

From Guatemaltecas to Guerrilleras:  
Women's Participation in the Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres

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## CHAPTER I

### Women with Guts, Women with Guns

#### Introduction

An intelligent, industrious, and courageous Ixil woman, Tila worked her way to becoming a regional director<sup>1</sup> of the *Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres* (Guerrilla Army of the Poor, or EGP)<sup>2</sup> – a political-military organization that used *guerrilla* warfare<sup>3</sup> to combat violent state repression during Guatemala’s thirty-six year long civil war. As a part of her activism, Tila often, and unapologetically, shared with fellow *guatemaltecas* the deep-rooted inequalities she saw within their country that led her to join this insurgent group:

I went... because I understood the struggle. Mainly, women in the village, we have no right to do other services, a bigger thing for the people than to be in the house. We are just locked up in the house; but in the Revolution, men *and* women can participate. I can handle arms, I can fight the army, and I can fight against the police to struggle for the people and for the children. Many times women simply end their lives in the house because they don’t have rights; there is not respect for their work. But in the mountain it is different; there the woman counts, she is a combatant, she is a leader.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> More specifically, she was a member of the *Dirección Regional* (Regional Directorate) of the organization’s Ho Chi Minh *Guerrilla* Front. The book in which this quote appears does not state whether Tila is her real name, but it is possibly a nom de guerre. Silvia Solórzano, comp., *Mujer Alzada* (Barcelona, España: Sendai ediciones, 1989), 17.

<sup>2</sup> I have italicized all Spanish words/terms (with the exception of place names and individual persons’ names) in the main body and footnotes of this paper in their first use only; however, entire sentences or passages – which only appear in Spanish in the footnotes – are not italicized.

<sup>3</sup> Guerrilla Army of the Poor, “The Guatemalan Revolution,” *Contemporary Marxism* 3 (Summer 1981): 33.

<sup>4</sup> Emphasis added. Original Spanish reads, “Yo me fui... porque entendí la lucha. Principalmente, las mujeres en la aldea no tenemos ningún derecho de hacer otros servicios, una cosa más grande para el pueblo que estar en la casa. Solamente estamos encerradas en la casa; pero ya en la Revolución, los hombres y las mujeres pueden participar. Yo puedo manejar armas, puedo combatir al ejército y puedo hacer combates contra la policía para luchar por el pueblo y por los niños. Muchas veces las mujeres solo acaban sus vidas en la casa porque no tienen derecho; no hay un respeto para su trabajo. Pero ya en la montaña es diferente; allá la mujer cuenta, es combatiente, es dirigente.” Solórzano, *Mujer Alzada*, 18.

Tila's statement illustrates that patriarchal traditions and attitudes – which limited female participation and worth outside the home – pervaded mid-twentieth century Guatemalan culture. At the same time, it reflects the EGP's active inclusion of women as political agents and the new gender roles *guerrilleros* and *guerrilleras* were adopting in their revolutionary labors. Finally, her statement reveals that her reasons for joining are deeply gendered; she is fighting not only for all Guatemalans to have a better life, but especially for women to be treated as equally valuable members of society and to have the right be socio-politically engaged, from the local to the national level.

Like Tila, many women joined the Ejército to combat oppression of all kinds and worked side by side with men in the armed struggle. Unfortunately, their experiences and contributions have largely gone unrecognized in the historiography surrounding Latin American insurgencies. Of course, it is important to note, as other academics have, that data about guerrilleras in particular is innately limited. This is due to both the nature of guerrilla organizations (which reside outside the realm of conventional politics) and women's participation traditionally being lower than men's.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, as will be discussed more in the next section, research on female guerrilla fighters in the region has been carried out. However, few works have specifically examined the Guatemalan Civil War, and scholarship that has explored women's experiences during this bloody period have tended to focus on them as targets of state violence

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<sup>5</sup> Sociologist Linda M. Lobao, in her comparative study on women in Latin American guerrilla movements, discusses these reasons more in-depth and also states, "Information about guerrillas is typically impressionistic and fragmentary. Some case studies examine the contribution of individual women and a few biographies exist. While female participation is mentioned, details such as the number of females involved or the duties they perform are missing." Linda M. Lobao, "Women in Revolutionary Movements: Changing Patterns of Latin American Guerrilla Struggle," *Dialectical Anthropology* 15 (1990): 211-12.

and/or refugees<sup>6</sup> rather than as militants, especially indigenous women.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, most studies on the EGP (and the country's other armed rebel campaigns) have centered upon ethnic, rather than gender, issues.<sup>8</sup>

Such discursive gaps point to the need for an exhaustive examination on females' contributions as a part of this group to be undertaken. My thesis seeks to do this, and it is important because it can help us better understand guatemaltecas' continuing struggle against oppression today. Their experiences as armed activists has undoubtedly impacted their post-conflict gendered identities and lives. It has undoubtedly lead to setbacks and successes in their fight for equality. Moreover, this work can serve as a foundation for future comparative studies on women as revolutionary agents during the Guatemalan Civil War, as well as to make the existing historiography surrounding female guerrillas throughout Latin American more comprehensive.

My thesis, then, is an in-depth exploration of female involvement in the EGP. I begin by briefly laying out the early history of the war and the Ejército's formation, along with the

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<sup>6</sup> In the book *Women and Civil War: Impact, Organizations, and Action*, for instance, there is a chapter that focuses on the trauma Guatemalan (and Salvadoran) women underwent as targets of state violence. And while the work as a whole argues that women are active participants in war and that they can redefine gender roles through such struggles, it also focuses mainly on female participation in refugee camps and international and women's organizations. Krishna Kumar, ed., *Women and Civil War: Impact, Organizations, and Action* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> *Memorias rebeldes contra el olvido* states, "After the peace signing, stories were written of women combatants or sympathizers of rebel groups from an urban and *ladina* perspective.... There are publications that record the experiences of indigenous women... [but] from a perspective of *ritualized repetition of the traumatic and sinister story*. Few texts present experiences to assess the contribution of subjects with gender and ethnic identity, within a clandestine military organizational structure." Rosalinda Hernández Alarcón et al., comp., *Memorias rebeldes contra el olvido: Paasantzila Txumb'al Ti' Sotzeb'al K'u'l* (Guatemala: AVANSCO, 2008), 17-18.

<sup>8</sup> One such study is "An Indian Dawn," which explores the EGP's increasing presence within indigenous areas during the 1980s. Carlotta McAllister, "An Indian Dawn," in *The Guatemala Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, ed. Greg Grandin, Deborah T. Levenson, and Elizabeth Oglesby, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 352-359. The book *For Every Indio Who Falls* investigates the various avenues Maya activists took before and during the Civil War, including their membership in armed groups like the EGP. Betsy Konefal, *For Every Indio Who Falls: A History of Maya Activism in Guatemala, 1960-1990* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010).

development of guatemaltecas' political participation from the early twentieth century to the war and the traditional gendered ideas and practices present in their society at that time. I then delve into the first part of my analysis, closely looking at the backgrounds of several women (both indigenous and nonindigenous) within the organization to create a collective, comparative image of their gendered experiences before they joined, as well as why and how they joined. While this image is in no way complete, it does illuminate the similarities between, as well as the diversity of, these individuals' beliefs, fears, hopes, and desires as women and as Guatemalans. I argue that these women, even though they came from many different backgrounds, faced and fought discrimination because of their gender in their everyday lives. However, overall, gendered discrimination was not a primary motivation in their decision to join the EGP.

In the second part of my analysis, I deconstruct these women's experiences as insurrectionists, addressing the challenges they continued to face in their revolutionary activism because of the patriarchal attitudes and norms inherent within society at that time. I point to the difficulties the Ejército had in recruiting women, the discrimination *compañeras* sometimes faced from their *compañeros*, and the domestic responsibilities they had to balance with their political engagement. Related to this, I also discuss the shortcomings of the guerrilla group in relation to promoting gender equality outside the organization. More specifically, I posit that while it argued that both sexes could and should participate equally in the insurgency, women's rights issues were not an underlying motivation of its struggle, and it evaded any in-depth discussion of how to bring about gender equality in the future revolutionary nation-state.

Finally, the third part of my analysis deals with the ways guerrilleras and the EGP as a whole challenged the normative gender roles present in Guatemalan society at that time. I contend that not only did its members raise their consciousness about gender discrimination, but



they worked to end domestic abuse and machista attitudes they saw present amongst themselves and within their bases of support, as well as contradicted traditional standards of feminine beauty. Moreover, women took on a number of roles in the Ejército, including jobs traditionally tasked to men. In these ways, they directly confronted and resisted patriarchal traditions.



Figure 1. Photograph printed at the end of a chapter titled “Es necesario que nosotras, las mujeres, participemos” in *Mujer Alzada*.<sup>9</sup>

## Methodology

My investigation has drawn on a diverse array of primary sources, gathered principally from the historical archives at the *Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica* (Center for Mesoamerican Research, or CIRMA) in Antigua, Guatemala, the Guatemala News and

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<sup>9</sup> Solórzano, *Mujer Alzada*, 42.

Information Bureau Archive – an online collection of documents from the years 1963 to 2000 (part of the Princeton University Digital Library) – and Vanderbilt University’s libraries. These sources include “official” EGP discourse; that is to say, documents that the organization authored and published/distributed, intended as propaganda for both a national and international audience. The Ejército’s *Manifiesto Internacional*, editions of its international magazines *Compañero* and *Informador Guerrillero*, articles printed in popular domestic newspapers such as *Prensa Libre*, and a compilation of interviews with Commander-in-chief Rolando Morán<sup>10</sup> provide just a few examples. The insurgents produced all of these works between the late 1970s and mid-1980s.

Such sources also include the “unofficial” testimonies and memoirs of both male and female EGP members. Yolanda Colom’s *Mujeres en la alborada*, Mario Payeras’ *Los días de la selva*,<sup>11</sup> *Memorias rebeldes contra el olvido* (which shares the testimonies of 28 indigenous women),<sup>12</sup> Nicolás Andersen’s *Guatemala, escuela revolucionaria de nuevos hombres*,<sup>13</sup> and Silvia Solórzano Foppa’s *Mujer Alzada* (which shares interviews and letters of many EGP combatants and collaborators, interspersed with Solórzano Foppa’s personal commentary) have all been vital to my research. Some of their testimonies were printed while the Ejército was still active, while others were written and published after the war’s end.

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<sup>10</sup> Rolando Morán is a nom de guerre; the guerrilla commander’s real name is Ricardo Ramírez de León. *Encyclopædia Britannica*, s.v. “Ricardo Arnaldo Ramírez de León,” accessed November 28, 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ricardo-Arnaldo-Ramirez-de-Leon>.

<sup>11</sup> The edition that I obtained for my research is an English-translated version. Thus, all quotes I use from this source are not my translations. Mario Payeras died in 1995; he and Yolanda Colom were married. Mario Casasús, “Yolanda Colom: ‘Con la desilusión del golpe de 1973, contactamos a la guerrilla guatemalteca,’” *Clarín*, July 9, 2010, accessed December 20, 2016, <http://www.cedema.org/ver.php?id=4008>.

<sup>12</sup> When mentioning women from this source, I always use the nom de guerres that are used in the book.

<sup>13</sup> Nicolás Andersen is a pseudonym. Nicolás Andersen, *Guatemala, escuela revolucionaria de nuevos hombres: Con el Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres, 1981-1982, experiencias, testimonios y reflexiones* (México: Editorial Nuestro Tiempo, 1982), 8.

Many of the documents I have analyzed are at once both personal testimony and part of the EGP's official discourse. "Testimonio: María Lupe, mujer parcelaria de la selva," for instance, is a guerrillera's firsthand account, published as an article in *Compañero*.<sup>14</sup> Another example comes from an interview with Solórzano Foppa that originally ran in a June 27<sup>th</sup>, 1982 *Uno más Uno* column titled "En Guatemala guerrilla y pueblo somos lo mismo,"<sup>15</sup> but which the EGP republished in a December 1982 collection of articles titled "El EGP en la Prensa."<sup>16</sup>

In addition to these primary sources, I have utilized the rich array of secondary literature surrounding women's political activism in Guatemala, the nation's Civil War, and the intersections between the two. On an even broader scale, I have looked at comparative scholarly studies on guerrilleras involved in various Latin American uprisings. These resources have allowed me not only to historically contextualize my work, but to better understand how female participation in the EGP was similar to and unique from previous and contemporary regional guerrilla movements. Lastly, I have looked at various academic investigations centered on different facets of the Ejército, helping me to more fully grasp its underlying motivations and goals, and thus its decisions in relation to gendered issues.

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<sup>14</sup> I consulted both the original Spanish version of this article and an English-translated version (titled "Testimony: Maria Lupe, A Peasant Woman from the Jungle") for my research. All the quotes I use in this paper are from the English-translated version. Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres, "Compañero: revista internacional del ejército guerrillero de los pobres, número 5," n.d., Civil War, Society and Political Transition in Guatemala: The Guatemala News and Information Bureau Archive (1963-2000), Princeton University Digital Library, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey, <http://publ.princeton.edu/sheetreader.php?obj=vm40xs358>. Guerrilla Army of the Poor, *Articles from Compañero, The International Magazine of Guatemala's Guerrilla Army of the Poor, EGP* (San Francisco: Solidarity Publications, 1982).

<sup>15</sup> *Uno más uno* is a Mexican newspaper. This article's author, Simón Mejía Puc, was at the time a member of the *Asociación de Periodistas Democráticos de Guatemala* and did clandestine work. Simón Mejía Puc, "Silvia Solórzano Foppa: En Guatemala, guerrilla y pueblo somos lo mismo," 27 de junio de 1982, Archivo del Comité Holandés, Archivo Histórico, CIRMA.

<sup>16</sup> Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres, "El EGP en la Prensa," diciembre 1982, Archivo Personal de Mario Payeras-Yolanda Colom, Archivo Histórico, CIRMA.

Most of the primary sources (and some of the secondary sources) I use have been printed solely in Spanish; therefore, when using direct quotes, the English translations are usually my own.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, when directly quoting a source (one which I have translated myself), I leave the terms “compañero(s),” “compañera(s),” “guerrillero(s),” and “guerrillera(s)” in Spanish, so as not to interfere with their original gendered meanings.<sup>18</sup> However, both conscious and critical – as many scholars are – that the plural form of these words at times allows women to be subsumed in a masculine identity,<sup>19</sup> I take a slightly different approach in my own analysis. Therefore, when I say “guerrilleros” or “compañeros,” I mean male combatants only. When I am talking about both men and women, I typically use the term “guerrilla fighters.” (And when I use “guerrilleras” or “compañeras,” I am referring specifically to women, as is typical in Spanish.)

## Literature Review

International relations specialist Jane S. Jaquette’s 1973 article “Women in Revolutionary Movements in Latin America” is one of the earliest contributions to academic discourse focusing on guerrilleras in this region. The study traces female participation in violent uprisings across

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<sup>17</sup> I mention in the footnotes when the English translations are not my own.

<sup>18</sup> I have chosen to leave only these terms in Spanish because they are the most commonly-used labels for the men and women who fought in the EGP. “*Compañero/compañera*” translates as “comrade” or “companion” while “*guerrillero/guerrillera*” translates as “guerrilla.”

<sup>19</sup> As is still standard in the Spanish language, when both men and women comprise a group, the noun that describes that group becomes masculine. For example, female guerrillas would be referred to as “guerrilleras,” male guerrillas would be “guerrilleros,” and both male and female guerrillas together would also be “guerrilleros.” In the documents I have examined for this paper, the authors normally conform to this format (although occasionally they separate the sexes out, saying “guerrilleros and guerrilleras”).

nine different countries, from the 1950s Cuban Revolution onward.<sup>20</sup> The author argues that women played a number of roles as armed insurgents, from cooking to spying to carrying contraband weapons. However, she also states that in most of these places, including in Guatemala, female involvement was limited and the organizations they contributed to did not offer any political statements on gender issues.<sup>21</sup>

Then, in 1990, sociologist Linda M. Lobao also published a comparison of female membership within Latin American guerrilla groups. She similarly started by looking at the Cuban Revolution, then explored the mid-1960s revolutionary struggle in Colombia, Uruguay's Tupamaros uprising and Nicaragua's Sandinista campaign during the 1960s and 70s, and finally El Salvador's 1980s Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN).<sup>22</sup> Unlike Jaquette, however, she explicitly points to why female contributions to guerrilla struggles have historically been hindered, citing the region's patriarchal attitudes and the relegation of women to strictly domestic roles as the primary reasons. Moreover, she finds a newer trend in guerrillas' activism, arguing that beginning in the early 1970s an increase in awareness of feminist issues, as well as rebel movements' greater focus on gaining popular support (which the mobilization of women greatly served), led to a steep rise in their numbers.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> She looks at guerrilla activities in Cuba, Colombia, Peru, Venezuela, Guatemala, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and Bolivia. Jane S. Jaquette, "Women in Revolutionary Movements in Latin America," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 35, no. 2 (May 1973): 344-54.

<sup>21</sup> It is important to note, though, that at the time of this article's publication, the EGP was only roughly a year old and was still a clandestine organization.

<sup>22</sup> This article is actually a later, but almost identical, version of an article Lobao originally published (under the name Linda L. Reif) in 1986. Both versions use the same five countries as case studies and put forth the same broad arguments. Linda L. Reif, "Women in Latin American Guerrilla Movements: A Comparative Perspective," *Comparative Politics* 18, no. 2 (January 1986): 147-69. Lobao, "Women in Revolutionary Movements," 211-32.

<sup>23</sup> Lobao, "Women in Revolutionary Movements," 213-14.

Political scientist Karen Kampwirth's 2002 book *Women and Guerrilla Movements* – which also looks at the Cuban Revolution, Nicaragua's Sandinistas, and the FMLN in El Salvador, along with the 1990s Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico – echoes several of Lobao's arguments. She also posits that women's involvement in Latin American revolutionary campaigns grew vastly throughout the 1970s and 80s,<sup>24</sup> and that they took positions not only as armed combatants, but as guerrilla leaders. While Jaquette's, Lobao's, and Kampwirth's studies in some ways take a more quantitative, and certainly a more broadly comparative, approach to looking at guerrillas' activism, I take a more qualitative approach, looking not for sweeping statistics, but rather for the significance in the shared personal experiences of one organization's members. Nonetheless, these three works have been vitally important for my research because they have allowed me to better understand how this group fits into or differs from larger regional trends of female guerrilla participation. Thus – although it is not this paper's main purpose – my analysis does take on a comparative lens.

My work has also been strongly influenced by two scholars that have undertaken studies addressing women's sociopolitical engagement specifically in Guatemala, Latin Americanist Lorena Carrillo Padilla and linguist Nathalie Narváez. Carrillo Padilla's 2004 book *Luchas de las guatemaltecas del siglo XX* explores their involvement in the nation's various political upheavals throughout the twentieth century, including its civil war. And while the author does not mention the EGP, her arguments single out the 1970s and 80s as a conflictual but crucial moment for redefining gender roles through political agency.<sup>25</sup> I show in my own work that

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<sup>24</sup> In fact, some estimates put their participation in the FSLN, FMLN, and EZLN as high as around 30 percent. Karen Kampwirth, *Women and Guerrilla Movements: Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chiapas, Cuba* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 2-3.

<sup>25</sup> Lorena Carrillo Padilla, *Luchas de las guatemaltecas del siglo XX: Mirada al trabajo y la participación política de las mujeres* (Antigua, Guatemala: Ediciones del Pensativo, 2004).

Ejército was a part of this moment – that its members were integral actors in redefining gender norms.

Meanwhile, in her 2015 article “¿Guerrilla unisex?,” Narváez does explore the lives of EGP combatants as part of a larger gendered investigation on Guatemalan guerrilla fighters. She deconstructs Payeras’ and Colom’s works, along with testimonies from members of the *Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes* (FAR),<sup>26</sup> and through these argues that guerrilla fighters reorganized gendered ideas and functions.<sup>27</sup> However, she also posits that *compañeros* and *compañeras* had to overcome many challenges when faced with the reality of Guatemalan society at that time, which was deeply machista and patriarchal. My study builds off of hers, but takes a different angle, as I analyze a broader range of EGP combatants’ accounts and take into consideration the impact of the organization’s official discourse.

Overall then, this thesis works to expand the ongoing scholarly dialogue surrounding Guatemalan and Latin American guerrilleras by contributing new voices and experiences, as well as to propel it forward by urging us to consider how armed activism has impacted women’s lives there today. Patriarchal attitudes and practices are still very present in the region. Thus, such dialogue needs to continue – not only on an academic level, but also on a political and sociocultural level – and female voices need to be heard.

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<sup>26</sup> Specifically, she looks at Rolando Morán’s *Autobiografía de una guerriglia*, Aura Marina Arriola’s *Ese obstinado sobrevivir*, and Mirna Paiz Cárcamo’s *Rosa María, una mujer en la guerrilla*. Morán (aka Ricardo Ramírez, see footnote 10) first worked with FAR and then went on to become a founding member, and even later the commander-in-chief, of the EGP. Arriola and Paiz Cárcamo were also participants in FAR. Paiz Cárcamo’s sister, Clemencia, was a member of the EGP and is one of the women I discuss in this paper. Nathalie Narváez, “¿Guerrilla unisex? Ser mujer u hombre en el conflicto guatemalteco a partir de testimonios de combatientes,” *Kamchatka* 6, special no. Avatares del testimonio en América Latina (December 2015): 499-516.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER II

### Guatemala at War, Guatemaltecos at War

#### Civil War and the EGP's Formation

On June 15, 1954, Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas (backed by the U.S.' Central Intelligence Agency) overthrew democratically-elected President Jacobo Arbenz, undoing a decade of agrarian and other revolutionary reforms and beginning a roughly forty-year period of bloody oppression.<sup>28</sup> (The ensuing structural violence was enacted by state security forces under the direction of a succession of ruthless leaders, who either came to power through "election" or by coup.) Approximately six years later, on November 13, 1960, one-third of the Guatemalan military revolted. The uprising failed, but a few rebel officers – led by Luis Augusto Turcios Lima and Marco Antonio Yon Sosa – fled into the Sierra de las Minas and formed the *Movimiento Revolucionario 13 Noviembre* (Rebel Movement November 13, or MR-13).<sup>29</sup> Soon renamed FAR,<sup>30</sup> this was the country's first guerrilla group. Throughout the 1960s, then, the Guatemalan military and police, while forming "death squads," initiated several

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<sup>28</sup> "CIA and Assassinations, the Guatemala: 1954 Documents," National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 4, The National Security Archive, The George Washington University, Washington, D.C., <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB4/>.

<sup>29</sup> Central Intelligence Agency Directorate of Intelligence, "The Communist Insurgency Movement in Guatemala," September 20, 1968, [http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document\\_conversions/89801/DOC\\_0000653094.pdf](http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0000653094.pdf).

<sup>30</sup> FAR also encompassed the *Frente Guerrillero Edgar Ibarra* (Edgar Ibarra Guerrilla Front, or FGEL). Mario Payeras, *Days of the Jungle: The Testimony of a Guatemalan Guerrillero, 1972-1976* (New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 9.



counterinsurgency campaigns. They violently subdued MR-13/FAR, along with student movements, workers' unions, and any other "leftist" or subversive operations.<sup>31</sup>

Decimated by the counterinsurgency operations, and lacking both strong methodological and ideological resoluteness (as well as widespread public support), the remnants of the 1960s MR-13 regrouped, forming now several different guerrilla bodies. Thus it was that on January 19, 1972, the first EGP cadre – with a total of only twenty-five combatants – made its way from Mexico to the Ixcán jungle in the mountains of El Quiché province.<sup>32</sup> By early 1975, the rebels had bases that covered an area of over eight hundred square miles, steadily gaining support from among the largely indigenous population there.

But with the insurrection's strengthening, state security forces also increased their viciousness. The latter part of the decade was fraught with massacres in rural areas, especially in indigenous communities (such as the May 1978 massacre of Q'eqchi *campesinos* in Panzós).<sup>33</sup> Then, in January of 1980, thirty-six protestors at the Spanish Embassy in Guatemala City were killed in a blaze caused by police firebombing.<sup>34</sup> Just one year later, President Romeo Lucas García initiated a "scorched-earth" campaign, and death squads were soon committing brutal acts

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<sup>31</sup> "Operación Limpieza" ("Operation Cleanup"), for example – a series of military raids that began in early 1966, led by Colonel Rafael Arriaga Bosque and under the direction of U.S. Public Safety Advisor John P. Longan – ended in several executions of *arbenistas* (Arbenz supporters) and other leftists. Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War*, updated ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 96-98. Additionally, the Guatemalan air force undertook bombing campaigns, aiding army and police ground operations in the city and countryside; eventually, an all-out counterinsurgency offensive formed in late 1966. This scorched-earth campaign resulted in roughly 8,000 dead rebels and civilians. "U.S. Policy in Guatemala, 1966-1996," National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 11," The National Security Archive, The George Washington University, Washington, D.C., <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB11/docs/>.

<sup>32</sup> Payeras, *Days of the Jungle*, 7-8, 21. Guerrilla Army of the Poor, *Articles from Compañero*, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres, "Línea de Masas del EGP," in *Construyendo Caminos: Tres Documentos Históricos de la Guerrilla Guatemalteca*, ed. Centro Rolando Morán (Guatemala: Centro Rolando Morán, 2008), 130.

<sup>34</sup> Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, ed., *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, trans. Ann Wright (London: Verso Editions, 1984), 184-7.

of genocide across the country.<sup>35</sup> By March of 1982, however – when yet another coup brought another corrupt leader to power<sup>36</sup> – the EGP had developed into five different fronts, spread across eleven of Guatemala’s twenty-two departments.<sup>37</sup> Within its ranks, men *and* women worked and fought side by side as revolutionary *compañeros* and *compañeras*.

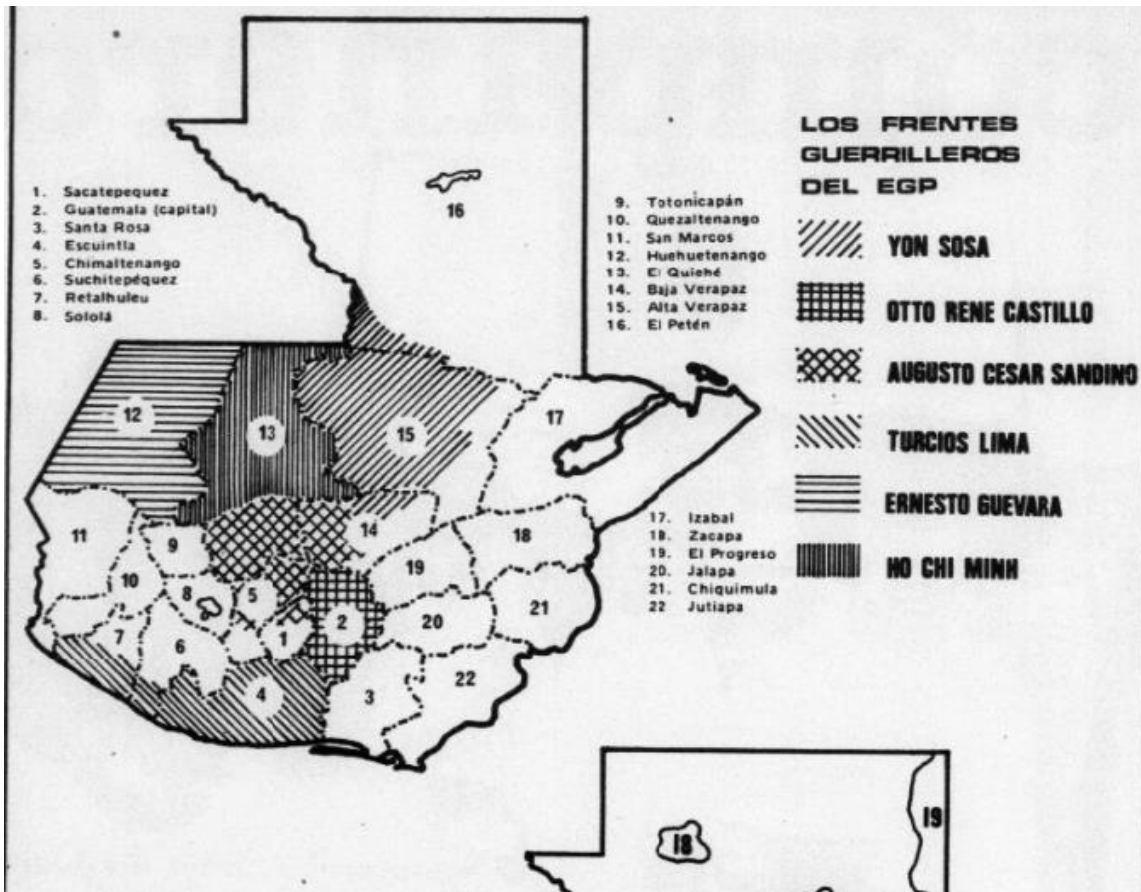


Figure 2. Map, published in an issue of *Compañero* magazine, which shows the various EGP fronts. El Quiché province, where the first guerrillas entered from Mexico, is labeled number “13” on the map.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> “U.S. Policy in Guatemala, 1966-1996.”

<sup>36</sup> General Efraín Ríos Montt came to power in this coup. Payeras, *Days of the Jungle*, 16.

<sup>37</sup> Guerrilla Army of the Poor, *Articles from Compañero*, 2.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

## Patriarchy and Women's Political Participation

At the same time the Civil War was beginning, women in Guatemala were trying to raise a greater collective consciousness about the inequalities they experienced because of their gender. They were also becoming more involved in civic events and activities of all kinds, from the local to the national level. Historically, guatemaltecas' lives had been marked by social, political, and economic discrimination; their nation (and Latin America as a whole) was inundated with patriarchal traditions and machista ideals.<sup>39</sup> This was further complicated by the fact that indigenous and nonindigenous people had different gendered customs, and that they did not always understand or agree with each other's beliefs and traditions.<sup>40</sup> But no matter *indígena* or *ladina*, Guatemalan women were often openly, and sexually, objectified by men. It also was not unusual for drunken husbands to abuse their wives, for fathers to make all the decisions for their families, or for young girls not to be allowed to go to school with their brothers. Furthermore, females were expected to do all the domestic chores and be the primary caregivers of children.<sup>41</sup> This is not to say, however, that they were not employed outside the home – for

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<sup>39</sup> A general definition of “machismo” is an “exaggerated pride in masculinity, perceived as power, often coupled with a minimal sense of responsibility and disregard of consequences. In machismo there is supreme valuation of characteristics culturally associated with the masculine and a denigration of characteristics associated with the feminine. It has for centuries been a strong current in Latin American politics and society.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, s.v. “machismo,” accessed November 28, 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/machismo>.

<sup>40</sup> Guatemala has entrenched in its history a deep socioeconomic, political, and cultural divide between *indígenas* (indigenous persons) and *ladinos* (*mestizos*/nonindigenous persons). Greg Grandin, *The Blood of Guatemala: A History of Race and Nation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000). Konefal, *For Every Indio Who Falls*. Although I do not discuss it at length in this thesis, I want to note that *ladina* women and indigenous women often had different gendered experiences because of their ethnic identities. Furthermore, indigenous women were doubly oppressed because of their gender and ethnicity. Census records indicate that in the 1970s and 80s, Guatemala's indigenous population – which consists of over 20 different Maya groups – was estimated anywhere from 40 to 60 percent. *Poverty in Guatemala: A World Bank Country Study* (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 2004), 57. Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres, “Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres: Manifiesto internacional,” *Nueva Antropología* 4, no. 16 (December 1980): 227, <http://www.cedema.org/uploads/EGP-1979-10.pdf>.

<sup>41</sup> Sociologist and women's studies scholar Norma Stoltz Chinchilla's *Nuestras utopías* – in which twentieth-century guatemaltecas discuss their lives – gives several examples of these traditions and attitudes. Norma Stoltz Chinchilla, *Nuestras utopías: mujeres guatemaltecas del siglo XX*, (Guatemala: Agrupación de Mujeres Tierra Viva, 1998). Additionally, in a 1988 sociopolitical commentary discussing the need for gender equality in Guatemala, its author

many certainly were. Especially women from the lower classes, as well as those who were the main/sole providers of their households, took work where they labored long hours for little pay, barely making enough to survive.<sup>42</sup> Of course, they frequently earned less money than their male counterparts for doing the same jobs.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, female engagement in politics was limited; they did not even earn the right to vote until 1945.<sup>44</sup> Yet, despite all of these oppressive gender norms, guatemaltecas found ways to become meaningful sociopolitical agents. For instance, they participated in both the 1920 and 1944 insurrections against dictators in Guatemala, although their activism largely stayed within the domestic sphere. They fed combatants and protesters, tended to the wounded, cleaned clothes, and sewed flags.<sup>45</sup> Beginning in the 1950s, women increasingly became involved in

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states, “In an indigenous community the man takes leadership roles in religious brotherhoods, village committees, the family, the community. He has all the rights to have opinions and to make decisions.” J. Rappaport, trans., “Guatemalan Indian Women Reach Consciousness,” *Off Our Backs* 18, no. 3 (March 1988): 31. Finally, feminist and social activist Bobbye Suckle Ortiz has argued in her article “Changing Consciousness of Central American Women” that husbands in the region often physically – meaning violently – and psychologically control their wives. She also states that that this hierarchical domestic pattern of gender relationships has “provided a model of domination and submission which is generated and replicated throughout the spheres of paid work, trade unions, education, political parties, legal systems, and state structures.” Bobbye Suckle Ortiz, “Changing Consciousness of Central American Women,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 20, no. 17 (April 27, 1985): WS2.

<sup>42</sup> Stoltz Chinchilla talks about the rise of female-headed households and female breadwinners in Central America during the mid-twentieth century as an effect of the high rate of male unemployment and underemployment, as well as husbands’ and fathers’ frequent family abandonment. Norma Stoltz Chinchilla, “Women in Revolutionary Movements: The Case of Nicaragua,” June 1983, [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PNAAX120.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNAAX120.pdf) 6.

<sup>43</sup> Suckle Ortiz contends that women do mostly unpaid labor (inside and outside the home), and when they are paid it is less than men. Suckle Ortiz, “Changing Consciousness of Central American Women,” WS2.

<sup>44</sup> In 1945 guatemaltecas earned limited suffrage – only those over 18 who could read and write were allowed to vote. “Guatemala Women Penalized,” *New York Times*, February 8, 1945, <http://login.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/docview/107202010?accountid=14816>, ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Patricia Faith Harms, “Imagining a Place for Themselves: The Social and Political Roles of Guatemalan Women, 1871-1954,” PhD diss., Arizona State University, 2007, 227. ProQuest (AAT 3258100).

<sup>45</sup> Carrillo Padilla, *Luchas de las guatemaltecas del siglo XX*, 144, 147. María Jerez Rivera de Fortuny, one of the founders of the *Alianza Femenina Guatemalteca* during the 1944-54 revolution, said that it “gave the Guatemalan woman the possibility to have another type of life, she could participate more actively, openly, and massively in the struggle to satisfy the needs of Guatemala.” Stoltz Chinchilla, *Nuestras utopias*, 147.

church groups, literacy, labor, and civic education programs, nutrition and health projects, and various local cooperatives and coalitions.<sup>46</sup> At the onset of the Civil War, then, guatemaltecas immediately started contributing in both formal and informal ways to combat state violence and repression. Many became a part of political organizations and social movements, such as the *Comité de Unidad Campesina* (CUC, or United Peasant Committee)<sup>47</sup> or the *Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo* (PGT, or Guatemalan Labor Party). Others chose to collaborate with or fully join guerrilla campaigns. Besides the EGP, the two main guerrilla groups that existed were FAR and the *Organización Revolucionario del Pueblo en Armas* (ORPA, or Revolutionary Organization of the People in Arms).<sup>48</sup> However, it is specifically the EGP and its female members which I now discuss in-depth.

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<sup>46</sup> Rappaport, “Guatemalan Indian Women Reach Consciousness,” 31.

<sup>47</sup> In fact, Carrillo Padilla argues that the CUC was the vanguard organization in promoting equal activism among both sexes. Carrillo Padilla, *Luchas de las guatemaltecas del siglo XX*, 174-5.

<sup>48</sup> Like female EGP members, women involved in other revolutionary campaigns also publicized testimonies and memoirs about their political activism. Rigoberta Menchú Tum, for instance, is a Quiché woman who was first a leader of the CUC, and later a member of the ‘Vincente Menchú’ Revolutionary Christians. In 1982, she was interviewed about her war experiences by Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, and that interview was later turned into a book. Burgos-Debray, *I, Rigoberta Menchú*. Similarly, Chiqui Ramírez – an urban intellectual and activist who worked with the PGT – published a book about her civil engagement. Chiqui Ramírez, *La Guerra de los 36 Años: Vista con ojos de mujer de izquierda* (Guatemala: Editorial Óscar de León Palacios, 2001). Aura Marina Arriola and Mirna Paiz Cárcamo (see footnote 26) are still other revolutionaries that have shared their experiences. Aura Marina Arriola, *Ese obstinado sobrevivir: autoetnografía de una mujer guatemalteca* (Guatemala: Ediciones del Pensativo, 2000). Mirna Paiz Cárcamo, *Rosa María, una mujer en la guerrilla: relatos de la insurgencia guatemalteca en los años sesenta*, ed. M. Gabriela Vázquez Olivera (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2015).

## CHAPTER III

### Mujeres Discriminadas, Mujeres Alzadas

#### Shared Experiences amidst Diverse Roots

At its inception, the EGP counted very few females amongst its ranks, especially in the mountainous Ixcán. In Payeras' description of the first cadre that entered Guatemala, in fact, out of the fourteen guerrilla fighters in his unit that he names, none are women. Moreover, the first three peasant collaborators he mentions, as well as the first full-time recruit (within their initial two years in the jungle), are all male.<sup>49</sup> He does reference a "woman compañera in the city" at that time who functioned as an intermediary, helping various branches of the organization establish contact with one another.<sup>50</sup> He also cites that in 1973 his unit saw Ju, who was "the first compañera to have gone into the mountains."<sup>51</sup> But overall, his account clearly shows that few women worked for the Ejército at its birth. Similarly, María Lupe states that during the early 1970s "in the [rural] camps there were compañeros from everywhere – from the mountains and from the jungle. At that time there were few women – only four of us...." She continues, though, saying "now there are many more."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Payeras, *Days of the Jungle*, 29-30, 43, 51.

<sup>50</sup> He does not give the specific city in which she is located. *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>51</sup> Payeras states that this is the second time they saw her; however, he does not say where they saw her the first time (whether it was in the mountains or not), nor exactly when she went into the mountains. Nonetheless, it is clear that she became involved in the rural campaign very early if she was there by 1973. It is likely that "Ju" is a nom de guerre. *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>52</sup> Guerrilla Army of the Poor, *Articles from Compañero*, 30.

By the end of the EGP's first decade in operation, then, female participation had increased vastly, as they worked with its campaign both directly and indirectly throughout the country.<sup>53</sup> Those who joined came from urban and rural areas, as well as from a variety of socioeconomic, ethnoracial, and political backgrounds. Many subsisted in poverty. Doña Rosa (a fighter in the Augusto César Sandino Front), for instance, was a street saleswoman who lived in one of Guatemala City's ravines that served as a trash dump. There she and her family had trouble getting clean water, and six of her twelve children died while infants because of malnutrition or illnesses.<sup>54</sup> Meanwhile, María Lupe was an impoverished ladina who worked with her male partner for rich people on a finca – where she did domestic chores such as cooking and cleaning<sup>55</sup> – and then on farmland in Ixcán, trying to support themselves and their kids. Still others like these two toiled in coffee or cotton fields, raised animals, made and sold food or other items in markets, were household maids and servants, or were prostitutes.<sup>56</sup>

Some had even worked from a very young age, never having had the opportunity to receive an education. An indigenous woman recalls, for example, “When I was a young girl, I went to work with my father with the hoe and machete to clean the milpa; I also knew how to grind on the stone. They did not put me in school, I got up at four in the morning... to carry

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<sup>53</sup> Unfortunately, I have no exact count or estimate as to what percentage of the EGP was made up of women when it grew to its largest size. A newspaper article does state that the organization's “first group of guerrillas was comprised of 175 ex-combatants [from an earlier organization], of whom 21 were women.” Silvia Lemus, “URNG, El partido de la Insurgencia,” *Prensa Libre*, 15 de agosto de 2015, <http://www.prensalibre.com/hemeroteca/urng-el-partido-de-la-insurgencia>.

<sup>54</sup> Solórzano, *Mujer Alzada*, 45-48.

<sup>55</sup> María Lupe states, “Before we were very poor. We worked for some rich people on a *finca* (a large plantation). I took care of the workers, cooked and washed from one in the morning to ten at night.” She does not note if she and her partner were married or not; she always refers to him as her “compañero” rather than husband. Guerrilla Army of the Poor, *Articles from Compañero*, 28.

<sup>56</sup> Hernández Alarcón et al., *Memorias rebeldes contra el olvido*, 54-58. Andersen, *Guatemala, escuela revolucionaria de nuevos hombres*, 33. Solórzano, *Mujer Alzada*, 48.

water, sweep, make lunch.... There was a lot of poverty. When I grew up, I started working doing business to earn eight cents, I was about eight. At eleven I could support myself.”<sup>57</sup>

Interestingly, as these examples show, guatemaltecas’ occupations were not always confined to the domestic sphere. In fact, another indígena remembers, “My mother did not teach me to work in the kitchen, my father put me to work the milpa; I did not weave anything, I only knew the work of the man: in the milpa, splitting firewood with the hoe.”<sup>58</sup> This illustrates that while she performed duties outside the house, she recognizes that such jobs were, at that time, still typically seen as “men’s work.” These individuals, then, certainly broke normative gender roles by carrying out hard labor, but it was mostly done out of economic necessity.

On the other hand, several women in the Ejército had been born into society’s middle and upper classes; these individuals were usually more formally educated and unaccustomed to working in fields or on fincas. Yolanda Colom, for example, was an urban, middle class ladina;<sup>59</sup> her family even had enough money to send her on a trip to Europe after she graduated college.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, Clemencia Paiz Cárcamo (alias Cecilia) was born into the urban petty bourgeoisie. Her father had been a colonel in the army under Arbenz, and her maternal great-grandfather was also a military man and a wealthy landowner. Her parents were divorced, but she lived with her mother and attended a private institution run by nuns up through part of secondary school.<sup>61</sup> Silvia Solórzano Foppa (alias Rita) too came from the upper echelons of

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<sup>57</sup> Hernández Alarcón et al., *Memorias rebeldes contra el olvido*, 55-56.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>59</sup> Nathalie Narváez, “No hay capital hecho sin sangre: Entrevista a Yolanda Colom,” *Kamchatka* 6, special no. Avatares del testimonio en América Latina (December 2015): 518.

<sup>60</sup> Casasús, “Yolanda Colom.”

<sup>61</sup> Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres, “Boletín interno de noticias, Numero 3, Homenaje a: Alejandro, Cecilia, Jorge,” marzo 1978, Archivo Personal de Mario Payeras-Yolanda Colom, Archivo Histórico, CIRMA.



society (her ancestors had been wealthy landowners). Her father was the famous intellectual Alfonso Solórzano Fernández, and her mother was the renowned journalist and art critic Alaíde Foppa Falla.<sup>62</sup> Silvia herself went to school to become a doctor.

Middle- and upper-class guatemaltecas were also sometimes raised in an atmosphere of political activism. Solórzano Foppa, for instance, grew up in exile in Mexico because her father was a communist and member of the PGT and her mother collaborated with various anti-government groups. In fact, her mother was kidnapped and disappeared by members of the Guatemalan Anticommunist Secret Army. Additionally, her brother Mario was a founding member of the EGP.<sup>63</sup> And during Paiz Cárcamo's childhood, her house functioned as a safe haven for the armed insurgency. A homage to her states, "She started collaborating with the revolutionary organization at the age of 14 years, when her house was used by persecuted compañeros for their revolutionary activity. She made purchases, hid weapons, and put together equipment at the same time that she began to study revolutionary ideas." It then goes on to describe how Yon Sosa, Turcios Lima, and other rebel leaders became like family to her.<sup>64</sup> So although these women did not perform manual labor, by receiving higher educations and being politically involved, they too disrupted sexist customs.

This is not to say, however, that all women who came from impoverished backgrounds did not earn an education or were not politically active before they decided to join the Ejército. The compañera Zoila, for example – who came from a very poor urban family and worked from

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<sup>62</sup> Mario Menendez Rodriguez, "En las Montañas de Guatemala: La Doctora Silvia Solorzano Foppa, Guerrillera," 6 de agosto de 1981, Archivo del Comité Holandés, Archivo Histórico, CIRMA. Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres, "El EGP en la Prensa."

<sup>63</sup> Menendez Rodriguez, "En las Montañas de Guatemala."

<sup>64</sup> Although the article does not specifically say which "revolutionary organization" she grew up helping, the leaders that it mentions indicate that it was MR-13/FAR. Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres, "Boletín interno de noticias."

the time she was young – went to business school and then studied psychology at the University of San Carlos.<sup>65</sup> Doña Rosa was involved for several years in a local collective, petitioning the state to bring better social services to her neighborhood. She also took part in various anti-government protests, so many that eventually she started receiving threats by the police.<sup>66</sup>

Unfortunately, no matter the various ways their background led them to resist traditional gender norms, these guatemaltecas also could not escape gendered discrimination in its numerous forms. Many of them were expected to take care of the children and to complete all of the domestic duties for their households. For example, Colom says that she and her husband chose not to have children immediately because their work and political concerns, as well as economic instability, “Made it impossible to reconcile the former with the responsibility of children, especially for the woman. I could not have studied, traveled, and worked as I did in those crucial years for my training if I would have had kids immediately.”<sup>67</sup> This illustrates her acknowledgement that she, like most women in society at that time, would be the primary caregiver for kids.

Meanwhile, Flor – an Ixil woman with eight siblings – reflects on the relegation of cooking and cleaning, “Four of us are women, plus my mom, and any of us cook. Sometimes there are no women, only men; then only the mom cooks. My sisters and I, from the time we were little girls, started to make tortillas, to cook. The men don’t want to cook; there they don’t cook. Sometimes, if we tell them to wash a dish, they say no, ‘because I am not a woman.’”

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<sup>65</sup> Solórzano, *Mujer Alzada*, 55.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-51.

<sup>67</sup> Yolanda Colom, *Mujeres en la alborada: Guerrilla y participación femenina en Guatemala, 1973-1978, Testimonio* (Guatemala: Artemis & Edinter, 1998), 3.

They ignore helping us in the house.”<sup>68</sup> An unnamed indígena states, “Before the girls were not allowed to go to school, I was with my mother helping, washing my brothers’ clothes – [who] were going to study – and making their food.”<sup>69</sup> This reveals that not only was she assigned the household chores, but that her family (like countless others) did not permit her to receive an education because of her gender. Another indigenous fighter similarly remembers, “...I only had one brother, and as he was studying, my dad said, ‘you are women and you cannot study, you have no right to study, you have to work.’ I wanted to learn things, but they did not give me that opportunity.... I remember my grandma telling my dad ‘let her study,’ and he responded, ‘she cannot because they are women and they have to learn to help in the kitchen or in the milpa.’”<sup>70</sup>

Furthermore, these guatemaltecas often suffered physical and emotional domestic abuse, with the men in their families drinking too much (leaving them with more responsibilities, among other negative effects) and/or aggressively trying to control them. The same indigenous combatant whose father did not let her go to school, for instance, mentions that he used to hit her. Andersen discusses a compañera named Elodia whose mother died when she was young, leaving her and her little brother with only their drunkard father. Thus, the kids had to find work to survive. She soon got married, but “at her husband’s house they beat her and gave her little food.”<sup>71</sup> Likewise, Flor says that her partner also drank excessively; she decided to leave him

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<sup>68</sup> Solórzano, *Mujer Alzada*, 37.

<sup>69</sup> Hernández Alarcón et al., *Memorias rebeldes contra el olvido*, 54.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>71</sup> Even though Andersen does not state that it was specifically the woman’s husband who beat her or kept her from getting adequate food, it is assumed that he at least knew what was happening because it was in his home. Andersen, *Guatemala, escuela revolucionaria de nuevos hombres*, 33.

because of this when she was pregnant with their child.<sup>72</sup> Finally, both María Lupe and Colom talk in general about the psychological and physical dominance men tried to hold over their wives. The first argues, “Besides knowing the discrimination of the rich, we knew what discrimination by our husbands was like. They say that one should stay in the house, that you can’t do this or that.”<sup>73</sup> The second echoes, “The man had the right to decide for the woman, to command her, to berate and beat her at [his] discretion.”<sup>74</sup>

Lastly, these women received lower labor compensation in comparison to their male counterparts. For instance, María Lupe, who (as mentioned before) worked on a finca with her partner, reflects that he earned fifty cents a day, while she only earned meals.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, Tila explicitly contends, “Women, more discriminated, therefore, although we work the same, they pay us half [of what they pay the men] and give it to the man, the money; we women do not see the money, nor do we benefit from our work, because they give the money to the husband, as if everything is his...”<sup>76</sup> Her comment illustrates that not only were women paid less, but that they could be subsumed – like property – under their male partners, who would then receive their salary for them. In fact, all these examples show that in their everyday lives, through various common societal practices, these guatemaltecas were subsumed under or subjugated by men. And yet, they were courageous in the face of this exploitation, making the choice to change their lives, to defy the patriarchy and become armed revolutionaries.

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<sup>72</sup> Flor and her partner were not married. Interestingly, she says that it does not matter in their town whether couples get married or not. Solórzano, *Mujer Alzada*, 38.

<sup>73</sup> Guerrilla Army of the Poor, *Articles from Compañero*, 29.

<sup>74</sup> Colom, *Mujeres en la alborada*, 52.

<sup>75</sup> Guerrilla Army of the Poor, *Articles from Compañero*, 28.

<sup>76</sup> Solórzano, *Mujer Alzada*, 18.

When looking at the composition of females that joined this rebel campaign as compared with those in previous Latin American guerrilla groups, as well as women's earlier political activism in Guatemala, there is a slight divergence. Jaquette argues in her article that "historically, the women who have participated as guerrilleras have shared certain characteristics: they are young, often in their early twenties; they often come from upper middle-class, educated backgrounds; and they are quite often wives or relatives of male revolutionaries."<sup>77</sup> Similarly, Kampwirth posits that in Cuba, Nicaragua, and El Salvador, "In the cities, females were more likely to be available for mobilization into the revolutionary coalition than in the countryside...."<sup>78</sup> And Carrillo Padilla states that it was mostly middle-class, urban women who participated in the 1920 and 1944 Guatemalan uprisings.<sup>79</sup> As we see within the case of the EGP, however, women of all ethnicities and socioeconomic and education levels joined; the fact that so many poor, formally uneducated indígenas took up arms is probably in large part because the Ejército began building its first guerrilla base in the rural highlands (and continued focusing its clandestine activities there throughout the war), which was an overwhelmingly indigenous and poverty-stricken area. Furthermore, as I show in the following section, not only did women of all ages join this insurgency, but it was quite common for women *younger* than twenty to do so.

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<sup>77</sup> Jaquette, "Women in Revolutionary Movements in Latin America," 344.

<sup>78</sup> Kampwirth, *Women and Guerrilla Movements*, 120.

<sup>79</sup> Carrillo Padilla, *Luchas de las guatemaltecas del siglo XX*, 144, 147.



Figure 3. Illustration depicting Paiz Cárcamo and two of her compañeros, all of whom were killed in battle together. The caption reads, “Fallen in combat today, hidden away, loved, and mourned, glorified when dawn gives its first fruit.”<sup>80</sup>

### Roads to Becoming Revolutionaries

Because of their varied histories, women took up arms in the EGP under a diverse array of circumstances and reasons. Some joined when they were still children or teenagers, while others joined as adults. For instance, seven of the 28 indigenous guerrilleras interviewed in *Memorias rebeldes contra el olvido* specifically cite joining by the time they were 15, three cite joining between the ages of fifteen and twenty, and still others mention joining when they were a

<sup>80</sup> Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres, “Boletín interno de noticias.”

“child” or a “very young girl.”<sup>81</sup> María Lupe, on the other hand, became involved when she was an adult. However, she and her partner passed on their revolutionary activity to their daughters, who were with them in the mountains from a young age.

This also shows that many women began their clandestine work with other people – often partners, family members, or friends. An indígena named Maricela mentions that she became a guerrilla fighter with her brother and father; another named Rita states that she and her three siblings left home to fight.<sup>82</sup> Additionally, Colom says that she and group of friends who studied political theory and revolutionary history were approached by both the ORPA and the EGP, and she decided to join the latter.<sup>83</sup> Yet others went to the mountains alone to become combatants.

An indigenous woman named Mari, for instance, states:

...I had an aunt who rose up and came to visit us. ‘Do not be scared because we are *compañeros*,’ she said. One time I was in my house and the *compañeros* came and told me to go with them, to rise up. That's why I thought about leaving, although I was very young. I did not tell my parents, I just left. I thought that I should leave alone. I had a sister but I did not say anything to her or to my dad. Later, the *compañeros* informed my house that I had left. My parents did not say anything, ‘if you thought about it, then it’s fine.’ That’s how it went. Just me.<sup>84</sup>

Whether they joined the Ejército as young girls or adult women, with or without their loved ones, it is important to recognize these individuals’ decisions to engage in armed political activism confronted, and often challenged, patriarchal gender dynamics.

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<sup>81</sup> Hernández Alarcón et al., *Memorias rebeldes contra el olvido*, 76-80, 85, 89. Although I do not discuss this in my thesis, I do want to note that some women who joined the EGP when they were young talk about how their armed activism in the mountains impacted their transition from “girlhood” to “womanhood,” as they had to become guerrilleras at the same time they were going through other significant life changes such as puberty. Ibid., 58-59.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>83</sup> Colom, *Mujeres en la alborada*, 2.

<sup>84</sup> Hernández Alarcón et al., *Memorias rebeldes contra el olvido*, 77-78.

As in their daily lives, then, in choosing to become guerrilla fighters, guatemaltecas often faced discrimination from their husbands, fathers, and brothers. Colom, for example, discusses how the EGP had problems persuading its popular bases of support that women should participate in the struggle alongside men. She says that many campesinas and campesinos argued that wives and mothers could not contribute because they had to take care of children and the household.<sup>85</sup> María Lupe similarly describes the difficulties of influencing couples, but especially of encouraging husbands to allow their spouses, to join. She states, “All the families collaborated, although sometimes we would only talk to the husband or the wife, who then had to convince their partner – sometimes they did not agree. Many times the men were jealous and didn’t like other men giving political attention to their wives. Then other women would give political attention to these women.”<sup>86</sup> Yet another combatant, an indígena named Irma, reflects on the resistance put forth by her father and grandfather:

I thought about supporting our compañeros that were fighting and I left. My dad was sick and he went to cry with me, he told me ‘who is going to give you food, you are the oldest and who is going to take care of your siblings and your grandparents; do not go my daughter, you do not have the ability to flee and go to work there.’ My grandpa told me that I would not be able to carry a weapon. I responded: yes I can. My grandpa also cried for me. When I left he was sad, but I left.<sup>87</sup>

This quote also shows that despite men’s possessiveness, their attempts to keep females confined to the domestic sphere, or their reservations about their skills, women defied them. As Lina, an

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<sup>85</sup> Colom does not clarify whether it was just men who argued this, or whether both men and women in the rural communities they visited gave them these reasons, although it is not unlikely that because of longstanding patriarchal traditions some women also argued that they should stay at home. Colom, *Mujeres en la alborada*, 109.

<sup>86</sup> Guerrilla Army of the Poor, *Articles from Compañero*, 28.

<sup>87</sup> Hernández Alarcón et al., *Memorias rebeldes contra el olvido*, 80.



indigenous guerrillera, boldly states, “My father didn’t want it, but I went. In my heart I said: I have to endure, I can.”<sup>88</sup>

However, not many women joined for specifically gendered reasons. In this work’s introduction, Tila contends that both men and women have the capabilities and the right to engage in a revolutionary struggle for their people. She later builds on this, saying:

We no longer want that life, that our children die of malnutrition. We want to change things; that's why I went to the mountain. On the other hand, in the countries that have been liberated, women, after they are pregnant, are cared for, well fed, so that their children are born strong, and, since they are born, there are two months that they do not work, and they also have clothes and food for their children. They do not die of malnutrition, measles, or malaria, and there are schools and hospitals. For that reason of changing our lives we have to wage war against the rich. And the woman is equal, has the right, has the same capacity as the man. Many times men say that we are not worth anything, but within the Revolution we are equal. Women can fight because we are poor too, we have the right.<sup>89</sup>

In other words, Tila joined, and wanted other women to join, so that they could have access to providing better care for their own wellbeing, along with the basic necessities for their children. She was fighting to end poverty, which was the EGP’s goal, but she tied it to the specific experience of many women who were the primary caregivers of their children. It was at once a common reason among all poor, but at the same time a gendered reason, for joining. She also talks about women’s liberation in other places and her belief that women have the same worth as men, reflecting that gender equality was likely a motivating factor for her to fight.

Besides Tila, though, only one other guerrillera named Ana María directly cites a gendered catalyst behind her decision to become an EGP member. She discusses how the liberation of women had always been a fundamental aim of her revolutionary work, and she adds, “In my case, liberation has been a long and contradictory process; it is probably not yet

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>89</sup> Solórzano, *Mujer Alzada*, 19.

fully completed. Guatemalan women who have already advanced on this path will achieve our total liberation, until the people of Guatemala triumph and succeed in building a new society in which men and women are truly equal.”<sup>90</sup> Essentially, this means she thought the Ejército and the change it would bring about would help guatemaltecas achieve gender equality.

The other reasons females decided to arm themselves were numerous. Also like Tila, many women wanted to rid their nation of its immense economic disparities between rich and poor, as well as its flawed political system. Colom, for instance, says that she was disillusioned with the political parties in her country, who were corrupt or complicit with corruption, and none of whom represented the interests of the lower-class workers and peasants, or even the middle working class.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, she decided to become a part of the revolutionary movement, as she saw no alternative to bringing about change. In addition, some compañeras sought to end ethnic discrimination. An indígena named Telma, for instance, discusses how she learned that the EGP was fighting for the poor, and she also wanted to do something to stop the economic exploitation she had witnessed throughout the country. Furthermore, she argues that she wanted to fight because the state did not recognize indigenous languages and treated indigenous people unfairly.<sup>92</sup>

Still others cite more general ideas of freedom from prejudice and oppression. In an interview, Solórzano Foppa reflects on why she joined. She mentions that she grew up with “a sensitivity towards inequalities, towards injustice.” However, while she was pursuing her medical career, she states that she decided “not to settle for distributing aspirin to calm the pains

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>91</sup> Colom, *Mujeres en la alborada*, 1.

<sup>92</sup> Hernández Alarcón et al., *Memorias rebeldes contra el olvido*, 79-80.

of the population, but to go to the root of social problems, get to the bottom of problems, to eradicate them once and for all. And so I met the comrades of the Guerrilla Army of the Poor. Little by little I understood what was necessary to do, the steps to give to free our people. I understood how important my career was for the process of revolutionary struggle. In that way, I joined the Guerrilla Army of the Poor.”<sup>93</sup> María Lupe says that one of her young daughters wanted to go up because “she wants to be free and have what she needs to defend herself.”<sup>94</sup> Interestingly, one indígena named Mari admits that she was not entirely sure of the reason she joined: “I spent three years as a guerrilla fighter, [but] I did not have a dream when I went to fight. The compañeros said that we fought for our people. Already raised up, I understood a little what the struggle was for.”<sup>95</sup>

Finally, others became combatants because of the immediate threat of violence they faced. Many women’s families and friends had been tortured and killed by the military, and they did not want to suffer the same fate. As an indigenous guerrillera named Lucía discusses, the army came into her village and killed four of her siblings. She remembers, “...another of my sisters rose up, first I left and then she. We went out of need, we thought if they caught us they would rape, torture, and kill us.”<sup>96</sup> Another indígena echoes, “I decided that I was leaving because I was afraid... if soldiers come in they rape women.”<sup>97</sup> Through armed mobilization, these women hoped to defend themselves, their loved ones, and their communities. The indigenous compañera Ana states, “My thought was, if I don’t go, my dad or my mom are going

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<sup>93</sup> Menendez Rodriguez, “En las Montañas de Guatemala.”

<sup>94</sup> Guerrilla Army of the Poor, *Articles from Compañero*, 31.

<sup>95</sup> Hernández Alarcón et al., *Memorias rebeldes contra el olvido*, 86.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

to die. I rose up to defend my family.”<sup>98</sup> In other words, some women saw joining the EGP as the best means of survival for themselves and their fellow citizens.

The life paths and underlying motivations that led these guatemaltecas to join the EGP are similar to those of other Latin American female revolutionaries. In the countries she looks at, Kampwirth mentions family traditions of resistance and membership in preexisting social networks (from student or church groups to labor unions and other community cooperatives) as common influences leading women to become insurgents.<sup>99</sup> As we have seen here with compañeras like Paiz Cárcamo, Solórzano Foppa, and Doña Rosa, these also seem to have been important factors leading to their armed activism. Furthermore, Kampwirth posits that violent repression caused women to want to engage in self-defense,<sup>100</sup> and again we see this is the case for many female EGP participants (especially indígenas). Finally, as I argue for Ejército guerrilleras, Kampwirth also contends that most women did not rise up for specifically gendered reasons.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 80-81.

<sup>99</sup> Kampwirth, *Women and Guerrilla Movements*, 11.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>101</sup> In fact, this is one of the author's main arguments. She states in her book's introduction, "The reasons women have given for participating in the guerrilla struggle are similar to those given by men: to end the dictatorship, to end the exploitation of the poor and the indigenous, to create more just countries for their children. Over the course of my more than two hundred interviews with female activists, only one woman, a Nicaraguan, told me that a desire for gender justice played a role in her initial decision to tie her fate to the revolutionaries. The vast majority joined the revolutionary coalitions so as to live in freer countries and to have more options in life, as did their male counterparts. So I do not argue that women chose to become guerrillas for reasons that were fundamentally different from those that motivated men." Ibid., 6.

## CHAPTER IV

### Las Dificultades para las Compañeras, las Deficiencias del Ejército

#### Balancing Domesticity with Armed Activism

Despite the fact that the EGP recruited women, and that many joined, female members still faced challenges within the organization, as well as from their own families and the communities with which they came into contact. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Colom notes that the rebels at times had trouble getting women to join because in some pueblos, people did not think that females should take on responsibilities outside the home. She adds to this, “...they claimed that war is a men’s thing.”<sup>102</sup> In other words, many Guatemalans believed that women should not be involved in armed activism. Similarly, María Lupe recalls that “It was [sic] necessary to struggle with men to let women do political work. Sometimes you had to go out at night, for example, and the men didn't want to let their *compañeras* go.”<sup>103</sup> This shows that some men did not think women should be political agents in any capacity. Tila too reflects that often when women decided to fight, the men in their families would not allow it. She says, “But the *compañeros*, their husbands and brothers, do not let them go, because they still have not changed their thoughts. They do go to the mountains, but they will not let [the women] go.”<sup>104</sup> Her statement not only illustrates the difficulties the Ejército faced in trying to change society’s

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<sup>102</sup> Colom, *Mujeres en la alborada*, 109.

<sup>103</sup> Guerrilla Army of the Poor, *Articles from Compañero*, 29.

<sup>104</sup> Solórzano, *Mujer Alzada*, 20.

disdain for female political engagement, but it also demonstrates the domestic power men still held over women.

Related to this, Tila also discusses the reservations guatemaltecas had about becoming guerrilleras because they were unsure of how their compañeros would treat them. She specifically cites that they were scared the men might hurt or kill them, or that they would not let them state their thoughts and opinions; that overall, they would not respect them.<sup>105</sup> She says that she tried to reassure them that all EGP members respected each other equally, no matter their gender. However, women did at times face prejudice from their comrades in arms. For instance, some were discriminated against because they could not run as fast as males, who would say to them, “Bitch, you lack fiber.”<sup>106</sup> Thus, they felt they had to work harder to prove themselves as worthy combatants. Flor, an Ixil fighter, says “In training, I was the compañera who got the most shots on target; between the compañeros there are compañeros who did not shoot on target. The compañeros laughed, because they said that they are men, they are compañeros, but they did not shoot on target. So, for my part, I made sure that we, women, are always equal with men, as according to practice.”<sup>107</sup> Her statement hints that male insurgents were not always worried about practicing shooting because they thought that their gender inherently gave them such skills; meanwhile, guerrilleras constantly had to prove that they had these same capabilities for war.

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>106</sup> The original Spanish states, “Púchica, les falta fibra.” “Púchica” could also be translated as “damn” or “shit,” but I translated it as “bitch” because in this context it is used in a derogatory way specifically towards women. It is interesting to note that this is one of the few examples I could find of guerrilla fighters referencing a specific sexist situation/specific discriminatory language used by male comrades. Most of the time, when misogyny among the EGP’s ranks is discussed, combatants talk about it in a more general sense. Hernández Alarcón et al., *Memorias rebeldes contra el olvido*, 53.

<sup>107</sup> Solórzano, *Mujer Alzada*, 39-40.

Another struggle female EGP collaborators and combatants dealt with was balancing their activism with tasks at home, which many were still expected to perform (especially if they were not fully integrated into the organization). A Quiché campesina named Yolanda, for example, says, “One of my concerns has been not to limit my political development with my domestic chores. It has been a process and a struggle in which I have had to deal with our mistaken attitudes, cultural traditions and wrong ideas about women’s participation.”<sup>108</sup> More specifically, and perhaps the most difficult duality compañeras had to find equilibrium between, was that of mother and fighter.

Many women in the Ejército had children when they joined and/or became parents during their armed engagement. And despite the group’s support of both male and female revolutionary participation, these guerrilleras still had the added responsibility of being the primary caregiver in their families. María Lupe, for example, had seven children. She discusses the process of how her partner first went into the mountains, and she later followed:

My compañero and my oldest daughter, who was twelve years old, went to train in the mountains.... I stayed alone with six children.... I was one of the first women to go up to the mountains because the army was chasing me, coming to get me. I left my girls with another compañera, but she couldn’t care for them well. To get the girls out I had to go back into town, where the army knew me and went after me. We did it like a military operation, and I went with the girls and everything up to the mountains. We lived in a camp there for months. Sometimes I stayed alone there with the girls, and the only other things we saw there were monkeys.<sup>109</sup>

This reflection illuminates not only how mothers, but even unrelated women – rather than fathers – took on the main responsibility of raising children. Furthermore, it reveals that this often put women in just as, if not more, dangerous positions than men. María Lupe mentions this trend

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>109</sup> Guerrilla Army of the Poor, *Articles from Compañero*, 28-29.

continuing with her own daughter. She says, “I have a one-year-old grandson now, and my daughter and her compañero are up in the mountains. Her compañero saw him eight months after he was born.”<sup>110</sup> Thus, the change in family dynamics was limited even as guatemaltecas increased their political agency.

Narváez has discussed how guerrilleras’ experiences of motherhood distinguished them from their male comrades, contending that it continued to be an eminently female experience because physically women were the ones who had to carry the babies to term, give birth, and nurse them.<sup>111</sup> I agree with this statement; however, I would add that the almost complete absence of many men in their children’s lives, or the failure to help out with childcare duties after the period of gestation, birth, and breastfeeding, points to a cultural, and not just physical, explanation. And that cultural explanation is that patriarchal traditions, as these compañeras have illustrated, continued to relegate childcare as a woman’s duty, even if women were now participating in the political sphere. In fact, as I have shown, in many ways these guatemaltecas continued to face discrimination, even while they fought alongside men. Thus we see that “in the jungle the gender gap narrows, although it does not disappear.”<sup>112</sup>

Other scholars have shown that these types of patriarchal traditions which challenged Guatemalan guerrilleras’ newfound sociopolitical agency were present in various Latin American armed uprisings. Lobao says, for example, that the mutual respect Nicaragua’s male

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 31. Likewise, the compañera Ana María describes how when she and her partner had a child, she had to make the difficult decision as to whether she would remain with him. She also comments on the continuation of Guatemalan women as their families’ primary caregivers, saying that with regards to childcare, “men do not assume that responsibility from the beginning. The society in which we live thus has determined it, and we have not yet been able to transform it...” Solórzano, *Mujer Alzada*, 63.

<sup>111</sup> Narváez, “¿Guerrilla unisex?,” 507-508.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 514.



and female Sandinistas shared “was not easily achieved. The first women recruited during the 1960s experienced isolation and an undervaluing of their achievements.”<sup>113</sup> Likewise, Kampwirth offers up different cases of women in El Salvador’s FMLN who were treated as incompetent because of their gender or who were sexually objectified by male fighters.<sup>114</sup> Indeed, as all these compañeras understood, the misogyny so deeply engrained in their societies could not be changed overnight.

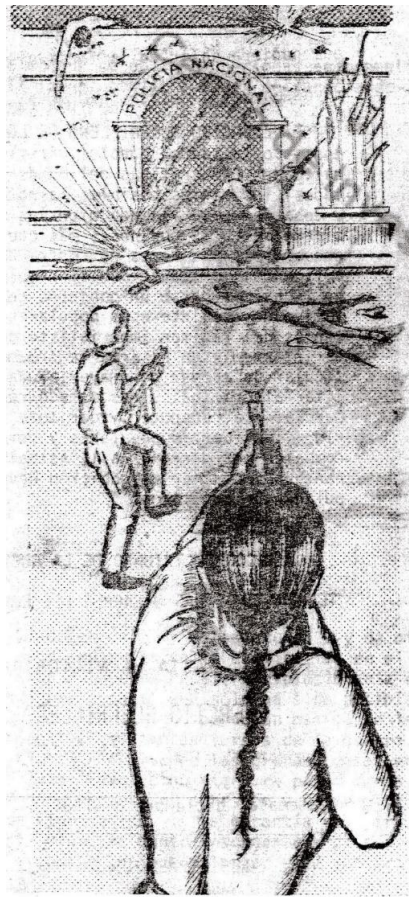


Figure 4. Illustration depicting a compañera and compañero engaged in battle in front of a national police building. This is on the front page of a national and international communique the EGP published in December of 1981.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Lobao, “Women in Revolutionary Movements,” 223.

<sup>114</sup> Kampwirth, *Women and Guerrilla Movements*, 76-79.

<sup>115</sup> Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres, “Comunicado nacional e internacional,” diciembre 1981, Archivo Personal de Mario Payeras-Yolanda Colom, Archivo Histórico, CIRMA.

## Achieving Gender Equality in the New Nation

Because guerrilleras faced continuing gendered prejudices in their armed activism, the EGP as an organization resolutely spread the idea that both sexes *could* and *should* contribute to its revolutionary struggle. Colom states, for instance, that the group argued that “women should participate in society and in the revolutionary fight in terms equal to men” because “both were humans and workers” and females had “as much heart and intelligence” as their male counterparts.<sup>116</sup> This calculated inclusion of women into its campaign is no doubt in part because the insurgency’s goal was to lead a “revolutionary people’s war,”<sup>117</sup> which meant it was concerned with mass mobilization. To achieve this, it had to unify Guatemalans of all different backgrounds to unite under its banner. Thus, in one news bulletin the EGP talks about its struggle as one of “diverse values, class extractions, regional and ethnic origins, [and] sexes....” and then contends that its combatants represent the unity of men and women, along with the unity of *ladinos* and indigenous peoples, rich and poor, and others of different backgrounds.<sup>118</sup>

However, the rebels’ concern over having both male and female participation in their war was more than just a strategy for mass mobilization. They recognized that the gender inequalities inherent within society needed to be done away with. For instance, in the same bulletin mentioned above, the organization also states that sexist issues and machista tendencies

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<sup>116</sup> Colom, *Mujeres en la alborada*, 109-110.

<sup>117</sup> “La lucha de nuestro Pueblo por su liberación definitiva, que las organizaciones revolucionarias caracterizamos como una guerra popular revolucionaria....” Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres, “Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres: Manifiesto internacional,” 208-9. “La Guerra Popular Revolucionaria es una guerra de las masas del pueblo.” Rolando Morán, *Entrevistas al comandante en jefe del Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres*, Rolando Morán (Guatemala, Centroamérica: El Ejército, 1982), 13.

<sup>118</sup> Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres, “Boletín interno de noticias.” Another communique, written and published by the EGP in conjunction with the FAR, the ORPA, and the PGT, makes a similar statement. Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca, “Comunicado internacional: Proclama unitaria,” febrero 1982, Archivo Personal de Mario Payeras-Yolanda Colom, Archivo Histórico, CIRMA.

would not be solved overnight.<sup>119</sup> Esperanza, a member of the group's National Directorate, argues that it deliberately seeks involvement from women not only because they make up a large part of the population, but because they encapsulate one of the most exploited sectors of Guatemalans, and their revolutionary contributions would lead to liberation in many different forms for them.<sup>120</sup> These examples illustrate that the Ejército was not only aware of women's longstanding oppression, but it thought that it could help them break free from this subjugation.

Unfortunately, despite its recognition of the need to solve sexism, gender issues were not a key underlying motivation of the EGP's struggle. In the introduction to an interview compilation with Commander-in-Chief Morán, it states that he will address the guiding principles of the revolution, which include the participation of the masses, the class and ethnic-national struggles, the role of Christians in the uprising, and the unity of the vanguard organizations.<sup>121</sup> Later in an actual interview, Morán reaffirms that the organization was founded on the basis of fixing the contradictions of the revolutionary movement so far and the crisis throughout the 60s, as well as the need to solve class and ethnic oppression. He further states that the Ejército is polyclassist and multinational,<sup>122</sup> referring to the importance it places on incorporating Guatemalans of different class and ethnic identities. Nowhere, though, does he mention the struggle for women's rights as one of the campaign's goals. Thus, it is clear that the fight for gender equality took a backseat to other issues, especially those of class and ethnicity.

Related to this, the EGP did not include a concrete plan to change patriarchal traditions as part of its plan for the nation's future. For instance, in an international communique, the group

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<sup>119</sup> Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres, "Boletín interno de noticias."

<sup>120</sup> Solórzano, *Mujer Alzada*, 111.

<sup>121</sup> Morán, *Entrevistas al comandante en jefe del Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres*, 3.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 8, 24.

states its “Principal Points for the Program of the Revolutionary [sic] Government.” Among the five points, there is mention of ending class and ethnic oppression, as well as a promise that the revolution “will lay the foundations for solving the fundamental needs of the people in the areas of land, labor, wages, health, housing, literacy, and culture.”<sup>123</sup> However, there is no comment on ensuring more female political participation, on working towards better pay for them, or any other women’s rights issues. Thus, it appears that although guatemaltecas could fight in the war, revolutionary society after the war promised no concrete changes for them regarding gender equality.

In fact, the National Directorate member Esperanza openly states, “In this moment, the women who fight form part of a sector that does not need to make feminist proposals, because their struggle is performed as poor [people], in order to solve the essential conditions of their existence.”<sup>124</sup> Her declaration assumes that all female insurgents’ classist identities are stronger than their gendered identities. She also hints that it is relatively unimportant to the EGP if the struggle for gender equality is postponed, because it will somehow inherently be achieved as a consequence of the resolution of poverty. Of course, some compañeras not only wanted to raise women’s rights issues in that moment, but they understood the Ejército’s shortcomings in regards to their own liberation and knew that realizing gender equality would be a continued struggle in the revolutionary nation. As Solórzano Foppa states, “Our struggle as women, which

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<sup>123</sup> Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca, “Comunicado internacional.” There is also no discussion of gender issues in the group’s international manifesto. Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres, “Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres: Manifiesto internacional.” The national manifesto makes only a vague reference to solving gender inequalities is when it states that people should have the freedom to not be discriminated against because of their ethnic origin, religion, or sex. Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres, “Manifiesto del Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres al pueblo de Guatemala,” 16 de octubre de 1979, Civil War, Society and Political Transition in Guatemala: The Guatemala News and Information Bureau Archive (1963-2000), Princeton University Digital Library, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey, <http://pucl.princeton.edu/objects/v118rf30z>.

<sup>124</sup> Solórzano, *Mujer Alzada*, 120.

has to break ideological structures deeply rooted in society, will undoubtedly extend beyond the seizure of power and the establishment of a patriotic, popular and democratic revolutionary government.”<sup>125</sup>

Like the EGP, Kampwirth points out that “important in explaining the role of women in the FSLN ,the FMLN, and the EZLN was the guerrillas’ use of the mass mobilization strategy, a strategy of winning the hearts and minds of thousands through work that was political as well as military.”<sup>126</sup> Thus, in all these places insurgent campaigns fought for equal participation from both men and women. In comparing regional guerrilla groups’ official platforms on women’s rights issues, Jaquette contends that Uruguay’s Tupamaros “alone among guerrilla groups, have developed a detailed position on ‘revolutionary women’” which argued that they had been culturally and educationally discriminated against, making them “spectator[s] to a history built by men.”<sup>127</sup> Lobao adds that after the Tupamaros, Nicaragua’s FSLN also confronted women’s oppression and even developed concrete, long-term objectives to help end gender inequality.<sup>128</sup> Kampwirth posits that the EZLN made a more comprehensive list of feminist plans from its first day in action as compared to all previous regional guerrilla insurgencies.<sup>129</sup> In relation to all of these contemporary movements, though, the EGP is perhaps most similar to El Salvador’s FMLN, which Lobao claims “tacitly supports women’s issues and encourages women to share

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>126</sup> Kampwirth, *Women and Guerrilla Movements*,127.

<sup>127</sup> Jaquette, “Women in Revolutionary Movements in Latin America,” 351.

<sup>128</sup> Lobao, “Women in Revolutionary Movements,” 222.

<sup>129</sup> Kampwirth, *Women and Guerrilla Movements*, 112.

tasks and leadership with men” but “has not developed a formal platform on women’s issues comparable to that of the FSLN.”<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Lobao, “Women in Revolutionary Movements,” 224.

## CHAPTER V

### Guerrilleras Taking Charge, Guerrilleras Creating Change

#### Confronting Misogynistic Attitudes and Practices

While few women joined the Ejército for primarily gendered reasons, many certainly gained a new gendered self-awareness during their activism, recognizing the sexism inherent in Guatemalan society's patriarchal traditions. They became strong, active proponents of changing these traditions, of gaining equality with men. As Solórzano Foppa says at the beginning of *Mujer Alzada*, the significance of the book's title is twofold: it at once reflects that women decided to take up arms and become a part of the guerrilla movement, of the people's fight; but it also "refers to the fact that in the same process we have risen above our own feminine condition, becoming aware of being exploited, oppressed and discriminated against, acquiring... security in ourselves, security not to depend on [men], to feel capable and entitled to perform any task or function and to be able to act without being subject to determinations alien to our being and our conscience."<sup>131</sup> Her statement is clear – for many guatemaltecas, this revolution is not simply about solving economic (or ethnoracial) issues, but it is about beginning to fundamentally and perpetually rid the nation of gender inequalities.

With this new gendered consciousness, the EGP's compañeras and compañeros openly challenged the patriarchy by recognizing, and working to change, certain misogynistic practices

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<sup>131</sup> Thus, she also says, "Raised up women, as part of the people, we have decided to conquer our liberation and to clear the road for the liberation of Guatemalan women in so far as we are fighting and constructing the foundations of a society in which one lives without exploitation, without oppression, without discrimination or repression; a free society in which men and women can make our equality a general and permanent reality." Solórzano, *Mujer Alzada*, 7.

present within their organization and the communities in which they worked. One of the main issues they addressed was violence against women. In her testimony, for instance, María Lupe discusses the group's efforts to stop spousal abuse: "The first thing that we tried to change was the practice of wife-beating. It was very hard to change this. While the women talked among each other, the compañeros explained to the men that women were not slaves, and that they shouldn't beat them. Wife-beating stopped eventually, and now it isn't done anymore."<sup>132</sup> Similarly, an indigenous combatant states, "The leadership gave us the idea: 'If the men are abusive... we're going to scold them.'"<sup>133</sup> These examples illustrate how the rebels attempted to end gendered brutality by not only verbally chastising those who enacted it, but also by explaining – to both sexes – why it was wrong.

Guerrilla fighters also fought against machismo, which could manifest itself in different ways.<sup>134</sup> On one level, they tried to curb chauvinistic language. Andersen says, for example, that when insurgents used inappropriate words the organization would have meetings to try and address the need to change their speech. For him, "this way of transforming language is a sign that the bad habits that remain in the old society must be left behind. Heavy, colorful words, with double and indirect meanings, reflect errors like machismo and sexism that poison human relationships."<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> I do not know if María Lupe is referring to a specific place or group of people where it seems as though spousal abuse stopped, or if she is just being overly optimistic, because certainly violence against women in Guatemala as a whole had not ended at that time; in fact, it still occurs today. Guerrilla Army of the Poor, *Articles from Compañero*, 29.

<sup>133</sup> Hernández Alarcón et al., *Memorias rebeldes contra el olvido*, 59.

<sup>134</sup> Sometimes, combatants mention more generally the issue of machismo. An Ixil guerrillero, for instance, talks about his own struggle with machismo, saying, "Before I have been very machista, but I was taught in the organization that it is not right. I understood and corrected myself." He does not, however, discuss specific machista attitudes or performances. Andersen, *Guatemala, escuela revolucionaria de nuevos hombres*, 25.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.



On another level, they disavowed the “macho ideal” – the arrogant man, the tough man, the man that responded to all situations with bloodshed. For instance, Mario Payeras criticizes a collaborator named Ramón: “He had come from the east and was devoted to the guerrillas, but he was deeply machista; a braggart and troublemaker of the first order.... He had occasionally collaborated with the earlier guerrilla movement, and perhaps because of that was full of false ideas about us. Each time we chatted he felt obliged to talk of violence and combat. His tales always led up to the moment when he, brandishing a machete, had done this or that or the other, or had frightened someone out of his wits.”<sup>136</sup> By mentioning Ramón’s machismo and then stating that he had false ideas about the EGP, as well as by poking fun at the stories he told, Payeras hints that the organization did not idealize an egotistical and unjustifiably vicious version of masculinity.

Lastly, guerrilleras – indígenas in particular – broke gender norms by changing out their colorful huipiles and cortes for olive shirts and pants. Several of them mention the Ejército giving them such uniforms to put on immediately after their arrival in the mountains, so it seems to have been standard practice for both male and female participants (in the rural area camps, at least) to wear them.<sup>137</sup> Dressing in this traditionally masculine attire was a significant change for women because it rid them of certain physical limitations. For instance, one compañera points out that she likes wearing pants because she cannot run in a corte.<sup>138</sup> But more importantly, it first challenged their own notions of feminine beauty, and then allowed them to challenge others’ conceptions. An indigenous fighter states, for example, that she initially thought she looked ugly

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<sup>136</sup> Payeras, *Days of the Jungle*, 52.

<sup>137</sup> Solórzano, *Mujer Alzada*, 40. Hernández Alarcón et al., *Memorias rebeldes contra el olvido*, 82.

<sup>138</sup> Hernández Alarcón et al., *Memorias rebeldes contra el olvido*, 51.

in a uniform, but soon she got used to it and liked it. She adds that when she showed her children, they told her that the pants looked ugly, and asked her if she was embarrassed to wear them. She replied that no, she was not embarrassed, because she had risen up.<sup>139</sup> Her conceptions of beauty, of performing femininity, were changing. Additionally, for some the uniform was a symbol of gender (and ethnic) equality. As one combatant discusses, the armed struggle “for us indigenous women [sic] was a different time. We did not use a belt nor huipil, nor corte, we wore uniforms, we were equal.”<sup>140</sup>

Although it is not something that EGP members discuss at length, these examples illuminate how they made efforts to stop violence against women, to change persons’ machista attitudes, and to challenge old-fashioned standards of feminine beauty. In other words, they were directly confronting and defying gendered discrimination in its many forms. Narvález makes a similar argument in her work, stating that many guerrilla leaders “questioned values like machismo, the oppression of women, the moral double-standard, sexual taboos, [and] the myth of virginity.”<sup>141</sup> She also discusses how guerrilleras performed duties traditionally seen as masculine activities, the subject to which I now turn.

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>141</sup> Narvález, “¿Guerrilla unisex?,” 505.



Figure 5. Photograph of two guerrilleras holding guns, featured in the *Compañero* article which shares the testimony of María Lupe.<sup>142</sup>

### **Challenging Gender Roles by Assuming Revolutionary Roles**

Along with their direct confrontation of machismo attitudes and actions, the revolutionary jobs these guatemaltecas took on presented another significant challenge to the nation's patriarchy. Of course, male and female EGP participants did assume some tasks in their activism which conformed to society's traditional gender roles. Guerrilleras, for example, often performed domestic-related duties such as sewing, cooking, and cleaning. María Lupe offers up an illustration of this when she describes herself and other women cooking for the rural guerrilla units. She states, "We, the women, organized ourselves to provide food. They brought it to my

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<sup>142</sup> Guerrilla Army of the Poor, *Articles from Compañero*, 31.

house, and I took it to the mountains where the *compañeros* were training.”<sup>143</sup> The *compañera* Elodia says that she sewed uniforms, awnings, hammocks, backpacks, and other provisions for combatants.<sup>144</sup>

Female insurgents were also less involved in activities such as hunting for food, scouting for the army, or fighting. Payeras, for instance, discusses how “on several occasions, while the rest of the guerrillas carried out tasks far from camp, our women *compañeras*... kept the troublemakers at bay. The slightest concession would have been fatal for us.”<sup>145</sup> He does not make clear who the “troublemakers” are,<sup>146</sup> although it is clear that he thinks these women’s work is extremely important. However, his reflection also points to the fact that females often remained at bases to keep the camp in working order while their male counterparts went out to do more “dangerous” or “manly” jobs.

Perhaps surprisingly, though, guerrilleros did perform domestic duties, contrary to their usual societal roles (which were outside the home). There were certainly times, especially at the Ejército’s outset, when units in the mountains were composed of only men – thus, necessity drove them to take up the tasks of preparing and serving meals, washing and mending clothes, and other domestic chores. However, many organization members made it a priority to ensure that these duties were shared among males and females when both were present. For example, Andersen and the Ixil *compañera* Flor both contend that in the guerrilla camps, men and women

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>144</sup> Andersen, *Guatemala, escuela revolucionaria de nuevos hombres*, 34.

<sup>145</sup> Payeras, *Days of the Jungle*, 82.

<sup>146</sup> He does not state whether the “troublemakers” are enemy soldiers, peasants that could tip off the army, potential guerrilla deserters, children that had to be watched, or others.

learned to cook and make the fire, and they worked in shifts doing these jobs.<sup>147</sup> Similarly, María Lupe says, “We continued fighting against discrimination. When the *compañeros* went to a house they always helped in the kitchen. Many of the women were surprised by this, but bit by bit it was explained that men and women could both do everything.”<sup>148</sup> Payeras echoes this when he mentions guerrilleros helping out in the kitchen of a peasant family with which the rebels collaborated. He states, “[The man’s] wife was one of those country women who do not have a moment’s rest the entire day. She carried water from the ravine, cooked the corn, ground it, and made the tortillas for the family and for us. At first she became very angry when we took over some of her tasks, but she soon gave in, somewhat amused by the rare spectacle of men grinding corn and patting out tortillas.”<sup>149</sup>

Furthermore, women took on a variety of roles in the Ejército that were not domestic or “support” functions, positions that remained largely in the sphere of male employment within broader Guatemalan society at that time. Some performed manual labor such as growing crops. María Lupe, for instance, reflects on doing agricultural work, “I helped in the fields, in the planting. I explained to people that before I couldn’t do those jobs, but that because it was necessary I had learned. I said that they should understand that women can also work in the fields. Whenever we went somewhere we helped with everything.”<sup>150</sup> Meanwhile, others worked in healthcare. Foppa – who had trained as a doctor – instructed nurses and ordered first-aid kits to be sent out to guerrilla columns for use.<sup>151</sup> Similarly, four indigenous compañeras

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<sup>147</sup> Andersen, *Guatemala, escuela revolucionaria de nuevos hombres*, 51. Solórzano, *Mujer Alzada*, 37.

<sup>148</sup> Guerrilla Army of the Poor, *Articles from Compañero*, 30.

<sup>149</sup> Payeras, *Days of the Jungle*, 53.

<sup>150</sup> Guerrilla Army of the Poor, *Articles from Compañero*, 30.

<sup>151</sup> Menendez Rodriguez, “En las Montañas de Guatemala.”

named Lidia, Flora, Antolina, and Telma also helped treat injured or sick combatants and collaborators.<sup>152</sup>

Still others coordinated the passage of people and information. Irma was a liaison between the EGP leadership and the rural camps and arranged transport for those wounded in battle, while two other indígenas named Estela and Angelina ran group correspondences between different municipalities.<sup>153</sup> These jobs could be extremely dangerous, for those traveling often came across the army's path. Colom, in just her first year of revolutionary work alone, provided logistic, security, and communications assistance for the organization, which she describes in detail:

During the course of the first year of militancy I carried out various tasks: logistic and communications support in accordance with the guerrilla front in the north of El Quiché; service and security support to members of the National Directorate and recruited veterans, in some of their mobilizations and work meetings, although at that time I had no idea what their identities were and where they lived. I always picked them up and left them at different points in the city or the country. And I supported them in locales and with vehicles that I myself obtained for the purpose.<sup>154</sup>

In other words, these females completed jobs vital to keeping local outfits, and entire fronts, supplied, functioning, and safe.

Guerrilleras also worked as planners or instructors in the Ejército's various education campaigns. Colom states that later in her activism she carried out political and cultural formation events for fellow workers and peasants, then – because she had teaching experience – helped craft a literacy project that could be implemented in the mountains.<sup>155</sup> Likewise, an

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<sup>152</sup> Hernández Alarcón et al., *Memorias rebeldes contra el olvido*, 87-89.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 83-84, 87, 91.

<sup>154</sup> Colom, *Mujeres en la alborada*, 5.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 5, 8.

indigenous member named Rita says that she started off in the EGP teaching children vowel sounds and mathematics. She then moved on to raising communities' political consciousness: "I gave talks about what the war was and gave people guidance so the people could rise up too, because we are exploited by the rich, we are poor, we don't have money or land. I walked from village to village, my work was mobile, always hidden."<sup>156</sup> Yet another example comes from Payeras, who references a "compañera who had come from the city to spend a few days, carrying a slate and alphabet cards, with which she was to teach the young illiterates who had taken up arms to read."<sup>157</sup> By working as educators, these female activists were putting themselves in leadership positions, making their ideas and voices heard among their fellow citizens.

At the same time some women were teaching, others were learning. María Lupe mentions twice how her daughters received an education within the EGP. She first says, "My compañero and my oldest daughter, who was twelve years old, went to train in the mountains. There my daughter learned to read and write."<sup>158</sup> She later adds that her five other daughters all learned to read among the guerrilla fighters.<sup>159</sup> Similarly, Payeras mentions a collaborator family who had five daughters, all of whom learned to read among his unit in the mountains.<sup>160</sup>

A few female insurgents not only gained literacy in Spanish, but they learned to speak indigenous languages, too. Mari, an indígena, states, "Also they taught us to read and write because I could not. As a very little girl I did not learn Ixil, because my mom and dad are from

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<sup>156</sup> Rita's reflection again shows that these guerrilleras' jobs could be very dangerous. Hernández Alarcón et al., *Memorias rebeldes contra el olvido*, 82-83.

<sup>157</sup> Payeras, *Days of the Jungle*, 70.

<sup>158</sup> Guerrilla Army of the Poor, *Articles from Compañero*, 28.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>160</sup> Payeras, *Days of the Jungle*, 53.

Chiantla. The compañeros taught me because I fought with Ixil.”<sup>161</sup> Likewise, Irma, whose father was Quiché and mother Ixil, discusses how she learned some Quiché (because she did not learn it growing up) as well as how to write some Spanish.<sup>162</sup> Women in the EGP, then, were gaining a multicultural education that most of them did not have access to, or were not permitted access to, before. This education, in turn, gave them skill sets that would allow them to seek a broader range of opportunities for work and life outside the home and in different places across the country.

Female guerrilla activists were educators, organizers, and leaders in additional capacities. Andersen references (a few times) a compañera named Miriam who helped the insurgent campaign raise female awareness for its revolutionary cause. In one specific recollection, he remembers her working to educate a group of campesinas on ways they could participate in government resistance, showing them different techniques for community self-defense (including bomb-making), and helping them to start planning the construction of a hen house to produce eggs for the guerrillas.<sup>163</sup> In another instance, an official homage to Paiz Cárcamo talks about how she not only was a founding member of the organization, but emphasizes that she was fundamental in helping to set up the Otto René Castillo Front. It also attests that she led the political organization of workers for the Ejército.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Hernández Alarcón et al., *Memorias rebeldes contra el olvido*, 86.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>163</sup> Andersen, *Guatemala, escuela revolucionaria de nuevos hombres*, 125-6.

<sup>164</sup> Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres, “Boletín interno de noticias.”



Finally, guerrilleras were most definitely and directly involved in what their name suggested: combat. Many women trained with and carried a number of different munitions.<sup>165</sup> The aforementioned homage to Paiz Cárcamo mentions that she had experience working with weapons and explosives.<sup>166</sup> An indigenous compañera named Irma says that she learned to clean and use an M-16, a Fal (Belgian rifle), a carbine, a revolver, and grenades, among other arms, and that other females carried machine guns.<sup>167</sup> Lucía, another indígena, describes how she learned to use, and carried throughout her time as a combatant, at least four different types of guns: an AK, a Mauser, an M-16 (U.S. infantry rifle), and a Galil (Israeli infantry rifle). She further states, “I went on to become squadron leader and I was very young. In training I was taught to kill soldiers, to shoot, and to defend myself. I had good marksmanship and I knew how to command. In my squad it was almost all men.”<sup>168</sup> While this illustrates that men made up the majority of combatants, it also reflects the idea that not only did women fight, but that they were leaders in battle as well as in other areas. In addition, it shows that even young girls learned how to fight and participated in violent clashes. María Lupe also demonstrates this when she talks about how her young daughters, after their entry into a guerrilla camp, “went to training with their wooden guns. This is what they played with.”<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Of course some women who trained with/carried weapons never experienced battle against the army, police, or any other state agency. An indigenous woman named Rita, for instance, says, “When I rose up I learned to use the shotgun, to clean it and assemble it, but I was not in combat. I just carried it in case at any moment we clashed, I was ready.” Hernández Alarcón et al., *Memorias rebeldes contra el olvido*, 82.

<sup>166</sup> Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres, “Boletín interno de noticias.”

<sup>167</sup> Hernández Alarcón et al., *Memorias rebeldes contra el olvido*, 83.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>169</sup> Guerrilla Army of the Poor, *Articles from Compañero*, 30.

Moreover, these women underwent the hardships and losses of battle, and some were killed. The indigenous guerrillera Lina reflects, "...I went to fight with the soldiers. Among the things I remember are the battles: if there were dead, we had to collect them. I recovered weapons. If our *compañero* was injured, I remember that I carried wounded men. I took them to where they were going to heal them. That's a heavy task, no matter if you're a woman."<sup>170</sup>

Another named Felicianita says:

I was second vanguard, behind the first where several go. I carried a [sic] Galil, the stock is small. The command says where we are going to concentrate and the other *compañeros* are defending us. That was how it happened in combat. Once we see that the army is down, we start shooting, us advancing and the other *compañeros* fall and we pass over, we get on the truck and we find soldiers still alive, we lower them and we take their weapons.... I endured about six years fighting.... Many *compañeros* before me fell, it is fortunate that I remained alive among the sheer dead.<sup>171</sup>

Still another named Cristobalina remembers her own wounds suffered in battle: "I participated in a fight in La Perla and I was injured in one foot."<sup>172</sup> And sadly, Paiz Cárcamo and Doña Rosa are just two examples of women who died during skirmishes with the army.<sup>173</sup> Thus, these *compañeras* not only made the same sacrifices as their *compañeros*, but they proved that they too had the mental and physical strength to endure battle – that war was not just "a men's thing."

These female EGP members were hard laborers, healers, couriers, teachers, students, leaders, and combatants; they were fully capable of, and did successfully fulfill, many of the same positions that men did as revolutionaries.<sup>174</sup> Their experiences fit into a larger national

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<sup>170</sup> Hernández Alarcón et al., *Memorias rebeldes contra el olvido*, 84.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> Paiz Cárcamo died in an army attack while on a mission with two other comrades. Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres, "Boletín interno de noticias." Rosa died in a confrontation in Acatenango. Solórzano, *Mujer Alzada*, 45.

<sup>174</sup> And in addition to the examples I've given, women occupied a number of other roles, often dangerous, that I will not discuss at length here. I will, however, provide one example from the *compañera* Irma, who – among the many

trend that Carrillo Padilla has cited, which is that during the 1970s and 80s many insurgent guatemaltecas began playing more than just support roles.<sup>175</sup> They also fit into a larger regional trend, as women in Uruguay's Tupamaros uprising, the latter half of Nicaragua's Sandinista struggle, and El Salvador's FMLN similarly took on counter-normative gendered tasks in their political activism.<sup>176</sup> This significance of these guerrilleras taking on such nontraditional occupations is that, as Narváez has said, they showed that "the guerrilla [is] a new space, a reorganizer of social functions."<sup>177</sup> And, at least in theory, taking on a variety of unprecedented gender roles within their revolutionary activism could help expand the roles they took on in everyday life, as well as increase the sociopolitical opportunities presented to future generations of guatemaltecas.

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different tasks she was assigned – had to go out at night to place weapons on the roads near where the army was, so that fellow guerrilla fighters could pick them up to use in attacks. She also penetrated villages surrounded by the army to recruit and organize support. Hernández Alarcón et al., *Memorias rebeldes contra el olvido*, 83-84.

<sup>175</sup> Part of this, she notes, was due to the state's counterinsurgency campaign that intensified in the 80s, leaving thousands of women without husbands, fathers, sons, or brothers. Thus, they had to perform many tasks men normally did. Carrillo Padilla, *Luchas de las guatemaltecas del siglo XX*, 178.

<sup>176</sup> Lobao, "Women in Revolutionary Movements," 221-22, 224.

<sup>177</sup> Narváez, "¿Guerrilla unisex?," 501.

## CHAPTER VI

### Conclusion

#### The Aftermath of Activism

The compañeras of the Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres – although they came from diverse backgrounds – all experienced sexism in many forms in their everyday lives. However, it was not the driving motive for them to join this rebel campaign. They continued to face discrimination because of their gender during their time as armed insurgents, from both their comrades-in-arms and the communities with which they worked. Furthermore, the EGP did not include in its vision of the new nation any formal or detailed plan to better women's lives. Nonetheless, these courageous female combatants challenged misogynistic practices such as spousal abuse, machismo attitudes and language, and traditional standards of feminine beauty. They also fulfilled tasks – including raising crops, working as medics, organizing and leading educational programs, and fighting – that up until that point had largely remained in the masculine sphere of work. Thus, they began to change deeply-rooted patriarchal gender roles through their revolutionary activism.

By illuminating the Ejército's female voices, my thesis helps shape a more complete picture of Latin American guerrilleras' experiences as a whole. Breaking away from previous national and regional trends of political participation, a greater percentage of the guatemaltecas who joined the EGP were very young, rural, and indigenous. Meanwhile, parallel to other regional armed movements of the 1970s and 80s, this group's female membership grew vastly (as compared with earlier movements). Furthermore, among its contemporary counterparts most

women activists did not become involved in order to combat their gendered oppression, although they similarly opposed sexist practices within their organizations and took on tasks that went against traditional gender roles. Some of these groups, particularly Nicaragua's FSLN and Mexico's EZLN, even created concrete and comprehensive revolutionary strategies dedicated to women's rights, unlike the EGP.

By analyzing the obstacles these compañeras confronted and were able to overcome or not overcome, this work also allows us to begin to understand how their armed activism affected their post-war lives, as well as the impact the Civil War had on guatemaltecas' lives as a whole. During the latter half of the 1980s, EGP leadership began to splinter, and the organization lost support. In fact some guerrilleras, such as Colom, left to join other sociopolitical coalitions.<sup>178</sup> Then, at the end of 1996, the *Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca* (Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity, or URNG) – of which the EGP was a member – and the government signed peace accords, officially ending the Civil War. But this was not the revolutionary triumph the guerrillas had hoped for, and with over 200,000 individuals dead or disappeared, rebuilding the nation would be a more difficult task than ever. As many EGP ex-guerrilla fighters tried to reintegrate into civilian life, they faced even worse economic situations and continued to suffer threats by the army.<sup>179</sup> Furthermore, they felt the URNG did not help them during the demobilization process nor even recognize their contributions, which cost them so much physical and emotional pain, to the war.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Casasús, "Yolanda Colom."

<sup>179</sup> Hernández Alarcón et al., *Memorias rebeldes contra el olvido*, 95.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 96-98.

The Ejército's former female combatants, in particular, continued to face additional challenges leading into the twenty-first century, as gendered discrimination in Guatemalan society was still very present. In the "Indigenous Rights Accord" of the peace agreements, there is a short section titled "Rights of indigenous women" in which the government agrees to: "(a) Promote legislation to classify sexual harassment as a criminal offence, considering as an aggravating factor in determining the penalty... the fact that the offence was committed against an indigenous woman; (b) Establish an Office for the Defence of Indigenous Women's Rights, with the participation of such women, including legal advice services and social services; and (c) Promote the dissemination and faithful implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women."<sup>181</sup> And the "Socio-economic Accord" has a section dedicated to the "Participation of women in economic and social development" which advocates for gender equality in regards to education and training, housing, health, labour, organization and participation, and legislation.<sup>182</sup> However, these sections are a relatively miniscule part of the accords, and they seem to not have had an immediate effect on guatemaltecas' lives.

Today, indigenous and ladina women still suffer from unequal access to education, receive unequal pay for their labor, and are victims of violence perpetrated by men.<sup>183</sup> Certainly

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<sup>181</sup> This translation is not my own. There is also a declaration in the section "Rights relating to the land of the indigenous peoples" which states that the government shall work to "eliminate any form of discrimination against women, in fact or in law, with regard to facilitating access to land, housing, loans and participation in development projects." Jeremy Armon, ed., "Accords of the Guatemalan Peace Process," *Accord: An International Review of Peace Initiatives 2* (1997): 42, 49, <http://www.c-r.org/accord/guatemala>.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-54.

<sup>183</sup> Cecilia Menjivar's book *Enduring Violence* discusses these various forms of oppression as experienced by ladinias living in eastern Guatemala. Cecilia Menjivar, *Enduring Violence: Ladina Women's Lives in Guatemala* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011). Several scholars have studied, and many human rights organizations have addressed, the increasing rate of violence against women (especially femicide) in recent years. Corinne Ogrodnik and Silvia Borzutzky, "Women under attack: Violence and poverty in Guatemala," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 12, no. 1 (January-February 2011): 55. "Fact Sheet: Femicide and

in some ways, then, it seems that while EGP members successfully challenged social norms during the war, this did not necessarily have a profound impact on the way all guatemaltecas continued to be treated in society. As Narváez has posited, “The guerrilla started to lay the foundations for a more equal society and sometimes the roles were shared or exchanged, but once this was finished, women were forced to occupy a place in society in accordance with the previous stereotypes or to live on the margins of this.”<sup>184</sup>

On the other hand, although Guatemalan society remains largely patriarchal, many of the EGP’s former female combatants and collaborators were forever changed by their activism. Their newfound sociopolitical agency during the armed struggle continued post-war, as they fought against poverty, ethnic discrimination, women’s rights, and a myriad of other inequalities in new social campaigns. Some joined broad sociopolitical movements such as *Plataforma Agraria* (Agrarian Platform), which is trying to change the finca system and struggles against racism, but also encompasses *la Red de Mujeres* (the Network of Women). This network fights to end violence against women, works for better sexual and reproductive healthcare services, and encourages female sociopolitical participation on a local, regional, and national level, among other issues.<sup>185</sup>

Others became involved in strictly feminist organizations such as *Periódico laCuerda/Asociación La Cuerda*, a political association and newspaper whose goal is to broadcast the diverse experiences of guatemaltecas, as well as to join in the national struggle for

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Femicide,” Guatemala Human Rights Commission, accessed February 3, 2017, <http://www.ghrc-usa.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Femicide-FACTsheet-2013.pdf>

<sup>184</sup> Narváez, “¿Guerrilla unisex?,” 514.

<sup>185</sup> “Demandas de la Red de Mujeres,” Plataforma Agraria, last modified July 16, 2012, <http://71.18.198.15/demandas/demanda-de-la-red-mujer.html>.

their equality.<sup>186</sup> Still others joined local collectives such as *Asociación Kumool* (Kumool Association), a primarily Ixil-membered group in El Quiché which has many goals, including gender equality. As Amalia, an ex-guerrillera and member of this groups states, “Also the plan of our association is the defense of women’s rights. The war moderated [our oppression], but our struggle has not ended.”<sup>187</sup> Overall, then, their experiences as fighters expanded guatemaltecas’ post-war opportunities, presence, and power in the public sphere. It also pushed them to include gendered liberation as a part of their endeavor for a more egalitarian nation.

This thesis has attempted to capture the strength and bravery of the EGP’s compañeras amidst a brutal war in a longstanding male-dominated country. Hopefully, my work not only contributes to the existing scholarship on female armed activists’ experiences but can also serve as a building block for future comparative studies on the ways Latin American insurgencies have been affected by, and affect, women’s oppression and rights. Without a doubt, these guerrilleras have made profound contributions to Guatemala’s continuing struggle for gender equality.

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<sup>186</sup> “laCuerda: miradas feministas de la realidad,” Periódico laCuerda y Asociación La Cuerda, accessed February 20, 2017, <http://www.lacuerdaguatemala.org/>.

<sup>187</sup> Hernández Alarcón et al., *Memorias rebeldes contra el olvido*, 99.



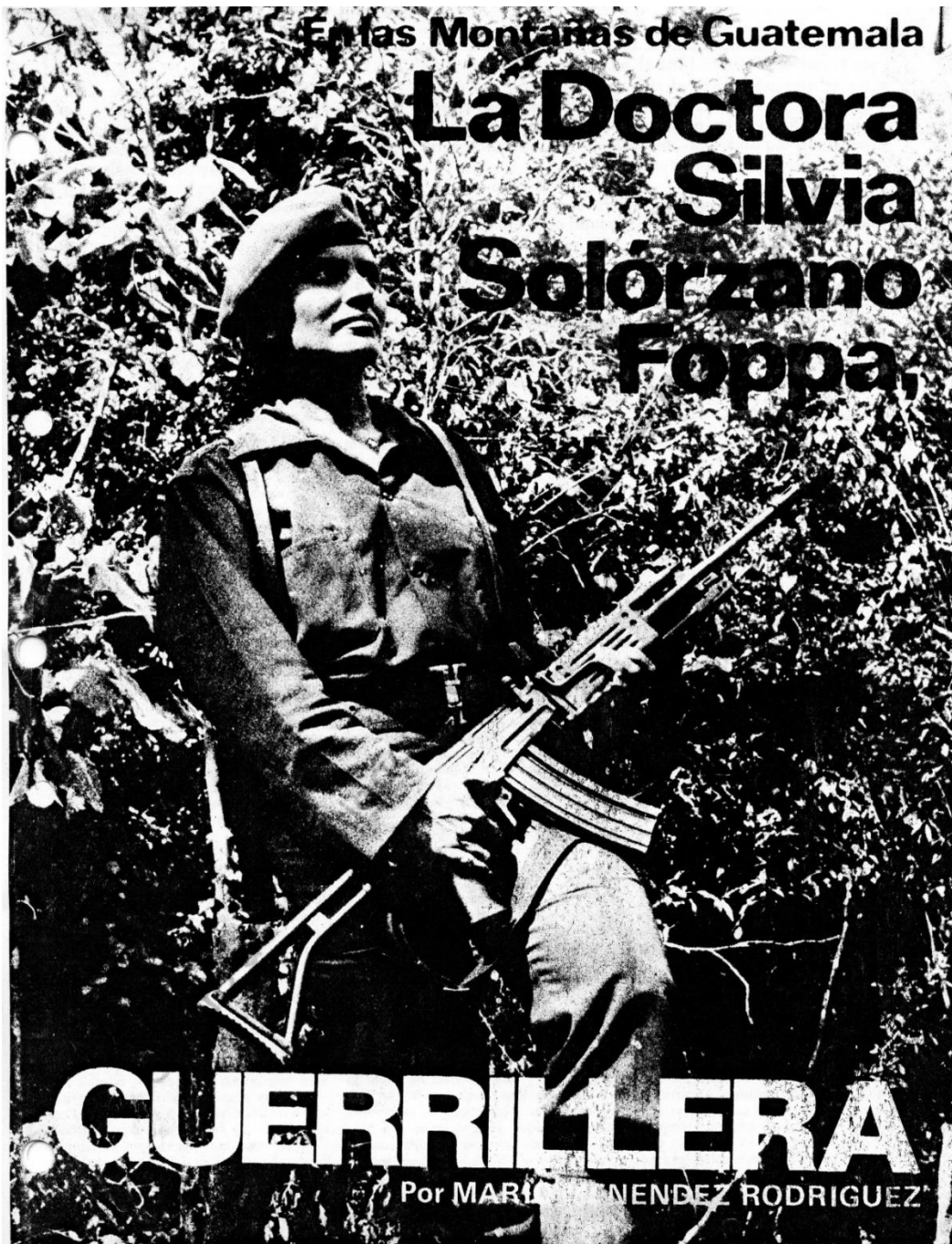


Figure 6. Photograph of Solórzano Foppa in EGP uniform, holding gun. This serves as the cover page of a published interview with her.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Menendez Rodriguez, “En las Montañas de Guatemala.”

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