

**Dams, Displacement, and Perceptions of Development
A Case from Río Negro, Guatemala**

by

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Abstract

Guatemala's history is plagued with 'development' projects that result in displacement, violence, and increased marginalization of its Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations. In order to make way for development initiatives such as the production of coffee, bananas, and sugar cane, the extraction of metals such as gold and nickel, or, in this specific case, the construction of a large hydroelectric dam, the land-based, predominately Maya, farmers, or *campesinos*, are systematically uprooted from the lands of their birth, and launched into uncertainty. Using the case of the Chixoy Hydroelectric Dam, built from 1978-83, this thesis examines the effects of displacement on the former residents of Río Negro, a community which endured a series of massacres by the military and paramilitary due to its resistant stance on forced removal. Through the use of open-ended interview discussions, or *testimonios*, as well as other qualitative methods, I attempt to illuminate this specific incident of displacement and violence, and discuss the outcomes thirty years later. My findings, based on fieldwork conducted January through April 2009, suggest that the majority of survivors from the Río Negro massacres are still adversely affected from the destruction of their families and livelihoods, and that the return to a more self-determined and traditional Maya-Achi way of life is crucial for personal and community rehabilitation. I conclude that despite this incident occurring in unique circumstances, and at the height of the internal conflict, the same struggles over land and rights continue into the present—and if policies are left unchanged, in both international development agencies as well as the Guatemalan government, clashes of this nature will only increase in time.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iii
Acknowledgement	iv
Timeline of Events	v
Map	vii
List of Acronyms	viii
Chapter 1- Introduction	1
Chapter 2- Methods and Research Design	15
Chapter 3- Literature Review	33
Chapter 4- Guatemala Historical Context	55
Chapter 5- Río Negro and the Chixoy Dam	70
Chapter 6- Analysis	84
Chapter 7- Discussion and Conclusion	119
Bibliography	137
Appendix I--Photos	156
Appendix II—Interview-Conversation Guide	164
Appendix III—Ethics Approval	165

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Timeline of Events At Río Negro

June 1972—Guatemala's National Institute of Electrification (INDE), with the help of private Consorcio LAMI, a German-based construction firm, identifies the Chixoy Basin as the site for a new hydroelectric dam. Feasibility studies begin.

January 1976—Interamerican Development Bank (IDB) loan US \$105 million granted to INDE for the construction of Chixoy.

1976-78—Army and INDE begin to show up at Río Negro and other Chixoy-affected communities to notify them of their displacement.

June 1978—World Bank loan of US \$72 million granted to INDE for Chixoy.

January 1980—Leaders from Río Negro are taken to Pacux, the resettlement community begin constructed for their community near Rabinal. After viewing the poor construction and lack of arable land, they reject the compensation plan offered by INDE.

March 1980—Tensions rise between military police and Río Negro residents after two workers (both from Río Negro), are arrested and tortured after being accused of stealing beans. When police arrive to the village for further interrogation, a skirmish takes place leaving seven Río Negro residents dead from gunfire. One of the military police officers also died from drowning in the river after being attacked by angry citizens. From this time on, the army arrives repeatedly to the village, interrogating and torturing residents in attempt to get information about guerrillas.

Spring 1980—INDE demands Río Negro citizens to hand over land titles, promising to return them. Later in the year INDE claims to have never received them.

July 1980—INDE demands the *Libro de Actos* to be delivered to the dam site by village leaders. This book outlines all compensation agreements and promises made by the INDE. The two men delivering the book were kidnapped and murdered. The book was never seen again.

September 1981—Army massacre at an annual fair in Rabinal claim some 200+ innocent civilians.

October 1981—Army massacre in nearby village of Xococ. A civilian defense patrol (PAC) is established.

November 1981—Río Negro forced to form a PAC.

February 4, 1982—Xococ attacked by guerrillas, killing five PAC members. A captured guerrilla names individuals from nearby communities, including Río Negro.

February 6-7, 1982—80 Río Negro residents are summoned to Xococ by the local military commander. They are captured but later freed, after handing over ID cards.

February 13, 1982—Río Negro residents return to Xococ. They are accused of being guerrillas, and subsequently fired upon. 71 individuals are killed. One survivor returns to Río Negro with the news. Army and Xococ PAC members later surround the village, chasing individuals into the surrounding mountains and into other villages.

March 13, 1982—Army and Xococ PAC arrive to Río Negro and round up women and children (the men were in hiding at this time—thinking the women were safe). They are forced up the mountainside to a pass called Pocoxom. 107 children and 70 women are murdered and tossed into a ditch. 18 children are kept as slaves by PAC members. The village is deserted, with survivors either taking shelter in surrounding villages, or living in the mountains.

May 14, 1982—92 Río Negro residents are killed by Army soldiers at the nearby village of Los Encuentros. 15 women are taken away by helicopter, never to be seen again.

June 1982—General Efraín Ríos Montt becomes president resulting from a coup. He offers ‘amnesty’ to refugees living in the mountains. Drops pamphlets from helicopters.

September 14, 1982—Massacre at nearby village of Agua Fria takes the lives of 35 refugee children from Río Negro.

January 1983—Dam gates closed and reservoir begins to fill.

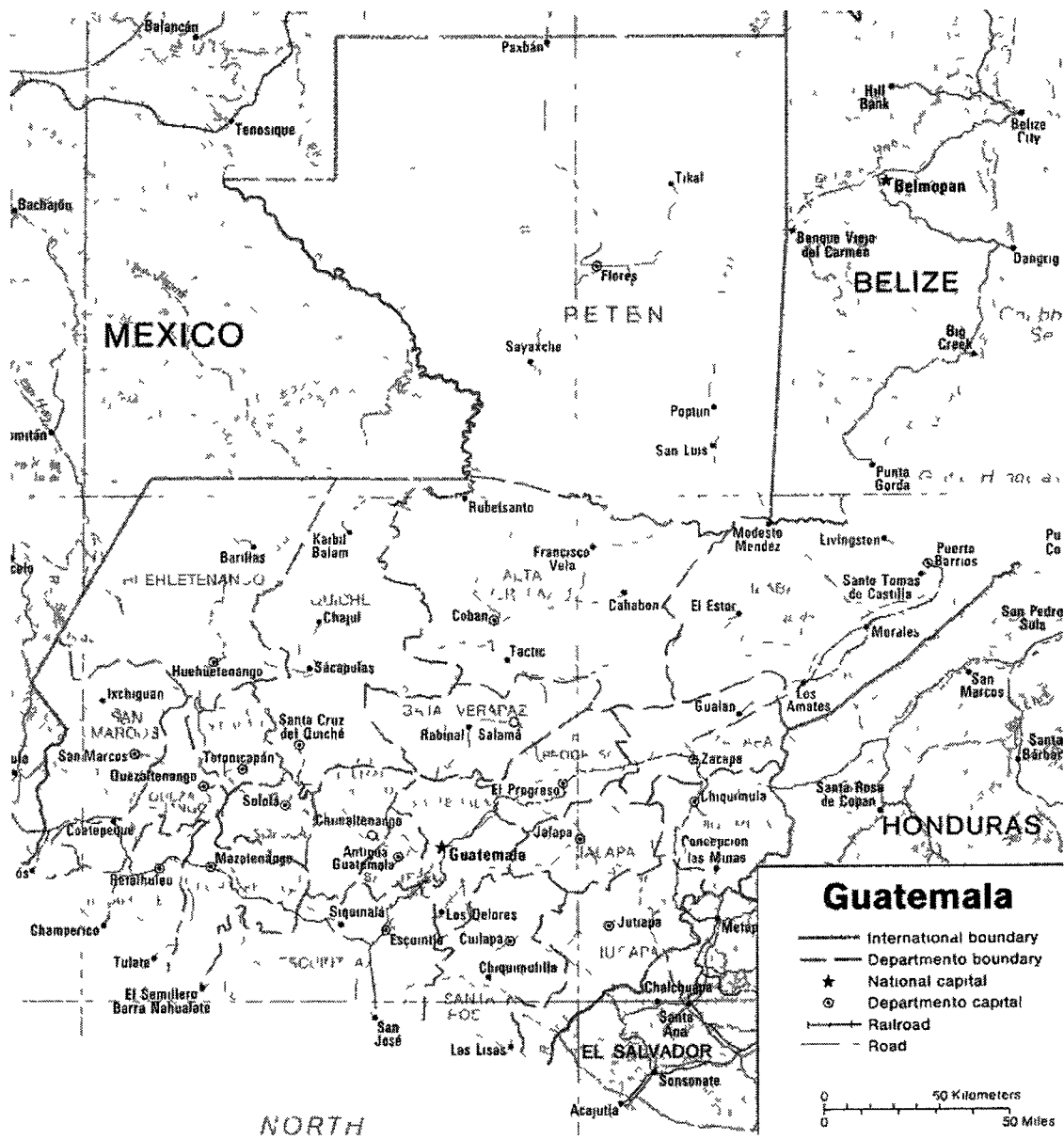
August 1983—The first families begin to arrive in Pacux. Many are tortured and kept in the military garrison built adjacent to the community.

March 1985—Another World Bank of US\$44 million is granted to INDE, partially for rebuilding damaged tunnels.

April 1986—Commercial use of the facility begins.

1991—Río Negro massacre survivors and their families begin to return the land directly above the old village site of Río Negro, now underwater.

Map of Guatemala



Source Guatemalareservations.com

List of Acronyms

ADIVIMA—Association For the Integral Development of the Victims of Violence in the Verapaces, Maya Achí

ASCARA—Campesino Association Río Negro 13 of March Maya-Achi

CAFTA-DR—Central American Free Trade Agreement-Dominican Republic

CCDA—Campesino Committee of the Highlands

CEH—Commission for Historical Clarification

COCAHICH—Coordinator of the Communities Affected by the Construction of the Chixoy Dam

COCODE—Community Development Council

CONIC—National Indigenous and Peasant Coalition

COPAE—Guatemalan Pastoral Commission on Peace and Ecology

EGP—Guerrilla Army of the Poor

FAR—Rebel Armed Forces

FRG—Guatemalan Republican Front

GDP—Gross Domestic Product

IDB—Inter-American Development Bank

INDE—National Institute of Electrification

IMF—International Monetary Fund

NAFTA—North American Free Trade Agreement

NGO—Non-governmental Organization

NRES—Natural Resources and Environmental Studies

ORPA—Revolutionary Organization of the People in Arms

PAC—Civilian Defense Patrol

REB—Research Ethics Board

UFCo—United Fruit Company

USAID—United States Agency for International Development

UNDP—United Nations Development Program

URNG—United Revolutionary Unity of Guatemala

Chapter 1- Introduction

My early perceptions and imaginations of Latin America were formed in the border city of San Diego, where I grew up. Although it was rare for my family to venture south into Mexico when I was young, it was frequent that I obtained vistas of the sprawling cardboard shanties perched on the canyons and mesas above Tijuana, as well as the rugged desert mountains and islands that lay further south. These two images, I believe, sparked my initial curiosities for the region: the vastness and emptiness of the landscape, and the knowledge that something completely ‘foreign,’ and seemingly indescribable, existed just minutes from my home. And from an early age, I knew that I would one day explore both of these realms.

Aside from the many weekend trips I made to northern Baja California during the latter part of my teens, my first extended travels to Latin America took place in Costa Rica and Mainland Mexico, and consisted primarily of surfing and hiking. By and large, these early explorations offered a limited perspective to the life and landscapes of the places I visited. I stayed and worked in American-owned surf camps and spoke limited Spanish. I knew nothing of history or culture or the impact of American tourism and capital on Costa Rican society, and thought little about anything other than surfing and finding situations that would allow for a longer stay. However, despite my naiveté at the time, or even ignorance of the situation I was participating in, I do remember feeling that something crucial was missing from my consciousness and experiences. In due time, my infatuation and knowledge of natural history overtook my desire to surf, and I began to plan trips for viewing birds, rare habitats, and walking through the backcountry. Once I realized the unlimited possibilities for exploring mountains, forests, and the inhabited

countryside, my objectives shifted into an attempt to obtain some form of intimacy within the landscape, and learn all I could about the distribution of species and ecosystems, and the physical characteristics of the terrain¹ Inevitably, an interest in history and culture flourished as I veered further from the ‘gringo trail,’ as did questions pertaining to the underlying causes for the bleak economic realities I witnessed along the roadways and footpaths

My 2004 trip to Guatemala fell in the middle of a three-year traveling stint During this timeframe, I worked, saved, and planned during a portion of the year, then spent the little money I earned by exploring the mountains of Latin America or California Guatemala was part of a four-month loop beginning and ending in Cancun, on Mexico’s Yucatán Peninsula My goal was to experience the region historically and contemporarily inhabited by the Maya, including regions of southern Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, and the northern sliver of Honduras For years I dreamt of visiting this part of Middle America and Mexico, not only to glimpse the lives of the present-day Indigenous Maya, and the Classical ruins of Palenque and Tikal, but also to walk and bus through the volcanic cordilleras and high plateaus of the *Sierra*, and take inventory of its increasingly rare temperate forests

¹ The idea of becoming immersed within a landscape, issue, struggle, or culture, is an on-going theme in my studies and objectives, which I attribute, at least in part, to my early interest in the work of naturalist and writer Gary Snyder (1996), as well as other ‘nature’ writers who share the same ideas of ‘meditation into place’—a practice and theory which ideally results in a deep, almost spiritual base of knowledge for the natural and human-influenced patterns and processes that make up a landscape

Although my awareness regarding the effects of colonialism and the unequal structures of power and ‘development’² expanded significantly while traveling through the Andes that previous year, my experiences in Guatemala brought forth yet another level of intimacy into histories marked by waves of violence and oppression. Particularly apparent were the lasting effects from the civil armed conflict of 1960-96. Lacking sufficient knowledge of the conflict and the tension that remained, I planned a three-day walk, by coincidence, through one of the most devastated regions in the country, known as the Ixil Triangle (see Perera 1993, Stoll 1993). Once a stronghold for the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP), an opposition group with wide support from local Ixil, Mam, and Quiche-speaking Mayas, the Guatemalan army targeted the entire region by burning whole villages of suspected guerrilla supporters, often resulting in complete annihilation (CEH 1999). As pointed out by Guatemalan writer Victor Perera (1993, 62), the number of primarily Indigenous victims was astonishing in the Ixil region during the late 1970s and early 80s, with over 25,000 inhabitants, or nearly one-third the population, either murdered or exiled.

Although my walk through the Cuchumatanes was amazing in regards to the resilient traditional society that I encountered, as well as the remnant patches of native conifer forest and grasslands, evidence of a lingering violence permeated even the most peaceful and pastoral spaces of the countryside. From one community to the next I heard stories of massacres, of exile to the forest and into Mexico, and witnessed extreme levels of poverty and environmental degradation. In the highest of villages, over 3000 meters on

² My knowledge on these topics accumulated through conversations with locals, other travelers, and in guidebooks. However, my introduction to Eduardo Galeano’s seminal book, *The Open Veins Of Latin America* (1973), offered an entirely new perspective on contemporary structures of conquest and imperialism.

the stark, moonscape of the *altiplano*, food appeared scarce, except for cabbage and tortillas, and the men, intoxicated and staggering about in the late day mists, wanted to share with me stories from the war

“We weren’t communists,” one man told me, from inside his smoke-filled home “We farmed potatoes and had some sheep The army came to kill us all, we left for weeks at a time They burnt our homes and slaughtered all the animals ” In his notebook were written histories—names of the murdered—and drawings of airplanes dropping bombs, and uniformed soldiers with machine guns

At the time it puzzled me why the army would target such remote and impoverished communities, but equally confusing were the posters of former President General Efraín Ríos Montt—the notorious general dictating the massacres of the early 1980s—tacked up to some of their doors One man, in the Quiche-speaking village of Xexocom, said that members of Montt’s political party, the Guatemalan Republican Front (FRG), showed up before the 2003 election in which Montt was a candidate, and promised money if the people showed support “They promised all kinds of things,” he told me, “and some people believed, even after what happened ” Luckily, Montt did not win the presidential election, but to this day he remains a key figure in Guatemalan politics, despite charges of genocide by the United Nations (CEH 1999), and by the Guatemala-based Association for Justice and Reconciliation (AJR) (FHRG 2007)

As written by historical geographer W George Lovell (1988, 1995), the complex patterns embedded within the landscape, culture, and political activities of the Maya peoples can only be interpreted through four and a half centuries of periodic oppression, displacement, and “cycles of conquest”—often carried out as a means for the governing

elite to upkeep unequal structures of power and land ownership. Given the rich and varied geography of Guatemala, history has played itself out differently from region to region, often reflecting capitalistic endeavors carried out by the oligarchy and its partners in the United States, and the levels of resistance as employed by the marginalized, Indigenous class. In the Ixil, like so many other highland locations, the production of coffee and the need for cheap, seasonal labor, as well as large tracks of fertile land, shaped the resistance movement and impoverishment that afflicts the region both historically and in the present (Perera 1993, Lovell 1995). Although I was still quite unaware of these realities at the time of my initial visit, my somewhat disturbing, yet eye-opening experiences in the mountains, as well as my observations from the cities and tourist centers confirmed the conclusions made by Lovell, and my desire to understand the complexities of such deeply entrenched inequality and dysfunction was well underway.

A fateful meeting with Dr. Catherine Nolin of the University of Northern British Columbia's Geography Department in the Fall of 2007 led me to an opportunity that entailed something other than simply 'checking things out' in Latin America (which by this point had become quite unfulfilling), by introducing a plan of formalized study and investigation into the negative processes and patterns I witnessed on my travels. During that winter and spring, the bulk of my studies, as directed by Dr. Nolin, consisted of Guatemalan politics and history, as well as a critical introduction to 'development' and its role in the making of the 'third world' (see Power 2003). A field school to Guatemala that May brought these two elements together, where a series of experiences among oppressed peoples, not unlike my trip to the Ixil, revealed entanglements of global

capitalistic development, and the enduring conquest as outlined by Lovell (1988) and other scholars (see Perera 1993, Handy 1984, Jonas 1991, Carmack 1988, Grandin 2004, Nolin 2006, Nelson 2009) Through community visits, and discussions with key actors in the struggle for environmental and social justice, our delegation witnessed the ‘lived experiences’ of those affected by foreign-owned mining projects, hydroelectric dams, and severe economic and social repression For me, these meetings and introductions offered a raw and unfiltered glimpse into struggles reaching as far back as the original conquest, and brought to light some of the underlying causes of displacement, underdevelopment, violence and conflict

Among the numerous communities we visited on our 20-day delegation was that of Río Negro in the highland department of Baja Verapaz, whose historical and contemporary struggles would eventually become the topic for my Master’s research Aside from pure circumstance, and the rare opportunity to have access into such a remote, traditional, and particularly sensitive community³, I chose Río Negro and its connection to the Chixoy Dam as an investigative study because of its clear depiction of the relationships between ‘development’ and violence, as well as the deep ideological divides existing between the Mayas and Ladinos

Not unlike the Indigenous displacements that occurred at the time of the original conquest (Lovell 1988), and continuing into the 20th century with the advent of export-

³ Access to Río Negro for our delegation and my future ethnographic research came through Grahame Russell, co-director of Rights Action, a Guatemala City based non-governmental organization (NGO) Since 1994, Grahame and co-director Annie Bird have been involved in the struggle for justice in Río Negro, and nearby Rabinal, where many of the survivors of the 1980-83 massacres presently live Along with Dr Nolin, Grahame co-led our delegation to various locations in which his organization has affiliation

agriculture such as coffee and bananas (Handy 1984, Schlesinger and Kinzer 1983), the World Bank-funded Chixoy Hydroelectric Dam, built between 1976-83 by the National Institute of Electrification (INDE), was slated to remove over 3400 Maya-Achí inhabitants from their Chixoy River Valley communities, in order to provide ‘cheap and reliable’ electricity for the minority of citizens with access to services (Witness for Peace 1996) With approximately 800 residents spread across the open landscape, the village of Río Negro occupied a fertile track of land at the rivers’ edge, where they grew traditional crops—corn, chiles, and beans—as well as fruits and vegetables for local markets and the nearby centers of Rabinal and San Cristobal Verapaz As noted in the limited reports compiled before the dam’s construction (Ichon 1978), as well as by previous residents, Río Negro had access to good water, fishing, land, and maintained Achí customs and subsistence agriculture not too distant from their pre-conquest ancestors

Despite World Bank protocol on relocation for ‘development’ projects (see World Bank 1978, Lynch 2007), Río Negro inhabitants informed me that the INDE never consulted them, and simply appeared one day by helicopter to inform residents that a dam would be built several kilometers downstream, and that their village would be flooded For the first several years of construction, INDE agents made promises regarding compensation—sufficient land, proper homes, and services—but as time passed, it became apparent to residents that no such agreements would be kept (Osorio 2003, Colajacomo 1999) As will be thoroughly discussed in later chapters, Río Negro’s attempt to receive proper compensation for their land, homes, and economic livelihoods, and their eventual decision to collectively resist their pending displacement, was met by targeted assassinations of community leaders, kidnappings, and massacres now

confirmed as acts of genocide by the United Nations Truth Commission (CEH 1999, VI, Illustrative Case Annex no 1) In a series of planned attacks carried out under army orders, over half the residents—men, women, children, and the elderly—were murdered shortly before the dam’s final construction (Rights Action 2000) Those who survived the violence fled into nearby wooded gulches and mountain ridges, or were taken in as slaves by paramilitaries (Johnston 2005a, Witness for Peace 1996, Colajacomo 1999, Osorio 2003)

Not unlike the stories I heard from Ixil, and confirmed through extensive investigations undertaken by the United Nations (CEH 1999) the Catholic Church (REMHI 1998), and numerous anthropologists (see Carmack 1988), murder and intimidation were tactics commonly employed by President General Ríos Montt, and his predecessor General Roméo Lucas García, in their attempt to eliminate opposition movements throughout the country Resistance at this time in any shape or form—from unions, churches, human rights and development groups—was interpreted as guerrilla or communist activity (Manz 1988) And since Río Negro fit this subversive profile, it became one of the 600+ Indigenous villages to be wiped off the map as part of the government’s (U S -sanctioned) ‘scorched earth policy’ (CEH 1999)

Most individuals who survived the massacres of 1980-83, and the years of hiding that followed, presently live with their families in the relocation village of Pacux, the INDE-built relocation ‘village’ that sparked the initial resistance movement among Río Negro’s elders and community leaders As I witnessed during the ethnographic component of my research, life in this cramped, severely impoverished community has all but shattered the original Achí way of life, as residents must cope daily with the

memories of lost mothers and fathers, and attempt to survive in a ‘modern’ capitalist economy with extremely limited opportunities and resources. Those few individuals who reached a breaking point in Pacux have since risked their lives in order to move back to the Chixoy River basin and return to a more traditional and self-determined lifestyle. Located directly above the original Río Negro village site, now submerged by the reservoir, approximately one dozen families work the steep, arid slopes, and are miraculously successful in re-colonizing the land and offering an authentic Achí way of life for their children⁴

As previously mentioned, the events from Río Negro and the Chixoy Dam are not uncommon given the historical context of development and modernization activities as carried by the oligarchy/state, and their foreign, (primarily U S) partners (Jonas 1991, Grandin 2004). Resultant violence, displacements, and exclusion from these processes have effectively shaped the geography of the country (Lovell 1988), initiated and sustained conflicts (Arias 2006, Benson et al 2008), and shattered Indigenous structures of community and identity (Nolin 2006, Fischer and Brown 1996). Aside from this specifically Guatemalan context⁵, however, lay the powerful role of international actors and the dominant global development paradigm existing since the post-WWII era and into the present (Power 2003, Appelbaum and Robinson 2005). Just as the incidents from

⁴ More on my experience in Río Negro, both in the field school and during my ethnographic research in 2009, will be discussed in both the historical and methods chapters of this thesis

⁵ Although the aforementioned development activities and violence occur(ed) on Guatemalan soil, most events have international relevance, as investments, ideologies, and power—often in the hands United States citizens and government—have initiated and carried out activities in partnership with dictatorships, and through the use of military enforcements (See LaFeber 1993, Handy 1984, Schlesinger and Kinzer 1983, Galeano 1973)

Chixoy may be viewed as highly symbolic in terms of Guatemalan development and its linkages to state-sponsored violence and conflicts over land and ideology, its construction represents the neoliberal development ideology resulting in thousands of dams and other mega-development projects of that period (and the present), funded and planned extensively by U S and European-based international financial institutions such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) (Witness for Peace 1996, Lynch 2007, McCully 1996) While these projects have done their share of environmental damage, as well as perpetuating dependent relationships between formally colonized nations and institutions of the Global North, they are also responsible for massive worldwide displacements, political unrest, and cultural annihilation (McCully 1996, Escobar 2003, de Wet 2008, Chomsky 1999)

By converging these interrelated subjects and interests, my thesis seeks to locate the on-the-ground realities of those affected by this form of neoliberal-inspired development, as it melds into the violent political and historical Guatemalan context Admitting that the case from Río Negro contains aspects unique to the complex nature of Guatemalan politics and the civilian armed conflict, my objective is to utilize the histories from this event to bring to light the highly destructive properties inherent with this form of development, both in Guatemala and elsewhere, in the past and the present In bringing this history into the present, I also aim to describe the deep ideological differences that remain in Guatemala between the Maya and Ladino, by illuminating the development perceptions and activities of the Achí survivors of Río Negro

Specific questions guiding my ethnographic research in Río Negro and Pacux, as well as my choice for topics covered in the literature review, includes the following

- 1 What were the ‘lived experiences’ from the Chixoy Dam project on the Maya Achi inhabitants of Río Negro, the surrounding communities, and local environment? What does the situation look like 25 years after the flooding of the basin?
- 2 How does the Chixoy Dam fit into the current national and global development discourse?
- 3 What are the perceptions of development for the current inhabitants of Río Negro, and how are they implementing these ideas into the planning of their community?

Approach

As a Master’s student of the NRES (Natural Resources and Environmental Studies) Graduate Program—Geography Stream, my thesis follows an interdisciplinary approach. With interests not limited to strictly geographic methodology, I embrace this flexibility by utilizing aspects of other disciplines, such as anthropology, environmental studies, sociology, and economics. As a natural historian, I also enjoyed the freedom to pursue interests pertaining more to the ‘natural’ sciences, rather than exclusively social.

In order to maintain solidarity with the people of Río Negro, as well as fulfill my own desire to locate and document the underlying causes for their suffering and unjust treatment, my overarching approach for this thesis is that of a critical, or radical geographic inquiry, best exemplified in the works of Harvey (1973), Peet (1977, 1998), Aitken and Valentine (2006), and Power (2003). As geographer David Harvey (2001, 2008) states: “A critical geography might go so far as to challenge contemporary forms of

political-economic power, marked by hyper-development, spiraling inequalities, and multiple signs of serious environmental degradation ” By adopting this critical stance, rather than the more traditional positionality of ‘objectivity’ and observation, my research seeks to address the urgent social issues I encountered, by remaining active and questioning of the systems that create and perpetuate injustice and inequality (Peet 1998, Manz 2008) Key approaches I use to decipher the events at Chixoy and elsewhere in Guatemala include addressing the spatial unevenness of development (Power 2003), critical North-South connections (Frank 1972), and the consequences of globalization at micro and macro levels (Harvey 2001, Galeano 1973, Chomsky 1999) Because the Chixoy Dam, as well as other human-displacing projects, are often perceived in the ‘Western’ economy as activities indicating ‘progress’ (Escobar 2003, Davis 2009, Bodley 1990), I found it necessary to make explicit the inherent flaws of capitalism, and use the example of Rio Negro as a consequence in the most severe case Although I did not adhere to one theoretical approach in which to carry this out, as mentioned above, one important theory utilized was that of a Marxist-inspired approach As stated by geographer Richard Peet (1977, 116)

The essence of the Marxist argument, therefore, is that inequality is not a “temporary aberration” nor poverty a “surprising paradox” in advanced capitalist societies, instead inequality and poverty are vital to the normal operation of capitalist economies Unemployment, underemployment, and poverty are inevitably produced by mechanization, automation, and the uneven course of economic development Inequality underlies our whole economic way of life

Along with this grounding in critical social theory, my work in Rio Negro is aligned with a growing camp of activist anthropologists and geographers dedicated to uncovering and exposing the violence occurring historically and presently in Guatemala (See Nolin 2006,

Manz 2008, 1988, Carmack 1988, Sanford and Angel-Ajani 2006, Falla 1994) The work of these scholars, including that of Guatemalan anthropologist Myrna Mack (see Lynn 1998), whose documentation of the destruction of rural villages ended with her own brutal assassination by the military in 1990, has been crucial in the dissemination of information often hidden from the public and academic sphere As repeatedly stressed by anthropologist Beatriz Manz (2008), there are no ethical choices for the social scientist or ethnographer, in a place such as Guatemala, to remain neutral and uncommitted to work in the promotion of justice and advocacy Although I was not present in Guatemala at the height of the genocide as Manz and other scholars were, I understand and adhere to this belief after witnessing the blatant injustice and inequalities in Guatemala, which continue unabated

Through the utilization of critical ethnographic methods, as will be further justified in my methods chapter, my work in Río Negro seeks to highlight the voices of those directly affected by the violent acts perpetrated against them, and my intention is to continue searching for venues in which to disseminate their story and current movement for reparations

Overview

My thesis is organized into seven separate chapters, the first of which is this introduction In chapter two, I describe the specific methods used to carry out my research, as well as the challenges I had working in Río Negro and Pacux In chapters three, four, and five, I synthesize a large body of information intended to give the reader ample background in which to understand the analysis and conclusion In chapter three, I begin with a literature

review focusing on a wide range of topics relating to ‘development,’ both in a historical and contemporary context. Following this in chapter four, I give a brief historical sketch of Guatemala, with a focus on Indigenous repression and development activities as carried out by the governing Ladino class and partners in the U S. From this broad historical perspective, I move into the Río Negro story, utilizing my own experiences, but also relying heavily on previously written documents and reports. Chapter six contains the heart of the thesis – the analysis from my ethnographic research. Finally, in chapter seven, I summarize my findings and conclude this study.

Chapter 2- Methods and Research Design

Introduction

My thesis attempts to illustrate the ‘lived experiences’ of those affected by the Chixoy Hydroelectric Dam, and the violence that occurred during, and after, its construction. In order to collect the data necessary to achieve this objective, I employed qualitative research methods as outlined by geographer Iain Hay (2005), which included semi-structured interviews, observation, and participation in the 2008 UNBC Geography field school. In addition to the ethnographic component, my research utilized secondary documents, which led to a wide-ranging literature review on the topic. In conducting this review I also achieved a grounded understanding in the situation regarding the Chixoy Dam and Río Negro, as well as the necessary underlying political and historical context.

In the utilization of at least three methods, what Baxter and Eyles (1997, 506) refer to as ‘triangulation’, I created a rigorous design for my collection of data. According to geographers Matt Bradshaw and Elaine Stratford (2003, 73), in order for rigor to be demonstrated in our work, it must be possible for our research to be evaluated, and therefore our methods must be made explicit throughout the entire process. While in Guatemala conducting fieldwork, as well as my time in the U.S. and Canada, where I conducted my literature review and data analysis, I attempted to maintain a constant self-reflection (Bailey et al. 1999), while also remaining flexible and aware of my overall objectives.

‘The Field’

The bulk of my research was carried out in the field, employing ethnographic methods (Hay 2005, Patton 2002) According to the Dictionary of Human Geography (Johnston et al, 2000, 238) ethnography is used “to convey the inner life and texture of a particular social group or locality ” Through interviews, observation, and participation in meetings and daily activities, I supplemented what had already been written about the topic, while bringing to light the on-the-ground realities that are so often left out of development studies

Ideally, ethnographic research is carried out over an extended period of time, where one can fully engage into a community or particular location As stated by geographer Matthew Taylor (2007, 182), “It is only through time in a community, however, that a story of past and present life emerges ” Due to circumstances of lack of money and time (and the fact that this is a master’s study rather than doctorate), I spent a total of four months in Guatemala, with roughly one third of this time in the communities of Rabinal and Río Negro Although this provided enough time, I believe, to interview a sufficient number of participants to reach saturation (Kirby and McKenna 1989, 123) on certain key themes in my research, as well as achieve a general understanding of what life is like in the communities, I cannot claim in this limited time to have a very in-depth, first-hand knowledge of the everyday realities of living in resettlement and poverty

As a human geographer committed to social change and justice (see Fuller 1999) for those negatively affected by the Chixoy Dam, I employed a critical stance in my ethnographic research As stated by ethnographer D Soyini Madison (2005, 5)

Critical ethnography begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain. By 'ethical responsibility,' I mean a compelling sense of duty and commitment based on moral principals of human freedom and well-being, and hence a compassion for the suffering of living beings. The critical ethnographer also takes us beneath surface appearances, disrupts the status quo, and unsettles both neutrality and taken-for-granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and control.

As a result of my commitment of solidarity to the people of Río Negro and Pacux, bias and subjectivity inevitably shape the research design, and approach. My purpose, as explicitly stated at various points throughout this study, as well as to all those involved in my research, is to document the effects of the Chixoy Dam on the original residents of Río Negro and their families. As an open critic of mega-projects—and genocide—it was my aim to generate evidence, in the form of oral histories and my own personal observation, that would denounce and expose the institutions and ideologies, responsible for the displacement, cultural annihilation, and murder that took place against the people of Río Negro (Rights Action 2000, Witness for Peace 1996, Johnston 2005ab).

Purposefully, I did not interview, or even try to contact, people in support of the dam. If desired, I could have located individuals involved in the paramilitary at the time of the counterinsurgency, and heard, first-hand, their side of the story. Although this may have provided a more balanced study, I believe that by operating in this manner I would have completely jeopardized my relationship and trust with survivors, as well as broken my firm commitment, and solidarity, with my respondents (see Nolin 2006, 10-18).

As mentioned in the introduction, my fieldwork for this thesis began, unofficially, while participating in the UNBC field school during the month of May 2008. Co-taught by Dr. Catherine Nolin and Grahame Russell of Rights Action, this course exposed a handful of students, and myself, to the realities of Indigenous displacement, the

legacies of the 36-year internal armed conflict, and the current struggles for rights-based development. Among so many localities, our group managed a trip to Rabinal, as well as the remote re-settlement community of Río Negro. Despite my previous knowledge of the massacres and Chixoy Dam⁶ it was at this point that I made initial connections with local leaders and heard, first-hand, the stories that I had read so much about. Sebastian Iboy Osorio, who is president of the local COCODE (community development council) in Río Negro, was the guide for our trip to his community, which included a boat ride across the reservoir, and a night at the recently built Centro Histórico (Historical Center). At various points, Sebastian shared his personal story, or *testimonio*, of the violence that occurred in Río Negro, as well as stories of his life, and that of the entire community. He spoke of development projects taking place in Río Negro, and guided us up the mountain one morning to the massacre site where he lost most of his family during the March 1982 massacre at Pocoxom.

During this initial visit, my classmates and I were given a unique and intimate perspective of the struggles and realities that afflict so many Indigenous Guatemalans. From this visit, I produced roughly seven pages of notes, as well as a full *testimonio* from Sebastian, which I used in my analysis.

Included in our travels of this part of Guatemala was a visit to nearby Rabinal, where we met with Jesús Tecu Osorio, a Río Negro massacre survivor, and founder of Fundación Nueva Esperanza, a local organization which opened a school dedicated to Maya-Achí culture and sustainable development. Again, it was a whirlwind of visits and

⁶ It was during Winter Semester 2008 that I was first introduced to the story of the Chixoy dam and Río Negro, while writing a research paper that addressed the similarities, and differences, between Chixoy and the Williston dam in Northern British Columbia.

various exposures to people and developments in the community, with a focus on the displacements that occurred in Río Negro, as well as the violence that took place in the local region

After several days of brainstorming ideas with Dr Nolin and Grahame Russell, we agreed that Río Negro would be an appropriate location to conduct further research for my thesis, and we discussed a set of objectives

After seven months in Canada and the United States, writing my proposal and gaining approval from the Research Ethics Board (REB) at UNBC, I returned to Guatemala in January 2009. Almost immediately, I joined a human rights delegation in Rabinal, with Grahame Russell as well as two professors from the University of Guelph. The purpose of this visit was for Grahame to introduce me to Carlos Chen, who is co-director of COCAHICH (Coordinator of the Communities Affected by the Construction of the Chixoy Dam), and a Río Negro massacre survivor. Due to Grahame's tight affiliation and support for all organizations working towards justice and reparations in Rabinal, Río Negro, and Pacux⁷, Carlos, as well as other members warmly welcomed me and encouraged further contact upon my return. Word was also sent, through these men, to Sebastian in Río Negro, informing him of my objectives to carry out this study, which included at least two weeks in Río Negro. My proposed work in Rabinal, and Río Negro, would have been much more difficult without these initial introductions, and obvious support from Grahame.

I spent the next month and half at various locations across the country, with the

⁷ A handful of local Maya-Achí groups were founded in the early 1990s to address the problems associated with the Chixoy dam. COCAHICH, and ADIVIMA (Association For the Integral Development of the Victims of Violence in the Verapaces, Maya Achí) are a couple of the most well known.

majority of my time in the city of Quetzaltenango (commonly known by the Maya name of Xela), where I studied Spanish and attended various lectures and discussions on social justice offered by my language school, Proyecto Liguistico. Throughout my time in Xela, I followed *La Prensa Libre* (the national newspaper) and other periodicals that discussed the current situation regarding development and Indigenous struggles. Having knowledge of present topics in the country provided an even greater background from which to draw, and proved to be essential for my understanding of the complex political and economic situations. I was also fortunate, during this time, to join Grahame, as well as other activists from Guatemala City, on a visit to the western department of San Marcos to meet with those presently affected by the Marlin gold mine in San Miguel Ixtahuacan. This was my second visit to the site, and I was able to meet with some of the individuals whom I met on my first trip with the field school. These discussions gave me the chance to hear how the struggle was progressing against Canadian-owned Goldcorp Inc., the current owner of the mine. Again, this visit offered a unique, on-the-ground perspective of how Indigenous peoples are affected, and react, to the forces of globalization and neo-imperialism (see Moody 2007).

Beginning in late February 2009, I arrived to Rabinal via Uspantán and Cobán, where I viewed the Chixoy River from a northerly perspective, and took inventory of the enormous landslide that killed dozens of Maya-Achí individuals—all of them members of COCAHICH—just two months before.⁸

⁸ In order to be a member of COCAHICH, one must have been directly impacted by the construction of the Chixoy Dam, or be an immediate family member of someone who was. There is current speculation between leaders from Achí organizations in Rabinal that this slide was at least partially caused by the construction of a large pipe that tunnels

I spent the remaining five weeks of my time in Guatemala between Río Negro and Rabinal. I went to Río Negro on two separate visits (in addition to my visit in 2008), spending approximately two weeks. On my first trip, I arrived to the community on foot from the small community of Chitucan (a three hour hike). The second trip I arrived by boat (the more standard method) from the dam site at Pueblo Viejo. On my second visit, which was the longest period I spent in the community, about eight days, I participated in the annual commemoration the massacre at Pocoxom, which included several hundred survivors and their children, mainly from Pacux. We all walked up the hill together, single file, just as the victims were forced to twenty-five years earlier. It was a day and night I will never forget, with dancing, religious ceremonies, feasting, and a time for many to tell their stories from March 13th 1983, when 177 Río Negro residents—mainly women and children—lost their lives and were thrown into a mass grave below the mountain pass.

Except for the one night up at Pocoxom, I spent every evening at the Centro Historico. During my time in Río Negro, three groups of students—one Canadian, one American, and one from Guatemala City—came to visit and stayed in the bunkhouse at the Centro. I participated in many of their activities, such as planting fruit trees, attending lectures by massacre survivors and current residents, and boating to the ruins at Cahual. Between visitors, I focused on setting up interviews and spent as much time as possible in the community, either helping with on-going projects, or simply ‘hanging out’ with residents. I also spent a fair amount of time waiting at the Centro for interviewees to arrive.

through the mountain, in order to bring water from the reservoir to the turbines on the other side. No conclusive evidence, as of now, has been generated to support this claim.

In Rabinal, I stayed at a local hotel, but spent most of my time in Pacux (a fifteen minute walk from the central square in Rabinal), where I carried out interviews with survivors of the massacres, and their children. I also attended several meetings with Heidi McKinnon, a Peace Fellow for the Advocacy Project⁹, who was working with ADIVIMA for reparations and on local development projects. These meetings, between community leaders, and coordinators of the various Achí groups, were very helpful in understanding the complexities regarding the reparations process, as well as learning about the daily realities of those displaced.

Data Collection

I gathered most of my data through semi-structured, open-ended interviews, as outlined by Dunn (2005) and Leech (2002). According to geographer Kevin Dunn (2005) “Semi-structured interviews employ an interview guide. The questions asked in the interview are focused and deal with the issues or areas judged by the researcher to be relevant to the research question” (88). These “interview/conversations” (Nolin 2006, 16) were typically long (one to three hours), exhaustive on the particular issues, and highly emotional. Although interviews were highly variable, based on the age of the respondent, or whether they were a current resident of Pacux or Río Negro, I followed a standard set of questions (See Appendix 2).

This form of in-depth interviewing, also known in geographical methodologies as *testimonio* (Nolin 2006), has demonstrated, according to ethnographer Celia Haig-Brown

⁹ The Advocacy Project is a non-profit organization based in Washington D.C. which sends Peace Fellows to numerous countries in order to work with local advocates for peace and social justice. For more information see <http://www.advocacynet.org/page/about>

(2003), “an apt approach to respectful, useful, and overtly political research” (416) Haig-Brown (2003) also states that the *testimonio* “has the potential to create space for other impossible knowledges that are underrepresented or invisible within conventional academic discourses” (416) The *testimonio* as a research method is also a useful way to obtain the histories of a community without interviewing every single person, a concept Catherine Nolin and Finola Shankar (2000, 267) refer to as “collective remembrance ” As stated by Haig-Brown (2003, 420) “Central to the testimonial is the fact that the life story presented is not simply a personal matter, rather, it is the story of an individual who is also a part of a community A *testimonio* presents the life of a person whose experiences, while unique, extend beyond her/him to represent the group of which she/he is a member ”

Although I hoped for the most accurate depiction of what took place in Río Negro at the time of the construction of the Chixoy Dam, I do realize the issues of accuracy that surround the use of in-depth interviews, or *testimonio*, and I agree with Clifford and Marcus (1986, 7) in that all, “ethnographic truths are thus inherently partial—committed and incomplete ” As stated by Catherine Nolin (2006, 18), “in-depth interviewing can be an excellent tool if the researcher is flexible enough to allow for some inconsistency, repetition, exaggeration, or omission in order to understand the subject of their research project in more depth ” She also goes on to mention that “when the limitations of *testimonio* and in-depth interviewing are understood and acknowledged, then the identified shortcomings can be dealt with through supplementation with secondary material such as newspapers, journalistic accounts and other written material” (Nolin 2006, 18)

Following the interviews of several key informants (see Patton 2002, 321), such as Sebastian in Río Negro, and Carlos in Rabinal, a snowball sampling process (Monk and Bedford 2005, 62) led me to other interviewees. My initial goal was to collect at least ten *testimonios*, from a diverse mix of individuals—male, female, older, younger, from Pacux and Río Negro—as well as community leaders who were involved in the social justice movement, and could speak of issues that affected the entire community. In the end, I conducted fifteen interviews. As initially hoped for, I was successful in reaching individuals from a wide range of backgrounds and ages, from a 27 year old male born while his mother was in hiding, to older (40+) males and females both active and inactive in community politics and the struggle for reparations. This number of participants, along with the diversity of their backgrounds, provided a sufficient amount of data necessary to supplement previously written accounts, while also allowing for the development of new themes. Although I do not claim to have the ‘whole’ story collected through my limited amount of interviews and time spent among residents, the fifteen interviews, from both leaders and every day citizens, illuminated several themes to be discussed in chapters five and six.

Depending on the situation, whether I was in Pacux or Río Negro, or if other outsiders were visiting, I had variable success in locating respondents willing to speak with me (this point will be further discussed later on in this chapter). The collection of some of the richest data occurred during discussions and lectures given to visiting groups while I was in Río Negro. Following these events I was usually able to ask questions that pertained to my research, as well as get contact information for future interviews. In

Pacux, Heidi McKinnon was immensely helpful in leading me to respondents, particularly women, which in turn resulted in other interviews. Although I am content with the number of interviews I conducted in Pacux, I could have conducted many more if needed. Residents were particularly fond of Heidi and her work in the community, and took me in with an incredible amount of confidence and trust.

Interviews generally took place in the homes of individuals, on the deck of the Centro Histórico in Río Negro, or at the ADIVIMA office in Rabinal. I used a digital tape recorder and asked everyone's permission before turning it on. No one asked to remain anonymous or had a problem with the recording of our discussions. Due to the highly publicized nature of the Río Negro massacres, and the success they have had with international solidarity groups, survivors expressed no fear in giving *testimonios* or participating in studies and media events. Many respondents asked to have their pictures taken and included in the report with their full names used.

Although I did not intend to pay individuals for participating in my study, I chose to bring a bag of food from the market to respondents in Pacux, in order to compensate them for their time, which cost about five to seven dollars U.S. per respondent. This gesture was recommended by Heidi, and appeared to be a standard protocol among researchers, and/or journalists, who work in the area. In Río Negro, I paid the set amount for housing at the Centro Histórico, which was two dollars U.S. per night. I also paid for transportation to and from the boat launch at Pueblo Viejo. In the end, I gave a small donation to the community for their time and food they gave me. The money was given to Sebastian, and put into a community fund for future projects.

As a strategy to obtain the most accurate information possible, as well as ask newly emerging questions, I interviewed several key informants, such as SEBASTIAN¹⁰ from Rio Negro, as well as MARIO from Pacux, on multiple occasions (Baxter and Eyles 1997, 5) Because of the informal nature of my visit, especially in Rio Negro, many discussions also took place while walking, eating, or in the boat, which I wrote about in my notebook

Participant observation was another aspect of my fieldwork, which generated a sizeable amount of data both in the communities, as well as throughout my time elsewhere in Guatemala As stated by Robin A Kearns (2005, 196), “participant observation of a geographer involves strategically placing oneself in situations in which systematic understandings of place are most likely to arise ” Although interviewing key individuals was essential in gathering data about the past and present conditions for the lives of the survivors, my observations and conversations in an everyday, unstructured setting offered new perspectives crucial for this study While in communities, I always had a small notebook with me, and would wait for appropriate times to jot down notes I then transferred all the notes into a larger notebook, which I used in my analysis

Analysis

Data analysis followed a systematic protocol under the guidance of Kirby and McKenna (1989), Patton (2002), Hay (2005) as well as my supervisor, Dr Nolin The first step involved transcription from digital files into Word documents, which was a long and fairly tedious process, as each interview was played several times in order to get the

¹⁰ All interviewees involved in this study are mentioned in CAPITAL letters, in order for the reader to make a distinction between them and other individuals

translation correct Background noise was also a major issue, as children and animals were often in the same room After completion of this step I printed out all the transcriptions and made Xerox copies of my notes After reading them through several times, I began to take note of recurring patterns, or themes, that emerged from the data The most pronounced themes are 1) Effects of Violence, 2) Economic Impacts, and 3) Contemporary Development

After identifying these initial over-arching themes, I identified sub-themes that corresponded, and supported, the major topics Each sub-theme received a code, and I used a highlighter and pen to organize the data, and made extensive notes in the margins

The sub-themes identified in my transcriptions and notes are a direct result of my beliefs and educational background, and therefore, are subjective For example, under the final theme, Contemporary Development, I identified Social Justice as a sub-theme, due to the fact that I view social justice as an element of ‘positive’ development (see Power 2003) An economist, however, may not view this form of discourse as one of ‘development ’

For the analysis chapter of this thesis, I synthesized the themes and sub-themes into a narrative In this narrative, I also included direct quotes of selected individuals, which strengthened the weight of my argument (Baxter and Eyles 1997) Although I originally intended to discuss all nine sub-themes coded in the data, I condensed these original nine into six, to create a much stronger narrative, and to avoid redundancy

Challenges

Despite my connections with Grahame, Sebastian, and Carlos, and my established solidarity among survivors and their children, access to respondents was an issue. As stated by anthropologists Gupta and Ferguson (1997, 5) “Anyone who has done fieldwork, or studied the phenomenon, knows that one does not just wander onto a ‘field site’ to engage in a deep and meaningful relationship with ‘the natives.’” Although this statement somewhat contradicts my experience in Pacux, where we made many lasting bonds with relative ease, in Río Negro, it was a different story. For example, in Río Negro, residents were extremely busy, and did not seem to have a whole lot of time to accommodate me (which I completely understood!). Although I stated, on several occasions, my willingness to volunteer with anything that needed assistance (such as digging holes for foundations, hauling supplies to the Centro from the boats, cleaning the Centro after guests departed), I was typically not invited to work. This response was understandable and I did not take it personally. Many projects are happening, one in particular involved the building of new homes with concrete blocks donated by the municipality of Rabinal. A handful of carpenters were hired from Rabinal to work on the construction, who appeared to be working at least 12-hour days. Every male I saw from the village was involved in this project.

Due to the layout of the community of Río Negro, and the location of the Centro Histórico, it was a bit awkward to simply wander into ‘town’, which consisted of a dozen family compounds, spread out over a relatively large area. What this resulted in, for me, was a lot of time waiting at the Centro, for people to arrive, or for meetings, which were typically scheduled late in the afternoon.

While conducting research in Río Negro, as well as Pacux, inevitable complications associated with cross-cultural research emerged (see Scheyvens and Storey 2003, Patton 2002) In Río Negro, my position as an ‘outsider’ was much more pronounced (than in Pacux), as residents there lived in a much more traditional manner Except for Sebastian, I assume that many residents from Río Negro are not accustomed in dealing with visiting gringos like myself I found the women to be extremely shy, and for the most part, not totally comfortable speaking with me, especially alone Additionally, some of the older women may speak only limited Spanish Although I never felt threatened by anyone in Río Negro, people were less inviting, and kept to themselves I imagine that through extensive time I would have gained better access into the community

In Pacux, residents are much more integrated into a more ‘westernized’ culture, and used to seeing ‘white’ researchers, development workers, and tourists Despite the overwhelming poverty, some residents had television sets, cell phones, and used the internet at school This familiarity, however, did not translate into any animosity towards me, at least none that I became aware of Residents were open, extremely friendly, and curious about my life in Canada and the United States Part of this openness may have to do with my affiliation with Grahame and Heidi, whom they obviously respected and adored

Another major challenge was that of the language barrier Although I felt relatively comfortable with my Spanish language skills, they could have been better, and despite my training in Guatemala, one cannot escape the changes in local dialect and slang that accompanies conversation in the *campo*, or countryside Although the

interviews went smoothly, as respondents generally spoke slower and more clearly when on a one-on-one basis, making appointments on the phone was very challenging, as was understanding discussion at community meetings. To make interactions much more difficult, in Río Negro, most people almost never spoke Spanish. This meant that even if I did get invited into a home, or was able to observe some sort of activity or chore, residents generally spoke in Achí. And, as stated earlier, I understand that most women speak only limited Spanish, or in some instances, none at all.

Ethical Considerations

At the forefront of my ethical concerns was that of representation (Smith 2006). As stated by anthropologists Marcus and Fischer (1999, 83), “the crisis [of representation] arises from uncertainty about adequate means of describing social reality.” At various points throughout this research, I caught myself thinking *Who am I, a North American white male, to interpret the stories from Río Negro, to express their dreams of development, while molding it into complex theories and explanations?* In grappling with this dilemma, I remained self-conscious about my limitations as an interpreter of knowledge and experiences, and kept in mind that all writings of this nature (whether the author believes so or not) are highly dependent on the individual perceptions and background of the researcher (Geertz 1988). I also attempted to remain explicit and self-reflective (Dowling 2005, 28) throughout the entire process, from research to writing to presentation, with a full acknowledgement that what I saw, wrote about, and questioned, was entirely based on my emotions, as well as my academic background and interests.

Alongside these issues of representation and interpretation is that of ‘positionality’ (see Aitken and Valentine 2006, Sundberg 2003) According to Kim England (2006, 289)

Positionality is about how people view the world from different embodied locations The situatedness of knowledge means whether we are researchers or participants, we are differently situated by our social, intellectual and spatial locations, by our intellectual history and our lived experiences, all of which shape our understandings of the world and the knowledge we produce Positionality also refers to how we are positioned (by ourselves, by others, by particular discourses) in relation to multiple, relational social processes of difference (gender, class, ‘race/ethnicity’, age, sexuality, and so on), which also means we are differently positioned in hierarchies of power and privilege

As a North American (with all the privileges and power that go along with it) I often wondered what interviewees thought about me, and whether there was any resentment (although none was visibly expressed) I also wondered, at times, whether my respondents—especially in Pacux—hoped that by speaking with me, they might be able to get some form of financial gain from it There was one instance in particular, where one interviewee talked in great length about his financial woes, and how he hoped that Rights Action would help fund some of his project ideas He then went on to mention, several times, my relationship with Grahame This was an isolated incident, and for the most part I firmly believe that respondents knew my objectives well, and felt empowered by speaking with me, and knowing that someone, like myself, cared deeply about what they experienced, and was there in solidarity

As stated earlier, my own background of education, upbringing, and political stance, as well as my position of solidarity and deep compassion for those I interviewed, affected the way I wrote and planned this study At times, my own attachment to the survivors, as well as the emotional difficulties I had in dealing with the stories I heard

made it difficult to maintain my ‘professionalism’ (Hume and Mulcock 2004, 154) I felt compelled to help respondents any way that I could, and at times, I held myself back from giving some of the women in Pacux personal donations after hearing about their struggles. As a means of dealing with these emotions, while also desiring to achieve my research objectives, I attempted to study my own emotions by keeping good notes and opening up to survivors. This, in turn, empowered and propelled me, and made my small and seemingly insignificant objectives feel worthy.

Despite all these issues to take into consideration, I believe that I acted in an ethical manner throughout this project. I worked in collaboration with the participants of the study, and tried my best to employ methods that would empower and relate their story, in the most accurate way possible, to an audience that might not be reached were it not for someone to listen and observe. I also intend to transfer the material from this thesis into Spanish, as well as write more articles that will bring their story to a popular, non-academic audience¹¹

¹¹ In May 2010, I was fortunate to return to Río Negro with Dr. Nolin and other students as part of the 2010 UNBC Field School. At this time I handed over an article to the community that I wrote for *EntreMundos Magazine*, a popular venue of human rights published in Quetzaltenango. The article, titled *Río Negro’s Truth/La Verdad de Río Negro*, covered a brief history of their return to Río Negro after the massacres. It was translated into Spanish by the editor of the magazine.

Chapter 3- Literature Review

When we project modernity, as we define it, as the inevitable destiny of all human societies, we are being disingenuous in the extreme. Indeed, the Western model of development has failed in so many places in good measure because it has been based on the false promise that people who follow its prescriptive dictates will in time achieve the material prosperity enjoyed by a handful of nations of the West. In reality, development for the vast majority of the peoples of the world has been a process in which the individual is torn from his past, propelled into an uncertain future, only to secure a place on the bottom rung of an economic ladder that goes nowhere.

Davis (1999, 196)

The topics covered in this literature review intend to provide the reader with an understanding of my theoretical approaches, in addition to context and background on key issues, or themes, within the global development discourse. As stated in the introductory chapter, my primary approach for this thesis falls under a critical geographic inquiry. Choices for the topics explored in this review reflect my theoretical grounding, and result in a lens highly critical of 'Western' hegemony in regards to 'development,' particularly within formally colonized nations. Four separate, yet interrelated, topics are covered in this chapter, beginning with a discussion on postcolonial theory, and followed by a critical analysis of 'development,' focusing primarily on the past century. I conclude with a discussion of neoliberalism, and a brief overview of dams and displacement on a worldwide scale.

Postcolonialism

In the colonial experience, which lasted from 1524 to 1821, lie the seeds of contemporary Guatemalan underdevelopment and dependency.

Jonas (1991, 14)

The theory of postcolonialism, with its broad critique of ‘development’ and structural racism within formally colonized nations (Escobar 1995, Power 2003, Said 1978) is an especially useful tool in deconstructing the Chixoy Dam project and its effects on the people of Río Negro, as it forces us to acknowledge that colonial systems remain in place today, and thus affect all layers of political and social activity. As stated by geographer Sarah Radcliffe (2005, 291) “Postcolonialism speaks to the fact that different imperial and colonial encounters are embedded within expectations of modernity and hierarchy. Most importantly, the material and discursive legacies of these encounters live on in the ambivalent and tense North–South relations of development.” Through the critical examination of these ‘North-South relations of development’ as Radcliffe puts it, which in the colonial period involved, among many activities, the extraction of precious metals and its exportation to the North, as well as laying the blueprint for oppressive systems of labor, it becomes apparent how the ‘First World’ and ‘Third World’ were effectively created (Galeano 1973, Escobar 1992, Wright 2009). As Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano concludes (1973, 2)

For those who see history as a competition, Latin America’s backwardness and poverty are merely the result of its failure. We lost, others won. But the winners happen to have won thanks to our losing, the history of Latin America’s underdevelopment is, as someone has said, an integral part of the history of world capitalism’s development. [Our defeat was always implicit in the victory of others, our wealth has always generated our poverty by nourishing the prosperity of others—the empires and their native overseers. In the colonial and neocolonial alchemy, gold changes into scrap metal and food into poison.]

Despite the wide variation of colonial experiences across the Global South, geographer Marcus Power (2003, 29) argues that the discrediting and dismantling of traditional

cultures, and the missions to modernize and ‘civilize’ the ‘backwards’ societies, were ubiquitous across colonial geographies, and that “developmentalism was associated with an unconditional belief in the concept of progress and the ‘makeability’ of society ” Following the era of formal colonialization, which affected much of today’s ‘third world’ countries (Escobar 1992), ‘liberated’ nations were quickly and effectively transformed into ‘peripheral satellites’ for the Global North to control and situate into the world economy, where they were encouraged to “produce what they did not consume (e g primary products) and consume what they did not produce (e g manufactured/industrial goods)” (Power 2003, 82) As researcher Evelyne Hong (2002, 7-8) states in her report on the effects of globalization on world health

‘Imperial policies’ and the market enterprise did not end with colonialism, it was given a new name with ‘Development’ With independence and the postwar ‘development decades’ that followed, Third World states became tied to the world system of trade, finance and investment with the TNCs [transnational corporations] in the forefront of this economic order to enable the newly independent states to catch up with their former colonial masters, it was believed that economic development was the answer

According to Colombian anthropologist Arturo Escobar (1992), the U S and other nations of the Global North maintained hegemonic relations with former colonies by importing their newly constructed industrial programs shortly after the fall of the Axis Powers in Europe Several concepts, such as ‘neocolonialism’ (Ashcroft et al 2000, 128)—which asserts that colonialism never really died, yet merely changed forms—and ‘modernity’ (Escobar 2003,1), stem from this era As pointed out by Latin American historian Thomas O’Brien (2007, 187), “Modernization theorists asserted that the wealth generated by their development would trickle down through the layers of society and make it unnecessary to redistribute economic or political power through revolutions ”

The forces of modernization—often funded and designed by financial institutions and ‘aid’ programs from the U S and Europe—facilitated the construction of roads, dams, suburbs and industrial farms, and created the military infrastructure in order to protect it (Power 2003, 31-37)

In Guatemala, schemes of modernization have appeared in various forms since the country’s independence in 1821, from the large-scale infrastructure programs built by the United Fruit Company of Boston in the early to mid 20th century (Bucheli 2006), to the construction of dams (Witness for Peace 1996) and projects for rural electrification (Taylor 2004) As will be further discussed, these “exclusionary modernization processes” (Kay 2001, 24)—frequently dictated by foreign companies and financial institutions (Handy 1984, Galeano 1973)—often create further stratification of society, rather than bring economic and social equality (Manz 2005, CEH 1999)

‘Development’

The dominant development model of our time is economic globalization, a system fueled by the belief that a single global economy with universal rules set up by corporations and financial markets is inevitable Economic freedom, not democracy or ecological stewardship, is the defining metaphor of the post-cold war period for those in power

Barlow and Clark (2002, 81)

The definition of ‘development’ varies widely across all boundaries and ideologies, from its typical Western assumption of production and accumulation of capital (Escobar 1992), to its meaning among Indigenous peoples—including the Maya of Guatemala—which commonly relates to their spiritual views of land and resources, and the preservation of traditional livelihoods (Davis 1993, Ashton and Bryan 2002, Amnesty International 2005,

Fischer and Brown 1996) Although universal definitions of the concept are nearly always perceived as progressive and positive, offering solutions to poverty, inequality, and access to services (Loker 1996, 77), scholars such as Gilbert Rist (2004) argue that the pro-growth, positivist model which has dominated the past century completely degrades the kind of development that may better represent marginalized peoples, while truly only benefiting a select minority

Development critics of the past half century argue that free markets and neoliberal economic strategies¹² on a massive global scale, dictated by financial institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF)¹³ as well as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (O'Brien 2007, LaFaber 1987), are deeply entrenched in the world system, and offer limited positive and equally beneficial development to a large percentage of the population, especially within the Global South (Power 2003, Peet and Watts 1996) As stated by Power (2003, 132) "Despite all the talk of 'empowerment', 'development' is still very much something that is defined and enunciated by the 'First World' Just as in colonial times, the frameworks and strategies of development are authored outside the country concerned and are grounded in foreign

¹² These concepts, developed by Adam Smith and built into its current form by Milton Friedman among other American capitalist economists of the 1950s, are based on the assumption that an economic system dictated by the global market, free from government regulations, restrictions, and international tariffs, will create a free and balanced environment (see Harvey 2004) However, as will be discussed further in the following section, this strategy has its negative effects, due in part to the lack of protection from foreign exploiters, and the privatization of social services

¹³ The World Bank and IMF were founded in 1944 at the historic Bretton Woods conference in New Hampshire, with the purpose of post-WWII reconstruction in Europe, and a means to open up access to world markets Its most recent primary objective is the alleviation of worldwide poverty through its financial support of 'development' projects in 'Third World' and 'Developing' nations, yet critics argue that the projects and programs it often supports do not put into account local needs (Palacios and Perez 1999) For a full overview of the Bank's objectives and strategies, go to www.worldbank.org

(neoliberal) ideologies ” The ideologies that Power (2003) refers to are a direct reflection of our capitalist system and dominant Western views of ‘progress,’ which exist solely through mass production, consumption, and exploitation of natural resources And as aptly stated by Galeano (1997, 215), the ‘success’ of the Global North within this development paradigm “depends on the perpetuation of injustice The deprivation of the majority is necessary so that the waste of a few is possible ”

Free from the constraints of regulation, Hong (2000, 8) informs us that the present systems of free-market capitalism that dominate the international discourse lead to a dramatic increase in consolidation and power by the multinational corporations, which are in turn “unaccountable to government ” Projects and programs involving mining (Holt-Gimenez 2007), oil extraction (Watts 2004), export-agriculture on an industrial scale (Bello 2009, Handy 1984), and textile production (Keeling 2004, 10), exemplify this model of privatization, modernization and exclusion, which often results in increased poverty for the vast majority and widespread environmental degradation (Escobar 1995) In defense of the negative effects generated by these ‘development’ activities, economists often site quantitative measurements which describe improvements in livelihood to those affected, yet as pointed out by Galeano (1997, 222) “Statistics admit, but do not repent In the last resort, human dignity depends on cost-benefit analysis, and the sacrifice of the poor is nothing but the ‘social cost’ of Progress ” Similarly speaking, Davis (2009, 196-197) examines the realities of ‘progress’ often hidden from economic spreadsheets and databases

Consider the key indices of the development paradigm An increase in life expectancy suggests a drop in infant mortality, but reveals nothing of the quality of the lives led by those who survive childhood Globalization is celebrated with iconic intensity But what does it really mean? In Bangladesh, garment workers

are paid pennies to sell clothing that retails in the United States and Canada for tens of dollars. Eighty percent of the toys and sporting goods sold in America are produced in sweatshops in China, where millions work for wages as low as 12 cents an hour, 400,000 die prematurely each year due to air pollution, and 400 million people do not have access to potable water, so ruined are the rivers with industrial wealth.

Explanations for the current global development paradigm are often linked to the post-WWII era, at the beginning of the Cold War (Escobar 1996, Zia 2007). The rise of U.S. power, harsh anti-communist policies, and the creation of the World Bank and the IMF were crucial in putting modernization and global capitalism to work in the Global South (Palacios and Perez 1999), thus perpetuating dependent relationships between former imperial colonies and 'Western' societies (Frank 1972). Through its massive lending programs—which resulted in funds for the world's largest dams and industrial agricultural systems—these international financing agencies created a system of debt and vulnerability for receiving nations,¹⁴ while effectively keeping vital markets open for the continuation of exploitation and increasingly consumptive appetites in the Global North¹⁵ (Hong 2000, 7-11, O'Brien 2007, Galeano 1973, Frank 1972). As stated by food and land policy analyst Eric Holt-Giménez (2007, 5), the World Bank—despite its stated objective of poverty reduction and reform—works primarily as an agent to restructure space and

¹⁴ According to critics of the World Bank/IMF and other 'development' agencies (see Power 2003, Ferraro and Rosser 1994), the debt crisis resulting from Bank loans has perpetuated global poverty, particularly in the world's poorest regions, such as Sub-Saharan Africa. It is reported that as of 2002, developing nations were \$523 billion in debt to northern creditors, with over \$500 billion paid in interest since the 1970s (see Shah 2005).

¹⁵ As an element of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP), the World Bank loans out capital based on the agreement that certain reforms, such as trade liberalization and privatization, become instituted by receiving governments. Typically, this makes it easier for First World entrepreneurs to exploit with greater freedom. Critics, such as Walden Bello (2009), argue that these programs increase poverty rather than reduce it, by perpetuating neo-colonial policies of unequal power relations and distribution of land.

politics within the Global South to allow the entrance of foreign capitalists. For a large percentage of Indigenous and marginalized peoples—including the Maya of Guatemala—these policies have perpetuated historic struggles and begun new ones in their wake, as land and tradition must be continually defended (Bodley 1990)

As will be described further in the next chapter, capitalist development in Guatemala is marked by deep inequalities in political power and access to land and resources, which became institutionalized under Spanish rule (Lovell 1988, CEH 1999). Despite the progressive gains made between 1944 and 1954 during the democratically-elected administrations of Presidents Juan José Arrévalo and Jacobo Arbenz Guzman, which included agrarian reform, access to social services, and increased rights to workers (Chasteen 2006), present-day Guatemala suffers from extreme economic and social inequalities (Kurtenbach 2008), and according to the Centre for Economic and Social Rights (2008, 2) maintains the highest Human Poverty Index rating in all the Americas, after Haiti¹⁶

According to Taylor et al (2006), one may view Guatemalan ‘development’ in its relation to the land-holding elite, and their need for cheap labor by the peasant majority. Along with this oppressive (post) colonial structure, deep historic divides between ideologies and how development is carried out exist throughout the country, which has led to violent uprisings and reprisals by the state, as well as a persistent condition of rural and urban poverty, and increased migration (Witness for Peace 1996, May 1999, Manz 2005, Taylor et al 2006, Nolin 2006). As stated by Maya activist Raxche’ (1996, 77)

¹⁶ This index, designed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP)(2007/2008), factors current levels of illiteracy, child malnutrition, and access to health services, among others

In Guatemala development plans are complicated by the existence of two major peoples, markedly different in history, language, and culture and with a history of unequal power relations. In this context, growth, advancement, excellence, improvement, and change are relative, what direction does 'development' have to take in order to qualify as advancement, positive change, or improvement if what the Ladino cultural community considers advancement is the continuation of colonial subjugation and domination of the Maya cultural community? Development philosophies are not formulated by the Maya, who, because of the cultural oppression they have suffered for five hundred years, have their own concept of the type of development that the country needs.

Along with much of the Indigenous populations around the world, the Maya *campesinos*, or traditional agriculturalists of Guatemala, have suffered disproportionately from displacement and exclusion (Munck 2005, 112, Ashton and Bryan 2002), as modern capitalist development often discredits their 'anti-modernist' ideologies and livelihoods (Holden and Jacobson 2008, Colchester 2000, Loker 2006, Davis 2009). According to Shelton Davis (1993), a fundamental difference exists in how Indigenous peoples view land and 'development,' which in turn leaves them more vulnerable to the negative effects of globalization. As stated by Davis (1993, 11)

Indigenous peoples—in contrast to Western economists and development planners—do not view land as a 'commodity' which can be bought and sold in impersonal markets, nor do they view the trees, plants, animals and fish which cohabit the land as 'natural resources' which produce profits or rents. To the contrary, the indigenous view—which was probably shared by our ancestors prior to the rise of the modern industrial market economy—is that land is a substance endowed with sacred meanings, embedded in social relations and fundamental to the definition of a people's existence and identity.

The Maya are noted to hold similar values to land (Lovell 1988, Oxfam 2005), and how it is developed, which contrasts sharply from activities pursued by the state, as well as the foreign proponents of modernist development (Jonas 1991, 2000, Kurtenbach 2008, World Bank 2008). In a recent study which addresses the issue of mining in the country,

Holden and Jacobson (2008, 135) state that “activities such as open pit mining are utterly alien to the Mayan cosmovision,” and that its regional opposition “is another demonstration of resistance to neoliberalism ”(145) Holden and Jacobson (2008) also go on to assert that this form of capitalist development threatens the age-old cultural practices endemic to the Maya-Mam of San Marcos (where the study took place), due to involuntary displacement, and the changing of patterns inherent to their traditional livelihood According to the Minority Rights Group International (2008a), the Guatemalan government admitted that certain linguistic groups such as the Chortí, Mam, Chuj, and Sipakapense “will be faced with ethnocide if the mining projects are not handled appropriately ” In another study, geographers Steinberg and Taylor (2008), find similar cultural deterioration in the Cuchumatán Highlands of Guatemala, where they indicate that globalization, as well as population pressures, is resulting in negative pressures on maize diversity¹⁷ and traditional agro-ecological knowledge

Aside from these contemporary and localized examples, the issue of land, and how it is perceived and utilized, has been an on-going struggle between the Maya majority and Ladino landholders and politicians since the arrival of the Spanish nearly five-hundred years ago (Grandin 2004, Lovell 1988, Fischer and Brown 1997), thus dictating the national development discourse Whether it is mining, industrial export agriculture, or the building of dams, the development model expressed in Guatemala displaces and discredits the livelihood of rural Mayas, and offers little respite to the debilitating poverty that afflicts much of the nation (Kurtenbach 2008) However, despite these well

¹⁷ Maize, or corn, is a crop endemic to highland Guatemala with high cultural and spiritual significance (see Huff 2008) Due to manipulation by Maya peoples over the past thousand+ years, maize varieties are highly diverse (see Steinberg and Taylor 2008)

documented realities, the World Bank still insists on a highly debatable scheme of modernization and free-market reforms (Gauster and Isakson 2007, World Bank 2004, Food First 2002, Holt-Gimenez 2007), and the governments, whether dictatorships or democratically elected, are predominantly receptive to the Bank's prescriptions (Manz 2005, Kurtenbach 2008, Holden and Jacobson 2008)

Challenges to the current worldwide systems of development come from both North and South, and a growing resentment is evident among many global citizens towards the dominant model (Loker 1997, 76, Escobar 1992, Klein 2007, Wright 2009, Simon 2003) Postdevelopment is one of the recent theories developed to critique “western notions and assumptions of superiority and expertise that are seen to very often accompany development interventions and aid” (Sidaway 2007, 347) According to geographers Peet and Hartwick (1999, 11), the framework of postdevelopment suggests that we completely redefine what is meant by ‘progress’ and ‘modernity’ As stated by Power (2003, 26)

[Postdevelopment] involves a new kind of methodology in that everything that had previously been taken for granted or seen as untouchable is called into question as long-standing certainties are destabilized Thus development is seen here not just an instrument of economic control and management, but also as a knowledge discipline which marginalizes peoples and cultures and precludes other ways of seeing or doing development

From a Latin American perspective, Escobar (1992, 22) insists that within a growing realization of the post-WWII “hegemony of development”—which in turn created the ‘Third World’ into its present state of poverty, conflict, and debt—movements at the grassroots level, as well as scholarly opposition, will aid the postdevelopment momentum already in place As stated by Escobar (1992, 20)

Where one spoke of Development—or its flip side, Revolution—one is now allowed to speak a very different language that of the ‘crisis’ of development, on the one hand, and ‘new social actors’ and ‘new social movements’ on the other. In fact, many scholars seem to be proposing a radical reinterpretation of social and political reality based on a new set of categories such as ‘alternative development,’ new identities, radical pluralism, historicity and hegemony

Guatemala, among other Latin American nations, provides a clear example of local opposition movements towards the dominant development model, as well as communities embracing ‘alternative’ and ‘sustainable’ development activities as a means to combat poverty and environmental degradation, and maintain their culture¹⁸ (Holden and Jacobson 2008, International Rivers 2008, Cevallos 2006, COPAE 2006, Warren 1998, Rights Action 2007). Since the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996, hundreds, if not thousands, of local and national development groups have formed, or reorganized across the country. Organizations such as the National Indigenous and Peasant Coalition (CONIC), Campesino Committee of the Highlands (CCDA), and Madre Selva have been particularly active and influential in their work for environmental justice, the enforcement of fair trade practices, agrarian reform (as promised by the Accords), the revitalization of language and culture, and against imposed development projects that perpetuate historical struggles (Rodriguez 2008, Viscidi 2004, Montejo 2005).

Arguably one of the most controversial and widely opposed development initiatives in the country surrounds mining and other proposed mega-development projects (Holden and Jacobson 2008, ADISMI 2007, Fulmer et al 2008, Diaz 2009,

¹⁸ Despite the relatively open space created over the past decade for environmental and social justice movements to take shape across Guatemala (Fulmer et al 2008), repression in the form of threats, local military build-up, assassinations of community peasant leaders, and unlawful detentions, occur as a result of opposition against state-sanctioned development programs (see Amnesty International 2003, Fitzpatrick Behrens 2009)

Bonillo 2009) As stated by Holt-Gimenez (2007, 22), in his report on the Marlin Mine in the northwestern department of San Marcos, and its connection to World Bank programs within the country

[in] Guatemala, mining must be viewed as a *broad-based agrarian threat*, not only to peasant livelihoods, but to indigenous existence in the Highlands This threat arises not simply from the mine-shed—the footprint of social and environmental externalities associated with the physical act of mining—it is inherent in the political and economic transformation of rural territory associated with the restructured development hyperspace created by the World Bank the very hyperspace that enable activities like predatory gold mining to take root in the first place

Despite the (temporary) employment created through any form of infrastructure or ‘development’ project located within the rural, poverty-stricken districts of the country, environmental degradation due to the use of chemicals such as cyanide, excessive water usage, involuntary human displacement, and the negative effects from explosions and other large machinery, are just a few of the reasons why Guatemalans oppose mining projects in their communities (Holden and Jacobson 2008, Rights Action 2009, COPAE 2009) As stated in an Amnesty International (2005, 1) interview with Rudolfo Pocop, an Indigenous activist from San Marcos near the World Bank-funded Marlin gold mine

The benefit of mining to Guatemala is about one percent of the earnings generated, and only about half of one percent is for the municipality So after all the millions and millions are taken out, half of one percent is nothing And after they are done, they will leave our lands and they will be no longer useful for agriculture In the case of the Marlin mine, they project 109,000 ounces of gold and silver With this comes the destruction of 10,000 hectares of land There will be a lot of Mayan communities unable to survive into the future Our struggle going forward as indigenous people directly affected by mining is based on three principles we will keep struggling so that our cultural rights as indigenous peoples are recognized, under no conditions will we negotiate with the government or companies the principles of lands and territories—we have a territory, and this should be respected, and we have the freedom of self determination about our lands and territories and their resources

As a result of large-scale opposition to mining, local, national, and international groups are active in organizing communities, staging large protests, drawing up plans for alternative development projects and initiatives, and carrying out community consultations, or *consultas*¹⁹, which take into account local opinion of potential future mining (see Rights Action 2009, Bonillo 2009, Fulmer et al 2008) Although not all communities are effective in keeping foreign-controlled mining out of their districts through these processes and actions, certain municipalities, such as Sipicapa in the department of San Marcos, have kept the nearby Marlin mine from expanding operations into their communities, primarily through the *consulta* process (FHRG 2005, Paley 2007) As stated by Fulmer et al (2008, 22-23), in their study of successful resistance movements surrounding the Marlin mine

The Marlin mine typifies both the social and economic structures that have been in place since the Conquest and the newly emerging kinds of encounters between global corporations and local communities that will define the twenty-first century The iconic image of the poor Latin American peasant sitting atop a mountain of gold, ironically unable to benefit from the wealth of natural resources at hand, unfortunately still seems apt Yet the legal terrain on which both indigenous peasants and corporate moguls are attempting to find their footing has also undeniably shifted

Although somewhat smaller in stature to the mining resistance, a similar movement in the country is gaining momentum against the construction of more human-displacing

¹⁹ The *consulta popular* is a traditional procedure among Mayan communities to make collective decisions Although the process is legal under Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization (ILO)—which was signed into ratification by the Guatemalan Government in 1997— and states that all Indigenous peoples must be properly consulted before natural resource extraction takes place on their land, the Guatemalan government views *consultas* as non-binding under the constitution (see Kern 2007, COPAE 2008, Rights Action 2009) In the past decade hundreds of Indigenous communities have carried out *consultas* to state their formal opposition towards potential mining, hydroelectric, and oil and gas projects

hydroelectric dams in several locations across the country (International Rivers 2008, Kern 2007, Bonillo 2009)

In Rabinal and Río Negro, the specific locations for this particular study, local Maya-Achi development and human rights groups are actively pursuing a ‘rights based’ development initiative, which according to the Washington Office on Latin America (2000, 2), is described as a system where “people have a right to participate in the political and policy decisions that shape their lives ” These initiatives include sustainable agriculture (in contrast to export-based), and educational opportunities that focus on Indigenous empowerment and learning skills that are applied directly to their own communities Specific development projects, such as the new tourism and cultural center at Río Negro, which brings income to the entire community while educating international and national students, will be thoroughly discussed in the analysis and discussion chapters of this thesis

Neoliberalism

Certainly neoliberalism has constructed, with its great financial capital, a formidable enemy, capable of dictating wars, bankruptcies, “democracies”, lives, and above all, deaths in every corner of the world In this war of total conquest, everything and everyone must be subordinated to the judgment of the marketplace, whoever opposes or impedes it will be eliminated To oppose neoliberalism, to fight against it, is not just a political or ideological option, it is a question of the survival of humanity

Subcomandante Marcos (2004, 325)

One of the first experiments with neoliberalism occurred in Chile after the symbolic removal of progressive socialist President Salvador Allende by General Augusto Pinochet

in 1973 (Harvey 2005, 7-8) In an attempt to save the country from a ‘communist’ takeover, Pinochet violently overthrew democratically-elected Allende, instituting a doctrine—with support from the U S —consisting of “privatization, deregulation of financial and labor controls, reduction of social provisioning, and the facilitation of free-market principal” (Radcliffe 2005, 328) Since that point in the early 1970’s, neoliberal ideology has been imported and imposed throughout the world, with the help of international banks and U S imperialism, ensuring nations that “macroeconomic stability and greater efficiency will favor economic growth, which in the long term should reduce poverty and inequality and improve access to capital, skills, and opportunities” (Keeling 2004, 9) As geographer Marcus Power (2003, 9) defines it, this ‘religion’ of how development is operated and currently perceived “naturalises an image of internal markets as fair and efficient (when the reality is altogether different) and privileges ‘lean government’, economic deregulation and the removal of state subsidies to marginal and disadvantaged communities ”

The results of unbridled freedom in the global financial sector have proven to be disastrous on many fronts According to geographer David J Keeling (2004, 9) “Neoliberal reforms and the drive towards free-market economies within the context of globalization have placed renewed pressure on the physical environment and on natural resource inventories ” With state disengagement, often a rule under World Bank and IMF loans, come the increased exploitation of land, the decrease in social programs, and the protection of workers, assuming that a top-down trickling of wealth will eventually reach the lower echelon of society (O’Brien 2007, 187, Power 2003, 78-79) According to

Subcomandante Marcos (1997, 1), a leading figure and spokesman in the Zapatista struggle of Southern Mexico

One of the lies of neoliberalism is that the economic growth of companies produces employment and a better distribution of wealth. This is untrue. In the same way that the increasing power of a king does not lead to an increase in the power of his subjects (far from it), the absolutism of finance capital does not improve the distribution of wealth, and does not create jobs. In fact its structural consequences are poverty, unemployment and precariousness.

Since the historic event in Chile, Latin America has served as the U S 's experimental breeding ground for neoliberalism, which has arguably “exacerbated, rather than reduced, the uneven geographies of development” (Perreault and Martin 2005, 197). Instead of providing social services and protection from the ills of global power structures, such as tariffs, labor and environmental standards, many governments in Latin America now play a role in protecting industry and the neoliberal system by setting up “military, defense, police, and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets” (Harvey 2005, 2).

Exploitation of water, people, and minerals have coincided with the inability of the state to regulate multi-national corporations based on free-trade agreements and structural adjustment policies imposed by the World Bank/IMF (Keeling 2004, 15). President Ronald Reagan, whose influence in Central America cannot be overstated, had much to do with importing these ideals into the region during his 1981-89 tenure, often with the strong arm of the U S military, and help of authoritarian governments (LaFeber 1993). According to Fagan (1987, 26), “The central instrument of US policy since 1980 has been military force unleashed in a complex strategy that marries local armies to US money, technology, and tactics.” According to their research document outlining the effects of neoliberalism on educational reform in Chile, Henales and Edwards (2002,

120) state that “just as the dictatorships of the 70’s and 80’s were necessary to implant and sustain the first crude forms of economic liberalization, representative democracies and increasingly stratified systems are now necessary to protect and maintain neo-liberal policy ”

Neoliberal economic policies in Guatemala mirror much of the liberal, positivist-inspired ‘development’ activities of the early 20th century (Handy 1984), which included privatization of communal lands, forced labor, and massive export agriculture projects. Along with all the terms of neoliberalism, such as deregulation and the cutting of social services, Guatemala has experienced a dramatic increase in the development and planning of mega-projects over the past quarter century, primarily in the sectors of mining, electricity generation, and agrofuel production (Haas 2008, COPAE 2008, Wittma et al 2007), which results in similar issues of displacement, marginalization, and continued social unrest. Despite widespread opposition to these activities, as stated above, the enactment of multinational agreements such as the Central American Free Trade Agreement- Dominican Republic (CAFTA-DR), as well as a new mining law allows foreign investors to operate with greater ease in the country, and pay less royalties and taxes (GHRC 2008, COPAE 2005, Robinson 2000, Holden and Jacobson 2008). CAFTA-DR, which passed in Guatemala in 2005, is essentially an agreement between the U S and Central American nations that allows the fundamentals of neoliberalism to be placed into a legally binding document. As stated by the Guatemalan Pastoral Commission on Peace and Ecology (2008, 30)

With CAFTA, Central American countries are essentially concessioned off for 50 years, rendering governments effectively powerless, without the right to supervise or regulate foreign companies. Chapter 10 of CAFTA, the chapter related to foreign investment, sets an unequal legal playing field— it is very difficult for a state to take

legal action against a multinational company, while investor companies can sue the state as they please for loss or potential loss of profit caused by any change in regulation, law, or policy. These changes often arise from the legitimate demands of the affected populations. Thus, chapter 10 of CAFTA, similar to the extremely controversial Chapter 11 of NAFTA, increases the power of large corporations while attacking the sovereignty of governments and their ability to act in public interest.

As documented by this study on the Chixoy Dam—which was clearly a neoliberal-inspired development project—it is apparent that violence and displacement arrive as an expected result from this paradigm, particularly when coupled with an already fragile and deeply fractured society (Jonas 1991, Grandin 2004, Witness for Peace 1996).

Dams and Displacement

Among the various problems associated with development over the past half-century is the issue of involuntary human displacement (McDowell 1996). Despite what we know about displacement as a result of conflict and war, we have yet to calibrate the number of people who are displaced, often forcibly, due to large-scale infrastructure projects, particularly in ‘third world’ nations (IDMC 2008). As anthropologist Arturo Escobar (2003, 175) plainly states:

Displacement on a massive scale has become an indubitable fact of our times, [and furthermore is] an integral element of Eurocentric modernity and its post World War II manifestation on Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Both modernity and development are special-cultural projects that require the continuous conquest of territories and peoples.

Although involuntary human displacement results from a wide range of development activities—such as mining, industrial agro-business, super-highways, tourism, and conservation—the 45,000+ large dams built worldwide for irrigation and hydroelectric

power contribute significantly to that number, with as many as 80 million people displaced in the last century (Stanley 2004, 8-9) As symbols of modernity, national pride, and domination over the landscape (Roy 1999), large dams are highly emblematic of the post WWII development model, and are vigorously supported by the World Bank and other international financial institutions (McCully 1996, Witness for Peace 1996) As McCully states in his landmark book, *Silenced Rivers* (1996, 237)

Perhaps more than any other technology, massive dams symbolize the progress of humanity from a life ruled by nature and superstition to one where nature is ruled by science, and superstition vanquished by rule of rationality They also symbolize the might of the state that built them, making huge dams a favorite of nation-builders and autocrats

Although dam-generated energy is often sold to the public as ‘environmentally friendly’, the resulting damage to ecosystems and displaced communities is staggering (Witness for Peace 1996, 29) In addressing the human and environmental impacts of large dams on a global scale, anthropologist Thayer Scudder (2005) thoroughly debunks the ‘green-washing’ associated with hydroelectricity

Large dams are flawed for many reasons Benefits are overstated and costs understated Especially serious are the adverse environmental impacts on the world’s river basins, impacts that tend to be irreversible where dams are built on mainstreams and large tributaries Implementation continues to impoverish the majority of those who must be resettled from reservoir basins and project works, and to adversely affect millions of people who live below dams whose living standards are dependent on natural food regimes

Of particular significance to the case of the Chixoy Dam in Guatemala, is the fact that a disproportionately high percentage of those affected by dam development worldwide are of ethnic minorities and Indigenous descent, which adds to the already existing argument that “the creation of a global economy and its accompanying industrial infrastructure has only been possible through dismantling local cultures and reassembling them in more

modern forms” (Colchester 2000, 43) As stated by geographers Ashton and Bryan (2002, 4) in their report on Indigenous peoples and the environment

There is, of course, a certain implied inevitability about the displacement of indigenous peoples from the environment embedded in state property regimes and development projects State governments continue to apply notions of indigenous lands as being empty through natural resource development and conservation policies, frequently excluding indigenous peoples from participation in planning conservation and development strategies States continue to grant concessions for mining and logging, and to support road and dam construction in areas where indigenous peoples on the basis that those lands are not privately owned and therefore are property of the state Regardless of whether state’s formally recognize indigenous peoples’ use and occupancy of land and resources, development projects and privatization of land ownership introduce dramatic changes in by indigenous peoples’ societies

These ‘dramatic changes,’ as outlined through countless books and case studies (see McDowell 1996, Stanley 2004, De Wet 2006, Colajocomo 1999, Windsor and McVey 2005) as well as what I learned first-hand regarding the Chixoy Dam, prove to be highly disruptive to Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples alike, and too commonly result in moderate to severe socioeconomic problems, such as increased drug and alcohol abuse, extreme poverty, cultural annihilation, and disease Despite this growing body of knowledge, however, countries such as Guatemala still pursue development projects that displace and dismantle communities (McGahan 2008, Rights Action 2006) One such government-initiated project, the proposed Xalala Dam in Northern Guatemala, would flood 36 villages if completed (McGahan 2008) Widespread local opposition, however, supported by international solidarity groups and national Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have effectively blocked the project for the time being, and with the prospects of another Chixoy disaster, even the World Bank has backed away from funding the project

Conclusion

This review intends to inform the reader of my critical approach regarding development and its effect on humans and the environment. Beginning in broad terms, capturing themes such as global development discourse, neoliberalism, and the theory of postcolonialism, I move narrower into the specific topic of this thesis: dams and displacement, and its effect in Guatemala, and more specifically, Río Negro. By weaving together both international and Guatemala-specific cases and results from the current development paradigm, I give the reader a sense of the interconnectedness of these systems, and discuss how theories and ideas created in the offices of the World Bank or other development and aid organizations can, and do, have disastrous effects on the ground. Moving deeper into the specific region of this thesis, Guatemala, the next chapter offers insight into the country's unique history, which in turn provides the reader with greater insight into the processes that led to the incidents at Río Negro.

Chapter 4- Guatemala Historical Context

It would be difficult to fully comprehend the events from Río Negro without some general knowledge of Guatemala's tumultuous history, with particular attention to the five centuries of conflict between Spanish colonizers and the Indigenous Maya peoples. This chapter provides historical context relevant to my study, while remaining within the general topics of 'development' and Indigenous repression. Historical and contemporary topics relevant to Guatemala issues will narrow in scope in the following chapter, where I provide an overview of Río Negro and the Chixoy Dam.

Along with much of what we now refer to as 'Latin America,' from the U S-Mexico border down to the tip of Chile at Tierra del Fuego, present-day Guatemala is a land of conquest, where much of its native constituents—the Maya and poor Ladinos, as well as the Xinca and Garifuna peoples—continue to suffer from the enduring legacies of colonialism (Chasteen 2006, Lovell 1988, Jonas 1991, Perera 1993, Handy 1984, Nelson 2009). Despite the ability for some groups to defend their lands and cultural practices at various points over the past five hundred years (Lovell 1988, Montejo 2005), the lives and livelihoods of all Indigenous Mayas were forever changed after the arrival of Pedro de Alvarado and his troop of *Conquistadores* in 1524. Although colonial rule varied throughout Guatemala, the Spanish colonists, and later the Ladinos (people of mixed Spanish and Indigenous ancestry), dominated the Maya peoples by displacing them from their original lands (Tanaka and Wittman 2002), forcing them into serf labor on haciendas or agricultural plantations (Fagan 1987), and resettling them into locations

where they could be more easily controlled (Lovell 1988) As stated by Lovell (1988, 30), on the issue of control over the early colonial Guatemalan landscape

Spanish hegemony put Maya communities under immediate pressure to conform to imperial designs A fundamental element of the Hispanic quest for empire was to organize space and to control population movement by founding towns and villages Under the policy of *congregacion*, which began in the highlands in the mid-sixteenth century, thousands of native families were coerced from their homes in the mountains into new settlements (congregaciones) built around churches located, wherever possible, in open valley floors For the Spaniards, congregacion promoted more effective civil administration, facilitated the conversion of Indians to Christianity, and created centralized pools of labor that could be drawn upon in myriad ways to meet imperial objectives

It is estimated that on the eve of Spanish arrival, up to two million Maya peoples lived in the mountains and tropical lowlands of what we now distinguish as Guatemala (Lovell and Lutz 1996, 399) Within a century, their numbers would be at about one-twentieth of that Although warfare is partly to blame for this depopulation, disease was the major cause of death, as was the subsequent effects from forced labor and seasonal migration (Lovell and Lutz 1996, 403)

Shortly after independence from the Spanish Crown in 1821, Maya peoples were subjected to the next round of conquest²⁰ Through newly enacted liberal reforms and policies under *Caudillos*²¹ such as Justo Rufino Barrios, Guatemala projected itself into the global market and, as a result, large sections of the country were further carved into monocultures of commodity crops, such as coffee, sugar, bananas, and cotton Handy (1984) informs us that Indigenous labor was integral to the formation of these systems of

²⁰ Historical geographer W George Lovell (1988, 27), identifies three 'cycles' of conquest in Guatemala These include (1) That of the original Spanish intrusion, (2) The introduction to both internal and international capitalism, (3) The campaign of state terror

²¹ A political/military head, with authoritarian characteristics

large-scale production and export Eduardo Galeano, in his eloquent history of the oppressed, *Open Veins of Latin America* (1973, 49-50), describes the situation of the Latin American peasant illustrative of the period after independence, and into the present day

They participate in an economic and social order which assigns them the role of victim—the most exploited of the exploited They buy and sell a good part of the few things they consume and produce, at the mercy of powerful and voracious intermediaries who charge much and pay little, they are day laborers on plantations, the cheapest work force, and soldiers in the mountains, they spend their days toiling for the world market or fighting for their conquerors

The production of coffee, which had success in establishing a middle class in neighboring Costa Rica, created further stratification in Guatemala between the landless majority and the plantation owners (Chasteen 2006, 184) According to researcher Finola Shankar (1999, 19), “the introduction of coffee, the ‘great modernizer’ can be seen as one of the major causes of past and present-day poverty, landlessness, increased monoculture, changing land tenure and settlement patterns, and seasonal migration ” Lovell (1995, 138) also argues that “to the state coffee represented progress, civilization, and advancement, to Maya communities it meant loss of land and forced indentured labour inequalities that began to emerge at the national level in the nineteenth century have yet to be redressed, especially in the countryside ” As a result of the continuation of this system—where fertile terrain is expropriated for export production, or simply placed under control by the oligarchy for future use—Guatemala remains to this day with the most unequal distribution of land in all of Central America, and one of the most extreme in the world, with no more than two percent holding roughly 75 percent of agriculturally productive land (Tanaka and Wittman 2002, 6)

The turn of the 20th century brought forth two significant positivist-inspired dictatorships, those of Manuel Estrada Cabrera (1898-1930), and General Jorge Ubico (1930-1944) (Handy 1984) Under Cabrera, the United Fruit Company (UFCo), a U S-based corporation later known as Chiquita, was granted 40 percent of the country as land base for its banana growing operations In addition to land, the company was able to monopolize the railroad and electrical systems in the country (Jonas 1991) According to historian Jim Handy (1984, 85)

The UFCo, Minor Keith and Samuel Zemurray [owners] used their powerful influence on Guatemalan politics freely, always watchful to maintain the company's dominant position in the economy and intent on wringing whatever concessions they could from a weakened congress and accommodating dictators UFCo's intervention in politics was, in the words of Guatemalan academic and politician Luis Cordoza y Aragon, "constant, open and bloody "

Cabrera's successor, General Jorge Ubico, a notorious authoritarian, made it legal for hacienda owners to kill rebellious workers, and reacted ruthlessly to any 'communist activity' (Bucheli 2006, 15) Grandin (2004, 48-49) informs us that Ubico, through ruthless military coercion, secured cheap labor for the plantations and public works projects In recalling the effects of the Ubico regime on his Maya-Achi ancestors in the remote valleys of Baja Verapaz, Jesús Tecú Osorio (2003, 2) states how "the government used the army to force the rural peasants to construct roads and to put telegraph wires throughout the country The infrastructure benefited the rich they [the Mayas] worked, yet did not receive salaries or food "

In 1945, the country voted in their first democratically elected president, Juan José Arévalo, after a 1944 coup orchestrated by students, military officials, and liberals (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1983, 30-35) A number of social reforms were created under his

presidency, such as the legalization of labor unions, initiatives for gender and racial equality, and the foundation for health care and social security. President Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán followed Arevalo in 1951, yet failed in his bold attempt to permanently restructure the feudal economy and unequal social structures in Guatemala (Perera 1993, Grandin 2004). Latin American historian John Charles Chasteen (2006, 260) remarks on Arbenz's brief era of revolution:

In this country where half the people were illiterate Mayan peasants, treated more or less like animals by the owners of the coffee plantations, who retained great influence, Arbenz started to confiscate large estates, and divide them up for peasant cultivators. In addition, his government expropriated land from United Fruit, along with Guatemala's foreign-owned railway.

Through Arbenz's ambitious agrarian reform program, which benefited up to 100,000 families (Galeano 1973, 113), the state also began to ascertain control over United Fruit's monopoly by charging them taxes on their land and exports. It was not long before Washington decided that Arbenz was creating an unfavorable environment for business, especially that of United Fruit, which had its CIA connections (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1983). According to the powerful United Fruit elite among the Eisenhower administration, Arbenz and his administration had become a 'communist' threat—yet critics will argue that Arbenz represented simply a barrier to their financial interests, which had been protected in the past by dictators such as Ubico and Cabrera (Whitfield 1996, 158). It was not long after Arbenz's enactment of land reform that a U.S. orchestrated campaign for removal was underway (LaFeber 1993, 121). In a short yet very symbolic battle, Arbenz was overthrown in 1954 by the U.S. military and conservative Guatemalan partners, thus initiating the first of the cold-war crusades in the

Global South, and the extermination of other nationalistic movements of the period (Chasteen 2006, 293, Grandin 2007)

Colonel Castillo Armas took the presidential office and quickly reversed reforms from the previous ten years, including the abolition of all labor organizations (Perrera 1993) According to historian Jim Handy (1984, 188), the movement towards “ultra-laissez faire” economic development (increased export agriculture, large infrastructure projects, lower taxes), designed and assisted almost exclusively by the U S and the World Bank, resulted in deep inequalities—and social tensions—that still resonate today (Manz 2005, Nelson 2009) The switch in power and ideologies also left peasants without protection from the large landowners, who were recruiting the necessary connections with the military for increased power over the workers (Jonas 1991) The Armas regime named supporters of the policies of Arbenz as insubordinate, or communists, and developed lists of the possible suspects (Booth and Walker 1993, 117) After six years of increased repression and militarization, a 1960 rebellion sparked by a group of dissident junior military officers initiated the 36-year internal armed conflict (CEH 1999)

The history of the Guatemalan civil uprising—and the state-sponsored terror that followed in its wake—is complex, and the intensity of guerrilla and counterinsurgency activities varied throughout the country from one region to the next Like much of Central America, crises relating to the firmly entrenched export driven economy and national debt, authoritarian repression by the military and paramilitary, and a growing socialist movement, caused simultaneous rebellions throughout the region (Fagan 1987, 22) As expressed in historian Walter LaFeber’s *Inevitable Revolutions* (1993), military training and assistance offered by the U S , and particularly the CIA, were essential for

the success of the Guatemalan army and their highly organized campaign against any leftist, socially progressive, or subversive movements that might challenge the free-market system. As pointed out by Manz (2005, 21)

The growing political realities of the cold war and the United States foreign policy toward Central America gave the Guatemalan military and economic elites complete license to rule in an increasingly authoritarian way. Anticommunism served to justify and conceal the most heinous of crimes, and the United States—except for the Carter administration—eagerly funneled millions of dollars to military regimes decade after decade, showing no concern for the brutality committed by the armed forces. The battle for global, ideological hegemony had far-reaching local consequences for even the most isolated of peasants.

Although there is no single definitive motive for the uprising in Guatemala, Handy (1984) suggests its roots lie in the aborted revolution and agrarian reform under President Arbenz. According to Jonas (1991, 6), “The ‘rebels’ were not simply those who have taken up arms but are the unseen hundreds of thousands among Guatemala’s 87 percent majority who have refused to accept a fate of poverty and discrimination.” Along with the hundreds, if not thousands, of rebellions that have taken place in Guatemala, the poor distribution of land, coupled by social exclusion and a deeply entrenched structure of racism and inequality, must be acknowledged in order to fully understand the underlying causes of the armed conflict (Grandin 2004, Stewart 2006).

According to Lovell (1988, 44), the radicalization of the countryside, particularly in the early to mid 1970s, was aided by foreign-born Catholic Priests associated with Accion Católica (Catholic Action), a group which quickly “engaged in projects sought to ameliorate the social and economic life their native parishioners.” Projects relating to the formation of agricultural cooperatives were particularly effective as a means of developing community independence and empowerment, thus producing a direct

challenge to the Guatemalan status quo (Lovell 1988, 44), particularly that of plantation-based agribusiness, which at that time experienced a boom in export production and sales (see Davis 1988)

During the period of construction of the Chixoy Hydroelectric Dam, from 1976 to 1983—without a doubt the worst period of the entire conflict (See Carmack 1988, CEH 1999, Lovell 1988)—much of the nation experienced an unprecedented level of violence, described by Latin American scholar Susanne Jonas (1991, 146) as a “wholesale slaughter and genocide by the new death squads, the counterinsurgent forces, this time carrying out illegal violence themselves, without the façade of legal constraints ” A rich combination of economic crisis, a widening gap between wealth distribution and the lowering of wages (despite marked growth in GDP), a continuation of unequal power structures and racism, and the earthquake in 1976, which left one million homeless and 23,000 dead, reinvigorated popular movements that originated in the early 1960’s (Jonas 1991, CEH 1999, Booth et al 2009, 120-121, Grandin 2004) As pointed out by anthropologist Shelton H Davis (1988), the increase in landlessness of the Indigenous majority, and the surge in economic productivity by the oligarchy—resulting in a strong push for cheap seasonal labor²²—increased the already explosive tensions between the two groups Resistance movements—often with Marxist affiliation—in both the countryside and the cities were able to draw popular support from a desperate majority, with an increase in state-sponsored violence to follow (May 2001) According to Jonas (1991, 88)

²² Not unlike the seasonal recruitment of labor described by Osorio (2003) under the Ubico regime, Davis (1988, 15) notes that working conditions on the large plantations before the violence of the late 1970s were “totally unacceptable in terms of health, education, and morality,” and remarks on “situations of penury and peonage ”

By the late 1970's the bourgeoisie had consolidated significantly with each other, and with the military, forming a tight alliance. The centuries of racism and exclusion, necessary for the elite to continue their financial success, had reached a boiling point.

Again, the demographic with the highest rate of casualty and victimization was the Indigenous peasant (CEH 1999), and at the height of the violence, just being Maya put one in a precarious, if not dangerous, position (Lovell 1988, 46).

Perhaps no other incident embodies this new epoch of violence more appropriately than the massacre at Panzos, Alta Verapaz on May 29th, 1978, an event that W. George Lovell (1988, 45) refers to as the likely beginning of widespread state terror. According to historian Greg Grandin (2004), the Indigenous protest that took place that morning in the town square, and the shooting that followed, was not unlike so many others in the rural district of Alta Verapaz²³. However, as stated by Grandin (2004, 2)

the Panzos massacre is distinct in that it represents the passing of such exhausted patterns of protest and reaction, prefiguring more deadly forms of counterinsurgent violence that were soon to come. Likewise, the soldiers who guarded the plaza that Monday morning may have been called in by local planters, but they were no sleepy outland militia detachment occasionally roused into action. They were part of Guatemala's new army, steeped in anti-communism and flushed with counterinsurgent training equipment, the front line in an escalating civil war between a spreading rural insurgency and an increasingly repressive state.

More than one hundred Q'eqchi' Maya were killed on that day, and military units stayed in the region for one month, patrolling the area by land and air (Grandin 2004, 164).

The back-to-back military regimes of General Roméo Lucas García (1978-82) and General Efraín Ríos Montt (1982-83) followed this event, and with their anti-communist

²³ The May 1978 protest in Panzos, which included as many as 700 Maya supporters, was the result of 30 years of tension between local Ladino landowners and the Indigenous peasant majority. For an extended discussion on the complex history leading up to this event, see Grandin (2004) and Brockett (2005).

zeal and brutal counterinsurgency tactics, the massacres, executions, and disappearances escalated into genocidal proportions, especially in rural districts (Grandin 2004, 3, Jonas 1991, 122) Under these two administrations, which enjoyed personal and financial support from U S President Ronald Reagan (Manz 2005, 23, Fagan 1987, Perera 1993), a scorched earth policy was adopted, which involved the burning of whole villages containing suspected guerrillas or guerrilla sympathizers (CEH 1999) According to the UN Truth Commission (CEH 1999) at least 626 primarily Maya occupied villages were completely annihilated through this policy The military also set up armed civilian defense patrols (*Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil*—PAC) (Colajacomo 1999, Remijnse 2001) as a means of controlling the insurgency in rural districts Up to one million men (mostly Maya) were eventually forced into the PACs, which was intended to be an extension of the army's fear campaign throughout rural areas (Jonas 1991, 150, Remijnse 2001) The military considered those who rebelled against joining the PACs as guerrillas, or guerrilla supporters, and were punished severely

Another element of Ríos Montt's strategic control over the rural areas was the creation of 'model villages,' or, 'development poles,' which were in essence camps built to house and monitor internal refugees As Guatemalan writer Victor Perera (1993, 111) states

For all their frequently touted resemblance to the Vietnam War's notorious "strategic hamlets," the model villages more accurately reflect the colonial Spaniards' reduction of rebellious Indian communities into nucleated settlements for the convenience of landowners and the missionary priests

In reflecting on the short yet highly destructive presidency of Ríos Montt, historian Jim Handy (1984, 255) remarks that "throughout 1982 and 1983 the military was able to

complete a process that began in 1542 the acquisition of control over the countryside and the total breakdown of village autonomy ”

Following a military coup that ousted Rios Montt from presidential power, a very slow, drawn-out movement towards peace was established, beginning with the democratic December 1985 election of civilian president Vinicio Cerezo Arevalo (Lovell 1995) Despite Cerezo’s attempt to initiate dialogue with the URNG²⁴ (United Revolutionary Unity of Guatemala), the military, at least at this stage, refused and continued its unlawful detentions and assassinations in the name of crushing the dying insurgency (Jonas 2000) It was not until 1996, with the facilitation of the United Nations, that military and guerrilla groups signed a final Peace Agreement (Jonas 2000)

In all, the U N sponsored Truth Commission estimates that the military and paramilitary death squads killed at least 200,000 thousand people during the conflict, with over one million persons displaced (CEH 1999) Although much of the killings and massacres were aimed at the rural, Indigenous populations, as the military viewed Maya peasants as the most susceptible to be taken in by the guerrilla movement (May 1999, 73), political assassinations of possible left wing conspirators (teachers, unionists, journalists, intellectuals, students) were all too common in the capital as a means of social cleansing (Galeano 1973, Nolin and Shankar 2000), with a tally of over 34,000 Ladino deaths (Taylor 2004)

²⁴ The Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG) was formed as an umbrella for the four main guerrilla groups operating within the country These groups include The Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP), Rebel Armed Forces (FAR), Revolutionary Organization of the People in Arms (ORPA), and the National Directing Nucleus of PGT (PGT-NDN) The URNG was established as a legitimate political party in 1998

Despite the high hopes that accompanied the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996²⁵, disparities have not improved. According to the UNDP (see CESR and ICEFI 2008, 2), Guatemala has the highest income inequality in Latin America. Poverty stands at over 80 percent, and despite continued talk of reform, the country still suffers from one of the most unequal land distribution patterns in the world, with the vast majority of fertile land is owned and occupied by large export-agricultural plantations (Godoy 2006, Hamilton and Fischer 2005).

On top of these economic realities, ‘post-conflict’ Guatemala still reels in its legacy of violence and insecurity (Benson et al. 2008). In a reflection of life after 1996, anthropologists Benson et al. (2008, 29) argue that despite what the indicators show—that the frequency of political murders and disappearances have dissipated, and that massacres no longer occur in the rural districts of the country—“Peace has proven elusive.”

What they mean by this, as I witnessed on my own visits to the country, is that violence and insecurity still prevails in present-day Guatemala, just in a different form. At the time of my research, gang violence and organized crime, primarily in the capital, had reached unprecedented levels, and the average murder rate had reached 17 per day (GHRC 2009). Extortion, femicide²⁶, narco-related violence, and assassinations have risen every year since 2000 (Sanford 2008). Due to the low incidence of investigation by

²⁵ On top of a peace agreement between the military and guerrilla groups, the 1996 Peace Accords also promised to locate the root causes of conflict in the country, while addressing issues such as Indigenous rights, tax reform, land distribution, gender equality, and demilitarization. For more information regarding these agreements, see Jonas (2000).

²⁶ Femicide is defined as the murder of women, specifically because they are female. In Guatemala, there is a sharp increase in the rate of femicide, from roughly 200 in the year 2000, to 600 in 2005 (Sanford 2008, 105).

the national police—which remains currently at two percent—impunity reigns, and a resurgence of ‘*mano dura*’ (strong arm) tactics offered by right wing political groups—often associated with former military regimes of 80s and 90s—seems a likely outcome in the future (Melville 2007, GHRC 2007)

The source of this new violence appears to be another flare up from unresolved social and economic problems that afflict the country, as well as a destabilization created by the oligarchy/military to ensure that power remains consolidated, and unchallenged by renewed popular social movements (Campbell 2007, NISGUA 2003) As stated by geographer Beatriz Manz, (2008, 151)

The violence is rooted in a society that historically has been deeply divided along ethnic and rigid class lines and that has been fundamentally unjust, discriminatory, and abusive toward the oppressed population. The challenge then is much greater, and the likelihood of continued violence that much more likely, when the underlying grievances have not been and are unlikely to be addressed because those in power do not have the will to bring about the necessary changes

Neoliberal restructuring of the Guatemalan economy over the past two decades, which has resulted in a decrease in social services and regulation for corporations (particularly in the mining sector), as well as an increase in mega-project developments that further encroach upon lands occupied by Indigenous *campesinos* (Rodriguez 2008, Holden and Jacobson 2008), is also noted as a probable underlying cause in Guatemala’s overall increase in violence and insecurity among its populace (Benson et al 2008) As stated by sociologist William I Robinson (2000, 1), Guatemala’s neoliberal order “is inherently unstable and indicates contradictions internal to global capitalism, including social polarization between the rich and the poor, the loss of nation-state autonomy and regulatory power, and the deterioration of the social fabric in civil society ” Sabine

Kurtenbach (2008), a principal researcher at the Inter-American Dialogue in Washington D C, claims that despite macroeconomic growth over the past decade, little can be said regarding improvement in terms of social inclusion and overall equality, which has lead to the increase in crime Kurtenbach (2008, 35) also goes on to argue that through these neoliberal reforms, most outside capital is directed towards mega-projects, “in mining or energy sectors which only provide few job opportunities and where the profit is made by a small group of local or international entrepreneurs Thus, natural resources are not used for the public good but for private enrichment, another process that can be interpreted as path dependency ”

Mining, as well as the development and planning of other new mega-projects, is causing considerable social unrest in certain departments, as the newly ratified mining law makes it very difficult for local Indigenous occupants to legally protect their land (Imai et al 2007, Oxfam 2009) According to Guatemala’s Ministry of Energy and Mines, there were 356 mining licenses granted as of December 2006, with hundreds more in the process The Minority Rights Group International (2008a, Paragraph 39) reports that up to ten percent or more of the country’s land has been sold to international corporations for mineral exploration and exploitation, with little or no consent from local populations

The arbitrary implementation of such mega-projects is often accompanied by human rights violations which, according to indigenous leaders and human rights defenders, run in contravention to international law on indigenous rights and the Guatemalan Constitution Cases have been reported of forcible displacement through violent means carried out by private security forces contracted by the companies and through massive state-authorized military and police operations, usually carried out late at night or during the very early hours of the morning Methods utilized by security forces to intimidate the communities have included the destruction and burning of indigenous houses and other property, denial of access to certain areas within their territory, and threats against those who refuse

to sell their land. The communities charge that the companies have misled them on the benefits to be gained from the mega-projects exploiting their illiteracy and poverty.

Although resistance to this kind of imposed ‘development’ has increased dramatically over the past several years (International Rivers 2008, McGahan 2008, Paley 2008)—as outlined in the previous chapter—there has yet to be a conclusive agreement between communities opposed to the presence of mining in their districts, and those who grant licenses to the foreign corporations.

Although this chapter presents just a slice of historical information pertaining to the lands and peoples of Guatemala, I chose very specific incidents and facts regarding conflict over land, which will allow for a better understanding of the Chixoy Dam and its effects on the peoples of Río Negro. In the following chapter, I expand on the region in which Río Negro is situated and the events that regard the Chixoy Dam, with specific reference to the larger picture covered in this chapter.

Chapter 5- Río Negro and the Chixoy Dam

In this chapter I provide a general overview of the Chixoy Dam hydroelectric project and its effects on the Maya-Achi population from Río Negro, as well as a brief description of the regional and human history. Information from this section was gathered through various sources, primarily that of already published research by NGO's, journalists, and academics, though I also include evidence from the ethnographic research I carried out in the region during the winter of 2009. In the analysis and discussion chapter of this thesis I will provide a much greater insight about the specific events which took place at Río Negro through my original research.

The Chixoy River, or Negro as it is also referred to, is one of Guatemala's largest river's, with its origins beginning along the perennially moist southeastern slopes of the Cuchumatanes Mountains, in the departments of El Quiché and Huehuetenango. After making a large S-shaped bend through the deep, rugged canyons of north-central Guatemala, the Chixoy flows due north through the tropical lowlands, forming the border between the departments of El Quiché and Alta Verapaz. From there it extends across the border into Mexico, eventually reaching the Bay of Campeche at the Caribbean Sea.

At the river's bend, roughly 150 kilometers north of Guatemala City, lies the remote and relatively low fertile basin (700 meter elevation) once referred to as *El Cuenca Medio del Río Chixoy*, or, the Middle Basin of the River Chixoy (Ichon 1978). Through archaeological research, we know that various Indigenous Maya groups inhabited the region since the Classic Period (300 BC to 900 AD) (Colajomo 1999, 3). Dozens of religious sites throughout the basin, though now mostly underwater, mark the

existence of civilization in the valley The ruins of the Great City of Caunal (see Rodriguez 2009), which emerges from the south end of the Chixoy Reservoir towards the end of each dry season, is compared in importance to that of the famous Maya complexes found on the Yucatán Peninsula (Arnauld 1996)

Before 1982, some 3,450 people, from 23 different communities, utilized the rich farmland surrounding the river and local fishery, and a vibrant local economy, and culture, flourished (Colajocomo 1999, Johnston 2005a) Local centers of trade, such as Los Encuentros, located at the confluence of the Chixoy and Salama rivers, were established for locals to meet and sell goods to one another, as well as celebrate Catholic and Maya holidays (Johnston 2005a) The community of Río Negro, or Panima' in the Achí language, was one of the larger villages along this stretch of the river, with a total of 791 inhabitants according to a 1977 census (Colajocomo 1999, 1) According to MARIO, a previous resident of the community, the original inhabitants of Río Negro arrived from Rabinal no more than a couple hundred years before, due to the access to good land for their animals, cornfields, and wood collection, and the good water from springs that originate in the canyons above the river

Like most rural Guatemalan communities, inhabitants from Río Negro were primarily subsistence farmers, with small family plots, or *milpas*²⁷, which extended up the hillsides above the valley floor According to SEBASTIAN, who lived there until 1982, fruit trees lined the river—mangos, jocote, banana, papaya, peanuts, and citrus Other previous inhabitants recall the bountiful harvests of corn and fruit, as well as access

²⁷ Endemic to Mesoamerica, *milpa* farming is a system that has been perfected over thousands of years The primary crop is usually corn, or maize, along with squash, beans, and often some kind of chile pepper (see Mann 2006)

to excellent fishing. They had a school, a church, and a local development committee (Witness for Peace 1996). On market days in Rabinal, or San Cristóbal in Alta Verapaz, vendors from Río Negro would leave well before dawn, on foot, to sell excess goods and crafts, and return with things they could not grow or make for themselves (Osorio 2003). The inhabitants of Río Negro were also known for their work with local palm fronds (and still are, to a lesser extent), which they collected locally and wove into mats, called *petates*, and sold at various markets.

Without roads or profitable land for agro-business, the region was isolated, and insulated, and able to exist, for the most part, without the intrusion of colonial policies that dominated elsewhere (see Lovell 1988). French archaeologist Alain Ichon (1978, 18-21), who surveyed the basin for Maya ruins, wrote about the remarkable similarities between what he observed at Río Negro, and what he knew about pre-Hispanic life among the Maya. Instead of the typical Spanish colonial set-up, with a town square or plaza, surrounded by homes, churches, and other community structures, Río Negro consisted of a scattering of family *ranchos*, or compounds, surrounded by individual *milpas*, and other food producing trees. Ichon (1978) estimated that about half of the families had cattle, but raising chickens and pigs was more common. He also noted the strong manufacturing co-ops for *petates* and other crafts.

Former residents of Río Negro speak of a difficult life, but one that was provided for, and tranquil (Johnston 2005a, Witness for Peace 1996). As stated by CARLOS, a local leader who lived in Río Negro during his childhood and into his twenties:

Before in Río Negro, we made *petates*, and we fished. This was the basis of our economy. And, one might have cows, or pigs, or chickens. It was all free land, we had resources. Occasionally people would leave for the coast to cut sugar to earn

money, in the month of July or January But it was for just one month per year, so we could buy clothes and medicine, sometimes maize

The Chixoy Dam Project

As stated in the previous chapter on Guatemala history, the 1970s and 80s—a period also known as *La Violencia*—were terrible, unpredictable times, even in the most remote districts of the country (Jonas 1991, Carmack 1988) The municipality of Rabinal, which included the community of Río Negro, experienced an unusually high level of military and guerrilla activity, which resulted in the murder of roughly 5000, mainly Achi, civilians (CIIDH 1996, Ch 4) According to sociologist Julie Stewart (2006, 203), Rabinal is “a microcosm of Guatemala ” With its high levels of poverty, as well as its historic land struggles between Ladinos and the Maya-Achí majority, Rabinal was able to draw early popular support from the FAR (Revolutionary Armed Forces), as well as the EGP (Guerrilla Army of the Poor) (CIIDH 1996, Ch 4) As a result, the military government labeled many individuals, or entire communities, as guerrillas or guerrilla supporters, and subsequently targeted them during counterinsurgency activities (Stewart 2006)

Concurrent with this period of violence and insecurity was a worldwide movement of increased modernization and free market economic policies, especially within Guatemala and other nations within the Global South (Jonas 1991, 75, Booth and Walker 1993, Handy 1984) As pointed out by O’Brien (2007, 266) the U S government, along with international banking firms, promoted this new ‘religion’ vigorously, and right-wing dictatorships throughout Latin America allowed for, and often greatly

supported, the entrance of large multinational corporations, along with an increased flow of aid towards ‘development’ In this same period, Guatemalan capitalists enjoyed a surge in export-driven production and subsequent industrialization (Davis 1988) and, as a result, the country experienced a deepening energy crisis due to escalating petrol costs (Witness for Peace 1996, World Bank 1978) Amidst rolling blackouts, Guatemala’s National Institute of Electrification (INDE)²⁸ designed a plan for a hydro-electric facility in the Chixoy River basin, located at Pueblo Viejo, about six kilometers downstream from the village of Rio Negro Although project plans began as early as 1972 (Witness for Peace 1996, 11), the idea was sold in 1976 to the World Bank with an initial loan of \$72 million, and the Inter-American Development Bank for \$105 million, with an estimated total cost of \$340 million (Colajacomo 1999, 2, World Bank 1978, 49) According to the Witness for Peace report (1996, 11) “international lending institutions quickly approved funds for this “engineering miracle” which was to transform Guatemala’s ‘third world’ economy with cheap energy by the year 2000 ”²⁹ As stated by independent researcher Barbara Lynch (2007, 4), “[Chixoy] was intended to provide some 60 percent of Guatemala’s electricity It would be the energy source that would permit exploitation of copper and nickel deposits—and possibly oil—in the Northern Transverse Strip ”³⁰

²⁸ The INDE was founded under the administration of Manuel Ydígoras Fuentes (1957-63), as a means to gain military control over the nation’s resources An ex-General under Ubico (see previous section), Ydígoras was known for his “unparalleled corruption” and was overthrown from office after massive protests (Handy 1984, 190)

²⁹ It should be noted that these loans were given to the state-run electricity company without any proof that they had title to the land needed for the reservoir or dam (Johnston 2005, 3)

³⁰ Known as the ‘zone of the generals’ (Jonas 1991, 128, Manz 1981), this lowland region bordering Mexico was bought up in large quantities (100’s of thousands of acres)

It was not until the funding was secured that INDE officials approached Río Negro citizens to notify them about the dam project and their need to relocate, due to the flooding that would occur behind the dam. After extensive research in the region, anthropologist Barbara Rose Johnston (2005a, 16) indicates that no agreement or dialogue existed between INDE and the affected communities, and there were no legal transfer of land titles. As stated by Lynch (2007, 9), early INDE documents indicate no plan for social impact assessments or resettlement, and only began to devise a plan based on World Bank conditions for the loan. Former residents from Río Negro assert that INDE officials simply showed up in their helicopter and told them that their village would be flooded, and that they would provide a *finca*, or farm, where they could move. According to former Río Negro resident Jesus Tecu Osorio (2005, 13), “They [INDE] promised to finance the construction of one hundred and fifty homes, purchase farming land and cattle pasture. Those affected would choose the land that would replace their flooded land. The INDE promised to compensate people who would lose their crops.”

According to survivors, it was early in 1980 that INDE officials led a handful of community leaders across the mountains to the ‘model village’ of Pacux, near Rabinal, which was to be their new home. The restricted, urban setting, and lack of communal land to grow food and continue their subsistence lifestyle led to the conclusion that they must either fight to obtain proper compensation (of which they were entitled, and

by President General Lucas García, and other military generals of the era, for investments in natural resource extraction. Manz (1981), reports of a massive infrastructure program in the region—including hydroelectric power facilities—to help aid the efficiency of projects such as oil extraction, coffee production, and logging.

specifically funded for under IDB and World Bank policies), or resist leaving Río Negro (Witness for Peace 1996, 17)

According to the Witness for Peace (1996) report, as well as testimonies from former residents, varying degrees of resistance existed among the community, but most residents decided they wanted to stay in Río Negro and protest the move, especially after seeing Pacux, and realizing that the INDE were not going to fulfill their promises³¹ Ichon (1978, 27) indicates in his report that the elders of the community were most resistant, due to their strong attachment to the land Ichon (1978, 31) also noted that reactions between different affected communities varied radically For example, the strictly Indigenous population of Río Negro (rather than a mixed Ladino/Achí population, as was the case in other communities), as well as its strong social cohesion among residents, contrasted sharply with the neighboring village of Chicruz, whose relocation came with little resistance

The organized—yet peaceful, and completely legal—resistance of Río Negro citizens in 1980 was met with a campaign of terror and intimidation by military officials, and later by the PAC from the neighboring community of Xococ, which had aligned itself with right-wing military groups³² (Witness for Peace 1996, Osorio 2003) Because of Río

³¹ According to the exhaustive report published by Witness for Peace in 1996, the promises made by INDE included 1 Cement houses, 2 Potable water and FREE electricity, 3 Five acres of fertile land per household, 4 A community truck, 5 Compensation for crops and orchards lost to flooding, 6 A church, schools, health center and access roads, 7 A boat, 8 Social services

³² The reasoning behind Xococ's affiliation with the military's extreme right-wing faction is difficult to understand and explain Osorio (2003, 18-22) informs us that conflict between the military and EGP guerrillas (some with potential affiliation to Río Negro) resulted in assassinations and intimidation in the community during the early 1980s, and that through these complicated events, a PAC was formed to carry out insurgency operations under the military's close supervision and intimidation (see Stewart 2006)

Negro's opposition to the construction of the dam and their forced displacement, INDE and the military labeled residents as subversive and in coordination with guerrillas (Johnston 2005a, 4) ³³ According to a wide variety of sources, as well as testimony from survivors, the violence began in 1979, soon after INDE officials demanded land titles from Río Negro residents, and assured that they would be returned. When village leaders demanded for their titles several months later, INDE claimed to have never received them. Following this incident, tensions mounted between INDE officers and local residents, and during one such heated argument, military police (contracted by INDE) shot and killed seven individuals from Río Negro (Lynch 2007, 13). One officer was chased away from the village, and subsequently drowned in the river. Accusations by the military of guerrilla corroboration mounted against villagers, and officers began to visit the community on a regular basis to interrogate and harass potential suspects. Not long after this initial incident, two Río Negro community representatives were found mutilated after handing over to the INDE documents which outlined compensation promises, land title, and signatures (Lynch 2007, 14).

As noted in Osorio's (2003, 21-22) testimony, it was during the month of February 1982 when the Xococ PAC began to terrorize Río Negro residents, thus initiating a series of massacres that would result in over 400 deaths (Rights Action 2000, CEH 1999, VI, Illustrative Case Annex no. 1). The first of these massacres took place in Xococ, after a local commander ordered 72 men and women from Río Negro to report to

³³ According to Osorio's (2003) testimony, as well as other respondents with whom I spoke, the EGP guerrilla group became active in the region after dam construction began. Due to the fact that some residents in Río Negro worked for INDE in construction, as well as the diverse levels of resistance in the village, EGP presence caused tension, and made it easier for the government to label the community as a stronghold.

the village on February 13th to retrieve identity cards which were confiscated a week prior. According to SEBASTIAN, as well as other supporting documents and testimonies, just one person escaped the massacre that took place, a woman by the name of THEODORA, who walked back to Rio Negro and informed residents what had happened. Following this incident, soldiers appeared regularly, and the older boys and men began to sleep out in the fields to avoid confrontation. One month after the Xococ massacre, on March 13, 1982, the PAC reappeared alongside military soldiers, and captured roughly 200 women and children. After forcing them up the mountainside behind the village, the captors raped, tortured, and eventually murdered 70 women, and 107 children at a mountain pass called Pocoxom (Lynch 2007, 14, Witness for Peace 1996, 17). “The women didn’t leave,” one survivor told me. “Because no one thought that they would kill women, kids, or the elderly. We didn’t think.” Through multiple testimonies, the UN Truth Commission report (CEH 1999, VI, Illustrative Case Annex no. 1), describes the incidents from the March 13 massacre at Pocoxom, later interpreting it as genocide.

They then forced the people grouped together to walk three kilometers uphill. “During the entire walk, they hit the women a lot, they called them cows, they treated them as if they were cows rustled into a new field. They hit the children a lot and said they were children of the guerrilla.” When arriving at the zenith of Pocoxom hill, a member of the Army, according to a declarant, said that “now it will be easy to kill some guerrillas.” In this manner, they continued to torture and kill the passive victims. Some were hung from trees, others were killed by machete and others were shot. “The small children were held by their hair and hit against rocks to kill them.” In one mass grave, they were throwing the cadavers. “One that was still alive suffering was left there like a log, one on top of another, they were not left in an orderly manner because they were just thrown in there.” The grave was covered with rocks and branches. Around five o’clock in the afternoon the massacre was over and the assassins headed to Xococ. The aggressors took nineteen child survivors to Xococ.

The excuse for the massacres, as reported by the military, was that of the outcome of counterinsurgency operations (Colajacomo 1999, 5) A Río Negro survivor responds to this unquestionably false and ungrounded accusation (Witness For Peace 1996, 18)

How can innocent children and women, many of them pregnant, be mistaken for guerrillas? They couldn't be None of us were We were peasants trying to make a living from the soil like our parents and ancestors I'll tell you the real reason for the violence they wanted our land for their cursed reservoir and dam, and we were in the way

Residents who survived the massacre at Pocoxom fled to the steep mountains and canyons above the river valley, or were taken in as slaves by the paramilitaries, as was the case for Jesús Tecú Osorio (2003) According to SEBASTIAN, and documented in other reports (Lynch 2007, 14, Witness for Peace 1996, 16), two more massacres followed that of March 13, one in May, where 82 persons were killed in the nearby village of Los Encuentros, and then in September, where another 92 individuals were brutally murdered near the Chixoy Dam at Aguas Frias

It was in early 1983 that the valley was flooded from the newly completed dam, effectively inundating any structures that remained at Río Negro (Colajacomo 1999, 5) After hiding for nearly two years without proper shelter, food, and water, massacre survivors arrived to Pacux to live in the resettlement community built for them by INDE³⁴ Upon arrival some of the men, such as SEBASTIAN and others I spoke with, were locked in the adjacent military base for up to two weeks where they were tortured After moving into the homes built by INDE, the military forced residents to create a PAC and continued to face constant harassment by army officials and other paramilitaries

³⁴ It should be noted that a handful of survivors made it to refugee camps in Alta Verapaz, Guatemala City, and in a rare circumstance through international adoption, the United States (see Flynn and McConahay 2002)

According to Osorio's (2003, 41) testimony "The army entered the village of Pacux and entered the widow's homes and raped them. The patrollers did not object to the soldiers' activities because they knew they would accuse them of being guerrillas." People from Río Negro continued to be kidnapped, tortured, and killed if they showed any signs of resistance against the conditions. In addition, INDE disregarded nearly all of their relocation promises. According to the Chixoy Legacy Issues Study (Johnston 2005a, 26)

All the resettlement communities experience problems from the lack of potable water, which has caused disease, problems with crowded homes and deteriorated buildings, inadequate land to grow food for the household, and, lack of income generation opportunities. For more than 20 years these communities have suffered from the lack of access to fertile lands, markets, and critical resources (fish, palm leaves, fruits, firewood). Extreme poverty has contributed to malnutrition, and many died for lack of food in the first years of resettlement.

Colajacomo (1999, 17) indicates that initial reports by the World Bank make no reference to the mass killings that occurred at Río Negro, and another loan of \$44 million was granted to INDE after technical difficulties started in 1985. Although the role of individual Bank employees in the massacres is unclear, it is evident that the lending institutions knew about the violence (Witness for Peace 1996), as well as the fact that major difficulties involving resettlement and proper compensation existed (Johnston 2005a, 3). For example, Johnston (2005a, 17) found in her research that "World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank regularly sent staff to the area to evaluate performance and conduct new feasibility studies in support of additional financing." Through extensive research in the region, Stewart (2006, 206) indicates that many individuals living in the area knew of INDE's involvement in the massacres, stating that it was easier—and more cost efficient—to label those from Río Negro as guerrillas and eliminate them, rather than give them the compensation originally promised. Speculation

also exists among local residents, survivors, and researchers, regarding the involvement of INDE officials with corruption at the highest levels of the military (Stewart 2006, Witness for Peace 1996) As mentioned in the extensive report generated by the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) (2004, 14), the INDE was placed under military control by the administration of General Romeo Lucas García Given the nature of this military government—and the investments the president, as well as other generals had in the Northern Transverse Strip (Jonas 1991, 128)—COHRE (2004, 36) documents conclude that “INDE stood to benefit from the human rights violations suffered by the Río Negro community The massacre, forced eviction and Río Negro community meant that INDE did not have to relocate or provide just and fair compensation to the residents, and as such INDE was unjustly enriched by these human rights violations ”

The past 25 years have proven difficult for the survivors of the Río Negro massacres Along with all the other resettlement communities, residents in Pacux suffer from extreme poverty as a result of a lack of economic opportunity and inadequate land in which to grow crops, and the community is becoming increasingly inflicted by gang violence among its youth (COHRE 2004) As concluded from my research in the region during Winter 2009, as well as the through the research of others (Colajacomo 1999, Johnston 2005ab, McKinnon 2008a), it appears that although residents have become active in the past 15 years in demanding reparations from the government, as well as justice for the murders that took place, little has transpired As will be discussed in much greater detail in the following chapter, as well as in my conclusions, the long-term effects of displacement and loss of life has had significant negative results in the lives of many

individuals who live in resettlement communities

Since 1991, a handful of families and individuals left Pacux in order to pursue a new life above the reservoir in Río Negro. Although respondents expressed the extreme difficulty in re-establishing the location, due to the fact that the best, most arable land lies far beneath the water of the dammed Río Chixoy, they have been successful in colonizing the land and initiating projects for their sustainability, such as the newly built Centro Histórico, which houses a small museum and hostel. As I experienced during my research, the March 13th commemoration to Pocoxom, to honor those who lost their lives, and bring remembrance to the event so it will never happen again, is a vital aspect of healing and reconciliation for the community.

As for the Chixoy Dam project post-1983, it has proved to be a financial disaster, even according to high-level officials in the INDE and World Bank (Witness for Peace 1996, 27). As early as 1987, reports indicated that “corruption of past military governments, engineering failures, and inflation left the dam two years behind schedule, and skyrocketed the original price from \$340 million to \$1 billion” (Bryson 1987). Sources report that up to \$500 million dollars were lost due to corruption (Colajocomo 1999, 14). Besides the financial difficulties, which can be associated with nearly every mega-dam project worldwide (Scudder 2005), Chixoy has yet to deliver the electricity it promised, and as of 1999, had only worked at 70 percent of its expected power generation (Colajocomo 1999, 14). According to a 2004 report by the Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA), unexpected sedimentation rates will result in a much shorter anticipated lifespan, and it may need to be decommissioned in less than 20 years.

My purpose for this chapter is to provide a solid background on the Chixoy Dam and Río Negro. Like the previous chapter on Guatemala history, I pulled key events and themes from the story in order to give proper context and understanding for my research findings, outlined in the following chapter. A full account, from the initial stages of the project and into the present, would likely take an entire book, or a series of books—and would be ideally written by a surviving member of the community.

Chapter 6- Analysis

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the voices of individuals directly affected by the Chixoy Dam and Río Negro Massacres, as well as those who work closely with the victims. Through my analysis of interviews, observations, and participation in meetings, I identified three key themes which illuminate the ‘perceived’ impacts of the Chixoy Hydroelectric Dam on the former residents of Río Negro. These include (1) Impacts from Violence, (2) Economic Impacts, and (3) Contemporary Development. In order to better describe these broad topics, I recognized sub-themes, which allow for a more detailed account.

Impacts from Violence

1. Loss of life

As explained earlier in this study, at least 444 citizens from the community of Río Negro lost their lives as a direct result of the violence from 1980-83 (Johnston 2005a, 6). This number does not reflect the potential total number of victims who later lived in the resettlement community of Pacux, and continued to face military repression in the form of kidnappings, torture, and assassinations.

The issue of past violence and the loss of family members unified my respondents more than any other topic discussed. I do not claim to be an expert in psychology or the field of mental health, I found that most interviewees seem to have suffered from psychological trauma due to what they witnessed, and expressed a deep sadness, and loss, in growing up without their parents, brothers, and sisters. All of my respondents, both

women and men, became emotional in some form or another when discussing what took place in Río Negro during the years of violence³⁵

On the night of March 13, 2009, at the commemoration of the massacre at Pocoxom, an informal interview with CRISTÓBAL, a survivor of the violence and resident of Pacux, turned into a very poignant telling of the story

My mother tried to escape, and I found her body, down there (pointing to the ravine that we were sitting near) sprawled out. She was shot and tried to escape. My wife had been carrying one of my daughters on her back. I found machete marks both on my daughter and my wife. I just found her there. She was cut in half. This is a very painful story but I thank you very much to come here to listen, because this is a very true story.

Many of the survivors whom I interviewed shared such grisly remembrances during our conversations, despite that it was likely the first time we had ever met. Individuals spoke openly about the rape, torture, and brutal murder that took place at Pocoxom, and almost always thanked me for listening to them.

As should be expected, past violence has long lasting effects on individuals, and on the entire community of Pacux, as well as the newly re-colonized community of Río Negro. Young survivors, such as ROLANDO, who was born while his mother was in hiding, told me how “alcoholism and severe mental problems were common ailments due to what individuals [such as his own mother and stepfather] had witnessed and

³⁵ Responses by Río Negro survivors regarding the past violence and its lasting effects are not unique in Guatemala, given the nature of the internal conflict. As outlined by anthropologist Linda Green (1999) in her book *Fear as a way of life*, which addresses the psychological trauma found in Maya widows, the fear and instability generated from such brutal and widespread violence has had numerous effects on both individuals and entire communities. Post-traumatic distress syndrome, as well as a “chronic state of emotional, physical, spiritual, and social distress,” are a few of the many lasting effects Green (1999, 112) found in her own interviewees.

experienced ” Other individuals, such as JULIÁN, believed that much of the youth gang violence in Pacux is “an effect of past violence, because there remains orphans There is no one to teach them to work We were taught to work [in Río Negro], we grew up with our mothers and fathers ”

Nearly all the women I met with in Pacux were particularly distressed when recounting what happened, and teared up, or openly wept, several times throughout the interview Many spoke about the hardships of being orphaned, and believed that much of their economic and psychological difficulties were due to the fact that they had grown up without parents, and were raised either by another family member, or in an orphanage Individuals, such as MARIA, a community activist in Pacux, stated that survivors were still “weak” as a result of growing up orphaned And when speaking about potential financial reparations offered by the Guatemalan government, MARÍA, as well as other respondents, commented that there was no amount of money that would bring back a loved one, or fix the fact that they had endured childhood without their parents CANDELARIA places much of her past and present sadness on the loss of her mother, who died at Pocoxom on March 13th 1982

One suffers a lot when they do not have a mother Because you don’t have affection from no one There is no happiness There is no hope, because I can’t see my mother, or visit her

CANDELARIA’s story is not uncommon in that her father survived the massacre at Pocoxom, as he was already in hiding by this point, and believed that the military and PAC members would not harm the women, children, and elderly Her father has since remarried, and problems arose between his new wife and CANDELARIA To exacerbate

the problem, CANDELARIA's father began to drink heavily after the violence while living in Pacux, before his eventual return to Río Negro in 1991. She claims he beat her repeatedly and hit her with his machete. She also stated that her stepmother would not feed or take care of her, as all her attention was placed on her own children. Again, CANDELARIA recounts the sad memories of her childhood:

I was nine years old when I met up with my father, and I went to live with him again. After that, I started to make weavings. And I didn't have time to make tortillas, and my stepmother didn't give me tortillas. I was hungry when I went to school. One teacher asked me why I was sick, and I told her, I am not sick, I'm hungry. Because my father does not feed me. Or my stepmother. I cried. Because one without a mother has nothing in this world.

While carrying out interviews in Pacux, I found that conflict between stepparents and their stepchildren was an all too common subject among those who lost just one parent to the violence.

In contrast to so many stories of sadness and despair, some interviewees (mainly men) spoke with relative ease about what took place, and talked of personal 'rehabilitation' since the violence. References to Jesus Christ were frequent when interviewees discussed their own path toward wellbeing and reconciliation with what took place. I found that those able to speak with more controlled emotion about the violence generally lived in present day Río Negro, where the socioeconomic burdens are far less extreme than in Pacux. SEBASTIAN, a current resident of Río Negro and community leader, spoke of his recuperation:

I am a bit recovered, because I have my house, and my wife has chickens, and dogs, and some ducks. My kids can study. My daughter GLORIA ANGELICA has graduated, and my other kid RODRIGO. I am really content, because he is studying in Livingston. I am struggling for them, and I have worked really hard for this. So now. I feel a lot better than before, because now we live directly in

Río Negro, and also we have this center, and we can get a bit of money from it, and I can buy fish to eat. At least this is an advance in how I was feeling

As will be discussed in greater detail in the section on ‘development,’ rehabilitation appears to be an easier process for those who are either working for reparations and justice, or have been able to return to a semi-subsistence lifestyle, such as those in Río Negro. It cannot be overstated how important it appeared for most of the men I spoke with to have their own land in which to cultivate a *milpa* (a traditional plot of corn, beans, and other assorted vegetables based on local geography and climate), and return to a more self-determined and traditional, Maya-Achi vision of life. And this, I believe, has aided some individuals considerably in the process of recuperation.

2 Physical displacement

Following the massacre at Pocoxom, survivors from Río Negro fled to the rugged mountainous terrain surrounding the Chixoy River basin, which began to flood shortly thereafter. Survivors left everything they owned in their homes, which were looted and eventually burned by soldiers and PAC members. Some fortunate individuals, such as SEBASTIAN, managed to arrive in time to “get corn and clothes and hide them in the mountains.”

Most survivors lived from one to three years in the wooded gulches surrounding the basin, as a means of hiding from military and paramilitary forces. A small number of individuals made their way out of the mountains to Guatemala City, into the neighboring department of Alta Verapaz, and in very rare instances, the United States.

CRISTOBAL, already 24 years old at the time of the violence, discusses life in hiding

We lived in small groups, all over, so we wouldn't be seen by the military. When we heard soldiers coming in from the Baja Verapaz side, we'd move over there [pointing up the mountainside], or from the Quiche side, we'd come over here. We slept under trees, with no water, no food. We would eat the middle of the palm stalks. We ate jocote roots, because there was no fruit. Uncooked. We fished at night. We ate it raw, without salt. We caught the fish with palm leaves and string. There is also a bean from a tree that we ate.

Many children perished due to the harsh conditions of living in the mountains, with limited food, water, and shelter. On May 14th, 1982, just two months after the massacre at Pocoxom, military forces tortured and killed an additional 84 survivors at Los Encuentros, located roughly five kilometers downstream from Río Negro. Days later in Agua Fría, another village within the vicinity, soldiers killed 35 children who were seeking refuge (Colajacomo 1999, 5).

Apart from those who fled to the mountains, PAC members took 18 children from the massacre site at Pocoxom to live at their homes in Xococ (Colajacomo 1999, 5). MARIA, who was 14 at the time of her abduction, told me about the incident from her home in Pacux.

I don't remember the day I left in 1982. When there was a massacre in Río Negro. Two patrollers brought me. I lived in Xococ. I pretty much had no family. I remain without my family. The patrollers made me cry, made me sad. I remained without my mother, father, grandparents, brothers and sisters, no one. My father was killed in '80. My mother '82, on the 13th of February. My grandparents on the 13th of March. And after that month, I went with the patrollers. All the kids and old people and women were killed. I lived in Xococ. I lived there for about one year. I don't really remember that year. And for 25 years I have lived here in Pacux.

JESUS TECU OSORIO, also taken in as a slave to Xococ, recounts in his book, *The Río Negro Massacres* (2003, 29), of life with his captor, Pedro Gonzalez Gomez

My life of uncertainty began the 14th of March I didn't know what was waiting for me I didn't know what kind of life I would have with Pedro Gonzalez Soon enough I realized that I was a slave for this patroller For over two years my life was suffering, pain and tears I had no hope of being rescued by a relative or friend I was a servant for that family

Family members aided by the church eventually rescued JESUS, along with other children captured from Río Negro However, some victims, such as MARÍA's brother, died while in captivity

In late 1983, after General Efraín Ríos Montt called an 'amnesty' for all refugees in hiding (Jonas 1996), most of the remaining survivors living in the mountains arrived to Pacux (though some originally ended up in camps in Alta Verapaz), to live in the houses built for them by INDE and the World Bank Upon arriving, all persons had to present themselves at the military base, which was located across the street from the entrance to the village SEBASTIAN recalls his eleven days locked up at the base

A man from my wife's community labeled us spies, so we were separated from everyone We were taken to a small room, a latrine, with feces everywhere We were tied up and chained to some pipes and separated into stalls This is my story, but I could hear men in other stalls too I was kicked and they grabbed my head and held a knife to my neck "You're guerrillas," they said "How many soldiers did you kill? Where are your weapons?"

After enduring many days of torture, SEBASTIAN told them that he had helped the guerrillas, thinking that by saying this, they would let him go He spent another six days in the latrine, tied by his hands to the toilet SEBASTIAN's brother, who had joined the guerrilla following the massacres, tried to escape from the base and was shot and killed Upon release, a military commissioner told SEBASTIAN, "I spared your life, but others

want to kill you ” SEBASTIAN was soon forced into the local Civilian Patrol (PAC) CRISTOBAL, who was also locked in the base for a total of twelve days, was finally rescued due to the help of a local Catholic priest, FATHER MELCHOR, who wrote letters to high-ranking commissioners and later had him released

After moving into their homes, military soldiers and PAC members continually harassed survivors. As a ‘model village’ Pacux was under strict military control, and residents could not move about freely. For SEBASTIAN and many others, there was no other option but to leave Pacux, for the safety of himself and family, and to find work. He traveled to the sugar cane plantations along the south coast, and to the Petén, before finally heading back to Río Negro in 1991.

For the orphaned children, moving from one place to the next was common, at least until they reached an age where they could fend for themselves, or get married. MARTINA, an orphan who survived the March 13th massacre by hiding in the Río Negro church, describes what life was like in San Cristobal, Alta Verapaz, where she ended up after living in the mountains with her brothers and sisters:

We didn’t have freedom to leave or pass. They [the soldiers] took care of us, with guns. Each morning, everyone, kids, old people, were gathered and talked to about the guerrilla, but we were kids, we didn’t know anything, we were just poor kids. There, we suffered a lot. For one year we were there. And every morning, at five in the morning, everyone was awakened and checked on by the soldiers. They yelled at us, all of us, kids, men, women. They taught us to sing the anthem for the army. It was the law.

One respondent, EFRAÍN, who currently lives in Pacux, has a fairly typical story of periodic movement from one location to the next following his arrival to Rabinal from the mountains.

When I was 15, in 1986, I was forced into the military, to work in Zone 1 I did it for three years, forced After this I worked in a factory in Zone 13, Mixco [a suburb of Guatemala City] I worked there for six or seven months After this, it was very hard to survive, I had to buy everything, so I came here [Pacux] I came to live in the house with my 13 brothers, then with my uncle I searched for a way to survive Some of my brothers went to the capital, to work on houses I married in 1992, and we went to Río Negro

A number of Pacux residents also migrated to the United States in search of work

Halfway through an interview with MARTINA I learned that her husband, also a Río Negro survivor, had been living in the U S for three years, with little contact She was unsure where he presently resided, as he was just laid off from his job in Virginia

A fairly common sub-theme that emerged from discussions regarding displacement from Río Negro is that of, what I call, ‘the life before ’ Although I tend to interpret these sentiments as more of an economic issue, the psychological impacts of such violent displacements—as well as the cultural impacts—are worthy to note in this section, and will be expanded on in my final discussion

Below is MARÍA’s response to my question about how life in Pacux compared to the life she remembers in Río Negro

Nothing is like living in your own community, when you don’t need anything, when you have everything you need, without thinking And now, we’re thinking about so many things, it’s not the same Not like before, when everything was calm, there was no sadness, nothing Not like now there are a mountain of things that we’re thinking, because, it is very hard, what happened What happened here

Throughout my time in the new Río Negro, references were made to important sites in the basin, many of which presently lie underwater On two separate visits I went to Cahuinal, a Classic Maya ruin that surfaces only during the dry season Those living in present day Río Negro spoke proudly about this location, as well as other ruins scattered

throughout the basin SEBASTIAN, as well as ÁNGEL, another long-term resident, often pointed out places of historical and cultural significance, such as meeting spots, other ruins, old corn fields, and places where the women used to gather lime to make tortillas. There was frequent talk about particular locations, such as at Los Encuentros (also underwater), where people from all over the basin would meet to trade goods and dance.

Although other communities in the basin besides Río Negro, such as Chicruz, are repopulating in recent years, the rich cultural activities and trade that defined the region is almost completely lost due to the displacements and loss of suitable habitat as a result of the flood.

Economic Impacts

1 Loss of Land, Possessions, and Livelihood

The truth is that, before, when I lived with my parents—before they built the dam—everything was good. I worked with my father, he had a business making artwork. We had materials, everything. We had peanut trees. There were many things we made: hammocks, petates, etcetera. When we lived in Río Negro, life was good. We had a small river, and fished at night. We had fruit trees: oranges, zapotes, and many other fruits.

The statement above, spoken by EFRAÍN from the small bible school that he operates out of his home in Pacux, is a common sentiment regarding what was lost due to the flooding and forced expulsion from their homes at Río Negro.

Respondents from both Pacux and the new Río Negro spoke about the bountiful harvests they had along the river's edge, and the free movement they had to trade goods

at local markets SILVESTRE, who was already middle-aged at the time of the violence, expands a bit on what he remembers

Before the violence, before the dam, we were better We worked in agriculture Almost all of us were campesinos Each family worked their own land, planting maize, beans, squash, tomatoes, jocotes, and mangoes Included in this was the fish Because right now, where the reservoir is, we had a river, a small river And there were many fish in it We had our houses separated, because the place was big So, we were good We didn't buy wood, jocotes, and we didn't buy much maize We sold beans and tomatoes

Respondents spoke nostalgically about how the best land was now underwater—land that used to support the entire community SEBASTIAN and ANGEL both told me how they used to have several species of fish, now locally extinct, and much better pasture for their animals

Now that the valley is flooded, people speak of the limitations of travel MARIO stated how “before the dam, people could cross the valley freely, with cows and products to sell in Rabinal, but not now We cannot pass because of the reservoir and it is very difficult to get in and out ”

When interviewees speak of loss, they frequently compare it to what they now have in both Pacux and the new Río Negro Most of the respondents are resentful towards INDE due to the unfulfilled promises of free electricity, land for agriculture and animals, and job opportunities

During interviews I was constantly reminded how, in Pacux, there was tremendous difficulty in finding wood, and land to plant crops—a sharp contrast as to how life was before in Río Negro, where both wood and land were plentiful and managed accordingly MARIO told me how “the women were being accused as robbers because they were getting wood from the hills, as they always did There are many who find work

[in Pacux], and still must collect on private land ” In asking MARÍA whom she blamed for her present economic struggles, she linked it clearly to what was lost, and not recovered (as originally promised by INDE and the World Bank)

I place the blame on INDE because, before, we had no needs, not like now Now, we have to buy wood, food, everything But before in Río Negro, we didn't have to buy anything Before, my father sold fish But now, there's nothing One pound of fish costs 15 Quetzales (about \$2 US)

MÁRIO also responded to the same question with anger and resentment towards INDE

There are problems with INDE because they didn't comply with their promises When we were living here, they took advantage of the war of '82 They made us houses that we didn't want And they only bought seven caballeros of land [in Río Negro there was roughly 22 caballeros] And besides this, how many fruit trees lie under water? How many harvests did we lose in 30 years? How much do they owe us?

Respondents also blamed the patrollers who, besides massacring family members, took possessions from their homes MARIO told me how “everything was stolen- the horses and cows- everything ” SILVESTRE emphasized this point at several times throughout the interview

All of our clothes were robbed by the patrollers They left us very poor, because there was money that we left in the houses We left radios, important things There, we suffered a lot

According to the survivors, as well as human rights and development workers, it is clear that the loss of property, livelihood, and land, is a very negative economic impact on those displaced from Río Negro

2 Increased Poverty

According to JOSÉ, director of ASCARA (Asociación Campesina Río Negro 13 of March Maya Achi), the community of Pacux is defined by its “extreme poverty.” Even by Guatemalan standards, Pacux, and many of the other relocation villages set up by INDE and the World Bank, are desperately poor, without access to basic services, or opportunities to better their situation.

Lack of resources, economic opportunities, discrimination, and lack of outside help—which was guaranteed by the World Bank and INDE upon their forced displacement—are the dominant perceived factors regarding an increase in poverty and decrease in overall well-being since the construction of the dam. Again, EFRAIN expresses his frustration:

We have no electricity, no water—our basic rights. And before, the INDE offered us many things—they made us these houses, but these houses don’t work. They need mending, and they were made 30 years ago. We are looking for a way to construct out of adobe, but there is no way, we don’t have the resources.

CARLOS CHEN, co-director of COCAHICH, a development organization which works on behalf of all Chixoy Dam-affected communities, acknowledged that the level of poverty in Pacux is exacerbated by the extremely crowded conditions, where up to five families share one small home. Lack of services, such as water, intermittent electricity, and proper sewage systems result in slum-like conditions. Residents, such as MARTINA, told me how the water only comes on for 20 minutes a day, with no service on Sunday. Several women explained that there was not enough water to clean what little clothes they had.

Interviewees, such as ROLANDO, expressed that great difficulties exist for children growing up in such extreme poverty to break out of the cycle, due to the lack of education. JOSÉ from ASCARA gave his synopsis of the situation:

The majority of families have no money, and if they don't have money, they can't send the kids to school. The kids can only go to primary school because they can't afford anything more. When the young people reach a certain age, they end up going to the capital to work, and there are also the youth gangs.

The increase in gang violence in Pacux is not unusual given the social and economic realities of the country (see Benson et al. 2008). A primary reason that the residents of Río Negro desire a secondary school in their community is so that their children do not have to live in Pacux, or Rabinal, in order to attend further schooling. ANGEL, from Río Negro, told me of a recent and tragic incident in Pacux, where his son was robbed and killed by a youth gang on his way to school. Nearly everyone I spoke with blamed the local violence, at least in part, to the dire economic situations that persist. Again, I argue that this can also be linked to the psychological impacts of violence experienced among survivors.

Lack of employment is also a major topic among residents in Pacux. Due to the abrupt change from subsistence living, which was successfully practiced in Río Negro, into a more 'modern' capitalist system, residents had to immediately find income to provide for their needs. Upon arrival to Pacux in 1983, up until today, residents faced discrimination by those who live in Rabinal, and are considered to be among the lowest rung of society. At several points, while talking with people in the market in Rabinal, to Ladinos and Indigenous alike, I was given stern warnings about going to Pacux alone, and even laughed at when I told them what I was doing. The residents in Pacux were very

aware that this attitude exists, and state it as a reason none of them could obtain jobs in town

As a result of so many factors, many survivors left to find work in the capital, in the plantations of the Boca Costa and Petén, and the United States. Survivors returned, and still do return, to Pacux, because it is there that they have homes (although many are structurally unsound) and a tight knit community of fellow survivors. However, finding a steady source of income is a challenge, if not impossibility, for nearly all of my interviewees

Many women, and to a lesser extent men, have taken up weaving, which helps, but is inadequate. Because of the expense of materials, and the amount of time it takes to finish a hammock, place mat, or blanket, the net gains are low, and cannot sustain a family. JULIAN, also a weaver, stated that he made only 25 Quetzales, roughly three dollars, for making a place mat, which required two days of work. HEIDI MCKINNON, a Peace Fellow for the Advocacy Project, a U.S. based NGO, is working on organizing a cooperative where local weavers can buy supplies at wholesale and sell direct to U.S. buyers. For women, such as CANDELARIA, learning to weave helps tremendously, as she can now work from home and take care of her young children, instead of constantly searching for work in Rabinal, or in the capital. “Always I thank God for having work in my house,” she told me. “Sometimes people ask for a canasta (hand made bag) and I make it for them. I am content, because I am making money. I have to know people [to sell them].”

Yet still, CANDELARIA spoke frequently of the desperate poverty that she and her family experience, and stated that if she came up with the money, she would like to

go to the United States to find work. When I told her what I knew about life in the States as an immigrant—the constant insecurity and lack of work due to the recession—she stated that “there is just no other route. Right now, I have no money to get my kids what they need to study. They need shoes, uniforms. And I just don’t have it.”

According to JOSÉ from ASCARA, most male inhabitants living in Pacux work intermittently as day laborers in Rabinal, while also planting a *milpa* during the rainy season on rented land. SILVESTRE, also a weaver, gave his opinion on how the current system is working out:

Look here, it is very difficult. I am talking for all the people, not just for me. Here, you can get work on some days, but for every day, there isn’t work. And for those of us affected, there is nowhere to plant [crops for subsistence and to sell]. Here, there is very little land. We plant a little, and harvest. We only have two months for corn. Why? Because there is no land. We don’t have land to get wood. The land you can see on the other side is the land of the Pueblo. It’s private. But for the necessity of many people, they go to collect wood. They go, to rob wood. They rob because they need to, because they don’t have money to buy wood. And before in Río Negro, they made petates [traditional mats they sold at regional markets], because the palm was close by. So, our lives here, now, are very difficult. Some women go to the village, to ask for work, to wash clothes. That’s what they do, the women, to survive, because there is no possibility to live better.

Almost all the men I spoke with still desired to live once again as self-sufficient *campesinos*, or traditional farmers, and the women also supported this way of life for their families. They spoke of products they made and sold in Río Negro, and of the culturally rich process of planting and harvesting their *milpa*. Again, the main problem is land, particularly the lack of access. Any person who wishes to have a *milpa* must rent the land from a private owner. This rent cost often offsets the benefits of the harvest. SILVESTRE, along with a group of 20 men bought a sizeable piece of land to harvest their crops near the reservoir (six to eight hours away), that they work shortly before and

during the rainy season (May to November) This purchase has proven to be successful, but it demands an incredible amount of resources and time to get to their farm EFRAIN rents land closer to Pacux where he grows jamaica (a flower which is used to make a sweet, traditional beverage) to sell at the market, as well as grasses for supplemental cattle feed But, again, this strategy provides work for only a few short months

In Río Negro, where land is still fairly plentiful, residents stated that it is much tougher now to grow food, because the best land is under water As in times before, the harvest is crucial for survival, though presently it is not always sufficient A variety of development projects—which will be discussed in further detail in the next section of this analysis—help the new residents of Río Negro to survive, and move away from the debilitating poverty experienced in Pacux Projects such as the new Centro Histórico, which hosts guests who pay nightly rates, and weaving projects supported by DOMINGA, a survivor adopted by a family in the U S during the violence, bring in additional income that residents share, and can be used to buy supplemental food

However, depending on the standards by which we gauge poverty, one might perceive that the residents of Río Negro are still impoverished From my own observations, I gather that the residents have enough to eat (at least during the time of my visit, at the height of the dry season), and live in adequate houses, but they lack the resources to provide proper sanitary conditions Dogs, pigs, chickens, and other animals are inside homes, and the water from the reservoir, in which they catch fish and bathe, is obviously polluted from upstream sources (see Appendix I, F) Additionally, since the local school only serves children to the age of ten, those who wish to study further must relocate to Pacux or Rabinal, and typically live with family members there Those who do

not have the money, or desire, to continue going to school, remain in Río Negro with a very limited formal education—at least among ‘western’ standards

Residents of Río Negro, as well as HEIDI, mentioned that since food supplies run thin for at least two months leading to the harvest season, residents must ration corn and beans, and have very limited vegetables, fruits, or meat. At the time of my visit, eggs and fish seemed plentiful, and I did not notice any signs of malnourishment in children or adults¹

Contemporary Development

1 Social justice

We have been struggling ever since [being displaced from Río Negro], against the dam—myself and Carlos—and we’ve all decided, that this is what we need to do with our lives. And if they kills us, well that’s what will happen, because we are not going to stop. And what we ask from the government is not help, but reparations, and justice

Although not everyone is as active in the movement for justice as CRISTOBAL, who gave the above statement at Pocoxom on March 13th 2009, most interviewees from Pacux and Río Negro speak of the need for justice, and are involved in one way or another. A handful of men and women have, since 1984, risked their lives to fight for reparations and reconciliation for all the survivors. Organizations, such as ADIVIMA (The Association for the Integral Development of the Victims of the Violence of the Verapaces, Maya Achi) and COCAHICH, which are both heavily involved in the

¹ It is important to note that these are solely from my own observations and interpretations, and that I am not an expert in this field

reparations negotiations and other major development objectives, were born out of this early movement

According to GRAHAME RUSSELL, co-director of Rights Action, a Guatemala City-based NGO instrumental in the fight for justice in Rabinal, the initial exhumations in 1993 at Pocoxom “empowered survivors, by allowing them to take back the site ” Since then, other sites have been exhumed, with the aid of the FAFG (Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation), in nearby communities, in Rabinal, and in the decommissioned military base adjacent to Pacux

Those pressing for exhumations and justice in the form of reparations for damages caused, and criminal trials against the material and intellectual authors, are frequently threatened (to a lesser extent in recent years), by the military and paramilitary The military labeled JESÚS a guerrilla throughout the early 1990’s for his leadership in the exhumation of Pocoxom, and for his testimony against the PAC members who enslaved him and killed his brother, Jaime In his book, *The Rio Negro Massacres* (2003,36), he explains the significance of exhumation day at Pocoxom

After the hard work of the anthropologists, we gave our families a Christian burial on the 24th of April, 1994 It was the saddest day for me because it was the last goodbye I wanted to cry, I wanted to drown myself in alcohol but I didn’t I thought that these activities would help me forget the pain This tragedy pushed me to continue the struggle I spoke with people and shared everything that I had lived at the massacre with them This was the only way I was able to alleviate pain, even though every word that I spoke reminded me of the anguish of the people who were massacred

Throughout Guatemala, exhumations of massacred victims from the armed conflict bring forth considerable healing and empowerment among affected family and community members (Sanford 2003) Maya and Catholic (and Evangelical) services and ceremonies,

as well as celebrations take place, to honor those who lost their lives due to the violence

In 1995, with the help of Rights Action, survivors built monuments in the Rabinal graveyard honoring those killed at Río Negro, and built a Maya-Achi cultural/holocaust museum

Every year in Río Negro, on March the 13th, hundreds of survivors and their families gather at Pocoxom, to stay up all night and commemorate the 1982 massacre. As stated earlier, I had the privilege to take part in the 2009 memorial. Although people gave many emotional testimonies, I found the event to be more of a celebration, or even a social gathering, where survivors from both Río Negro and Pacux visit with each other, tell stories, and feast. Survivors such as CARLOS, and JULIAN, gave speeches which help me understand that this event is very important for the collective health of survivors, and a major step towards empowering the population.

In conjunction with the Centro Historico (the collective cultural and ecotourism project in present day Río Negro), SEBASTIAN takes guests to Pocoxom, to tell his story of the massacre, and teach others about the experience. When I visited Pocoxom in 2008, with the UNBC field school, SEBASTIAN eagerly shared with us what happened, and ended our emotional visit with a statement, that I feel, shows the importance of the exhumation as it relates to the healing of his people:

I thank each of you a thousand times for coming to this sacred place. Now we strive to rebuild our community and to give our children a future, to pass on our values to the next generation. I hope you all return one day.

Along with providing closure to survivors who lost loved ones during the violence, the exhumations also provide forensic evidence for lawsuits filed against ex-PAC members, as well as high-ranking officials.

In an unprecedented case, JESUS, in 1998, testified against his captor, Pedro Gonzalez, who was later sentenced to life imprisonment. Another two PAC members from Xococ were also tried and sentenced. However, the intellectual authors of the massacre are still free, despite warrants out for their arrest (see Dill 2005, al Nabka 2008).

Throughout the latter part of the 1990's, after the Peace Accords of 1996, which 'officially' ended the 36-year civil armed conflict, dialogue opened up between those affected by the Chixoy Dam, the INDE, the Guatemalan government, and the World Bank (Johnson 2005).

According to MÁRIO and CRISTOBAL, negotiations were slow to transpire until September 7, 2004, when several hundred Chixoy-affected persons occupied the dam, effectively shutting it down. MARIO reflects on what this accomplished:

Yea, we shut down the dam, but the next day we were labeled as terrorists by the newspapers. So now some of us are on watch lists. But now we have lawyers helping us, both internationals and nationals, to help us fight for what we are doing. Even though the government tried to terminate us all, we are stronger now, as we have all come together to fight. Many people have since left the country to speak to audiences and denounce those who did this to our community. The government has realized that we have all this international support, and when we have meetings we have observers and people from other communities who weren't affected, so the government has been forced to listen to us. The government has always accused us of things—during the violence they called us guerrillas, and now terrorists, but since the peace accords, things have been better. We have been fighting this for 30 years with the government.

Since 2004, the negotiation for reparations has been on the forefront of the social justice movement. Several outside collaborators, such as Barbara Rose Johnson of the California-based Center for Political Ecology, Rights Action, and the Organization of American States (OAS), have put together exhaustive documents that aim to document

exactly what was lost due to the dam, and which promises were not carried out by the INDE JULIAN, who attended meetings between the INDE and the leaders of Rio Negro in the early 1970's before the dam was built, and worked for the archaeologists who carried out preliminary research in the basin, gave me a firsthand account of what was originally promised by the government, and how they were betrayed

They [INDE officials] entered the village and offered us many things, but nothing, or just a small bit of the promises were kept. The majority were not kept. One of the offers they made were to pay for the damages to the crops. INDE offered roads on both sides of the dam. They offered us trucks, but first they offered boats. To bring things from the market into town. They offered electricity. Because it was our land that gave them this, they offered it for free. But sadly, the dam was finished in 1982, and all that they promised before this, they didn't keep. And when there was a meeting at the INDE office, in San Cristóbal Verapaz, they kidnapped two of the committee members [from Rio Negro]. And they took the act with the signatures and their promises. And the committee members turned up dead. The book of acts and promises disappeared.

In a fairly surprising move, the Guatemalan government, under the current Colom administration, agreed to provide reparations for Chixoy-affected communities (McKinnon 2008a). I find it important to note, however, that up to this point, both the World Bank and the IDB have failed to claim any responsibility for what happened, despite acknowledgement that the dam has since turned into a disaster, and their continued financial support throughout the violence—which they were apparently aware of (Witness for Peace 1996).

According to HEIDI MCKINNON, whose work for the Advocacy Project focuses heavily on the negotiations, the reparation is a two-part process. Part one involves the most urgent needs for the relocation communities, usually involving projects initially promised by INDE. Each community will receive its own unique package, based on the 'most dire' necessities identified by local leaders and submitted to the committee. New

houses and school buildings, potable water projects, and electricity, are examples of guaranteed projects that some communities will receive in the next year

The second part of the reparation process has to do with a development strategy for economic stimulation. JUAN DE DÍOS, director of ADIVIMA, is in charge of this project, and strongly focuses on sustainability and self-sufficiency, as well as objectives expressed as important by the villagers. JUAN expressed a need for the formation of cooperatives, both agricultural and in the craft making industries, and has worked with HEIDI for more than a year on generating a working plan.

Along with the recent developments regarding financial reparations promised by the Guatemalan government, an international trial has begun involving survivors of the massacre, with the Inter-American Human Rights Court system³⁶. During the time I was in Rabinal, CARLOS, MARÍA, and two other survivors flew to Washington D C to give testimony at a preliminary hearing. When I asked MARÍA what she wanted out of this trial, she stated the following:

What we want in the court is justice. When you are a victim, there is no price. For this we are searching for justice. I am ready to rest, now, after 25 years of struggling. We have achieved the capture of one patroller, but this is an ex-PAC, not any soldier, or colonel—they are free. But hopefully we will resolve something later.

Like MARÍA, CARLOS also stated that the purpose of this trial is the capture of the colonel who ordered the massacre—the intellectual author of the massacres at Río Negro. However, CARLOS specified that he is also interested in obtaining financial

³⁶ With the aid of the Center of Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) in 2004, survivors of the Río Negro massacres filed a complaint to the Inter-American Human Rights Commission (IACHR), regarding the human rights abuses carried out by the Guatemalan State against the people of Río Negro. After years of deliberation, the court has officially taken up the case (see COHRE 2004).

compensation, similar to survivors of the massacre in the nearby community of Plan de Sánchez³⁷

The reparations process is complex, multifaceted, and at times, difficult to understand. Almost everyone I spoke with regarding the negotiations expressed some form of dissatisfaction or conflicting opinion about what is going wrong. Many people were not sure if they are on the list to be compensated because both of their parents were dead, and they lived in the house of their wife or husband. People expressed that ADIVIMA and COCAHICH are not consulting their opinion. After nearly fifteen years of work by the Achí groups, the government has yet to comply with any promises for compensation, and interviewees seemed very skeptical that anything would actually transpire, despite the promising news from the capital and the ADIVIMA office. EFRAIN, from Pacux, responds to a question regarding what he thought about the possibility of future reparations:

Yes, I have heard of this. We have struggled greatly for this, but, there is a large confusion. You see, there is an office established, by the government, to repair the damages. There are reparations for social, material, and economic help, for the survivors of the massacres. In this colony, there was a study two months ago. The government came here, and said they would construct new homes. And also, there are some of us who went to the Inter-American court. I heard they began to construct homes in another finca [community farm], and that it will happen here. If we receive this, it will be a start to the damages of the dam and the massacres that happened. It has been very difficult to receive this. For the Inter-American Court, most of us want to receive money, we want a little help, because we were orphaned. But for me, when they asked for my documents, and it showed that I was in the military, I was rejected. But they didn't know that I was forced. So I won't receive or benefit the same as my brothers. I won't receive nothing. Anyways, for now we haven't received nothing and continue to struggle. And there is the COCAHICH, and commission for the dam. And there are other

³⁷ The massacre at Plan de Sanchez is well documented, and set a precedent in international cases relating to the massacres of the 1980's. Although those who carried out the massacre are still free, each affected person was given \$25,000 by the Guatemalan State in 2004 (Inter-American Court of Human Rights 2004).

organizations But for three years we haven't seen anything They talk, but there is nothing

One area of sensitivity I found, which in turn has created internal arguments among survivors and their representatives, is due to the fact that the reparation agreements have become 'closed' between the government and the negotiators for Chixoy-affected peoples As a result of this decision, it has been advised that discussions regarding compensation for the massacres and human rights abuses must be, for the time being, silenced What this means, essentially, is that instead of the continued denunciation for what took place in Rio Negro, and a demand for government compensation and legal action, negotiators are currently only asking for compensation of what they were promised by the INDE, without reference to the sticky subject of the massacres, and those responsible This, they hope, will increase the chances of receiving funds from the government

There is also presently a silencing of critique regarding the role of the World Bank/IDB, apparently due to the ironic fact that the World Bank will be providing the initial investment to the Guatemalan government for the reparations According to HEIDI, a dialogue between the World Bank and Achi groups regarding possible future funding for stage two of the reparations campaign is also apparently underway

2 Perceptions of Development

We have development projects, for some chickens Ten chickens for each person The best development idea would be for us to study with some *compañeros* (partners), to help us get a source of income To lift us out There is terrain, there is water, but money, there is none We could plant corn, sweet corn, chilies We could plant tomatoes, melon, watermelon, papaya There's great land on the other side [of the river from Pacux] We have dreams, wishes, but lamentably, we

cannot achieve them. Some institutions, they could give us assistance, help our people. When there is more investment in the community, it is more tranquil. We search for a form in which to live, but we have no resources.

Despite the various responses I received from interviewees regarding their thoughts on ‘positive development’ in their communities, EFRAÍN, as quoted above, summarizes the dreams of so many in resettlement: to locate a source of income, obtain some form of outside investment, and return to the agriculturalist lifestyle so many of them practiced before the massacres and displacement.

The idea of an artisan cooperative was frequently talked about in both Río Negro and Pacux as a means to organize all the producers and find consistent markets for their goods. As stated earlier, HEIDI from the Advocacy Project works with weavers from all the Chixoy-affected communities, and has applied for grants through the U.S. to get the project underway. By working at many levels, such as producing their own native cotton fibers for production, HEIDI sees this project as a way to involve people from all the communities, and help create a niche market for the goods produced.

Education is also an important topic among many interviewees, as so many of them were unable to study due to their displacement. According to many survivors, the education of their children was also a means to break the cycle of poverty, and is seen as an opportunity and privilege. CANDELARIA, who has three boys attending public school, partly with the aid of grants by the Unitarian Church, repeatedly stated the importance of her children getting a good education, and the exciting possibility that they might attend university. “Thank God,” she told me, “that we are in Pacux, where there are teachers, and there are students who make it to university. Little by little things get better here.”

Both CARLOS, and JESÚS, who founded the innovative school Nueva Esperanza³⁸ (New Hope) in 2003, state that advances in education are among a list of ‘positive developments’ achieved since the early 1990’s by survivors. And despite the fact that many children do not have the opportunity to study due to the economic hardships, people from Río Negro move back to Pacux in order to give their children the opportunity to attend Nueva Esperanza and the other nearby public schools.

Discussions with survivors about agriculture, either at the subsistence level, or as a means to provide income by selling at regional markets, are so abundant that they could fill an entire chapter. As stated earlier, the ability for survivors to have their own *milpa* in which to grow food for their family, and perhaps sell or trade other cash crops, was very important, and spoken about by nearly all of my respondents. Among some individuals, such as SILVESTRE, the only moment of real hope, pride, and excitement occurred when speaking of his plot of land (to which he holds title), and the harvest season. Many survivors indicate that a return to this way of life is a way to connect to the days of self-sufficiency and the cultural practices of their ancestors.

According to most residents, as well as what I observed, the major limiting factor for positive development in Pacux is the lack of adequate land. The INDE promised land equal to what they had in Río Negro, in quality and quantity, but what they received was an infertile, and far too small piece in Pacux. ROLANDO spoke of the inadequacy of the

³⁸ Nueva Esperanza is a project designed to educate children whose parents were affected by the violence, particularly those who survived the massacres at Río Negro. There are currently three grades offered, from age 12-15, with an enrollment of approximately 120 students. The school, according to JESUS, as well as current director Guillermo Chen (see Guatemala Solidarity Network 2007), focuses on sustainability (primarily in agriculture), gender equality, and Maya-Achí history and culture. During my visit with the field school in May 2008, JESUS informed us that, among many plans for the future, was a specialized nursing program.

land they were given, and as a form of development, he wished for better land around Pacux (rather than land that was bought for them as compensation, located three hours away), and “support to the elders, who have knowledge about the Maya ways in which to grow crops.” MÁRIO also commented on a return to “proper resource management and conservation” as a means of sustainable development, and is currently working with a local NGO, Madre Tierra, which focuses on organic methods and permaculture design³⁹

In developing an alternative for residents in Pacux, at least for those who wish to return entirely to the Maya-*campesino* lifestyle, a *finca* called Saumax, located near Cobán in Alta Verapaz is currently being worked on by ASCARA, the reparations council, and Rights Action, as a means to accommodate residents. The land was originally bought by INDE in 1996, but due to the lack of funds to build houses, the piece remains vacant. According to JOSE, director of ASCARA, there will eventually be enough houses and space for 62 people, who are currently living in Pacux in extremely overcrowded conditions. There will also be opportunities to grow cash crops, such as cardamom and coffee will exist, due to the lush, tropical climate. CARLOS, despite his involvement in social issues in Pacux, is one of the residents interested in relocating to Saumax.

Yes, I want to live there. I want to live there because there is a cattle project. Apart from this, there is a housing project from the state. It's a nice place people want to live because there are two harvests of maize. Right now there is corn, there are *milpas*. Right now in Pacux, there are six or seven families living in

³⁹ Permaculture is a system in which agriculture and human settlements are designed by imitating that of natural ecosystems, typically by organic means. Projects include community gardens utilizing native, drought resistant plants, water catchment, and natural building.

one house. So, if there are houses and water there, people will go. One or two of the families. To start another life in Saumax.

When I mentioned Saumax to some individuals, such as MARÍA and JULIÁN, they were not interested, because they could not imagine moving again, and having to become acclimatized to a new climate and environment.

As a means to work towards a development vision more aligned with the ways of their parents and ancestors, as well as escape the injustice which continued to occur in Pacux, three individuals—SEBASTIAN, MARIO, and JULIÁN—returned to Río Negro in 1991, and have since developed a community of twelve families.

The return, as they each described it, was extremely difficult, and many returnees went back to Pacux after a short period. For the first two years, they lived under nylon tarps with their families, and each month SEBASTIAN had to obtain signatures by military personnel in the department capital of Salamá, which proved that they had permission to live above the reservoir. They had to establish plots for growing their crops, and if anything was needed from the outside, they walked the 12 hours to Rabinal. But as SEBASTIAN says over and over again, “*poco y poco*”, little by little, life improved.

Common responses to why people moved back to Río Negro included the free land that existed there to plant their *milpas*, as well as the high cost of living in Pacux. MÁRIO, who left Río Negro several years back in order to work for Madre Tierra, stated that families return because of the possibilities to have animals, wood, and access to fishing. “There are other possibilities to survive, in Río Negro,” he told me. ANGEL mentioned that he enjoyed the fact that he was “free to move about in Río Negro, and it

was safe ” But, as stated by SEBASTIAN on multiple occasions, life in Río Negro is not easy, even now, and many people end up returning to Pacux because life as a *campesino* is constant work, and many from Pacux do not know (or enjoy) that way of life

As well as the more practical, economic reasons for the return, SEBASTIAN, along with JULIÁN, mention the importance of moving back to their place of birth, and spoke of a deep connection with the land once inhabited by their parents and ancestors

As stated by JULIÁN, after I asked him why he returned

The reason we are here INDE forcefully relocated us to Pacux But I say, there are commitments because if an animal from the mountain is relocated to a dry place, he dies, because he is used to a green land And if an animal from the dry land is taken to the mountains, it is bad also, because he is accustomed to the dryness And this is like us before, because INDE moved us like this In Rabinal we couldn't live Some are accustomed And those who have become accustomed have jobs But not all of us have jobs Those of us who could not live there, returned to live here in our place Because in our place, we were born Because we knew that our parents and grandparents knew how to live here Because in the pueblo (Pacux) we had to pay for electricity We pay for potable water There is land, there in Rabinal, but it is not communal land And to get land from the mountains we had to steal And to come upon the owner of this land, we were treated like thieves So for these reasons we returned here In the year 1991 on the 18th of May there were three of us from Rabinal who returned, because we were not accustomed to live there And it is for this, that today we are here

Despite the sentiments that JULIAN and many other survivors feel for Río Negro, several of the residents I spoke with in Pacux did not want to return to Río Negro, as there are too many sad memories, and they have created a life in resettlement, and want to focus on the development of that community Many also did not want to leave the free (albeit broken down) homes in Pacux, or the possibility to have their children attend higher education It is also a significant financial undertaking to leave for Río Negro, where they must build another home, and quickly stake out land to cultivate CARLOS feels that there is only enough good land in the new Río Negro to provide for the current resident families

Development in Río Negro is an on-going process and struggle, since the three men arrived nearly 20 years ago SEBASTIAN, who is in charge of the Centro Historico project, and is more or less the acting mayor of the community (what they call the COCODE), spoke in great detail about past and future projects that would bring income to the community in order for residents to purchase items that they could not produce on their own, such as medicines and clothes, as well as obtain basic services Along with most of the inhabitants I spoke with in Río Negro, he was very satisfied with his work thus far

And for our kids, we now have a school And for those of us who live here, we plant flowers, and have *milpas* beans and *maicillo* [sorghum] And we have no fear for what happened anymore, we are relaxed We have potable water and for this, I feel that we are advancing, and that with more support, from organizations and visitors, we will hope for more, not much, but just enough to survive, and to not suffer like we have suffered

According to the description the survivor's gave me of the original village of Río Negro, as well as what was documented in pre-dam reports, it appears that the overall layout of Río Negro has once again developed towards a lifestyle which mimics their ancestors Alain Ichon's (1978) archaeological report, *La Cuenca Media del Rio Chixoy*, explains how Río Negro had striking similarities to what he knew about pre-Hispanic Maya communities, with its layout of '*ranchos*' or family compounds, surrounded by their *milpas*, as well as an assortment of other food producing trees and plants grown around the house Ichon wrote of each family having one to three head of cattle, with fishing, chickens, and pigs as a common form of animal production My observations in Río Negro, and the visions of development expressed to me, are identical to Ichon's description of the pre-dam community

SEBASTIAN, as well as others with whom I spoke, are happy to live in Río Negro, because of the life they could offer their children, as *campesinos* loyal to their Maya-Achí heritage, and away from the negative elements of Pacux, and the capital. Residents are also happy to be able to provide a life for their offspring, where if they wanted to study away from Río Negro, that they would have that opportunity, and hopefully return at a later point. JULIAN stressed the importance of having a home, for his family and all the survivors of the massacres, in which to develop as they see it fit, and hopefully never again be uprooted.

The successful development of Río Negro could not have been achieved without the help of outside organizations and individuals, namely that of DON VICTOR. VICTOR is a German man who by chance heard the Río Negro story, back in the late 1990's, while working for Servicio Aleman, an NGO based in the capital. In the beginning, his organization funded small projects, such as the purchasing of boats, fishing nets, and provided small grants for residents to invest on things as they pleased, such as a church.

Since 2006, however, VICTOR has embarked on a rather large endeavor, the Centro Histórico, which he expressed to me, was "his dream project." Located on a scenic bluff over the reservoir, the Centro is part museum, part hostel, and meeting hall. On the slope above the main building, herb and vegetable gardens, a tree nursery, as well as several traditional houses exist to educate guests on how the Maya-Achí once lived, before the dam. VICTOR sees this as a project of "empowerment, and healing," where residents can earn money for goods they cannot grow or make, as well as "educate both national and international guests about what took place during the violence, and provide a

unique cultural experience that is both remote and comfortable ” He spoke of many future ideas for the center, such as hiking and other nature tours, and archaeological explorations, while always maintaining the focus of Maya-Achí history and culture

SEBASTIAN, who is the current director of the Centro Histórico, explained how the project was started, and currently run

VICTOR saw that all the small projects were going well, and one of the dreams they had was to build a center for visitors, so VICTOR began to apply for money to help build the center here It was hard to build this place, because we had to carry up everything from the water, the rocks, the wood, everything, cement blocks It took one year to build this, how it is now The whole community is content to have this here, to receive groups, even though it's not that good, we are happy Everyone takes turns working, the women and the men, all twelve families and it really helps the community, because we divide all the money we make between us, to buy things that we need It's really helpful for the women, because they all take turns doing things, like washing the sheets, or cooking, and they get paid for each job they do And for the men, if they go get the *lancha* [small boat], or whatever they do, they get paid for that job The people of Río Negro are in charge of the project, not the Germans, and when there is money left over, it goes back into the project

When I asked others in Río Negro about the Centro Histórico, both men and women, all respondents seem content about how it was being run, and its purpose to bring guests and income During my time in the community, I stayed at the Centro, and at times, small groups of students, mainly from the U S , came to use the facility Although many individuals from the community are involved with the various tasks of accommodating guests, it is always SEBASTIAN who speaks with the guests, and arranges any trips The women show up to cook food, but rarely speak with the guests (it was under my assumption that many women in the community do not speak much Spanish) Due to the spread out layout of the community, and the constant work required for a *campesino* lifestyle, many people seem to have little involvement in the project

Although the Centro is fairly new (officially starting to receive guests in March 2008), it still has a ways to go, according to VICTOR and SEBASTIAN, before it will bring in enough income to the village to offset the general upkeep, maintenance, and construction of other unfinished projects associated with the overall plan. VICTOR spoke of the need for more advertising, and of his hopes to bring in long-term guests and volunteers to learn how to weave or farm.

Future development objectives, expressed by my Río Negro interviewees, include projects that will bring in cattle and a better system to sell their weavings and hammocks. Perhaps at the forefront, however, is the construction of a secondary school. Everyone I spoke with expressed the difficulty in finding and keeping teachers. Currently, only one teacher travels back and forth from Rabinal, every four days. The lack of funds necessary to build another structure is an issue. Part of the reparation demands for the community is to further develop this idea.

As for the cattle project, respondents make continuous references to the cows they had before the dam, how they were stolen by the patrollers, and that at the present time barely anyone has cattle. They also make reference to the poor quality pasture, especially during the dry season. The grazing potential in the basin is low due to the aridity and steepness and areas where animals graze, I observed excessive erosion (see Appendix I, B).

I hoped to learn more about community members' perspectives on future potential mining in the region. Mining currently dominates the 'development' debate in Guatemala, and some preliminary explorations are evident in the region, a topic which I return to in the final chapter. Most respondents did not have any idea about this situation,

and did not comment SEBASTIAN knew that geologists had come to scope out the possibilities, but seemed unconcerned However, those involved in the social movement were well aware of these prospects, and stated their strong opposition, even if it did bring in much needed income MÁRIO and CRISTOBAL are both involved in local struggles against potential new mining operations in other districts of the department, as well as the present struggle against new hydroelectric dams in the country MARIO commented on this matter, while speaking to a group of high school students at the Centro Historico

There are other people from the community that are involved in the world struggle over dams These exchanges are very important, because there are other projects in the country right now that may happen, and we don't want this to happen again Right now there is a project in the Peten that has been stopped due to the resistance, and we have been successful in this due to the collaboration There is importance to maintain this solidarity, so the government doesn't go on building more dams without fulfilling their promises to people who have already lost their lands

Conclusion

The analysis presented in this chapter intends to give the reader an understanding of the data I collected in Río Negro and Pacux Though I developed the themes and sub-themes evident in the interviews, I consciously let the voices of my interviewee's remain the focus of this chapter In connecting this material to the literature I provided in the previous chapters, I aim to draw conclusions in the next chapter, which consists of a discussion of my overall findings

Chapter 7- Discussion and Conclusion

At this point, it seems necessary to return to my original objectives for this study and discuss conclusions that might be drawn from the analysis and corresponding literature review. As stated in the introductory chapter, my aim for this research is to illuminate the 'lived experiences' of Rio Negro citizens affected by the development of the Chixoy Dam, and place their stories and continued struggles into both national and international development discourse. In the end, after reviewing key bodies of literature and synthesizing my discussions and observations from the field, the primary question from this research remains as it was in the very beginning: what can we learn about 'development' through this very specific, yet seemingly emblematic, case study?

Although many different avenues exist in which to grapple with this question, from Chixoy's symbolic representation of hydroelectric dams worldwide, as well as its similarities with other massacres that occurred throughout the country during the 1980s, my own experience and exposure to issues in both Guatemala and North America result in an approach that integrates both local and international themes, and focuses primarily on the divergent perceptions of land and 'development' existing between the dominant capitalist model, and that of Indigenous and/or marginalized peoples. My persistent attempt to connect the incidents at Chixoy to the recent surge in mining development throughout this thesis comes as a direct result of my time spent in San Marcos, near the vicinity of the Canadian-owned Marlin Mine, as well as in El Estor, Izabal, where tensions presently escalate due to Canadian-owned Hud Bay Minerals claims to Indigenous-occupied lands (see Imai et al. 2007). As mentioned in previous chapters, the

forced evictions, contrasting perceptions between Ladino/international capitalists and local Indigenous residents, and the neoliberal concepts of ‘development’ expressed in these projects, share many relevant characteristics with the events from Chixoy (as well as a myriad of other projects over the country’s history), and will be further expanded on in the following discussion

In locating the events from Chixoy and Río Negro within the global context, I reiterate the significant influence of the dominant development model, which continues to displace and discredit other ways of thinking about ‘progress,’ and ‘development’ around the world (Escobar 2003, Davis 2009, Power 2003) Due to my exposure to intensifying resource extraction activities occurring in Northern British Columbia (where I am based for my graduate studies) and the controversy that surrounds it, I make a comparison to this specific location towards the end of this discussion—however, I acknowledge the fact that two very different political situations exist in Guatemala and Canada My connection between these two regions are simply meant to reiterate that the same processes of exploitation, and contrasting views of land and how it should be developed, exist in various regions around the globe, and are informed by the same free-market, capitalist models

To begin this discussion, I return to the Guatemalan context, where the events at Río Negro mirror that of countless other massacres and forced evictions resulting from development activities imposed by the elite and their military counterparts (see Perera 1993, Carmack 1988, Jonas 1991, Handy 1984, Grandin 2004, CEH 1999, Lovell 1988) Violence, in the form of intimidation and physical acts, is a tool continuously employed

by the oligarchy to ensure ample land and labor for their capitalist endeavors since the ‘liberal’ era of the late 1800s (Handy 1984) and into the ‘neoliberal’ present (Moody 2007, Castagnino 2006) During the civil armed conflict of 1960-96—and particularly that of 1978-83—violence became a common strategy employed by the military to remove the ‘communist insurgency’ (Manz 2005, 21), and the population witnessed numerous assaults on Indigenous lands as a means to continue the aggressive national plan for modernization, as well as pacify the growing ‘subversive’ populations in the countryside (see May 1999, Witness for Peace 1996) Consequences from these unequal structures of power are expressed differently across landscapes and communities due to the wide variety of terrain, level of economic activity, and resistant response (Lovell 1988) Through my ethnographic research in Río Negro and Pacux, I aim to provide detail and voice to one of the many hundreds, if not thousands, of communities and individuals who fall victim to this prevailing system

As one might expect, those who survived such horrific events as the massacres at Río Negro continue to suffer, both emotionally and psychologically, and given the situation in Pacux, their economic hardships and cultural survival appears equally trying Due to the loss of land and family, the social and cultural fabric on which the community depended was torn apart, and the repercussions will likely spill into future generations As described in the previous chapter, those who return to a more subsistent, self-determined, and traditional agrarian-based lifestyle, as they aspire for in the new Río Negro—or are working towards with alternatives such as Saumax in Alta Verapaz—appear more content, and less economically and ‘culturally’ impoverished than those

attempting to survive within the bleak economic condition endemic to Pacux⁴⁰ By placing this conclusion into a broader context—one that might aid us in understanding the larger implications of such long-lived policy and its effect on culture and community—I continue returning to the issue of land, and how its perception, utilization, and control has so effectively dictated political, economic, and cultural outcomes within the country

In many ways, the ‘clash’ that occurred in Río Negro, between the Indigenous *campesinos* and the INDE/army, symbolizes the divergent perceptions of land, and ‘development,’ existing in Guatemala since the Spanish invasion, and the violent conflict they generate The INDE/army responsible for the murders and illegal displacements in Río Negro clearly represent ideologies and principles of the Ladino landholding elite, with ideas for ‘progress’ validated by the Western model (Wright 2004, Power 2003), and in this case, the world’s most influential development bank (Johnston 2005ab) The Maya-Achí farmers of Río Negro represent an enduring class of Indigenous peoples, whose identity and livelihoods depend on the land in which they farm, fish, and dwell with their families (Lynch 2007, Hamilton and Fischer 2005) Like many remote Indigenous communities, Río Negro’s isolation allowed for a “culture of refuge,” or “fugitivism,” as described by Lovell (1988, 34) in regards to Maya communities under

⁴⁰ It should be noted that this generalization is made solely from my personal contact with survivors, as well as the opinions of non-Río Negro residents involved with the reparations process, such as Heidi Mckinnon from the Advocacy Project Those involved in the political struggle for justice and sustainable development of their communities, namely CARLOS, MARIO, and CRISTOBAL, all of whom currently live in Pacux, seemed equally fulfilled and positive as those I met with in Río Negro, and also, perhaps, had more faith in their cultural and socio-economic status and futures

Colonial rule⁴¹, and as a result, an autonomous, traditional lifestyle was possible and social networks were strong (Ichon 1978)—and worth defending, as expressed by the resistance

Broadly speaking, Lovell (1988, 27) defines this universal attachment and “persistent defense,” of land, and community, as “fundamental to the maintenance of Maya identity.” Although the Maya-Achí of Río Negro lived along the Chixoy River for just a few generations (between 150-300 years depending on the respondent (see Osorio 2003, 1)), the strong collective resistance at the time of dam construction, and at other points,⁴² qualifies this statement, as do the actions presently carried out by survivors and their families. Individuals such as JULIAN, one of the original returnees to Río Negro, stressed the symbolic importance of this persistence on numerous occasions, as well as the violent clash that followed

Our elders didn't want the construction, because they knew we would be left without our land, without anything. And so where the dam occupies, there lived our ancestors, there they planted. So, our elders went to protest. And what did the company say, the INDE, when they arrived to protest their rights? They said that they are guerrillas. They are guerrillas because the guerrillas also protest their rights. So, we need to get rid of them. And so we left all of our things.

⁴¹ Although Río Negro was able to develop into a community mirroring those described by Lovell (1988, 31-32) during the 17th century—those that maintained, and defended, key traditions while integrating components of Ladino culture, essentially for their own survival—it should be noted that residents were not completely insulated from state policies, such as forced labor under the Ubico regime, and seasonal migration to sugar and coffee plantations (See Osorio 2003).

⁴² Previous examples of resistance to a Ladino-led ‘invasion’ of Río Negro land is stated in Osorio’s documentation, *The Río Negro Massacres* (2003, 3). In his remembrance of stories from this time (around 1970), Osorio quotes the elders: “Let’s fight to win the land so that the only owners will be our grandchildren” (2003, 3). According to this account, Río Negro residents, as well as members of the neighboring villages of Xococ and Pajales, successfully defended their land, with the help of lawyers.

Perhaps more telling than the statement above, however, is JULIÁN's opinion regarding the effects of displacement, and the idea of yet another move to Saumax

I make a comparison to the cutting down of a tree, because INDE took us out of our native land Forcefully We were forcefully taken out from Río Negro and planted in Rabinal And in Rabinal, we couldn't take hold of our roots Because it is not where we were born And now, what they say, is that you will be taken out from Rabinal, and planted in Alta Verapaz [Saumax] And what will happen, is that they won't be able to locate their roots

Such profound connection—and commitment—to the land, was demonstrated by the initial resistance, and confirmed once again by residents of the 'new' Río Negro, and struggling community members in Pacux⁴³ Although there lies an unquestionable element of economic practicality that brings survivors back to the land above their old village site—as resources such as wood, water, and fertile ground are far more abundant than one would encounter in Pacux—their continued dedication to the land, and self-determination, is highly representative of the miraculous resiliency as displayed by the Maya people Through tremendous adversity, individuals such as SEBASTIAN—whose mere existence is amazing enough—risked their lives in order to return to the land of their birth, and continue the rituals that define their culture the tending of the *milpa*, the use of native Achi language and remembrance of their ancestors, stewardship of the land, and development of community—as *they* envision it

It is through comparable diligence—along with a constant resistance (Montejo 2005, 27)—that Maya communities endured nearly five hundred years of economic and racial oppression, assimilation attempts, state-sponsored terror, and the present phase of

⁴³ It is important to note that although most survivors that I spoke with (living in Pacux) do not wish to return to Río Negro, for various legitimate reasons (as discussed in the analysis), nearly everyone had aspirations to return to a more traditional and/or autonomous lifestyle, particularly in regards to growing their own corn

globalization (Lovell 1988, Manz 2008) Although respondents from Río Negro did not mention to me an affiliation with the greater Pan-Maya movement active in Guatemala (See Cuxil 2007, Fischer 1996, Warren 1998, Montejo 2005, Fischer and Brown 2007)—nor did I mention it at the time—their tactics for cultural perseverance share characteristics with this larger theoretical and political entity ⁴⁴

Despite the wide-ranging interests the Pan-Maya movement currently represents, its main objective—for cultural survival and self-determination—speaks directly to the activities of massacre survivors in Río Negro and Pacux As stated by Pan-Maya activist and academic Victor Montejo (2005, 156)

With the recharging of our Maya cultural traditions and the emergence of a Maya unity with plural identity, we are ensuring that the voices of our ancestors and elders are becoming louder and louder again We must struggle to maintain our life where our placentas have been planted, since the land is essential for our lives and provides our communal spirituality

Acknowledging that ‘development’ activities initiated by the state historically isolate and discredit Maya tradition and livelihoods, Pan-Maya groups offer alternative strategies that incorporate language and cultural revitalization as integral components, rather than the traditional capitalist, ‘Western-based’ approaches (see Fischer 1996, 225) In addition to the act of re-inhabiting land which was legally theirs, and moving toward a cultural rehabilitation and rejection of the dominant economic paradigm, the Centro Histórico

⁴⁴ As described by anthropologists Edward Fischer (1996, 32-49) and Kay Warren (1998, 108-115), the all encompassing, or modern, Pan-Maya movement began soon after the worst years of the civil conflict (1978-1984), as a reflection of the space offered to groups pursuing cultural revitalization, and resisting the oppression Indigenous communities faced throughout the country In essence, the movement is one that attempts to connect and unite all Maya ethnic groups through language study, Maya academic scholarship, a reinvigoration of Maya cosmology, and solution-based resistance to the unequal power structures that dominate the development discourse, such as the maldistribution of land

tourism and cultural project offers a living example of the dynamic Pan-Maya ideology, as it incorporates history, culture, and language, while merging sustainability and innovation. It also represents the ever changing, and often survivalist tactics broadly representative in Maya culture. As stated by Edgar Gutierrez (1994, 1) on the dynamic nature of Maya cultural endurance

Fifty years ago, people were prophesizing the progressive ladinization of the indigenous people. Today, these predictions have collapsed. The Maya have a startling -- seemingly limitless -- capacity to absorb elements of foreign cultures and transform them according to their own code of understanding of the world and of the balance among its elements.

Gutierrez (1994, 1) goes on to recognize that aspects of Maya dress, diet, and religion are subject to the importation of ideas and strategies born outside Maya lands. Other writers on this subject, such as Fischer (1996, 32), note that “Maya activists necessarily seek their inspirations from the past—the continuity of their cultural tradition gives them the moral justification to call for Maya revitalization—and yet their philosophy is forward looking.” Without abandoning their traditional livelihoods, such as farming maize, and making tortillas and palm woven *petates*, the people of Río Negro pursue economic independence through the Centro Historico project, along with the pursuit of international markets for non-traditionally made crafts such as blankets and hammocks. Ideally, these activities will aid in Río Negro’s survival, while also giving residents the opportunity to work exclusively in their communities rather than migrate to large *fincas* as their ancestors did.

Other Pan-Maya initiatives such as education reform (see Montejo 2005) are also well represented among the Maya-Achí, particularly in Rabinal, where it is easier to establish progressive schools for the children of massacre survivors. As noted in previous

chapters, the establishment of Fundación Nueva Esperanza is an example of cultural perseverance by focusing on Maya-Achi culture and history, while also offering practical skills for those who wish to escape the poverty inherent to wage-labor employment

Despite these relatively successful attempts by survivors to maintain culture—through land re-habitation and other Achi-centered development activities—a fundamental difference of ideologies still exists between the powerful Ladino elite class, and the generally power-deprived Maya *campesinos*. And as long as issues concerning land/resource exploitation and unequal distribution remain unresolved at the national level, tensions are likely to further develop, thus affecting the overall success in Río Negro, Pacux, and the myriad of other Indigenous communities throughout the country with similar objectives

In order to continue discussing the significance of land, and its relationship to ‘development,’ it is crucial to provide an international perspective, as discourse and policy on this level inevitably influences the debate in Guatemala, both in a historical and contemporary context. As mentioned in the literature review, ‘development,’ particularly in the post-WWII context, has been particularly detrimental to Indigenous peoples worldwide (Power 2003, Bodley 1990, Galeano 1973, Davis 2009). As stated by Victoria Tauli-Corpuz (2008, 2), an indigenous activist with the Tebtebba Foundation in Baguio City, Philippines

In the post-colonial era when nation-building was the political and economic agenda of newly independent states, development and modernity provided the justification for the re-colonization of our territories and attempts to obliterate our identities and cultures. The homogenizing and centralizing powers of modern states has led to the destruction of some indigenous societies and cultures, which is one of the great tragedies of humankind

Modern industrial growth and material accumulation as global indicators of ‘progress,’ (see Wright 2009), along with the increasingly divergent views of land and its meanings (see Bodley 1990), are two important drivers to the systematic upheaval of Indigenous peoples from their land—which, as mentioned, aids significantly to the process of cultural and environmental degradation (see Windsor and McVey 2005, Davis 2009, Montejo 2005, Escobar 1995) Ideologies from this paradigm are harmful to traditional societies not only because they systematically discredit other ways of thinking about ‘development,’ but they also legitimize the excessively consumptive habits of ‘developed’ societies, which in turn leads to physical displacement as land becomes apprehended for export-driven production, such as coffee, sugar, bananas, and so forth, as well as infrastructure projects to generate the needed energy to continue such activity (Power 2003, Handy 1984, Galeano 1973, Lovell 1988) To reiterate the effects of this global system in a Guatemalan context, I turn once again to the work of Montejo (2005, 26-27)

The impact of Western economies, including feudalism and capitalism, in the entire Maya region has been another such external force [in addition to the importation of religion] As traditional Maya economic systems have been replaced or modified, the impact of capitalism can be noticed everywhere The new economic models have provoked ruptures in traditional lifestyles Different modes of expropriation and exploitation of native land, from *encomiendas* and *haciendas* to plantations, submerged indigenous people into dependent economic positions

Although the activities of independent international capitalists cannot be disqualified from its heavy impact on foreign (underdeveloped) economies, the awesome power and influence of the International Financial Institutions (IFI) on the importation of ‘Western’

capitalist ideologies and policies into nations such as Guatemala cannot be overstated (Power 2003, 75, Witness for Peace 1996) Although it would be difficult, if not impossible, to hold the World Bank and IDB accountable for the violent evictions and genocide that took place at Río Negro, it is instructive within their reports on the project, and that of the INDE and the foreign contractors, in how the Eurocentric—and openly racist—attitudes could have legitimated the discrediting of Maya-Achí livelihoods and their lands, thus justifying the use of violence After gaining access to original feasibility studies generated by the development agencies, Cornell University researcher Barbara Lynch (2007, 21) offers a potent reflection of her findings

In this [project] culture, modernization was a goal to be achieved, non-commodity agriculture and cultural production was systematically undervalued Language skills were not seen as particularly relevant to the data gathering process, which in any case favored the collection of quantitative over qualitative data Economic calculations obscured the impacts of construction on peoples' whose economies are not fully monetized and integrated into the national economy, analyses systematically undervalue crops and livestock produced for subsistence or for local markets, nor did they take into account the importance of resource complementary in rural livelihood strategies

Lynch's (2007) report is particularly important, not only because of her access to key documents, but because of the convincing manner in which she describes how a project like this came into fruition "With one exception," Lynch (2007, 26) concludes, "the project literature portrayed residents of the project area as a scattered, unidimensional group of backwards folk resistant to change "

However demonstrative these statements are in the ways in which 'development' projects are perceived and carried out, it should be acknowledged that these drafts were written over thirty years ago, in a different time and space Policy within institutions such as the World Bank has apparently evolved to accommodate Indigenous views,

independence, human rights, and involuntary resettlement (see World Bank 2005) In Guatemala the ‘war’ between the leftist guerrillas and the state is officially over, and with the Peace Accords of 1996 came the ratification of ILO 169, protecting the rights of Indigenous peoples (ADISMI 2007, 4), and opening of space for organized dissent (Fulmer et al 2008)⁴⁵ However, despite these good intentions and movement towards a more equal society (or at least the façade), have attitudes concerning ‘development’ really evolved as some proclaim? Are ideologies regarding land, and the contrasting views of those who remain powerless against the tide of modernization and ‘progress,’ accounted for in the grand scheme of globalization and Western-driven, neoliberal development? In my attempt to answer these questions, I look to the development ideology, and activity, not just in Guatemala but also in the Global North, which continues—perhaps even more tenaciously—to decimate culture and critical environments in the name of economic growth and prosperity

As mentioned in previous chapters, resource exploitation (mining, oil and gas drilling, energy producing facilities) is increasing in scope enabled by the deregulating freedoms of neoliberal policy, with conflicts similar to that of Chixoy taking shape across many regions of the world In Guatemala, where struggles over land are interpreted as a primary instigator of violence since the removal of Arbenz in 1954 (Handy 1984, Lovell 1988), mining offers the most contemporary threat to Indigenous, agrarian-based communities As stated by Holt-Gimenez (2007, 23)

Over the next decade, agrarian struggles for land in Guatemala’s Western Highlands may well be eclipsed by indigenous movements against mineral

⁴⁵ It should be noted, however, that this space is still quite restricted, as intimidation, illegal detention, and assassination of resistance leaders takes place, even in very recent times (see Paley 2008, GHRC 2005)

extraction Both are essentially struggles for livelihoods and cultural survival Indigenous resistance to territorial restructuring is not only crucial for confronting capital's threats to indigenous survival, it is necessary for embarking on purposive action for the "restructuring from below" that reaffirms indigenous space and place in the face territorial restructuring "from above "

Elsewhere in the world, the possibility for huge monetary gains by transnational corporations leads to similar exploitative endeavors, resulting in tensions over land, rights, and divergent perceptions of livelihood In Northern British Columbia, for example, where resources are abundant and the population relatively sparse, the increase in industrial development is staggering, while those opposed to the imposition of such activity—primarily consisting of historically-repressed First Nations bands—are given limited power to defend their sacred, traditional lands from corporate and provincial interests (Alfred 2009, Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs 2005, Minority Rights Group International 2008b, Harris 2003) With the price of minerals such as gold at an all time high, the race for licenses by the corporations to dredge, drill, remove, and pulverize the earth in the name of quick profit seems unstoppable (LaPlante 2008) And through a host of neoliberal reforms at national and provincial levels, corporations are now able to move through a once stringent regulation process with greater ease (Young 2007) On reflection of one recent proposal made by Royal Dutch Shell, to extract coal bed methane from the fragile headwaters of the Stikine, Skeena, and Nass rivers in northwest British Columbia, a land revered by local Indigenous groups, Davis (2009, 118-119) explores the absurdity of this form of 'development,' and what it represents

Environmental concerns aside, think for a moment what these proposals imply about our culture We accept it as normal that people who have never been on the land, who have no history or connection to the country, may legally secure the right to come in and by the very nature of their enterprises leave in their wake a cultural and physical landscape utterly transformed and desecrated What's more,

in granting such mining concessions, often initially for trivial sums to speculators from distant cities, companies cobbled together with less history than my dog, we place no cultural or market value on the land itself. The cost of destroying a natural asset, or its inherent worth if left intact, has no metric in the economic calculations that support the industrialization of the wild. No company has to compensate the public for what it does to the commons, the forest, mountains, and rivers, which by definition belong to everyone. As long as there is a promise of revenue flows and employment, it merely requires permission to proceed. We take this as a given for it is the foundation of our system, the way commerce extracts value and profit in a resource-driven economy. But, if you think about it, especially from the perspective of so many other cultures, touched and inspired by quite different visions of life and land, it appears to be very odd and highly anomalous human behaviour.

Nearly all of what Davis implies in the statement above is relevant to the contemporary, and historic, situation in Guatemala. Just as it was in the early to mid 1900s with the United Fruit Company, where decisions made from boardrooms in Boston skyscrapers and the U S Congress (see Schlesinger and Kinzer 1983, Galeano 1988, 149-154) resulted in the complete reorganization—and disruption—of land and society in remote locations throughout the country, we see similar neo-colonial situations today, where space and livelihoods are controlled by transnational corporations based in Vancouver, Canada and elsewhere (Fulmer et al 2008), or, once again, from the insulated offices of the World Bank and IDB (ADISMI 2007, Rights Action 2006, Holt-Gimenez 2007). And despite the humanistic, poverty-alleviating objectives that development agents *may* have for places like Guatemala (is it worth guessing the objectives of the corporations?), the strikingly different visions of ‘progress,’ between those few individuals who plan human-displacing projects such as massive infrastructure, mines, and energy development, and those who dwell upon the affected lands, will continue to generate increasingly violent conflict, and deplete cultural and natural heritage.

Concluding Thoughts

Despite the seemingly dismal scenario that I have scripted at times during the development of this thesis, my overall feeling after such in-depth analysis and fieldwork is positive and inspired. Rather than simply read about the dreadful state of marginalized peoples and the environment, which too often leads to negativity and disillusion, my intimacy with their struggles and lands empowered me beyond any activity in which I have participated. I accredit this to the individuals I met, not just in Río Negro and Pacux, but also those in San Marcos resisting the Canadian-owned Marlin Mine, those in Xela who lived through the state terror of the 1980s, and countless others who shared with me their stories and unrelenting passion for change. Nowhere had I heard such commitment for recognition and equality—though I do not doubt that this type of strength and dedication does exist in every corner of the world, even within the proximity of suburban Southern California, where such struggle appears non-existent. Even in Pacux, where the memories of such horrible, unthinkable acts linger, and the chances of attaining any form of reparation or prospects for an easier life seems at times unattainable, a noticeable force keeps survivors and their families moving forward, laughing, sharing, and fighting.

To conclude this thesis, I would like to briefly reflect on an interaction I had early on in my ethnographic research, with an economist and professor conducting his own investigations in Central America. After disclosing to him my objectives and project design, the professor pleaded with me to consider new methods. “Simply talking to these people,” he told me, “with no hard data—no one will take this study seriously!” He

continued to try and persuade me to recreate my study based on comparative analysis, and the use of complex equations in order to *prove* that the people of Río Negro had been adversely affected

Among certain circles (presumably, economists and politicians who continue to design mega-projects as a means of development), he is probably correct in that my qualitative conclusions will hold little weight. I complete this study with no graphs, no quantitative measures to show changes in livelihood. My findings simply illuminate the ‘perceptions’ of those affected, and my own subjective observations and interpretations of the impacts that resulted from the dam and the violence. At the time, having not yet spoken to survivors and experiencing their lives in resettlement, my arguments against his proposed methods were weak, and I left this interaction feeling somewhat confused about how I would add strength, or ‘validity,’ to my research.

It was months later during one late afternoon sitting on the deck of the Centro Historico, after so many days of talking with survivors, hearing stories of the past, present, and dreams to come, and watching life pass from my shaded perch above the reservoir, that the realization became apparent, quite overwhelmingly, and I remember scribbling in my notebook, after so much introspection: *There is no means by which to quantify what was lost here, in Río Negro, in terms of knowledge, culture, sacred ties, aesthetic beauty, ritual, and a connection unrecognized in economic theories. And even if the dam were not a complete failure, both economically and environmentally, would it have been worth it?*

It would be hypocritical for me to advocate, particularly as a North American never living for more than a few weeks without electricity, or produce grown in tropical

locals, or some form of petrol or minerals, that ‘development’ as we know it must cease at all costs. And furthermore, it would be naive, and irresponsible, to promote for a static cultural entity as some romantically believe the Maya to be. However, as cliché as it may sound, the activities and patterns of consumption that we assume as normal, and needed in our modern existence, *must* evolve. By illuminating the experiences of the Maya-Achí of Río Negro, and giving reference to the millions of others who succumb to similar fates, I aim to provide ample evidence for this claim, adding to the already existing call for holistic, multicultural, visions of growth and ‘development’.

Future research

By no means does this thesis document everything there is to know about the Río Negro massacres, the Chixoy Dam, and the future of the survivors in regards to their struggle for reparations and justice. My work represents that of a dozen or so projects undertaken by outsiders interested in the story, and concerned with the human rights of those affected by Chixoy—in Río Negro as well as the other communities negatively impacted by the project. Continued interdisciplinary work with communities will be needed as long as reparations are unattained. As previously mentioned, despite the national and international awareness brought to this case by activists and academics, future projects involving involuntary displacement loom on the horizon for many communities in Guatemala (see Rights Action 2008, NISGUA 2006, McGahan 2008). With the large number of social and natural scientists active in Guatemala and throughout Latin America, I situate myself within the camp of activist-oriented academics (see Nolin 2006,

Manz 2008, Sanford and Angel-Ajani 2006) in stating that it is our duty to alert the international community of what is happening in the far corners in which we study. Ideally, my research will inspire others to pursue the critical work needed to expose the effects of such developments, thus furthering the movement for justice and human rights.

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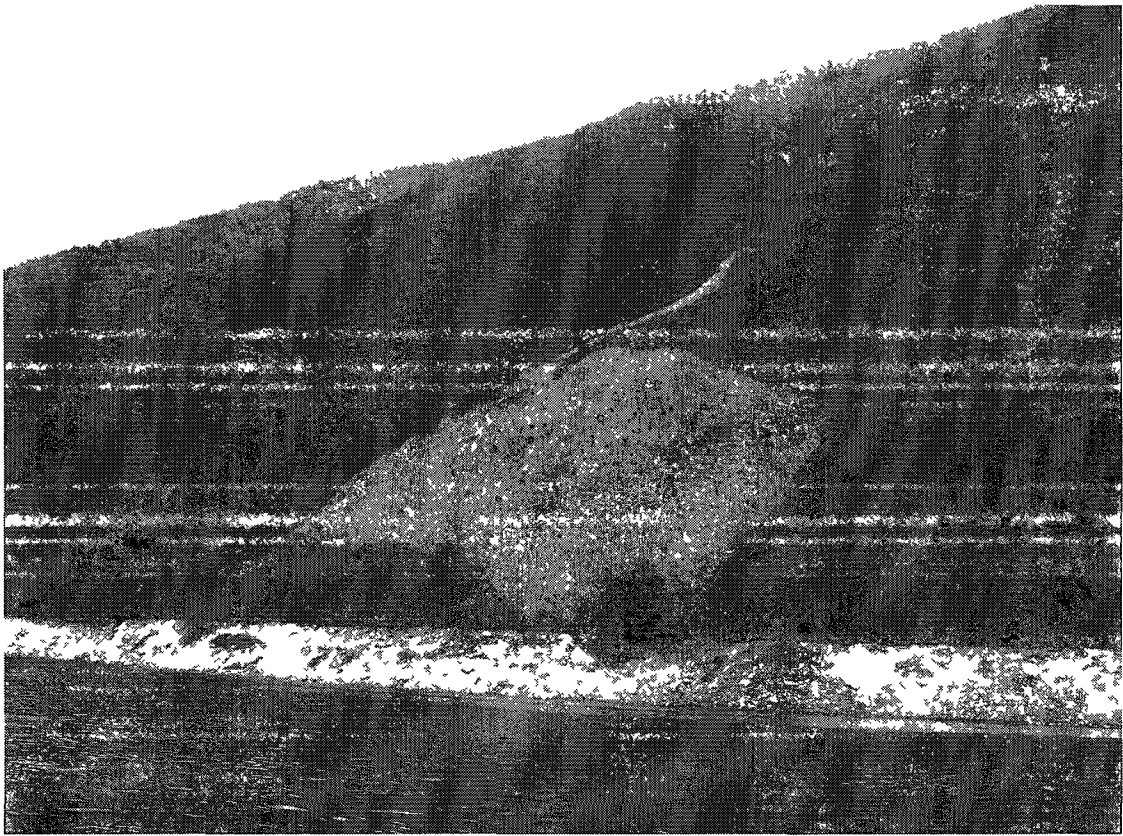
Appendix I

Photos



(A) Annual procession to Pocoxom, in honor of the 177 women and children massacred there on March 13, 1982. Photos taken one kilometer above the village of Rio Negro and Chixoy reservoir, March 13, 2009

*All Photos were taken by the author



(B) Milpa farming above the reservoir, near the village of Chicruz, roughly five kilometers south of Río Negro. Due to the flooding of the valley, much of the agriculturally productive land is now underwater, forcing villagers to grow food on steep, eroding slopes.



(C) Ruins at Cauinal, roughly ten kilometers upstream from Río Negro. During the wet season, when the reservoir is at capacity, these structures, as well as many others in the vicinity, are submerged.



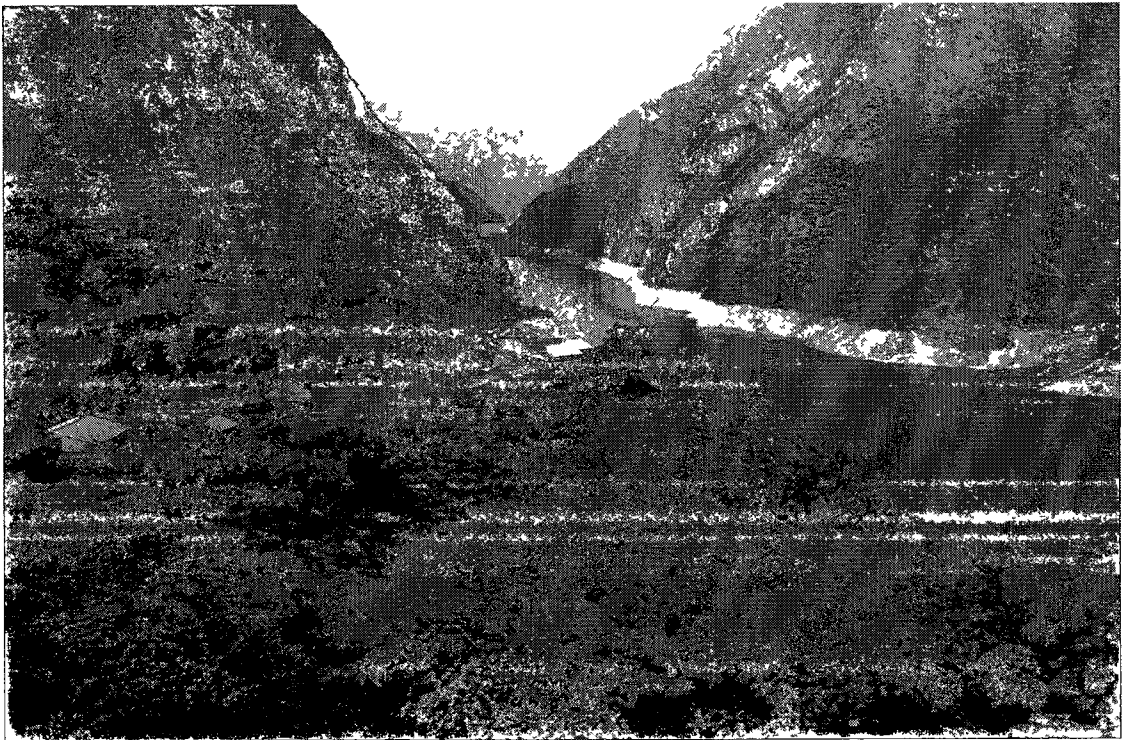
(D) A woman weaves outside her home in the INDE-built resettlement village of Pacux



(E) A street sign in Pacux, named after a massacre victim from Pocoxom



(F) Industrial pollution consisting of medical waste, sludge, and other garbage accumulates upstream from Río Negro. The children seen in the boat are from a small settlement near the Cahuinal Ruins.



(G) View of the Chixoy Reservoir Centro Histórico, Río Negro

Appendix II

Interview-Conversation Guide

1 I am trying to understand what your community was like before the Chixoy Dam was built. What was the local economy like? Was it subsistence-based? Were individuals working seasonally outside the community to support their families? Were there conflicts with neighboring villages? If so, which villages, and why?

2 It is my understating that your community resisted the building of the Chixoy Dam. Can you tell me why?

3 Were you offered compensation by the World Bank and INDE for your land in the Chixoy Basin?

4 Can you tell me what everyday life is/was like in the resettlement community of Pacux?

5 Why did you move back to Río Negro? Why did you stay in Pacux? And how long were you living there beforehand?

6 What kind of 'development' projects does your community have in mind for the future, and why?

7 Are you still fearful of the army and the PAC members that carried out the massacres?