that "the 125 mile trip to the proposed relocation site will probably kill many of the old and sick people among them and cause pregnant women to miscarry."¹¹³ After the first wave of relocations, they reported that "The journey was difficult and many died or became ill en route. . . . Women suffered a high number of miscarriages and still births, and malnutrition, especially among children and pregnant women, remains incredibly high."¹¹⁴ As the months passed and officials reduced food rations to encourage self-sufficiency, solidarists reported that the refugees were "suffering from hunger especially where the women are widows." Women, moreover, were forced to seek work in Mexican homes as servants, cooking, caring for children, washing clothes.¹¹⁵

Solidarists portrayed this—women entering the public sphere as laborers—as a break in tradition, a negative shift in gender roles. However, research by Erin Baines and Deborah Billings, among others, offers evidence that women were active in the public sphere of the refugee camps, forming organizations such as Flores Unidas, Nueva Esperanza, Nueva Unión, Madre Tierra, and Ixmucané, along with multicamp federations such as the Union of Guatemalan Refugee Women, and the Mamá Maquín Guatemalan Women's Organization.¹¹⁶ Despite the complex reality of women's activism, the publications of community solidarity councils essentialized women into symbols

113. "The Relocation of the Guatemalan Refugee Camps in Chiapas," ca. June 1984.

114. Guatemala Relief Project, "Update," June 1985, p. 2, in WHS, CALA Records, Box 8, Folder 3.

115. CARG, *Report on Refugees*, October/November 1985, p. 9; my translation.

116. Baines, *Vulnerable Bodies*; Billings, "Identities, Consciousness, and Organizing in Exile"; and Deborah L. Billings, "Organizing in Exile: The Reconstruction of Community in the Guatemalan Refugee Camps of Southern Mexico," in James Loucky and Marilyn M. Moors, eds., *The Maya Diaspora: Guatemalan Roots, New American Lives* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), pp. 74–92. Both Baines and Billings suggest that women's activism picked up in the refugee camps, particularly in the late 1980s and early 1990s, at least partly because of the influence of international aid groups, including the UNHCR, which encouraged such activity. To explore further the distinct role that women have played, future research might take a *longue durée* approach, tracing women's organization and mobilization at home, through the refugee experience, and back to Guatemala.

of loss. Solidarists relegated refugee women to the role of culture-bearers, as Indians and as mothers. Yet, even here, they emphasized the *loss* of these roles. Many remarked on the loss of markers of indigeneity, for example. Mexico's Secretaría lamented on one occasion that, although women weavers integrated many key symbols into their "multicolored drawings," for the most part "the weavers today don't necessarily know the meaning of their designs."¹¹⁷ Some solidarists condemned the Guatemalan military for preventing women from "practicing artesanal crafts [and] destroy[ing] thousands of looms in its campaign through the largely Indian highlands."¹¹⁸ Others warned that weavers faced "serious economic problems" and "grave danger . . . due to the scarcity of wool."¹¹⁹ News stories referred to the displaced women who "had to abandon [their] native dress and wear clothing like that used by ladino women."¹²⁰ An especially vivid description of loss was from a Mexican solidarist who, during a visit to the Chajul camp, observed: "The Indian mothers, normally dark skinned, were all white, very, very white."¹²¹

Even more prominent was the loss of motherhood. This happened in Guatemala, the result of government policies ranging from an "intense campaign of involuntary sterilization . . . in rural and indigenous areas" to military counterinsurgency tactics.¹²² Although references to the former were limited to mid-1984, vivid descriptions of the latter occurred throughout the decade: soldiers split open pregnant women's wombs, tore infants from their mothers' arms and kicked them to death, "dropped [children] upon their heads on to concrete," "grabbed [them] by their feet to shatter them against the stones," tied ropes around them and pulled in different directions, ripping the child to pieces, and "thrust stakes up their anuses to make them die slowly."¹²³ When women gave birth while fleeing military operations, their

117. SARG, *Boletín*, No. 18 (September 1988), pp. 59–60; my translation.

118. Stephens, Jr., "The Current Situation of Guatemalan Refugees," p. 13.

119. CDHG/USA, *Information Bulletin* (February 1985), p. 3, in NACLA Archive, File 70.

120. *News from Guatemala*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (May 1982), p. 9, in NACLA Archive, File 69. Victor Montejo notes that women stopped wearing traditional dress "out of fear" and that this practice became generalized in the refugee camps by 1982 or 1983, especially among the younger generations (*Voices from Exile: Violence and Survival in Modern Maya History* [Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999], p. 112).

121. CARGUA, *Boletín*, April 1983, pp. 6–7.

122. CDHG/USA, "Report to the Sub-Commission," pp. 9–10.

123. List compiled from *News from Guatemala*, Vol. 4, No. 5/6 (July/August 1982), p. 13, and *News from Guatemala*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (April 1981), p. 3, NACLA Archive, File 69; Movimiento Solidaridad con Guatemala "Otto Rene Castillo" (Chicago), *Chabil'J Tinamit/ La Voz del Pueblo*, No. 2 (1984), p. 7, CALA Records, Box 6, folder 16, WHS; and Nick Allen, Food First Action Alert, March 1983, NACLA Archive, File 54.

premature babies “died in the jungle, the mother[s] not having time to bury [them].”¹²⁴ When hiding from soldiers, mothers “pressed their infants against their breast, in order to prevent them from crying so they would not be discovered. After a while of tightly pressing their children to their breasts . . . [they] found they had suffocated their children. . . . [They had] accidentally killed their own children.”¹²⁵ Unable to protect their children from death, unable to fulfill their roles as mothers, these women became ghost-like, as in Concepción, Sololá, where survivors of a massacre “discovered a nine month-old baby, killed by machete, still with a piece of his mother’s breast in his mouth.”¹²⁶

Even refuge in Mexico did not permit women to fulfill their role as mothers. In some instances this was because they felt compelled to give up their children for adoption. A Canadian solidarity group, citing Mexican sources, reported that many women were “forced to give up their children to our peasants and countrymen, simply to assure that their lives will be safe in such an emergency.”¹²⁷ Víctor Montejo, a Mayan school teacher who lived as a refugee in Mexico for a time before relocating to the United States and completing a degree in anthropology, corroborated this charge. In his study *Voices from Exile*, he describes how people came from all over “with the intention of taking the fatherless children from their mothers. Families with a number of children were asked to give up some of them to the Mexican people who were eager to adopt them.” Although many promised to feed and dress the children well, he continued, others “were very aggressive, even pulling the babies from the arms of their mothers.”¹²⁸

In most instances, however, refugee women lost their children to malnutrition and illness. A common refrain in solidarity publications was that women were unable to produce milk for their infants. According to a 1983 PEACE report, “Mothers give their breast to their children but there is no milk. They are even sicker than their infants.”¹²⁹ A Mexican solidarist who visited the Chajul refugee camp recalled, “we were on the verge to see so many malnourished women and children, the children all rickety, all crying, mothers

124. James C. Stephens Jr., “The Current Situation of Guatemalan Refugees,” p. 13.

125. Movimiento Solidaridad con Guatemala “Otto Rene Castillo” (Chicago), *Chabil’J Tinamit/ La Voz del Pueblo*, No. 2 (1984), p. 7.

126. *News from Guatemala*, Vol. 4, No. 5 (June 1982), pp. 2–3.

127. Regional Ecumenical Information Centre report, cited in *News from Guatemala*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (May 1982), p. 1.

128. Montejo, *Voices from Exile*, pp. 108–109.

129. Stephens, Jr., “The Current Situation of Guatemalan Refugees,” p. 13.

giving them the breast, a dried up breast without any milk, for the children to suck desperately, not getting anything, continuing to cry.”¹³⁰

Whereas men served as the voices of the refugee community, refugee women served as visual symbols of trauma and loss. A remark from a CARGUA affiliate offers a poignant example of this attitude. After describing how a teenage girl had been raped by dozens of Guatemalan soldiers and slashed with machetes, the solidarist declared: “This young woman was introduced to me; I was to interview her but there was nothing left to ask. Her mere presence was testimony enough to her terrible suffering.”¹³¹ Once again, the woman has no voice, only her physical body—injured, damaged, symbolic.

The Solidarist’s Paradox

In the reports that solidarity organizations published about people who fled Guatemala in the 1980s, refugees were first and foremost essentialized as victims. These portrayals, moreover, were highly racialized and gendered. This gives rise to a disturbing paradox. On the one hand, the rhetoric of solidarists proclaimed a struggle for progressive, sometimes even radical change. They condemned U.S. intervention, the structural violence bolstered by the Guatemalan political and economic elite, and the physical violence perpetrated by the Guatemalan armed forces and death squads. They outlined a utopian future, a “new society . . . of free men and women,” where “divisions no longer exist” and where “everyone can realize their full potential.”¹³²

On the other hand, some methods—including their representational practices—perpetuated old patterns of marginalization. This is not to discount other efforts that may have consciously and directly supported utopian ideals. Nor do I mean to imply that solidarists intentionally marginalized. But what I do mean to point out is the insidious nature of many of the assumptions that undergird solidarity relations. In this case, the assumptions of solidarists rendered protagonistic roles impossible for all but a few male (usually *ladino*) refugees. Women and Mayas remained silent on the sidelines. In the words of CDGH/USA, they were indeed “the most tragic results of the war.”¹³³

130. CARGUA, *Boletín*, April 1983, pp. 6–7.

131. *Ibid.*

132. NISGUA, *Guatemala Network News: Organizing for Solidarity*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (July/August 1985), pp. 8, 13, 9. See also SARG, *Boletín*, No. 18 (September 1988), p. 8.

133. CDHG/USA, *Information Bulletin*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (March 1990), p. 3.

To some degree, this makes sense. As Betty Plewes and Stuart Rieky note, the “pornography of poverty” sells. Framed as victims, helpless and dependent on others, refugee women became useful political objects for solidarity and humanitarian aid organizations, tools for “rais[ing] large amounts of money.”¹³⁴ Images of the poor and suffering Indian refugee woman could “generate much more in donations than alternatives,” prompting “higher rates of support” among the North American publics.¹³⁵ Solidarists certainly were aware of this and made strategic decisions about how to portray refugees. The right kind of information, along with the right images could, after all, help them to “raise money/raise hell,” as NISGUA put it.¹³⁶

Despite the fundraising advantages, such representations of the displaced are highly problematic. At a basic level, support rooted in the “martyr syndrome” or pure victim narratives tends to be short-lived. As Larry Reid and others warn, once the image of the victim disappears from public view, so, too, do the funds. Moreover, solidarists’ use of these narratives can be counterproductive by discrediting or “alienat[ing] people who should be their partners.”¹³⁷ Indeed, by focusing so intently on victim narratives, solidarity groups actually duplicated a behavior for which they condemned the Guatemalan government: “robb[ing the people] of their role as protagonists of their lives and their history.”¹³⁸ This is especially true in the case of women and Mayas.

The reliance on victim narratives and essentialized representations of refugees also elevated solidarists to a position of superiority. In many instances, solidarity groups painted themselves as the saviors of the refugees. This was particularly common in the realm of physical safety and “protection.” International accompaniment, according to this view, saved lives. “The ref’s [*sic*] main protection,” a NISGUA affiliate declared, “is very visible international public concern.”¹³⁹ If solidarists saved refugees from attacks by Guatemalan armed forces, they also saved refugees from death by neglect. A Mexican solidarity worker put this most succinctly when she argued that, to “help these people . . . we MUST take responsibility for saving them. WE MUST SAVE THEM!”¹⁴⁰

134. Plewes and Stuart, “The Pornography of Poverty,” pp. 24, 30. See also Zolberg, Suhrke, and Aguayo, *Escape from Violence*, p. 221.

135. Plewes and Stuart, “The Pornography of Poverty,” p. 30; and Baines, *Vulnerable Bodies*, p. 37.

136. NISGUA, internal report, March 1984.

137. Reid, “Menchú Tum, Stoll, and Martyrs of Solidarity,” p. 84.

138. *News from Guatemala*, Vol. 2, No. 11 (December 1980), p. 12, in NACLA Archive, File 69.

139. NISGUA, internal report, March 1984.

140. CARGUA, *Boletín*, April 1983, pp. 6–7; emphasis in original.

This attitude and paternalistic behaviors that often accompanied it in many ways countered the objectives of solidarity groups. Despite their best intentions to serve as alternative sources of information and to educate the broader public about the situation, they ended up “convey[ing] a limited picture of life” in Guatemala and the refugee camps of Mexico. This, in turn, undermined “efforts to create a broader understanding of the underlying structures” of injustice that led to violence and displacement in the first place. In addition, by drawing such a stark contrast between an Us (North American solidarity workers, humanitarians, saviors) and a Them (refugees from Guatemala, Indians, victims), solidarists “convey[ed] a sense that . . . problems can only be solved by Northern charity.”¹⁴¹

This, as Leigh Binford explains, “reproduce[d] the effects of an ideological vision that is dominant in the West, of a world that is divided in two: a homogenous mass of poor, Third World humanity, cut more or less from the same cloth, on the one hand, and an aggregation of struggling Western individuals, each unique, each working to fulfill her or his potential on the other.”¹⁴² Herein lies the crux of the solidarist’s paradox: the perpetuation of a First World/Third World or North/South divide. The solidarists of the 1980s intended their work to be counterhegemonic on multiple levels. Some groups proclaimed themselves “anti-imperial,” and others expressed a more subdued opposition to intervention (particularly of the United States) in Central America or simply encouraged “better” foreign policies. Many organizations also sought to rewrite the practices of humanitarian aid. They opted for more horizontal and collaborative organizational structures than the classicist humanitarian organizations, where hierarchy reigned.¹⁴³ Moreover, rather than follow the classicist model of neutrality and impartiality, solidarity work directly engaged in politics by “taking sides in what [they] understood to be liberation struggles.”¹⁴⁴

Yet, despite their supposedly alternative, challenging stances, the patterns of representation reveal that solidarists’ actions continued to be based on uneven power relations and assumptions about the Exotic Other. Despite all efforts to the contrary, solidarity in many ways modeled colonial-imperial

141. Plewes and Stuart, “The Pornography of Poverty,” p. 24.

142. Leigh Binford, *The El Mozote Massacre: Anthropology and Human Rights* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996), p. 6.

143. Consider CARGUA, “Update: The Guatemalan Refugees in Chiapas,” December 1983, p. 2; Duncan Earle, “Mayas Aiding Mayas: Guatemalan Refugees in Chiapas, Mexico,” in Carmack, ed., *Harvest of Violence*, pp. 272–273; and STAR, *Newsletter*, No. 13 (7 September 1984), pp. 10–11.

144. NISGUA, *Guatemala Network News: Organizing for Solidarity*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (20 May 1983).

relations of paternalism and domination. As such, it formed part of the ongoing civilizing or modernization projects carried out by the region's elite leaders and the states they directed—precisely those figures the solidarists most critiqued.

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