

PsychoSocial Profile

Audience Analysis

GUATEMALA



Psychoanalysis of Conflict Participants



VALKA MIR



Psychosocial Country-of-Origin Profile – GUATEMALA

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APPENDIX A Psychosocial Country-of-Origin Profile - GUATEMALA

§A1 Regional Context. The Northern Triangle of Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador

The Northern Triangle is a term used by the United States and Organization of American States to refer collectively to these three states located between Mexico and Nicaragua. The graphic in **figure 1** provides a visual reference of these three countries and their capitals, which are approximately 200 kilometres from each other. The countries share an economic integration and a host of psychosocial, economic, cultural, political, and security challenges that have driven hundreds of thousands of residents into seeking asylum in North and South America as well as Europe.¹ International observers and interventionists ascribe the causes as a collection of psychosocial-cultural breakdowns that include



economic malaise, political corruption, human rights violations, crime, and climate change, amongst other reasons.² While the underlying issues are not unique to these countries, they are most distinctly expressed in a manner that

has become an intractable violent social conflict. The USA's Council on Foreign Relations estimates that more than 2,000,000 people have fled the northern triangle since 2014.³ In Honduras and El Salvador, the rates of femicide (killing of women and girls) are among the highest in the world.⁴ Honduras is the deadliest of the three countries with a homicide rate of 38 murders per 100,000 residents annually since 2020, and Guatemala is the next deadliest, averaging between 250 – 280 murders per month in 2024. Approximately 95% of these murders go unpunished by dysfunctional systems of justice.⁵ Some of the critical areas of the Northern Triangle, also known as 'red areas', are in effect conflict zones and exhibit high levels of violence and criminality, large numbers of injuries caused by firearms, physical and sexual abuse, torture, extortion, kidnappings, forced recruitment, curfews (unofficial), confinement, invisible borders, a population in fear of violent death or crime, lack of state rule, corruption and impunity, limited access to health and other basic services, and limited access to protection and justice. Significant portions of the population have been forced into displacement to escape threats

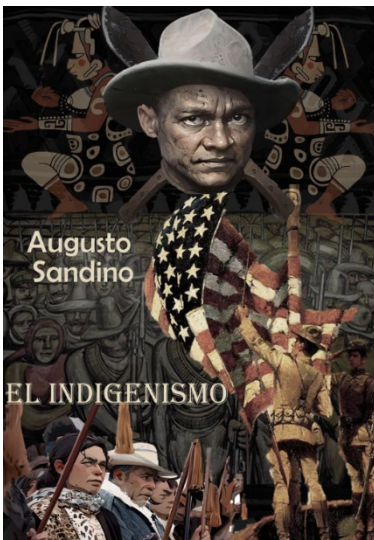


Figure 2 Augusto Sandino and the beginnings of El Indigenismo

¹ [Children and Families Fleeing Violence in Central America - WOLA](https://www.wola.org/analysis/people-leaving-central-americas-northern-triangle/)
² <https://www.wola.org/analysis/people-leaving-central-americas-northern-triangle/>
³ [Central America's Turbulent Northern Triangle | Council on Foreign Relations \(cfr.org\)](https://www.cfr.org/central-america/central-americas-turbulent-northern-triangle/p21487)
⁴ [Femicide or femicide | Gender Equality Observatory \(cepal.org\)](https://www.cepal.org/en/indicators/indicators/femicide)
⁵ <https://www.worldvision.ca/stories/child-protection/northern-triangle>
⁵ [Northern Triangle | Gangs and Migrants | World Vision Canada](https://www.worldvision.ca/stories/gangs-and-migrants)



and violence, moving within the state, requesting asylum, or resorting to irregular immigration.⁶ Over the past half-century, the type of psychosocial-political dysfunction described in the previous sections has resulted in the rise of criminalised societies that challenge the recognised UN state for power and influence in Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador. These three states geographically constitute key transit points for transnational drug trafficking. The leaders, members, supporters, and beneficiaries of these vast, net-centric criminal societies have penetrated state institutions, as evidenced by frequent cases of collusion between organized crime and high-level politicians.⁷

§A1.1 United States and Civil Wars in Central America.

Beginning in the 1970s, the central American countries of Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras have been in a nearly constant state of social, cultural, and ethnic conflict. The U.S. had significant influence in Latin America, including training some of the most notorious dictators at the infamous School of the Americas, also known as the “School of Coups.”⁸ For six decades, some 65,000 soldiers, dictators, assassins, and mass murderers counted themselves alumni of the school that was first created in Panama in 1946 to prevent the spread of communism in the Western hemisphere. The alumnus of this school included Roberto D’Aubuisson, a death squad leader who murdered thousands and gained the sadistic nickname of “Blowtorch Bob” for his methods of torture. Colonel Domingo Monterrosa, the first commander of the ATACATL — an elite paramilitary unit trained and equipped by advisors from the United States — also attended the school and was later fingered for directing the El Mozote Massacre, the bloodiest slaying of guerrilla sympathizers in the entire civil war.⁹ In Nicaragua, the United States supported the 46-year long dictatorship of the Somoza family which finally fell to the followers of a murdered peasant farmer named Augusto Sandino (Sandinistas) in 1979 after decades of civil war.¹⁰ The United States backed the Salvadoran military government with training, arms, and funding for decades against the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front, which killed between 75,000 and 90,000 civilians, mostly rural indigenous farmers.¹¹ In Guatemala, the US’ Central Intelligence agency supported a military coup against President Jacobo Arbenz in the mid-1950s, igniting a 35-year civil war ensued between mostly indigent Mayan peasants and western

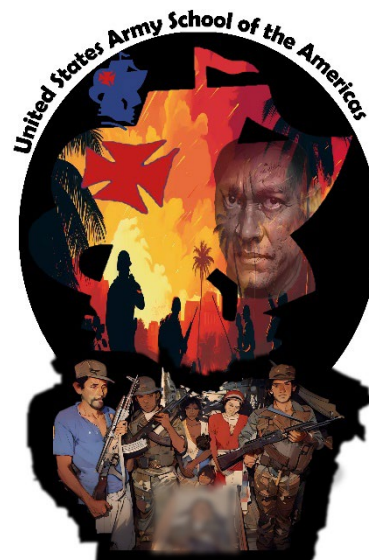


Figure 3 United States Army School of the Americas.

⁶ [Northern Triangle violence: 17,422 homicides in 2015 \(ticotimes.net\)](https://www.ticotimes.net)

⁷ (Aljazeera Staff, 2023; Blanco & Shenk, 2026; Mackey & Eisner, 2019; Phillips, 2019; Staff, 2023)

⁸ The school is now called the United States Army’s Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC) located at Fort Benning, Georgia.

⁹ This researcher was assigned to the 7th Special Forces Group during this time and has personal experience in the USA’s support to civil wars in Central America. As green beret officers, we found our orders coming directly from Washington DC rather than normal chains of command. We were ordered to train and equip these Central American military forces who, in turn, fought guerrilla factions. However, they also operated on their own at times and controlled the civilian populace through brutal violence no matter the cost or human atrocities they committed. All our complaints and objections were overruled, and internal USG investigations into those decisions and actions continues to this day.

¹⁰ (MacAulay, 1967)

¹¹ (S. Christian, 1985)

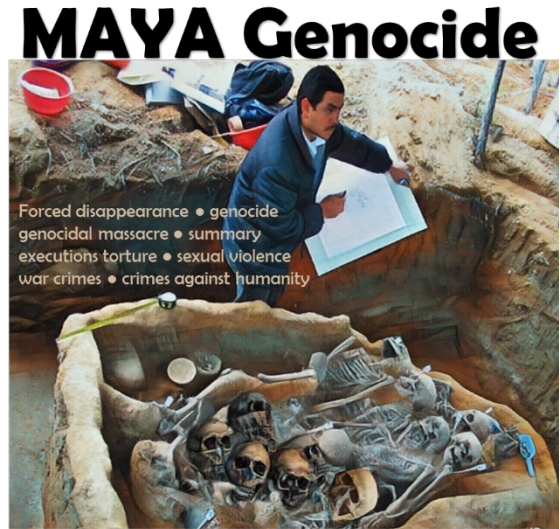


backed civil-military governments friendly to Wash DC. An estimated 200,000 Guatemalans were killed during the war, including at least 40,000 persons who "disappeared". 92% of civilian executions were carried out by government forces. The UN-sponsored Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH) documented 42,275 victims of human rights violations and acts of violence from 7,338 testimonies. 83% of the victims were Maya and 17% Ladino. 91% of victims were killed in 1978 through 1984, 81% in 1981 through 1983, with 48% of deaths occurring in 1982 alone.¹² In its final report in 1999, the CEH concluded that a genocide had taken place at the hands of the Armed Forces of Guatemala, and that US training of the officer corps in counterinsurgency techniques "had a significant bearing on human rights violations during the armed confrontation", but that the US was not directly responsible for any genocidal acts.¹³ The Guatemalan military officer that the US had supported, Rios Montt, was convicted of genocide and sentenced to 80 years in prison.¹⁴

The ongoing civil wars spread to Honduras, which led to constant coups and military dictatorships that employed extraordinarily violent suppression of the population.¹⁵ The CIA backed Honduran Army's death squad Battalion 3-16 led the suppression effort through mass murder, torture, and disappearances of anyone accused of dissidence.¹⁶

§A1.2 Psychosocial-Cultural Drivers of Conflict and Inhibitors of Resolution.

The population in the interrelated countries of Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador consist of segmented societies with vastly different psychological organization and sociological constructions¹⁷. The pre-Columbian indigenous peoples are the Maya, a Mongoloid ethnolinguistic people who are indigenous to Mesoamerica.¹⁸ Between 90% and upwards to 99% of all residents in the Northern Triangle identify as all or partially indigenous mestizo, or 'mixed blood'.¹⁹ Approximately 12% of Salvadoreans, 5% of Guatemalans, and 1% of Hondurans identify as Caucasoid-European of Spanish descent



The Secrets in Guatemala's Bones
Figure 4 OAS Genocide investigators exhume the bodies of Maya families and villages murdered during Guatemala's Civil War



Figure 5 mejorar la raza.

¹² (Amnesty International, 1981; T. P. Anderson, 1988; Grandin & Klein, 2011; Schirmer, 1988; United Nations, 1999)

¹³ (United Nations, 1999)

¹⁴ (Jonas, 2018)

¹⁵ (Ching, 2016)

¹⁶ (Fratus, 2020)

¹⁷ Psychological organization refers to the sociocentric versus egocentric individual and collective identity. Sociological construction refers to the assembly and ordering of families, clans, and tribes versus constructed, often urbanized-industrialized societies. The former is inherited over thousands of generations and the latter is artificially constructed by modern humans to replace lost or abandoned inherited structures.

¹⁸ Mesoamerica is a historical and important region and cultural area in southern North America and most of Central America. It extends from approximately central Mexico through Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and northern Costa Rica. Within this region pre-Columbian societies flourished for more than 1,000 years before the Spanish colonization of the Americas.

¹⁹ (Birx, n.d.)



from the original colonial settlements.²⁰ Most of the political-military power, economic control, and national cultural expression rests with the small percentage of those who identify as Caucasoid-European. There are very few 'criollos' or pure Caucasian-European descendants left in these countries. Race, therefore, is subjective and based on claimed lineage and family wealth which is preserved at all costs to ensure the family does not slide downward into indigenous categorization and out from European privilege. The darker one's skin and the more one's facial features reflect one of the indigenous typologies of indigenous phenotypes as shown in **Figure 5**.²¹ the more likely one is to be excluded from consideration as belonging to the power-holding Spanish culture. This racial-cultural dynamic illustrated in **figures 5 & 6**, presents itself in a social, political, and economic practice of *Blanqueamiento* (whitening) to *mejorar la raza* (improve the race) achieve a supposed ideal of biological and symbolic 'whiteness' or Europeanness²² such as parents sending their children to the United States or Europe to find a marriage partner. While the practice of *Blanqueamiento* works to affirmatively change racial identity of the dominant segment of Honduran society, other practices work to defend against subconscious threats of racial identity disintegration such as demonizing darker-skinned segments of society. The president of Guatemala from 2016 to 2021, for instance, was Jimmy Morales, and-up comedian who came to local fame portraying a blackface character²³ that denigrated Afro- Latinos, which account for around .02% of the population.²⁴ The most popular heroes and heroines in film and literature are blond haired, blue/green-eyed light-skinned European looking actors, even though those phenotypes have not been present in this region for decades. During interviews with members of Mara Salvatrucha-13 and Barrio-18, interviewees claimed to be neither Caucasoid-Europeans nor Mongoloid-Mayans. Their



Former comedienne-turned Guatemalan president turned narcotrafficker Jimmy Morales' stage character is called "Black Pitaya", or Black Dragon fruit.



Figure 6 Cognitive Dissonance within the mestizo elite: Emotional drivers of *Blanqueamiento* signify a preoccupation with being ethnically European and correspondingly, a terror of being black, darky, or mestizo.

²⁰ <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/>
²¹ Andid, Brasilid, Legid, Istmid, Patagonid, Huarpid, and Fuegid.
²² (Rahier, 1999)
²³ Called 'Black-Pitaya' or 'Black-Dragonfruit'
²⁴ [Guatemala prosecutors pursue ex-president Jimmy Morales \(yahoo.com\)](https://www.yahoo.com/news/guatemala-prosecutors-pursue-ex-president-jimmy-morales-1200000000.html)



extensive body art (tattoos) is a principal symbol of their identity and that identity's expression in physical form. My research suggests that the affected population segments have (or are trying to) meld the two competing identities (Euro-Indigenous) in a violent form of social reconstruction. During individual in-depth interviews with members of these groups, I found that their competition with each other and with the established socio-political-economic power base is not so much about physical gain.²⁵ Rather, it is about psychological affirmation and distinction of their large group identities of 'not-white' but 'not-indigenous' but 'not-impotent' either. The confusion over individual and collective identity is strikingly illustrated in **figures 14/15**, with the dramatic body art worn by these members.²⁶ This underlying psychosocial-emotional driver of social disintegration and participation in violent conflict suggest that the dangers that asylum returnees face cannot be calculated using western, rational logic. This section attempts to illustrate how the psychosocial-cultural structures of the Northern Triangle countries are in the process of disintegration. Perhaps more controversial is the suggestion that this disintegration has been increased by great-power interference and a failure to ameliorate the effects of post-colonial social ordering based on racial and cultural preference. My professional assessment to the USA and UK foreign offices has been that these countries are in what may be thought of as a 'free-fall' into increasing levels of violence and disorder, that will continue until the underlying dissonance is finally resolved by those who survive.

§A2 Corrupted Structures of Political & Justice in Country-of-Origin Guatemala.

According to the United States Embassy country team in Guatemala City, over the past year, there were no "significant changes" in the human rights situation in Guatemala.²⁷ They recorded continuing significant human rights violations from all sectors of the ongoing civil society conflict. Common examples of violations involved credible reporting of cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment or punishment by the government; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest or detention; serious problems with the independence of the judiciary; transnational repression against individuals in another country; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including threats of violence against journalists and unjustified arrests or prosecutions of journalists; serious government corruption; serious government harassment of domestic and international human rights organizations; extensive gender-based violence, including femicide and other forms of such violence; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting members of Indigenous groups; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex persons; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting persons with disabilities; and significant restrictions on workers' freedom of association, including violence and threats against union leaders.²⁸ As in previous years, the Government of Guatemala has not taken credible actions

Guatemala City, known nationally as '*Guate*', is the capital and largest city of Guatemala and the most populous urban area in Central America. The city is in the south-central part of the country, nestled in a mountain valley called Valle de la Ermita.

²⁵ During coding of in-depth qualitative interviews, issues of respect, honour, collective agency versus alienation, shame, and rage predominated, while financial gain was hardly mentioned.

²⁶ My research and findings are published in USA, UK, CAN Army Special Operations Textbooks that have limited availability to the public based on security classifications. **Figure 14/15** is an assembly of MS-13 gang body art that my research collects and works to translate into a psychosocial-emotional profile for non-lethal targeting by US and UK special operations forces.

²⁷ (United States Embassy Guatemala City, 2023)

²⁸ (U.S. Department of State Bureau of Democracy, 2023)



to “identify and punish officials who may have committed human rights abuses.”²⁹ The internal violent conflicts roiling the Northern Triangle states of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador are driving tens of thousands of asylum

USA Embassy *Guatemalan Corrupt and Undemocratic Actors Report 2023.2024*

- **Cinthia Edelmira Monterroso Gómez**, a current *prosecutor*, undermined democratic processes or institutions by bringing unsubstantiated, politically motivated criminal charges against journalists for exercising their freedom of expression as protected by Guatemalan law.
- **Edgar Humberto Navarro Castro**, a *former president* of Guatemala’s energy wholesale market administrator, engaged in significant corruption by providing official benefits in exchange for bribes and kickbacks, at the expense of improving energy efficiency and taking effective action against climate change.
- **Fredy Raul Orellana Letona**, a *current judge*, undermined democratic processes or institutions by authorizing unsubstantiated, politically motivated criminal charges against journalists who were exercising their freedom of expression as protected by Guatemalan law.
- **Gendri Rocael Reyes Mazariegos**, a *former minister* of interior, engaged in significant corruption.
- **Joviel Acevedo Ayala**, the current head of Guatemalan Education Workers Union (STEG), engaged in significant corruption by providing STEG’s political support in exchange for bribes from public officials.
- **Jimi Rodolfo Bremer Ramírez**, a *current judge*, undermined democratic processes or institutions by authorizing politically motivated criminal charges against journalists for exercising their freedom of expression as protected by Guatemalan law.
- **Lesther Castellanos Rodas**, a *former judge* and *current Guatemalan Rapporteur against Torture*, undermined democratic processes or institutions by retaliating against an anticorruption prosecutor for filing administrative complaints concerning Castellanos’s handling of a criminal case.
- **Melvin Quijivix Vega**, the *current president* of the National Electrification Institute, engaged in significant corruption by using his position and connections to improperly and unlawfully direct government procurement contracts to specific companies, in several cases to a company he privately owns.
- **Omar Ricardo Barrios Osorio**, the *current president* of the board of directors of the National Port Commission, undermined democratic processes or institutions by conspiring to intimidate and harass an anticorruption prosecutor for denouncing corrupt activity.
- **Walter Ramiro Mazariegos Biolis**, the *Rector of the San Carlos University*, undermined democratic processes or institutions by accepting the position of rector of the public education institution in July 2022 following a fraudulent selection process.
- **Dennis Billy Herrera Arita**, a Guatemalan lawyer, undermined the democratic process or institutions by participating in the “Parallel Commissions 2020” scheme to stack the Supreme and Appellate Courts with corrupt judges.
- **Carlos Estuardo Galvez Barrios**, *former Rector of the University of San Carlos* (USAC), undermined the democratic process or institutions by using his standing in the legal community to influence members of the judicial nomination commission in the facilitation of the “Parallel Commissions 2020” scheme to stack the Supreme Court and Appellate Courts with corrupt judges.
- **Jose Rafael Curruchiche Cacul (Rafael Curruchiche)**, the *current chief of the Public Ministry’s Office of the Special Prosecutor* Against Impunity (FECI), obstructed investigations into acts of corruption by disrupting high-profile corruption cases against government officials and raising apparently spurious claims against FECI prosecutors, private attorneys, and former International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) prosecutors.
- **Axel Arturo Samayoa Camacho**, the *owner of several trucking and shipping companies operating in the government-run EMPORNAC* (Atlantic) and EPQ (Pacific) ports, engaged in significant corruption by improperly colluding with public officials and paying bribes to ensure his companies won lucrative port contracts.
- **Ramiro Mauricio Lopez Camey**, the *current co-owner of construction company Asfaltos y Petróleos S.A.* (Aspetro), engaged in significant corruption by paying bribes to receive government construction contracts.
- **Ramon “Moncho” Campollo Codina**, a *current owner of Corporación Energías de Guatemala*, engaged in significant corruption by bribing public officials and in a manner that harmed U.S. commercial and policy goals to improve energy efficiency.
- **Geisler Smaille Perez Dominguez**, a *current judge* for the Third Criminal Court, undermined democratic processes by obstructing prosecutions of proponents of the “Parallel Commissions 2020” scheme to stack the Supreme Court and Appellate Courts with corrupt judges.
- **Sofia Janeth Hernandez Herrera**, the *current congressional representative* for the Union del Cambio Nacional (UCN) party, undermined the democratic process or institutions by misusing her official powers to intimidate her political opponents. She also solicited bribes and threatened to weaponize the legitimate purposes of Guatemala’s congress to retaliate against her enemies for personal benefit.
- **Steffan Christian Emanuel Lehnhoff Hernandez**, a *current owner of Corporación Energías de Guatemala*, engaged in significant corruption by bribing public officials and in a manner that harmed U.S. commercial and policy goals to improve energy efficiency.
- **Mayra Alejandra Carrillo de Leon (Alejandra Carrillo)**, *current Director of the Victim’s Institute*, undermined the democratic process or institutions by using her official position to facilitate the “Parallel Commissions 2020” scheme to stack the Supreme Court and Appellate Courts with corrupt judges.
- **Erick Gustavo Santiago de Leon**, a *former judge, and President of the Regional Appeal Civil Court*, engaged in significant corruption and obstructed investigations into acts of corruption by soliciting bribes in return for favorable court rulings in cases before him.
- **Nery Oswaldo Medina Mendez**, a *current Supreme Court of Justice magistrate*, undermined the democratic process or institutions by participating in the “Parallel Commissions 2020” scheme to stack the Supreme Court and Appellate Courts with corrupt judges.
- **Vitalina Orellana y Orellana**, a *current Supreme Court of Justice magistrate*, undermined the democratic process or institutions by participating in the “Parallel Commissions 2020” scheme to stack the Supreme Court and Appellate Courts with corrupt judges.
- **Mauricio Lopez Oliva**, the *current co-owner of construction company Asfaltos y Petróleos S.A.* (Aspetro), engaged in significant corruption by paying bribes to receive government construction contracts.
- **Victor Manuel Cruz Rivera**, a *current Criminal Court Judge*, obstructed investigations into acts of corruption by improperly delaying court proceedings.
- **José Luis Benito Ruiz**, the *former Minister of Communications and Infrastructure* from 2018-2020, engaged in significant corruption when he solicited, accepted, and offered bribes in order to maintain his official position and receive kickbacks from contractors, and facilitated the transfer of proceeds of corruption.

Figure 7 Guatemalan Public and Civic Leaders barred from entering the USA because of participation in corruption and anti-democracy activities.

²⁹ (Neau & Salomon, 2023)



refugees northward to the border with the USA and Mexico. American National Guardsmen try to repel these asylum seekers with razor wire, chemical spray irritants, water obstacles, and increasingly, threats of the use of deadly force which has led to an ongoing constitutional crisis between the Federal and State Governments. The states try to prevent these asylum seekers from obtaining an audience with an immigration judge because so many of them have bona fide claims of asylum against violence and death that their own government cannot and or will not act to resolve. The United States foreign diplomatic service and military special operations forces are besieged by both political parties to rehabilitate/coerce/advise/re-educate those states of the Northern Triangle to shut down the flow of refugees fleeing from the violence within their states. Once these asylum refugees appear and present their case to a Federal Immigration Judge, as much as 50% or more are granted leaves of stay, much to the chagrin of both conservative and liberal administrations. The United States Government recognises that it can either change its laws to try and slow the flow of asylum refugees or ameliorate – resolve the violence that is driving the flows of refugees. The subsections below help to explain why the United States has been unable to resolve the violent conflicts whose refugees threaten the political stability of its federal and border states governance. The formal remarks by the American Ambassador to the Organisation of American States (OAS) Ambassador Francisco O. Mora, present a clear portrait of the conflict that suggests it (the conflict) is between an elected government and its voter population. This belief is illustrated by the criminal identification, indictment, and or sanctioning of more than 60 current or former senior officials of engaging or facilitating corruption in the Northern Triangle countries of Guatemala (27), Honduras (13), and El Salvador (11). Among them are national presidents, lawmakers, judges, and a wide range of sociopolitical elites who effectively represent the elite populations of each of these countries. **Figure 11** offers a list of some of these officials. Beginning in 2007, the United Nations and OAS instituted one of the “*most ambitious justice projects in Guatemala’s history, and probably in all of Latin America*”, the **Comisión Internacional en Contra Impunidad en Guatemala CICIG**. With the goal of addressing the historic failures of the country’s justice system, the UN signed an agreement with Guatemalan authorities to create the independent body to work jointly with local personnel from the Public Ministry and the then-new Special Prosecutor’s Office against Impunity (FECI). The CICIG survived for 12 years (2007 – 2019) and investigated and dismantled dozens of criminal networks and structures, along with their links to state officials, resulting in 400 convictions.

Among otherwise high-profile convictions was the one known as “La Línea” [The Line], involving the investigation of former President Otto Pérez Molina and Vice President Roxana Baldetti. Pérez Molina ended up resigning from the presidency in September 2015 and was then imprisoned and prosecuted for crimes of corruption. In 2019, Guatemalan President Jimmy Morales and his administration ended the project and shutting down the structures of the CICIG and FECI. The Morales administration directed the systematic process of closing civil space, with the Public Ministry closing corruption cases on a massive scale, and even the country’s principal media outlets landing in the crosshairs. In 2022, there were 3,754 attacks against human rights defenders, and at least 73 justice officials, journalists, and activists were forced into exile, according to data from the Unit for the Protection of Human Rights



Defenders in Guatemala (UDEFEUGA). In many cases, the attacks resulted in baseless judicial proceedings, arbitrary detentions, or, increasingly, forced exile. It is estimated that at least 43 prosecutors, judges, human rights defenders, and journalists have been forced to flee Guatemala since 2018, the majority of whom continue fighting for justice in exile. The climate of corruption and impunity has permeated every facet of the country's daily reality, including politics.³⁰

§A3 Guatemala: A Country and Population at War with Itself.

The four decades of civil war (1970 – 1996) in Guatemala can be understood as an attempt by the US and Europe backed post-colonial elites to maintain control over a mostly indigenous people. In 1988, researcher Jennifer Schirmer called Guatemala “a violence called democracy” and little has changed since.³¹ This is my professional opinion based on four decades of participation in that civil war and research as a uniformed and civilian researcher.³² The breakdown in post-colonial Guatemalan law, order, and community over the past several decades was, perhaps, unavoidable as issues of inclusion, exclusion, domination, submission, and resurgence of oppressed indigenous culture finally emerged into the public space, only via violent conflict that could no longer be suppressed even with genocidal actions. Ultimately, the conflict in Guatemala and the Northern Triangle is driven by psychosocial-political-historical narrative disintegration or disaggregation of Guatemala's population segments within the boundaries of a sovereign civil state. Using the previous sections above, as a foundational analytical lens, this section explains how a UN recognised civil state could descend into a state of anarchy from which it may not be able to successfully rescue itself from. To be sure, the various levels of government (city and federal) have enough combat power to protect the Caucasian Spanish-cultural population segments that maintain the government, and its security services. Government security services also serve as a support backup to the privatized security that protects the national commerce structure. The majority remainder of the civil population are divided between those segments that identify and live as closed indigenous (as well as religious) communities and the remainder who identify as neither Euro-Spanish nor Mayan-Indigenous. The latter are often armed as well as government and private security services, from the flood of weaponry infused into the region by the United States and other countries during its decades of civil war.³³ As a consequence, the civilian population that is unable to obtain government or private security or are not under the protection of indigenous or religious communities living in closed societies, are left to survive on their own. This takes the form of *fight* (join a government or private security service, or one of the armed criminal gangs), *flight* (join caravans out of the Northern Triangle headed north to the United States), or *hide in place*, hoping that they will not be killed, abducted, forced

**A Violence
Called
Democracy**

³⁰ (Duran, 2020)

³¹ (Schirmer, 1988)

³² My participation in the historical disintegration of these Northern Triangle States was not from malign intent, but from ignorance of issues more complex than I understood then.

³³ (Fratius, 2020; Jonas, 2018)



into recruitment, or fed on by the conflict parties (rape, robbery, etc). Guatemalan society can best be understood as a series of interrelated population segments that are in various states of open conflict. At the top of the socioeconomic-political and security order are the country's elites, followed by its western supported indigenous populations, then the collectives of organised armed men, women, and families that constitute 'gangs'. The lowest segment of Guatemalan society is literally, everyone else. These four distinguishable social segments, with their differing psychosocial motivations, are individually and collectively, driving the conflicts that are driving Guatemala to the brink of a 'failed-state' status.

§A3.1 Indigenous. Maya Quechua

The first segment consists of indigenous settlements and other colonies that are self-sustaining and disconnected from Guatemala's central economic and political life based in the capital city. This segment is often provided enhanced surveillance and protection from external entities such as the United Nations and sponsoring indigenous and religious organizations from the Americas. They are by no means, immune however, from the violent war within Guatemala, El Salvador, & Honduras. The Indigenous communities of the Northern Triangle have been, and are, engaged in a struggle for their lands and sovereignty in contests that with greater frequency, end in assassinations and extra-judicial action by the respective military and police at the service of all three governments' elites and their

business interests. Although Guatemala might superficially resemble its neighbour to the north, Mexico, the two do not have as much in common as might readily be believed. The Indigenous population of Mexico, without European admixture, is believed to be no more than about 10 percent or so of the total. In contrast, in Guatemala, the Indigenous populations are estimated to be over 50 percent. The ability to speak Spanish is already a mark of status in Guatemala, whereas in Mexico the number of those who still speak Indigenous languages is comparatively small. Because of Guatemala's isolation, there is concomitantly little development outside of the two major cities, Guatemala City and Antigua, and even there the level of infrastructure does not approach, for example, the wealthier areas of many Latin American nations.³⁴ The story of the Indigenous in Guatemala is a remarkable one, and the past few decades are worth recounting for the light they



³⁴ (ELÍAS, 2023; OXFAM GB, 2008)



shed on international violations of rights and egregious social constructions. Among ethnic disasters of the past few decades, few can match in intensity or have been reported in the media more extensively than those of the Indigenous in Guatemala. The social structure of the nation—its hierarchy, driven by a light-skinned population, most of whom are ethnically mestizo but who do not identify with the purely Indigenous—its history, and its small size make it an important site for the documentation and reporting of ethnic disputes and differences. Mayan activist Lucía Ixchiú describes a reality that is not widely understood outside of the Northern Triangle. She lives in the western highlands of Totonicapán, Guatemala, immersed in the sacred communal forest she'd been taught to love, respect, and protect since she was a young child. The forest of Totonicapán is not only one of the most important water recharge sites of Mesoamerica; it's also a symbol of the collective fight of Q'eqchi communities against a colonial Guatemalan state that has repeatedly attempted to seize and destroy it. "We, as Q'eqchi people, recognize the trees as our ancestors," Ixchiú says. The word Q'eqchi literally translates to "a lot of trees." "That's what we are," she says.³⁵ In the last roughly two decades, illegal logging—facilitated by criminal structures and the government—has increasingly threatened the forest's survival and the livelihoods of the local communities that guard it. She fled Guatemala in 2021, after nearly 10 years of ongoing harassment and death threats from criminal organizations, culminating in an assassination attempt in September 2020. On that day, she was documenting illegal logging in the forest of Totonicapán with her sisters, Andrea, and Gabriela Ixchiú, and her partner, Carlos Ernesto Cano—all journalists and members of the collective *Festivales Solidarios*—as well as staff from Guatemala's National Council of Protected Areas and other local forest defenders. They were ambushed and badly injured by assailants armed with machetes after they confronted a group of men who were illegally smuggling tree wood out of the forest. Guatemalan authorities did nothing after the attack.³⁶ This violence is happening across Indigenous territories in Guatemala. In El Estor, Izabal, Q'eqchi' communities continue to resist a destructive nickel mine despite growing state militarization, killings, and arrests. And in the region of Quiché, Ixil Indigenous leaders are fighting against hydroelectric dams, illegal logging, and deforestation under the same threats. In 2019, a Mayan Mam indigenous woman named Thelma Cabrera ran for the presidency of Guatemala. The nation's supreme court ruled that she could not run as a candidate and disallowed her placement on the ballot. The decision was overturned under intense pressure from the USA, OAS, and UN, she was allowed to campaign a week before the election, winning 4th place despite polls and vote counts suggesting that Cabrera received enough support to



Figure 10 Indigenous Leaders under Fire

³⁵ (Duran, 2020; TARACENA, 2023)

³⁶ (Xunic & Sacatepéquez, 2022)



make it to the runoff election where two final candidates face off. Former blackface comedian Jimmy Morales won the 2019 election and rolled back the UN instituted corruption reforms over his 4-year tenure.³⁷

§A3.2 Eurocentric Elites (Social • Economic • Ethnic • Political)

The second segment consists of the men, women, and families that make up Guatemala's political, economic, artistic, and cultural upper segment from middle class and higher. The unifying psychosocial characteristic of this population segment is their Eurocentric origin of mental reality. Adherence to a Roman Catholic papacy. A European structure of family, laws, banking, governance, music, art, business, jobs, and the roles of men, women, and children, in the organisation of society. This segment spans a range of physical wealth from ultra rich, downwards to a level where every member of the family is mobilised to build the family's economic and social fortunes as a shared responsibility. They have access to, and some have control over, the structural apparatus of government, security services, and all forms of legal industry. They are politically active in terms of party participation, funding, and organising voting. For the most part, this second segment lives, works, and plays in Zones 1, 4, 9, & 10. **The top tier** of this social segment are transnational elites who are first- and second-generation immigrants from Europe and the Middle East who operate the country's service, banking, media, and telecommunications sectors.³⁸ These men and women have access and resources beyond what exists in Guatemala or Central America, and are able to use Guatemala as a wealth generator because of their ability to control the structures of governance, law, justice, and mechanisms of commerce. **The second tier** of this segment is a closed inner circle of traditional elites with deep generational roots in Guatemala, and who are the principal beneficiaries of the top tier activities. Thus, there is a mutual beneficial relationship between these two categories of Guatemalans. This secondary tier constitutes a large collection of connected families (both related and unrelated) who are the principal landowning farmers, livestock,



Figure 11 Paseo Cayala, one of Guatemala City's many gated communities for the elite population segment in Zones 9 & 10.

Zone 1 is the historical centre of Guatemala City, where you will find the city's main square featuring the national Cathedral and National Palace, which is now a museum. Zone 1 has some of the best shopping full of international chains and local restaurants, oriented and priced for this segment and the modest tourist and business traffic in Central America. Zone 1 has a strong police presence with security and police officers at each shop and café entrance. Police and military guard all the important monuments and buildings. Zone 1 security blanket ends after dark and when the shops and café's close. Next is Zone 4, which can be described as an upcoming hipster area for the grown offspring of this segment, with loft apartments and younger people's living and playing locales. The owners and operators of many of the Zone 4 establishments are part of that 'emerging elite' group. Like Zone 1, **Zone 4** is secured by blanketed layers of security from dusk till dark/closing time for restaurants. The best-established portions of the elite segment of Guatemala live in **Zones 9 and 10**, as well as Embassies, the airport, the best stores, restaurants, apartments, gated living communities, expensive office buildings, and much of the national political, social, judicial, and cultural points of interest.

³⁷ (ISAACS & SCHWARTZ, 2013)

³⁸ [Honduras Elites and Organized Crime: Introduction - InSight Crime](#)



coffee, and cacao plantation owners.³⁹ Their family members populate the national and regional government bureaucracies to include the uniformed officer corps of military and police, and the national justice system. These traditional elite families “form the backbone of the traditional political groupings, the National and Liberal Parties.”⁴⁰ These two tiers of the ruling elites create and control the capital wealth of the nation and harbour the face of its external cultural (European) identity without oversight or scrutiny even by its own parliament.⁴¹ Their activities are intricately tied together in a corrupted system of legal and illegal business operations that is protected and enforced by co-opted systems of justice and security.⁴² It is also the segment that the United States government works to reform and discipline, as well as arm and protect it, usually with poor results⁴³ since Guatemala has been one of the most fragile states in the world with an 8-year fragile state index average of 80.45.⁴⁴ The second tier of this population segment uses their control of the political parties to capitalize the increase in state expenditures from foreign aid and control the flow of foreign capital that passes through the hands and desks of its members in the bureaucracy. Besides foreign aid, international loans totalizing more than \$7 Billion USD have been directed into the business enterprises of this segment of the population with the state government as a vehicle for widespread, endemic corruption that is embedded into the entire national structure. The political bloc surrounding the most recent administration of President Alejandro Giammattei (2020-2024) is now the dominant power structure in Guatemala. In just a few years, this elite power structure has achieved an unprecedented consolidation of power across the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. This centralization of power is not a reflection of Giammattei’s popularity or that of his political party, Vamos, which has a minor voting bloc in Congress. The rise and power of this political block is a response to the attempt by the UN, OAS, USA to rebalance Guatemala’s population segments through breaking the hold of elites over the socioeconomic-political-justice-security structures. This inter-elite segment spans liberal and conservative ideologies that focus on keeping Guatemala on a uniform post-colonial Euro-Centric development course. This course is possible only through the marginalisation of the majority indigenous population and the elevation of the European aspirations of its mestizo and criollo segments. This alliance across the elite segment, took root during the Morales administration (2016-2020) when elites shared an interest in ousting the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (*Comisión Internacional Contra la Impunidad en Guatemala* – CICIG). The success in shutting down this drift towards non-European liberal development morphed into a systematic campaign to convert the judicial sector into a shield for nefarious actors and a weapon for exacting revenge on those who once fought against impunity. The result has been a period of corruption and graft, gradually

³⁹ (ELÍAS, 2023)

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ In 2014, Transparency International ranked Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras 140 of 177 countries in its corruption perceptions index, noting that it has “scarce” or no budget openness. Available at: https://transparency.org/country#HND_DataResearch

⁴² (Bunck & Fowler, 2012)

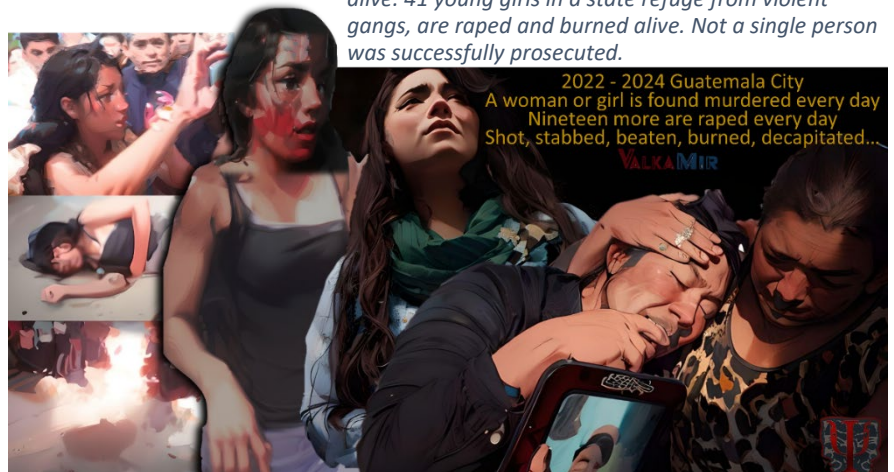
⁴³ [Where Are the Northern Triangle Countries Headed? And What Is U.S. Policy? | Center for Strategic and International Studies \(csis.org\)](#)

⁴⁴ The average value for Guatemala during that period was 80.45 index points with a minimum of 77.3 index points in 2023 and a maximum of 83.2 index points in 2016. The latest value from 2023 is 77.3 index points. The Fragile States Index measures the vulnerability in pre-conflict, active conflict, and post-conflict situations. The index comprises twelve conflict risk indicators that are used to measure the condition of a state at any given moment: security apparatus, factionalized elites, group grievance, economic decline, uneven economic development, human flight, and brain drain, state legitimacy, public services, human rights and rule of law, demographic pressures, refugees and IDPs, and external intervention. The higher the value of the index, the more “fragile” the country is.



spiralling out of control as key branches of the state sink into ungovernability. Regardless of the change in elite political parties in power, the entirety of the civil, security, and economic structures of Guatemala remains the same as they are drawn from all the families of this 'elite' segment of the population. To be clear, not every family attributed to this 'elite' segment is wealthy or corrupt by any means. Being a part of this elite segment of Honduran life more often means that a person and his/her family is connected. I have interviewed middle/upper-middle class families whose rise from poverty was facilitated by a wealthy family whose children were taught; house was cleaned; or business was engaged by the assisted family. Once a helping hand is offered; once a wealthy family or individual decides that an otherwise impoverished family has value, is trustworthy, and loyal, the assisted family must become completely responsive to their benefactor(s). What makes this type of arrangement viable is the complete lack of ability to create legal success that is independent of this controlling elite population segment. It is the second tier of this elite's segment of Guatemala's population described above regarding their psychosocial motivations of individual and family life. The obsessions with *Blanqueamiento* and European cultural displays are not simple preferences, but rather pathological defences against individual and collective identity disintegration. The white(er) Europeans offer validation of their identity against the chaotic collapse of the Spanish-culture state of Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, and others. It's not that they don't understand the other population segments that make up indigenous, gangs, and everyone else. These other population segments constitute the 'ugly-outer' that threatens their psychosocial-emotional hold over their own European cultural identity. For everyone in this second-tier elite segment, the bloodlines and family lines simply have too much non-European expression for them to be comfortable with their presence. Also, the attempts by indigenous populations to introduce non-European cultural expression of art, symbols, words, names, and ideas creates psychological terror of trauma. One example of the intransigence of the elite population segment is the 'Guatemalan project', a USAID initiative that is opposed at every turn by the legal and political alliances that hold sway over Guatemalan society. Under the two most recent presidents of Guatemala, every positive step taken to bring justice to Guatemalans and end corruption and impunity by the elite segment of the population has been dismantled. This remains a fact, even though a new president is nearing his first 200 days in office. The non-state actors of MS13/M or B18, and the hundreds of cliques are more of a nihilistic revolutionary movement than a non-state actor and the government-elites structure and control adds fuel to this movement daily as both opponents of the movement and economic competitors to it. In 2022, at least one woman or girl

Figure 12 Failures of protection and justice: A 16-year-old girl in Rio Bravo is beaten by a crowd and burned alive. 41 young girls in a state refuge from violent gangs, are raped and burned alive. Not a single person was successfully prosecuted.





died violently every day in Guatemala. The rate of violent deaths of women and girls was 4.9 per 100,000 females, which is higher than in 2021 and 2020, but lower than pre-pandemic rates. Homicides of women were more brutal than those of men. In Guatemala, reports show a daily average of 19 rapes of women and girls in 2022. Approximately four out of every 10 female victims of rape were adolescents ... Police had minimal training and capacity to investigate sexual crimes or assist survivors of such crimes, and the government did not enforce the law effectively. Rape, other sexual offenses, and other forms of gender-based violence were widespread and serious problems. Former Secretary of Social Welfare Carlos Rodas and former Deputy Secretary for Protection and Shelter Services Anahi Keller faced criminal charges for murder, abuse of authority, breach of duty, and abuse against minors following the deaths of 41 girls.⁴⁵ His charges were dismissed this past April 2023.⁴⁶ The country's justice system faces a growing demand from victims of gender-based and sexual; such cases increased by more than 20 percent from 2020 (68,861) to 2021 (82,828).

§A3.3 Criminal Social Structures.

The third segment of Guatemalan life consists of the ubiquitous armed organised criminal gangs. The upper leadership of these armed social criminal structures are usually drawn from the Eurocentric elites, while the remainder are drawn from everyone else in the invisible middle. The two largest gangs in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador are the MS13 and the B18. For the former, the MS stands for Mara Salvatrucha, said to be a combination of Mara, meaning gang, Salva, for Salvador, and trucha, which translates roughly into street smarts. The 13 represents the position of M in the alphabet. For the latter, the B stands for Barrio and the 18 was derived from the street where the gang originated, 18th Street. Barrio 18 is also called Mara (gang) 18 and Calle (street) 18. Mara 18 therefore, is another term of Barrio 18 and I use the term interchangeably. Mara Salvatrucha 13 (MS13), Barrio 18 (B18), and their subsidiaries are not unified organizations as much as they are chapters, affiliates, or franchises that are highly decentralised while sharing a common psychosocial-emotional composition. Another way of describing them is as a violent psychosocial-emotional movement of cliques that operate on an ideology of malformed, borderline personality disorder identity created by complex trauma of generations of violence, oppression, and cultural disintegration as described above. Each clique may exhibit different operating traits based on short term goals and objectives which cannot be generalized across all MS13 or B18 and related 'cliques'.⁴⁷

Figure 13 offers a glimpse into the ever-evolving cliques of the criminal social organisations in Guatemala that struggle for survival and the meeting of unmet human needs. The basic psychopathology of the movement and its members is stable and generalizable as the pathology deals with the malformation of a collective identity rather than a particular cognitive strategy employed by a clique to obtain a goal. The funding strategies of MS13 and B18 vary

⁴⁵ (Ahmed, 2019a; staff, 2019)

⁴⁶ The incident happened inside a group home for at-risk girls, aged 14-17, who had been put there by the government, supposedly for their own protection from mara gangs. As fire swept through the classroom, the pleas from the 56 girls locked inside began to fade. Most were unconscious or worse by then, as an eerie silence replaced their panic-stricken shouts. The police officers guarding the door — who had refused to unlock it despite the screams — waited nine minutes before stepping inside. They got water to cool down the scorching knob. Inside, dozens of girls placed in the care of the Guatemalan state lay sprawled on the blackened floor. Forty-one of them died.

⁴⁷ (ReliefWeb, 2015)

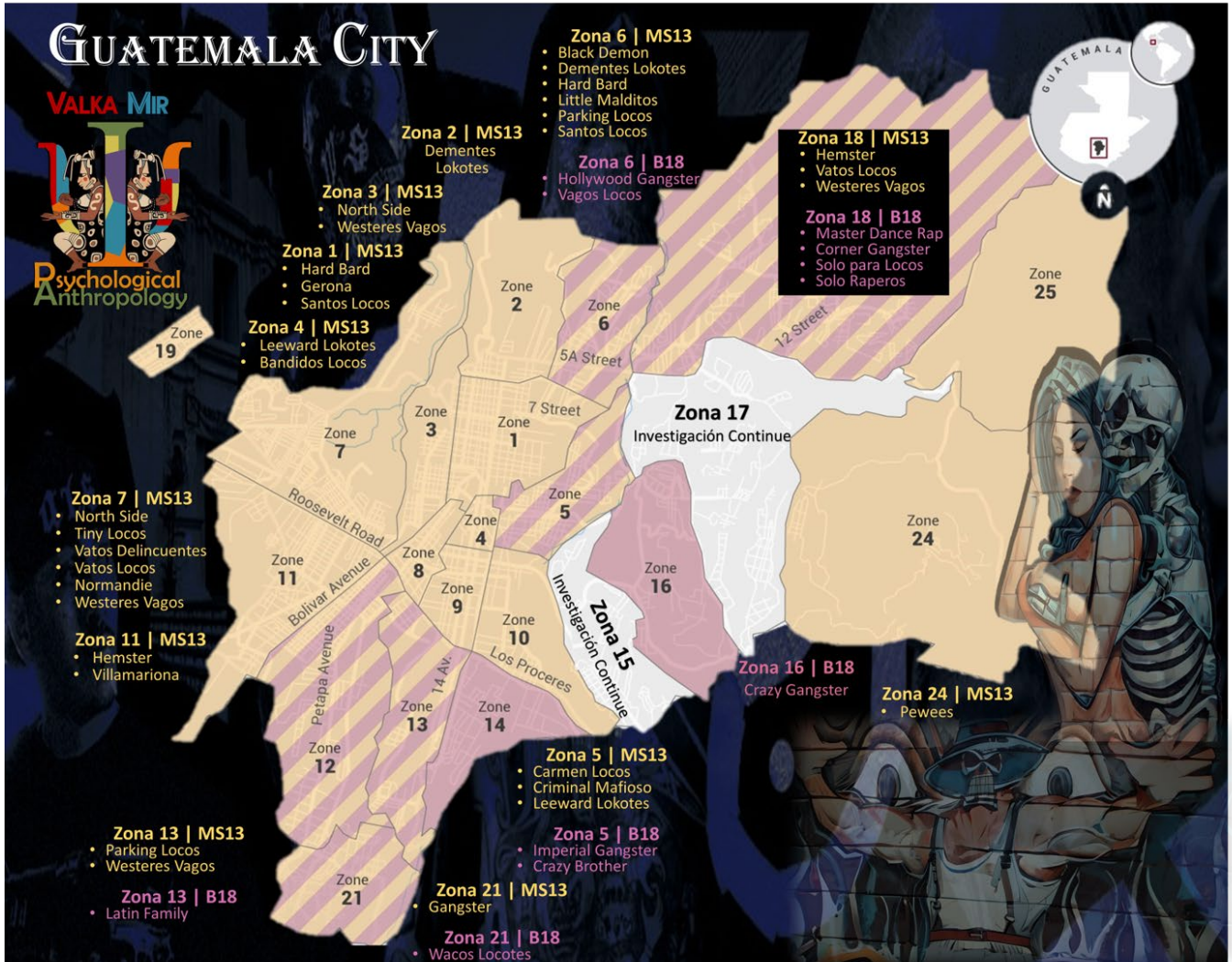


Figure 13 Social Criminal Organizations in Guatemala City

by clique and by neighbourhood, competing with government owned or supported criminal enterprises which routinely lead to spasms of episodic violence.⁴⁸ It is important to note that the financial extraction aspects of the gang members are secondary to other, deeper unmet psychosocial human needs.⁴⁹ MS13, B18, and their subsidiaries are firstly, psychosocial organizations made up of collectives of traumatized men and women, re-enacting violent, even psychotic fantasies of power and self-esteem. The graphic in figure 14 is drawn from street art painted by gang members in the streets of Tegucigalpa, San Salvador, and Guatemala City. These images are displayed over the bodies of the gang members, describing their inner ideations of despair, evil, rage, alienation, or justice, against desires for dignity, honour, love, and salvation. The fact that their membership numbers are in the

⁴⁸ (Ahmed, 2019b)

⁴⁹ (Casas et al., 2021; Roy & Cheatham, 2023)



tens of thousands suggests that the underlying causations of this complex trauma syndrome are long-term and widespread within the societies of the Northern Triangle. Guatemala’s president has used the national police PNC to prosecute MS13 and B18 through mass incarcerations of military aged males who pose the slightest suspicion. This has been possible through the suspension of civil liberties and the rule of civil law. The violent criminal social organisations of Guatemala adapted quickly by disaggregating into hundreds of smaller cliques as described in **figure 13**, with amusing, even nonsensical names.⁵⁰ In each of the neighbourhoods of Guate, however, while MS13 and B18 don’t exist, the hundreds of smaller cliques are well known as to their alignment. Instead of gang members, there are emeeses, as the gang’s members are known.⁵¹ On the walls at the entrance to the various barrios, artistic graffiti informs the inhabitants and visitors of which clique is in charge there: “Mara Salvatrucha 13 – Tiny Locos” reads one such graffiti sign in Zona 7.⁵² The following is an example of what it is like to visit these hundreds of gang-controlled neighbourhoods in Guatemala City. The author, Juan José Martínez D’Aubuisson, is an investigative journalist working in the Northern Triangle.

“In a corner at the end of the wall, a boy wearing tall socks and a pair of knock-off Nike Cortez sneakers, the gang’s trademark shoe, scowled at me as he spoke through his headphones – likely announcing my arrival. I guessed correctly. Three more boys were waiting for me on the next block. They watched me pass by with scathing eyes and informed the others. The further I ventured into the neighbourhood, the more visible the MS13’s presence became. If the first guy had imitation shoes, those in the next alley wore originals. Those standing in the following pathway have tattoos and, even though it is cold, they take off their shirts to flaunt them. But, despite the undeniable presence of the MS13’s members, all of my sources agreed that the MS13 does not officially exist here. Caballo Loco (Crazy Horse), the most veteran emeese in the neighbourhood, guided me through the alleys and pointed out the gang members, their graffiti and their hideouts. He is protected by slum rules, those that grant veteran bandits a godlike status. The seasoned gang member recounts each of the street corner’s bloody tales and explains, with tremendous patience, the logic that allows dozens of neighbourhoods in the Guatemalan capital to be filled with gang members even though they don’t belong to the MS13.”⁵³



Figure 14 Graphic gang street graffiti

⁵⁰ (Gurney, 2014)
⁵¹ (Sanz & Martínez, 2023)
⁵² (Lewis O’Neill, 2019)
⁵³ (D’Aubuisson, 2022; Sanz & Martínez, 2023)



The current approach can be analogised to using a scalpel to try and cut away an infection of the body, with the knife spreading and deepening the infection with every slice. The deeper unmet psychosocial human needs that Guatemalan (and other countries) people attempt to fulfil with membership in these organised gang-groups are non-negotiable in their fulfilment, such as love, connection, belonging, esteem, pride, worth, meaning, remembrance, honour, nurture, and identity; male masculine and female feminine identity that they are unable to construct outside of participation in violent gangs. Such motivations and drivers of this population segment only ensure that it will grow until it encompasses a portion of the country that collapses the state and drives out the remaining populations. These gangs are emanations from, and inextricably linked to, the majority population. Our social science research affirms that the violent repressive strategies (lethality, incarcerations, prison conditions, cordon, and searches, etc) of successive government administrations works to increase the depth and strength of the armed gangs, worsening the plight of those Guatemalans who are caught in the middle. As news breaks of each highly publicised 'win' over the violent social criminal gangs in Guate, the population becomes ever more jaded about their reality.

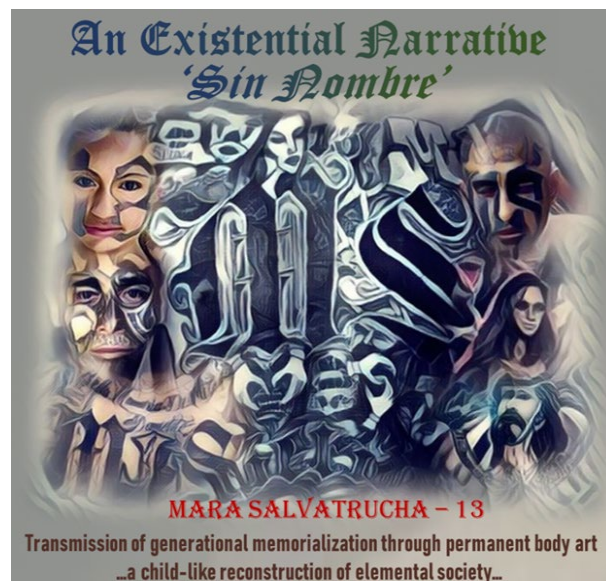


Figure 15 Mara Salvatrucha 13, Barrio 18 Existential Narratives

§A3.4 Everyone Else – The Invisible Middle

The fourth segment of Guatemalan life consists of everyone else in the country whose lives are ruled by the violent criminal societies and equally violent criminalized government security services.⁵⁴ This segment is distinguished from the elite segment in that they are in a transition state of social organization between rural and urbanized; and between indigenous Mayan Mongoloid and colonial European Caucasoid. They will usually have some levels of formalized education but limited access to university or trade schools. Most importantly, they have acculturation into a national Spanish-European oriented cultural identity of uncertain provenance.⁵⁵ Most of the small family businesses are in this segment of the population; below the elites, do not consider themselves to be indigenous, but neither do they think of themselves as European. They are not part of a gang, and lead lives that range from bare survival to profitability that allows them to save money. Finally, they attempt to organise and manage their family and work lives in the model established by the Euro-centric elites who control the levers of sociopolitical-economic sustainment. It is this segment that is in perpetual fight (join the elites, gangs, or indigenous segments) or flight (flee

⁵⁴ "The dependence of the elites on the state security forces to protect their enterprises led to the emergence of the military as a political and an economic player.

⁵⁵ Uncertain provenance in the sense that many poor Hondurans, Guatemalans, and El Salvadoreans are not sure how much of their ancestry is indigenous Mayan and how much is colonial Spanish. All they know for sure is that they are not particularly welcome by either.



into asylum).⁵⁶ Dr. Robert Kirkland is a scholar and consultant supporting USG programming in Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador. He writes that:

“Small business owners ... are targeted constantly by gangs for protection payments in order to allow their businesses to keep running. Gangs exert influence over neighbourhoods by requiring an impuesto de guerra or “war tax” on businesses. Failure of businessmen to pay the gangs has resulted in pilfering of merchandise, destruction of the business, or at worst death to the owner and his family. In particular, gangs target small business owners who are seen as profitable. In the vast majority of communities ... successful small business owners clearly stand out from the average person in the population.”⁵⁷

Compare Dr. Kirkland’s findings with the stories of refugees fleeing the Northern Triangle, leaving thousands of business closures collapsing the social structures that support the region’s population below the levels of the elite. The decisions made by this population segment to ‘fight or flight’ appears to be based on their connection to the Euro-centric or Indigenous-centric identity structures (fight) or abandon it and flee elsewhere. My field research shows that some portions of this population segment have adjusted to this ‘middle identity’ space and have been able to become educated, find jobs, start small businesses, and raise families. Their individual and family collective identity is progressive, modern, and subordinates their inherited ethnic and cultural identity which is confusing with varying levels of mixed blood and culture. Instead, they focus on constructed identities that allow for survival. These constructed identities are based on archetypal concepts of family-community personhood in what Benedict Anderson calls “Imagined Communities” of national formation.⁵⁸ These imagined communities would, if successful, relegate the inherited aspects of individual and collective identity to the personal sphere of social life in favour of constructed economic and cultural identities that transcends both colonial and indigenous identity.

PRENSA PLATINA
HEADLINE NEWS Guatemala dismantles 34 extortionist structures
Guatemala City, Jan 9, 2024

Guatemala’s National Civil Police (PNC) has dismantled 34 criminal extortionist structures, as it has arrested 2,882 of their members until 2023, an official source announced Tuesday.

The military forces have been coping with 16,626 cases, over those 13,329 by 2022; in addition, they reported 779 domestic raids in collaboration with the Public Prosecutor’s Office, the Interior Ministry unfolded.

The Ministry added that along with other PNC units, 129 firearms, 1,313 mobiles and 233 vehicles had been seized, all related to those illicit activities.

Much of the credit goes to the National Division against the Criminal Development of Gangs, the spokesperson for the Interior Ministry Jorge Aguilar underscored a few days ago.

Aguilar noted that most of the members of the criminal groups belong to the Mara Salvatrucha and Barrio 18 gangs.

The authority added that there are individuals who imitate those organizations though and use intimidating phone calls to extort money from the population.

The Deputy Director General of Criminal Investigation Edis Fabian highlighted in recent statements the effectiveness of the plans of actions taken, “fundamental to counteract the aforementioned criminal phenomenon at the national level,” Aguilar assured.

⁵⁶ For this segment of Guatemala’s population, the decision to fight by joining one of the other population segments is not always up to them. If a family in this segment is employed and under the protection of a wealthy elite family, then joining the elite segment can be an option offered to them. If their level of indigenous bloodlines and their acculturation to indigenous ideas of social organization are adequate, they can choose to abandon their Euro ties (psychosocial-economic-political) and forge/renew/deepen their indigenous aspects of individual and collective identity. This can be difficult as it means transitioning from an egocentric to a sociocentric psychosocial orientation. Joining the gangs is much easier, especially for young unattached males and females who’ve no where else to turn.

⁵⁷ (Kirkland, 2021)

⁵⁸ (B. Anderson, 1983)



Unfortunately for these imagined communities, the bulk of Guatemalan culture, theatre, education, arts, and social life is based on inherited identities of race, ethnicity, and the culture of colonial family life.

The oppositional cultural identity in Guatemala and Honduras is Indigenous and operates in stark contrast to the dominant European structure of global identity that is quite foreign to most Guatemalans. This educated and or compliant portion of adaptive Guatemalans serves as a labour force for the elites that includes service as soldiers, policemen, clerks, managers, and all manner of functionaries. The perceived value of these roles to this population segment is their opportunity to grant their children an opportunity to enter the bottom level of the elite segment, where their survival will be more assured physically, culturally, and generationally. Their ability to transition into the elite segment is mediated by their phenotype, family ties, intellect, ambition, and luck. They have few if any enforceable rights outside of what they are granted by the elites and those who work for the elites. Their rapes, robberies, assaults, injustices, and indignities are not normatively of concern to the municipal and federal police forces, even when cases are brought to trial by the abogados of the civil fiscalia.⁵⁹ The rural members of this segment live in subsistence mode, surviving on approximately £1.25 per day. Most of the members of this segment of Guatemalan society are at the mercy of any member of the elite segment and their security forces as well as the socio-criminal organizations competing for control of this part of the population.⁶⁰ They often fear government security forces as much as the gangs and are caught in the middle of a violent existential war. They flee Guatemala in caravans of 3-4,000 at a time.⁶¹ United Nation High Commission for Refugees has issued eligibility guidelines for Guatemala that implicitly recognizes this middle segment of Guatemalan society as a distinct and at-risk segment of the population:

“Gangs are reported to exercise extraordinary levels of social control over the population of their territories [...] In these zones, inhabitants are reportedly required to ‘look, listen and keep quiet’ and often face a plethora of gang-imposed restrictions on who they can talk with and what about, what time they must be inside their homes, where they can walk or go to school, who they can visit and who can visit them, what they can wear, and even, reportedly, the colour of their hair.” UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines⁶²

The UNHCR’s eligibility guidelines specifically details persons who are perceived by a gang as contravening its rules or resisting its authority as identified risk profile for Guatemala. The asylum claimant in this case, Clara Isabel Lucero Cordon, clearly belongs in this protected category of persons under UN conventions.

§A4 Exploration of the Armed Organisations (MS13/B18) at War in Guatemala.

The invisible middle of the populations of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, constitute at least 50% of the potential electorate, if they were either able to, or willing to, cast their vote. For these majority populations however,

⁵⁹ See paragraph 11.3.2 below.

⁶⁰ (Cordova Arauz, 2020; Staff, 2023; Staff at Cultural Survival www.cs.org, 2010)

⁶¹ (Verza, 2018)

⁶² <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/5943f0444.pdf>



they have little idea of what type of a candidate they would vote for as they have little capacity to visualise a future outside of subsistence survival. They work, love, pray, eat, sleep, make and raise babies, in a state of learned hopelessness achieved from decades of intimate violence from government and non-government sources. They exist in 'no-man's land' with both government and anti-government militias working to recruit their children into service as foot soldiers. The families from this 'invisible middle' are the preponderance of the flows of asylum refugees fleeing into exile, under pressure from both government and from criminal societies (gangs). To understand these pressures, we must understand these armed criminal organisations at war in Guatemala and the Northern Triangle.

§A4.1 Normal Crime.

The nature of the criminal organisations that are challenging the legitimacy of governance in the Northern Triangle, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, is central to the question of whether these states will survive; whether their civil populations will continue to flee into exile despite enormous risks and penalties; and how western intervention might reduce this flow of refugees. Every human society, at some point in its growth, develops some levels of individual and collective (organised) crime. Below the level of crime, there are issues of parental fairness, access to equal shares of family resources based on capacity and input, amongst other considerations. At its least destructive, crime is simply the violation of established rules for individuals and collectives. Crime is also relative in that, as rules change, so do actions that constitute crime. Normal organized crime in a healthy society is parasitic and driven by rational motives. Such organizations feed off the societal host without a desire to destroy it, as doing so would eliminate its source of sustainment. In fact, normal organised crime members support and even nurture the cultural society they feed on, with donation to arts and contributions to its defense from foreign invaders. Organised crime leaders and members operate in a logical, profit-motive pattern of activities that can be mapped and tracked (though not always proven) by criminologists. They may employ violence to protect their own commercial activities from other crime organizations or security services. Such organizations may attract members who display unusual levels of violent hostility but are controlled or eliminated as needed to protect the organization and its goals. Most importantly, organized crime members have psychological identities that are consistent with societal norms, albeit, with moral reasoning structures that allows them to operate criminally sanctioned commercial activities that are socio-culturally disapproved without personality disintegration. They often have families and homes that operate compliantly with social laws and norms. They serve in their communities alongside other community members who are not employed in criminal enterprises. Finally, they seek respect, admiration, and even love from the very society that they are illicitly feeding on.⁶³ There are 'normal' rational organised crime groups in Guatemala and many of their members are in prisons. These types of inmates are called 'paisas', Spanish for civilians and are usually linked to members of the elites in the public or private sectors of society. An example of this alternate type of criminal in Guatemala's prisons is Captain Byron Lima Sosa, who was once a staff officer on former President Álvaro Arzú's

⁶³ Criminal history research shows that these organised crime organisations in developed world countries are often, quite patriotic.



General Staff. Captain Sosa had been convicted, along with his father and three others, of murdering the bishop and human rights defender Juan José Gerardi in 1998 on the orders of someone with enough power to avoid implication and ensure that his former staff officers were cared for. As an important paisa inmate, Captain Sosa, his father and his former sergeants, were able to avoid expected disgrace and retain their key connections with elite political circles and the Guatemalan Army. Where the paisa inmates remain connected to the society whose laws they broke, MS13/B18 inmates are called 'cholos' and are loathed by the paisas who are often given control over them. Anyone with gang related tattoos who end up in Guatemala's prisons are subjected to daily humiliation, extortion, and dominance, which serves to incite psychological-emotional resistance to the point of kamakaze or even suicidal behavioural outplay. Any hint of resistance or pride would be met with a beating sufficient to build an ever deepening capacity to withstand pain and suffering without surrender. Imprisoned gang members describe how indiscipline was often punished with torture: electric shocks, administered while the guards looked the other way.

§A4.2 Criminal Insurgency.

By contrast, the growing violent criminalised societies of MS13/B18 in the Northern Triangle are *revolutionary malformations of society* that are driven by generations of *traumatic psychological and sociological traumas* that have morphed into new and terrifying realities of human life. My research into Mara Salvatrucha 13 and Barrio 18, suggests that they operate as a collective pathological cultural-identity group that exhibits traits of identity diffusion present in BPD (borderline personality development).⁶⁴ Every MS13/B18 member interviewed expressed complex trauma⁶⁵ with effects of frantic thoughts of avoidance of real or imagined abandonment. They reported patterns of unstable family relationships that alternated between extremes of



"The cry of the grandmother was gut-wrenching as she watched the burial of her grandson, the second killed in just days in a horrific wave of violence against children in. Kids, even very young kids, are often killed if they refuse to join powerful street gangs, a scourge plaguing the poor Central American nation reputed to be the world's most violent place. "Don't leave me, my children!" the woman cried. This second grandson was only seven years old. He was shot and tortured, his body found wrapped in a sheet and dumped in a vacant lot. The grandmother and the mother of the child were already in shock after the death three days earlier of another of their children, aged thirteen, in similarly grisly circumstances. In the space of a month, six more school-age children were murdered, and authorities say the reason was the same -- they had refused to join a street gang. Last week members of gang called the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) burst into a youth detention center, overpowered guards, and detonated a grenade, killing five members of the rival Mara 18 (M-18). That same day, a man stabbed a 13-year-old girl to death, and killed her siblings aged ten, seven and two. The heart-breaking scene of the grieving grandmother consumed with pain was broadcast on television."

Figure 16 AFP News Story: Context of life for 'everyone else'

⁶⁴ (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition, Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR), 2000b)

⁶⁵ Complex trauma is multiple traumatic events over the course of years, rather than just a single event.



idealization⁶⁶ and devaluation⁶⁷, often interspersed with domestic violence. The MS13/B18 interviewees recounted their early family lives and reasons for entering the gangs to overcome persistently unstable self-image or sense of self that were marked by self/family-damaging behaviour involving sex, substance abuse, self-harm, or suicidal ideations. Interviewees verbalized feelings of emptiness alternated with inappropriate, intense anger that they found difficult to control and attributed to stress related paranoid ideations of impending violence from (consciously) members of the competing gangs or security services and (subconsciously) from family trauma remembrance and repetition. We found that the membership of MS13 mirrors the membership of Barrio18 in terms of ethnic mix of indigenous-Spanish, and socioeconomic status.⁶⁸ They are, in most respects identical in terms of phenotype and archetype and require external physical signs (tattoos) to distinguish themselves from each other.⁶⁹ The pandillas and cliques of Mara Salvatrucha 13, Barrio 18, cannot be compared to organized crime in the UK, US, or Europe from a psychosocial-emotional analytical lens. These organised social-criminal movements are “not about generating revenue as much as [they] are about creating a collective identity that is constructed and reinforced by shared, often criminal experiences, especially acts of violence and expressions of social control.”⁷⁰ The central question posed by immigration tribunals in the UK, Americas, and Europe, is how is it possible that these governments of Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, are unable to regain a monopoly over criminal violence within their borders in the absence of an external aggressor?

§A4.3 Criminal Pathologies

The rage and violence perpetrated against each other is a projection of their own self-hatred borne of continuous devaluation and dehumanization by two opposing cultures (indigenous and colonialist) that they are neither part of nor separate from.⁷¹ The individual and collective identity diffusion of MS13/B18 is readily apparent in the gang-membership rituals as new and existing members work to cohere (pull-together) their subconscious-self through recreations of traumatic violence.⁷² The psychological dynamic at work here is called an Adversary Symbiosis between themselves and their ‘Enemy-Other’ gang or government security.⁷³ Essentially, MS13 and Barrio18 psychologically recruit and use each other to ‘cast-off’ or rid themselves of unwanted and unbearable thoughts and emotions about their own identity devaluation and disintegration.⁷⁴ Each ingroup casts off unwanted feelings of terror, fear, weakness, and helplessness through projection onto a psychologically-safe

MS13/B18 and their related affiliates, on the other hand, perceive only self-loathing from both their indigenous and European expressions of self-identity.

⁶⁶ Religious, metaphysical imaginations from generational stories amplified by the effects of trauma.

⁶⁷ Often, racial-ethnic devaluation based on societal stimulus that is culturally pervasive in the urban sprawls of the Northern Triangle capital cities.

⁶⁸ My research was conducted in concert with my colleagues in Valka-Mir Human Security under contract with the United States Army Special Forces Command at Fort Bragg NC.

⁶⁹ (Mohor, 2023)

⁷⁰ (Center for Latin American & Latino Studies, 2018) Page 3

⁷¹ (Moreno, 2024)

⁷² (B. Anderson, 1983)

⁷³ (Stein, 1982)

⁷⁴ Also referred to as trait dissociation. (Lensvelt-Mulders et al., 2008; Marmar, 1997)



'other.'⁷⁵ This 'cast-off' psychological material is then destroyed through outplays of violence upon the group that is projected on. The projection of self-loathing traits or attributes onto a an 'enemy-other' is a psychologically safe way for one ingroup to dissociate an unbearable reality of existential being.⁷⁶ Namely that they are unworthy of being alive. 'It is not me/us who are weak, dirty, ugly...it is the enemy-other who is these things.'⁷⁷ Psychologically, when this enemy-other is destroyed, so too are the traits that were dissociated and projected onto them.⁷⁸ This process offers a powerful and needed psychological relief to the large population of marginalized men and women who are disconnected to either of the two identities that make up their genetic heritage – indigenous or colonizer.⁷⁹ The resulting gang identity individually and collectively is in a state of BPD as described above. It is fragile, unstable, and highly volatile, which accounts for the uncontrolled displays of irrational violence and uncontrolled rage.⁸⁰ This



Figure 17 Guatemala City's casual violence is a primary symptom of large-scale psychosocial trauma. The emotional affects and psychological effects are transmitted generationally, creating malformed psychosocial realities that are easier to mold into existing and evolving criminal societies that challenge the legitimacy of the Euro-centric government and its social order.

⁷⁵ This psychological process is discerned through lengthy phenomenological inquiry, or qualitative psychological inquiry interviews, that we can code and compare to other cultural-ethnic groups who are in the same psychosocial conditions. We validate our finding by revisiting our interviewees and introducing stimuli (pictures, phrases, stories) that are designed to test individual identity diffusion through reinforcing preferred identity archetypes and measuring the interviewees reactions on a Likert scale.

⁷⁶ (Birtchnell, 1997)

⁷⁷ (P. J. Christian, 2016; Steiner, 1982)

⁷⁸ (Marmor, 1997)

⁷⁹ (Fonagy et al., 2017; Luyten et al., 2020; Marcia, 1966)

⁸⁰ (Luyten et al., 2020)



explains why the violence and growth of the violent crime organisations in Guatemala “defies logic” and “resists destruction.”⁸¹ This also informs us as researchers about the dangers that asylum claimants face on their involuntary return to Guatemala⁸² because the underlying drivers are subconscious psychological and emotional ideas of alienation and feelings of deep shame from irrational feelings of self-disrespect. Most often, these feelings of disrespect are ignited when they were met with refusal by victims to comply with whatever demands they made to share in the social burden of providing governance and security to the neighbourhoods ruled by the gangs. Such disrespect shown towards one member must be avenged by all members of the in-group to not threaten the artificial psychological construct of strength, unity, and collective agency.^{102F102F88F88F86F}⁸³ The vengeance to be extracted over identified victims’ refusal to participate in their tormentor’s psychodrama is not about money, but his or her challenge to that psychodrama that coheres and sustains them. The flip side to this vengeance is opportunity by members of organised gangs to find and punish victims as a means of adding to or increasing the collective feelings of value and validation of their collective power and respect, thus furthering their internal psychosocial-emotional coherence. As the construction of these violent organisations’⁸⁴ collective identity is so tentatively constructed based on what they are not, rather than what they are, this collective identity requires constant reassurance and total vigilance against external encroachment or internal malaise. This collective identity, BPD as it may be, is the bulwark against psychological disintegration and potential collective suicide, the most normal outcome of personality-identity collapse. The more well known MS13 and B18 are more like a brand than a formal organisation. This ‘brand’ offers young people in Guatemala something they don’t have...an identity. An idea of who they are that is worthy of being alive. In the barrios and maras of Guatemala, life is cheap unless you are somebody. Somebody who has respect, influence, love, admiration. If you have no valued identity, then your life is meaningless, and it can be taken away at someone else’s whim. In the phenomenological reality of MS13/Mara18, one must earn respect, admiration, love, and influence...they are not entitlements or birthrights. They are earned through the force of will that is evidenced using physical power which obviates the generational social order of the elites, to which they are not a part of. The cliques that unsuspecting victim’s disrespect, do not hate their victims, and in the cases of women, the clique’s males are often attracted to them. But they can’t accept love from someone else until they first earn that right to be loved; by finding and punishing her for her disrespect to them. This entire report seeks to explain the psychological pathology (illness) of the members of the Northern Triangle’s violent criminal societies in an admittedly imperfect manner. The full monstrosity of this pathology is still beyond my/our research reach. By the numbers, violence against females occurs in no greater amount than against males. The violence against females, however, is usually more intimate in its savagery because the feminine holds the power to most seriously undermine a male’s sense of masculinity. The more fully an offending female is reduced in her femininity; her private parts and

⁸¹ (Center for Latin American & Latino Studies, 2018)

⁸² How this situation came to be is beyond the scope of this research report but can only be understood through the combination of the effects of post-colonial domination and indigenous identity destruction that was compounded – made intractable – through the century long involvement of the United States and its 19th Century predatory capitalism and 20th Century fixation with communism in any form.

⁸³ (Center for Latin American & Latino Studies, 2018)

⁸⁴ BPD Borderline Personality Development



face destroyed, the more the avenging male will perceive his masculinity to be recovered. This, of course, is why it is called a 'pathology'.

"María Isabel Veliz Franco was a 15-year-old student and worked in a shop in the holidays. On the night of 15 December 2001, she was kidnapped in the capital. Her body was found shortly before Christmas. She had been raped, her hands and feet had been tied with barbed wire, she had been stabbed and strangled and put in a bag. Her face was disfigured from being punched, her body was punctured with small holes, there was a rope around her neck and her nails were bent back. When her body was handed over to me, I threw myself to the ground shouting and crying but they kept on telling me not to get so worked up. With the help of witnesses, the authorities identified two of the culprits and a luxury car and obtained details of the house where she had been held. The case was passed to two prosecutor's offices but those responsible are still at liberty".⁸⁵

The story of Maria Isabel is introduced here to illustrate the extreme psychopathological motivations behind the violence to women in Guatemala, a country with the highest rate of femicides in Central America, of which, more

Figure 18



than two-thirds of the cases are never solved.⁸⁶ After two decades of pressure by the US, OAS, and an official condemnation of Guatemala and its government by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in 2014, the perpetrators were finally arrested and sentenced to 30-years in prison for Maria Isabel's abduction, torture, rape, and murder.⁸⁷ As part of the international court's judgement, the Guatemalan President Bernardo Arévalo, offered an official apology to the court and the family of Maria Isabel on behalf of the nation.⁸⁸ As a psychological anthropologist, the time and attention that Guatemalan male perpetrators put into their violent deeds against women signify complex and highly emotional motivations. While every society has some

greater or lesser number of serial psychopaths, the difference in Guatemala is both their number and the normalization of violence against women. Turn back to the gang section and review the sheer alienated-shamed-rage perpetrated by the paisan prisoners against the cholo prisoners. Casual, cheerful attitudes to extreme violence and the infliction of suffering as symptoms of pathological trauma that do not just occur for no reason. Now turn back to psychosocial drivers of violence and the social obsession with *Blanqueamiento* amongst the elite segment of the

⁸⁵ (AI GTM UPR, 2005)
⁸⁶ (Rodriguez, 2024)
⁸⁷ (Escobar, 2019; Rodriguez, 2024)
⁸⁸ (Lang, 2024)



population. While I cannot accurately diagnose individuals without extensive clinical interaction, there is more than enough psychological and sociological indicators to authoritatively assert that the violence against the population generally and against females specifically, will continue as will the flight of those Guatemalans who are caught between the established elites, the emerging indigenous peoples, and the revolting gangs. In meteorology, the power of a storm continues until the underlying instability (heat, cold, moisture) is resolved. This analogy also applies to Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador.

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