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**Guatemala women as refugees. A study of change in
gender relations in the context of social movements**

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Chapter Four:

Representing Ethnic Identity

Introduction

The process of refuge has resulted in a complete restructuring of social relations. The changes in social relations were a clear result of the experience of extreme violence. Through interview excerpts, this chapter aims to give a broad assessment of the most general and pervasive changes that have occurred in the social relations of refugee communities. Essentially, the process of refuge has resulted in the conscious recreation of identities, and most importantly in the formulation of a new refugee identity based on a shared indigenous ethnicity.

The redefinition of ethnic identity is a result of fundamental changes in the way of life that refuge entails and the multiethnic settlement in the refugee camps.¹ This chapter will attempt to explore these redefinitions of ethnic identities. The Guatemalan refugees have undergone a process of cultural transformation, where they have embraced, rejected, or changed their previous cultural behaviour and outlook to come to terms with the refugee experience.

Additionally, the refugee situation has placed the exiles in a constant struggle with Guatemalan authorities over the ethnic representations that they have chosen. In expressing their ethnicity, Guatemalan refugees continue in what Richard Adams has called a 'partisan dispute' that has historically characterized Central American ethnic relations. In the opposition of state and autonomously created indigenous identities, there is still the residue of an unfinished process in which indigenous people in Guatemala were "forcefully subordinated by conquest" (Adams, 1990:159). The struggle over indigenous identity today is a continuation of the historical process of decolonization, where Guatemalan refugees are attempting to exert their legitimate

right to define and represent their own ethnicity.

Ethnic identity is put forth through a variety of symbols. In Richard Adams' "Strategies of Ethnic Survival in Central America", the author puts emphasis on territory, language, community, ritual, and biological and economic expansion as the key markers of ethnic identity (1991:191-200). In this chapter, I will examine each of these markers to detail the development of the struggle between the Guatemalan state and refugees over who represents, defines and changes ethnic identities, symbols and rituals. In essence, ethnic identity will be seen as a dynamic creation that responds to contemporary conditions by incorporating, rejecting, and altering cultural and social structures in order to best ensure group survival and propagation (Adams, 1991:200).

Before embarking on a an analysis of the markers of ethnic identity this chapter will concentrate on the formulation of refugee communities as the first step in the complex process of redefining ethnicity.

1. Refugee Communities: The Aftermath of Extreme Violence

One of the most noteworthy changes in social relations that occurred as a result of the refugee situation was the creation of new communities. The creation of refugee communities based upon a rethinking of ethnic, gender and social markers began with the process of understanding that is described by Catalina in the passage that follows:

"Aquí hemos aprendido muchas cosas. A resolver los problemas que tenemos que tener. Al principio no fue así porque los campamentos son multiétnicos que son de diferentes departamentos y diferentes culturas y como puedes tu entender a toda esa gente entonces se tuvo que entrar en un proceso de amistad, de entender, de comprender." -Catalina.

"We have learned many things here. To solve problems that we have to have. At the beginning it wasn't like that, since the camps are made up of many ethnic groups, each originating from different departments and from different cultures. And how can you understand all those people? So we had to enter into a process of friendship and understanding." -Catalina

Following a recognition of difference within the new settlement, communities began to develop.

Stella Tandai Makanya describes a similar process of community creation in the case of Zimbabwean refugees in Mozambique. For Tandai Makanya, closed communities were established in exile to ensure the maintenance of Zimbabwean identity, culture and value systems (1994:104). In the Guatemalan example, the creation of refugee communities goes beyond the maintenance of old customs and helps male and female refugees to redefine established cultural norms. In Tandai Makanya's description, the exposure to alternate cultures and customs drove the Zimbabweans further inward into their own communities. Guatemalan refugees, while similarly exposed to alternate cultures, did not exclusively embrace established norms. Rather, refuge led the communities to reinforce some established practices, redefine others and establish new adaptations to deal with their exile.

The changes in world vision described by Catalina above are distinctly cultural changes. In building their communities in exile, refugees began to rethink not only their ethnicity but also the relationships in which as peasants, women, youths or elderly people they interact in their current and future society. This change in social perception put emphasis on cultural faults that refugees felt contributed to the situation of indiscriminate violence that impelled them into exile. Thus, many refugees blamed the encloistering into extended family units for a lack of effective organization at community and regional levels. According to Catalina, exile pushed the refugee communities out of this forced encloistering.

"Nos vimos forzados a organizarnos. Tu sabes cuando uno vive muy bien cada uno resuelve su problema familiar pero cuando es una comunidad donde todos tienen que sentir

"We were forced to organize. You know when people live well, each person solves their own family problems. But, when it is a whole community where everyone feels the same

la misma problemática es mucho
mas fácil hacer consciencia y
que la gente se organice."
-Catalina

problem it is a lot easier to
raise people's consciousness
and start an organization."
-Catalina

Moving out of the immediate concern of individual families into concerns of the community opened the way for the creation of effective political actions that manifested themselves as the organization in exile and the plan for the return to Guatemala.

One of the best examples of the new community's determination to define and represent themselves is the response of the refugees of Quetzal Edzná to a visit made by Guatemala's first lady, Rachel Blandon de Cerezo, in 1986. The objective of the first lady's visit was to promote a massive return of Guatemalan refugees under the new government's 'repatriation with signed amnesty' scheme. The government emissary, accompanied by representatives of the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) and the Mexican Commission for the Aid of Refugees (COMAR) presented her voluntary repatriation option to the refugees. In the reception for the first lady, the widows of the camp dressed in black and demanded a rectification to the impunity that those responsible for the assassinations and/or disappearances of their family members enjoyed.² In a letter written to Mrs. Blandon de Cerezo, the refugee mothers wrote:

".... Sra. Raquel Blandon de Cerezo, mujer y madre de familia, Ud. sabe el dolor que sufrimos cuando tenemos hijos. Le preguntamos 'cómo se sentiría Ud. si mataran a sus hijos?'. Para Ud. y sus amigos es fácil decir que deberíamos olvidar lo que hemos sufrido porque Uds. están contentos con sus hijos...." (en IGE, 1987:42).

".... Mrs. Raquel Blandon de Cerezo, woman and mother, you know the pain that we suffer when we have children. We ask you: 'how would you feel if they killed your children?'. For you and your friends, it is easy to say that we should forget what we have suffered because you are happy with your children..." (from IGE, 1987:42).

Throughout this letter, the women used their female identity to re-enforce a political message. The mourning mothers symbolized

the resolve of the refugee communities to continue their political opposition to Guatemalan authorities and Guatemalan mainstream society in general. Essentially, the example of this letter and demonstration emphasizes that the collective memory of violence held by the refugees cannot be dealt with rhetorically, but must be incorporated into the official history of Guatemala.

As a result of the negative reception to the first lady's visit, only four families from Quetzal Edzná returned to Guatemala at that time.³ The refugee women themselves have emphasized this action as an important demonstration of the new unity among refugees.

Another example of communal action is the participation in development projects by the refugee women. In a joint interview, Doña Cristina and Doña Lucia describe their participation in a sewing project.

"Doña Lucia: A los dos años nos daban como 20 000 pesos al mes.

G. Torres: Y antes de eso no les pagaban nada?

Doña Lucia: Dos años sin ganar un centavo.

G. Torres: Quien ganaba esa plata?

Doña Lucia: Nadie, de nosotros nadie.

Doña Cristina: El trabajo que se hacía era para la comunidad.

Doña Lucia: Primero hicimos uniformes para las escuelas y cobramos a los padres 25 pesos por uniforme para los gastos de hilo." -Doña Cristina y Doña Lucia.

"Doña Lucia: After two years, we earned about 20 000 pesos a month.

G. Torres: And before that you didn't earn anything?

Doña Lucia: Two years without earning a cent.

G. Torres: Who earned that money?

Doña Lucia: None of us did.

Doña Cristina: The work was for the community.

Doña Lucia: First we made uniforms for the schools and we charged the parents 25 pesos per uniform to cover the cost of thread." -Doña Lucia and Doña Cristina.

For two years the women's work for the community contributed to the creation of links amongst the new neighbours. It was a simple action that served to satisfy a shared necessity, but also to emphasize the value of women's work within those communities.

Besides the aforementioned political and communal actions, the refugee communities also had to face a continuous struggle with Mexican authorities for the provision of essential services such as potable water, the establishment of suitably staffed schools and reasonable access to transitable roads. In order to ensure these minimal services, refugee communities had to unite internally. Even then, their success in this endeavour was marginal. This process of attaining internal unity in face of external obstacles was furthered by the change of status that the refugee camps in Campeche and Quintana Roo suffered in 1992.⁴ As independent communities, the refugees have had to join in order to solicit aid and infrastructure from national and international authorities.

The process of building genuine communities is cemented in the return of the refugees to Guatemala. In the process of return described in the following section it is evident that the refugee communities are much more than settlements. In representing their return to Guatemala the exiles are clear in manifesting their new identity based on political action to combat the possibility of the return of their violent past.

2. Planning the Return: The Future for Refugee Identities

"Nosotros tambien le hemos explicado a mi tía que está alla en Guatemala sobre el retorno. Pues, ella dice que esta bien que deseamos irnos pero organizadamente como nosotros le hemos explicado. Hay unos que si se han ido pero repatriados. Yo lo que pienso de eso es que no está bien repatriado porque a veces digo: 'Porqué se va la gente repatriada? Tal vez para ver si les va mejor'. Bueno como yo soy joven y antes yo era mas pequeña y no sabía como pensar decía:

"We have also explained the return to my aunt who is still in Guatemala. Well, she says that it is good that we want to go back but in an organized way as we have already explained to her. There are some who have gone already but repatriated. I think that it is not good to go back repatriated because I think sometimes: 'Why do people go back repatriated? Maybe to see if things will go better for them'. Well, I am young and before I was small and I didn't know

'Porque no nos vamos nosotros así repatriados?'
Porque yo veía lo que COMAR les daba a ellos. Entonces mi mamá me explicaba: 'A si claro, a ellos les da como es para el gobierno ahí todos van para el gobierno, los repatriados. Y porqué los retornados? Porqué los retornados estamos organizados y el gobierno piensa que estorbaremos al ir a Guatemala y por eso no nos quiere dar tierra a nosotros en cambio a ellos si como van directo para ahí.'
Nosotros llevamos los acuerdos que hemos tomado. Y por eso es que el gobierno no quiere que nosotros nos vayamos. En cambio los repatriados como uno no lleva ni un acuerdo. Nada mas porque ya quieren ya ir porque alla estan sus familiares por eso pero se van con el gobierno." - Mariana.

how to think. I used to say: 'Why don't we go back repatriated?'
I used to see how much COMAR gave to them. And so my mother would explain to me: 'Of course they are given things since it is for the government that you become repatriated. And why the returnees? Well because we are organized and the government thinks that we will be in the way when we get to Guatemala and so they don't want to give us land. They, [the repatriated] are going directly to them.'
We are taking with us the accords that we have signed. That is why the government doesn't want us to go. The repatriated on the other hand are not taking with them any accords. They are only returning because they want to be with their families and that is why they are going with the government". - Mariana.

The term "return" used to define the arrival of former refugees in Guatemalan lands is not the official term "repatriation" used by the Guatemalan and Mexican governments and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees to define the same process (UNHCR, 1993:1). The term *return* was put forward by the Permanent Commission of Guatemalan Refugees in Mexico (CCPP) as a response to the use the Guatemalan government has given to the term *repatriation*. Zetter reminds us that terminology like "refugee", "return" or "repatriation" are more than words used to define a population or a socio-political process. Rather these words take on highly politicized meanings and associations that are based on practical legal and policy making practices (1988:1). This is evidenced in the power relations that are encompassed in

the use of both terms. "Repatriation" allows for all effective power to rest at the hands of Guatemalan traditional authorities. It perpetuates already established power centers and power relations. Conversely, the term "return" alters the pre-existing power relations and allows for peasant communities to have effective administrative power over their own destinies.

Prior to 1993, repatriations of individuals and their families had taken place on the condition that these individuals adhered to an amnesty.⁵ Many of these repatriations were used by the Guatemalan government to promote an image of an improved Human Rights policy (Bastos, 1993:87). The fate of those repatriated is not easy to define since there exist conflicting news reports.⁶ It is believed that some repatriated refugees returned only to be confined into development poles or model villages.⁷ The acceptance of a return to Guatemala under these conditions meant for many refugees an utter denial of their exile and the worst form of government incursion into their societies. Thus, in choosing to remain in exile and reject the option of repatriation refugees exercised their right to define themselves and their own futures.

A return, is the evidence of the autonomy of refugee communities.

These repatriations do not reflect the process of return that has developed since 1993 where large groups of refugees have decided to return voluntarily, collectively, and in an organized fashion. After signing legal documents with the Guatemalan government that would ensure that seven basic conditions of safety and economic development of returnee communities were met, the CCPP began to organize a process of return.

3. Returnee Communities- A Refugee Future:

The best evidence that the creation of new communities was successful is the projected maintenance of these communities upon the return to Guatemala. The plans made to return to the agricultural cooperative of El Quetzal in El Petén⁸ include the

establishment of a community of 200 families, or more than 2 000 people, from different refugee camps in Mexico and from different ethnic and regional backgrounds in Guatemala. On the most part, the returning refugees did not originate from the Petén region, but have decided to return there for several reasons- including fear of returning to the areas where scorched earth policies took place. The refugees returning to El Quetzal met in a general assembly of the Vertiente Norte in October of 1994. During this time, it was agreed that the new settlements in Guatemala would continue to be multi-ethnic⁹ as the refugee camps had been, because the people were used to being 'mixed-up' or "revueltos".

The returning communities draw their strength and meaning from their organizational unity. In point eight of the Tikal Declaration the refugees maintain that "knowing that the return will take place with difficulties imposed by the system that oppresses us we have organized and we are ready to fight the obstacles that are put in front of us" (CCPP, 1995:5). Many refugees have preferred to return and live with other former refugees in order to ensure for themselves and for their families that there will be a viable organization that will ensure their rights are respected and their sustainable development is promoted.¹⁰ Thus, even families who owned lands in other areas of the country have preferred to cash in these titles in exchange for a reduction in the loan amount that they will have to solicit for their plot of land in the new cooperative of returning refugees.¹¹

The refugee communities, presently united on the basis of a shared identity as exiles, have the potential to prosper as genuine permanent communities even when their period of exile ends with re-establishment in Guatemala. The agricultural cooperative is an organization that serves to cement economic ties between the returnees, demonstrating the confidence that the returnees have in the future success of the multiethnic communities established in exile.

Refugee identity based on past experience with violence or on the experience with exile is not static. Rather, it is a dynamic construct of identity that responds to each context. It is precisely this possibility of change within the refugee identity that leads to the perception that refugee or returnee identity can persist even within the Guatemalan context. Currently, the power of the refugee identity is based on the potential and power of organized communal action. In the Tikal Declaration presented upon the first return of Guatemalan refugees to the Petén area the refugees describe this permanent 'refugee' identity in their own terms. As sons and daughters of Ixpiyacoc and Ixmucane (CCPP, 1995:1)¹² the refugees declare:

"Los que sobrevivimos tal brutal violencia, a tanta injusticia y crueldad, ESTAMOS AQUI DE NUEVO. Nuestra mirada es firme y llevamos las memorias de toda nuestra historia, de como vivíamos, como fuimos obligados a huir y como sobrevivimos en el exilio. Venimos para sembrar de nuevo en nuestras tierras, abonadas con la sangre de tantos mártires la semilla de lo que será un nuevo amanecer para nuestra Guatemala, para esta querida patria que ha vivido siempre en nuestros corazones" (CCPP, 1995:1).

"Those of us that survived that brutal violence, that injustice and cruelty, WE ARE HERE AGAIN. Our vision is firm and we carry with us the memories of all our history, of how we used to live, of how we were forced to flee and of how we survived in exile. We have come back to plant in our lands fertilized by the blood of so many martyrs the seed of what will be the new dawn for Guatemala. The beloved country that has always lived in our hearts" (CCPP, 1995:1).

Among the most noteworthy elements of this passage is the self-reliance of the community. Having lost much of their confidence on the state as a legitimate authority, many refugee communities have taken the power legitimization of authority into their own hands. The participation of refugee representatives in peace processes, return negotiations, and community planning have empowered returnee communities as a whole and has fuelled ambitious plans of reintegration into the Guatemalan regions of return.¹³

The return is described in the slogan used in all official letters and communiques: "Porque hoy mas que nunca el retorno es lucha y no resignación".¹⁴ In this slogan it is evident that the struggles carried out as refugees are ongoing into the process of reinsertion in Guatemala. This is particularly evident taking into account that the most influential concept in the vision for the return is the realization that a true peace process cannot occur in Guatemala without a thorough restructuring of property division in Guatemalan society as a whole.

4. Redefining Ethnicity:

A. Using the Past in View of the Future: The Creation of a Refugee Identity.

Refugee families have put great emphasis in transferring the experience with violence to their children. When I asked Claudia if she was planning to tell her daughter what had happened to them in Guatemala she responded:

"Bueno, nosotros como madres vimos lo que pasó y vamos a contarle a nuestros hijos lo que hemos sufrido y porqué salimos a Mexico. Ellos pues no saben porqué estamos aquí en Mexico. Ellos no saben porqué salimos. Es importante dar a conocer a nuestros hijos porqué el gobierno nos hizo eso. Darles a conocer porqué salimos. Si no lo hacemos nosotros quien va contarles de las represiones del gobierno. Eso es lo que se tiene que dar a los hijos." -Claudia.

"Well, we saw what happened as mothers and we are going to tell our children what we have suffered and why we came to Mexico. They don't know why we are here in Mexico. They don't know why we left. It is important to let our children know why the government did this to us. To let them know why we left. If we don't do it, who is going to tell them about the government's repression? That is what we have to give our children." - Claudia.

As seen in Claudia's account, the transference of the experience with violence is based on the maintenance and creation of a refugee identity. The refugee identity stems from the experience with violence and it is established as an opposition of memory to

official history. The stories that refugee mothers will tell their children about the early 1980s are consciously designed to serve as counter-histories that oppose government stories and establish the distinction between the refugee community and other peasant communities that surround them.

The experience with violence is turned into a symbol of refuge that distinguished the refugee community from the indigenous peasant populations that surrounded them in Mexico and the populations that surround the returnee communities today in Guatemala. While refugee and returnee communities share a marginalized position in society with the populations that surround them in Mexico and Guatemala respectively, they do not share the use of the experience with violence as an identity marker and a source for political reaction.

The refugee children that did not live through the repression themselves have absorbed the importance of this experiences through the stories told by their mothers. In the example that follows we can see that for María, 16 years old, her family's experience with violence is an intrinsic part of her personal identity. I asked María: ¿Qué es lo que quisieras que otros supieran acerca de tu experiencia como refugiada?¹⁵ Her response is as follows:

"Un día llego el ejército y nos reunieron en una casa grande a toditos. Bueno, yo solo veía, y ahora le pregunto a mi mamá y ella me cuenta y yo lo que voy a explicar es porqué mi mamá me lo cuenta. Nos reunieron en esa casa y uno andaba enmascarado y otro le preguntaba. 'Quién es guerrillero de acá?' Y el solo andaba y decía 'Nadie, aquí no hay nadie'. Esa vez, todas las mujeres temblamos ahí. Y los hombres también. Porque decían aquí

"One day the army came and put us all into a big house. Well, I could only look, and now I ask my mother what happened and she tells me. They put us together in that house and there was a man with a mask and an other man who asked him questions. 'Who is a member of the guerrilla here?' And he only said: 'No one, no one here'. That time, all the women there were trembling. The men too. They said they are going to

nos van a acusar y nosotros no tenemos culpa de nada. Somos libres. No somos culpables de nada. Nos encerraron ahí un día y tuvimos que aguantar hambre. Cuando regresamos a nuestra casa le contamos a mi padre.

Luego empezaron a sacar gente de noche. Empezaron a sacar vecinos y a nosotros nos dió miedo. Como empezaron a sacar a gente humilde nos dió miedo. Nos salimos así en la noche y nos venimos." -María.

accuse us of doing something and we are not to blame for anything. We are free. We are not to blame for anything. They locked us in there for a day and we couldn't eat. When we got home we told my father. After that they began to take people out of their houses at night. Our neighbours and we got scared. Because they began to take away simple people we got scared. We left at night and we came here." -María.

Using a story her mother told her as her own most important experience gives us an indication of the degree to which María has integrated into her self-conception the transference of violent experience. María is very active in the organization of the returns to Guatemala. No one in her family has participated in the leadership of any community organizations. When asked as to why she was involved in the organization of the return her response was the familiar one: to ensure that what happened to us in Guatemala will not happen again. Thus, the integration of the memory of violence is not remembrance for the sake of remembrance but rather remembrance with a view towards the future.¹⁶

In the transference of the experience with violence there is also a conscious transference of a refugee identity. At the end of my interview with María after we had discussed how she felt a drift living in Mexico and thinking about Guatemala I asked her: ¿Y tú que te consideras?¹⁷ Her response was:

"Si yo me considero mujer refugiada, si porque soy refugiada aquí en Mexico, aunque vine pequeña pero eso no quiere decir que sea de aquí. Siempre soy refugiada y algún día vamos a regresar." -María, 16 años.

"Yes, I do consider myself to be a refugee woman. Yes because I am a refugee in Mexico. Even though I came when I was small that doesn't mean that I am not here. I am always a refugee and some day we will return." -María, 16 years old.

For María the experience of being a refugee does not stop in her situation of living in Mexico or upon her return to Guatemala. Rather, the refugee identity is based on memories that mediate between the culture and individuals and the social changes induced by continuous migrations and changing institutional contexts. As such, the refugee identity provides both versatility and stability by basing social actions on the remembrance of violence. In appropriating her family's memories with violence as her own María also acquires a very strong sense of the changing nature of what it means to be a refugee.

The newly formed refugee identity incorporates many life transforming experiences, including the flight from Guatemala, and exile induced cultural changes, including a more cosmopolitan view of community. Of all these changes no other cultural alteration will have had as strong an impact as the restructuring of ethnic identities that has taken place in the situation of refuge.

B. Rethinking Ethnicity:

In the refugee situation a reconceptualization of ethnicity is part of a cultural readjustment needed to react and overcome the experience with violence. A reconceptualization of ethnicity is evidence of dramatic changes in cultural organization and outlook. More importantly, however, is the realization that the changes in ethnic representations and perceptions is not spontaneously a political cultural adjustment. Rather, rethinking and consciously representing ethnicity is part of a process of conscious opposition to state-sponsored visions of the 'indian', the 'refugee', and the 'returnee'. In general, the cultural restructuring that occurs is a reaction to a variety of the Guatemalan government's actions and currently serves to facilitate the everyday resistance to the Guatemalan government's continued repression.

The overall changes in ethnic self-ascription have resulted

from two processes: the physical cohabitational arrangement of the refugee camps and the overall process of cosmopolitization that the refugee community as a whole has experienced. The first part of this section will attempt to explain the dynamics of change in ethnic self-ascription. In the second part the emphasis will be put on two specific changes in the reconceptualization of ethnicity that have resulted from the situation of refuge: a positive attitude towards the ongoing process of **castellanización** and an autonomous redefinition of the components of Mayan culture seen through discourses on traditional dress.

1. Changing World Visions and a Conceptualization of Ethnicity:

A rethinking of ethnic identities results from the habitational constraints of the refugee situation that led to the cohabitation of ethnic groups. In the Campeche Camps, the refugees were put into planned settlements. Thus, the housing and public spaces of the camp were defined and standardized, and autonomous settlement only occurred within the established physical limits of the camp.¹⁸ The first autonomous arrangement in Quetzal Edzná, for instance, was the settlement in modules or living compartments within the camps according to departmental or regional origin in Guatemala. The adherence to modules also followed ethnic ascriptions closely (Garcia Cruz, 1994:5). As the settlements developed these spatially established ethnic divisions became less relevant. This process was furthered by the establishment of a new refugee camp Los Laureles in 1992.¹⁹ In this relocation, ethnic origin was not weighted as heavily as in the first settlements.

Beyond the issues of physical settlement, ethnicity was further redefined by a process of cosmopolitization. The realization that there were a vast array of ethnic differences and similarities in Guatemala began for many refugees when they became exiles. During this time, the refugee population was undergoing a general process of redefinition of their world vision. This

broadening of their world view or cosmopolitization, occurs as a result of three factors: cohabitation with a multiplicity of ethnic groups, settlement within Mexican society, and the presence of Non-governmental organizations representing North American and European cultures. The cosmopolitization of the refugee communities moved the immediate individual and community references from the traditional family circle or regional area to the international community.

Upon arrival in Mexico, indigenous peasants from all parts of Guatemala were put together in refugee camps situated in or near Mexican communities and run by international governmental and non-governmental organizations. The life experiences that the refugees brought with them were diverse. These experiences combined with idiomatic and ethnic differences to create a context of multiethnic living to which the majority of indigenous peasants were not accustomed. The one experience shared by the refugees was the exposure to violence. Based on this shared experience with violence and on the common problems that they faced as refugee communities in exile, new world visions and community organizations began to emerge.²⁰

The discourses on ethnicity are articulated precisely in the context of rethinking traditional perceptions of the world. The refugees' ethnicity was always a prominent factor of their individual identities as Mams, K'eqchis, and K'iche's, among others. Collective representations and ascriptions also included the Mayan origin of the vast majority of the refugee population.

The process of redefining and representing their ethnicity as refugee communities is described by Claudia in the following passage. In her description the political aims of an overt ethnic ascription are evident.

"Al principio no fue tan fácil porque los campamentos son multiétnicos. Son multiétnicos o sea que son de diferentes

"At the beginning it wasn't that easy because the camps are multiethnic. They are multiethnic because people are

departamentos y de diferentes culturas. Y qué, cómo puedes tu entender a toda esa gente. Entonces se tuvo que entrar en un proceso de amistad, de conocer, de entender. Y también la otra forma organizativa de los campamentos es la de los grupos. Digamos que por ejemplo los de Ixtahuacán, ellos tienen su propio grupo. Los de habla Quiché también tienen su propio grupo. Para poder entender a la gente tienes que aprender que es la democracia- la consulta popular. Hay que pasar por un entendimiento de otros idiomas." -Claudia.

from different departments and different cultures. And how can you understand all of those people. So we had to begin a process of friendship, of getting to know each other, and of understanding each other. Also the way that camps are organized is by groups. For example those who come from Ixtahuacan have their own group. Those that speak Quiche also have their own group. In order to be able to understand all those people you have to understand what democracy is- public consultation. You have to begin to understand other language groups." -Claudia.

For Claudia, ethnicity is articulated in essence as part of the organizational problem faced in the refugee camps. For her the organization that develops in the camps is partly a result of an established understanding or harmony between ethnic groups. In attaining relatively harmonious ethnic relations it seems that ethnic divisions become blurred. While the ethnic origins of refugees are still impossible to overlook, it would seem that the ideal of ethnic harmony of camp life has led to the establishment of an additional more encompassing ethnic identity: the Maya. This perspective will be discussed in further detail in the following section.

Ethnicity first comes into play as an overt political tool as the CCPP in Mexico begin to participate in the Guatemalan peace process.²¹ In order to open up a political space within this process, the refugee representatives have participated as both a part of 'ethnic' organizations and as a member organization of the Societal Sectors Arising from Violence- a group that does not specify ethnicity.²² In this process, ethnic ascription to the Mayan label becomes an important response to government policies

such as the creation of the 'Biosfera Maya'. Such policies not only hinder the refugees' ability to acquire land for their subsistence, but also challenge the refugee's right to define their own Mayan ethnicity. In the political struggle over the Mayan Biosphere, the CAPP and the Guatemalan authorities engage in a conflict over what Richard Adams has called one of the most important determiners of ethnicity: territory.

The Mayan Biosphere is, in theory only, an ecological reserve of the Peten's lowland tropical jungle administered by the National Council of Protected Areas (Conap). It was established in the area proposed as a return site for refugees. The establishment of a returnee community within the borders of a protected area impeded the return of refugees to the agricultural cooperative El Quetzal for more than a year. The Conap refused to allow the settlement of El Quetzal until February 1995 fearing that the returnees would serve to damage the ecological reserve. The fear of ecological damage used by Conap to deny the refugees' settlement petition in the Mayan Biosphere is not consistent with the current situation on the reserve land. According to refugees who participated in the land surveys for the Quetzal Cooperative, lands within the Mayan Biosphere were being actively logged and burned and the Conap did not show much concern over those violations of the ecological reserve.

Amidst allegations of continued official support to the commercial deforestation of the ecological reserve, the Conap's restriction of refugee resettlement seems to have been used more as a tool for political manipulation than as an environmental safeguard measure. To further the irony of this situation the government aimed to protect the Mayan Biosphere from the Mayans themselves. This point is made by the returning refugees in the Tikal Declaration by reminding the authorities that it is not them who are infringing on the Mayan Biosphere, but rather the laws and practices of government authorities which are infringing on the

populations that have historically maintained the area (CCPP, 1995:2).

The changes in the world vision of Guatemalan refugees come into play in the return communities that will settle in Guatemala. The multicultural camps in exile allowed refugees to gain a broad understanding of the pan-mayan concerns in their country. Through the cohabitation in exile a Mayan identity has arisen and radically moved the world view of rural peasants from the local to the national sphere. In the creation of ethnic identities the return to the Petén and overcoming government restrictions has allowed the refugees to gain control over who may determine their ethnic identity. In a politically effective fashion, Mayan refugees have claimed their historical right to their ancestors' lands.

2. *New Concepts of Ethnicity:*

The process of cosmopolitization has inadvertently resulted in a **castellanización** of the refugee population that affects the refugee's conception of ethnicity. The concept of **castellanización** denotes an idiomatic shift from the use of indigenous languages for everyday communication to the generalized use of Spanish. This process traditionally connotes a process ascription to national mestizo identities. In the case of Guatemalan refugees, **castellanización** simply means the use of Spanish as a much needed lingua franca which does not override the daily use of indigenous languages.

An incorporation of varied ethnic groups into Spanish language systems occurs in the refugee situation as a result of the necessity to facilitate communication between ethnic groups. In Guatemala, unlike the experience of the Andean region, one indigenous language is not prevalent over regional dialects and ethnic divisions are usually accompanied by an idiomatic separation. In general, refugees have a positive attitude towards

learning Spanish as a means for multicultural communication.

Additionally, many women approach the issues of ethnicity through a discussion of language learning and language differences.²³ Such an approach, while not directly dealing with ethnic self-ascription, highlights language as one of the most important markers of ethnic identity. In the discourses marked with a lesser political 'sophistication', women discuss the relationship between Spanish²⁴ and their Mayan language as a metaphor for the wider social-ethnic relations. Thus, as Carla presents

"Entré sin ningún estudio, entré sin saber ni una palabra en castilla. Lo que nos hizo organizarnos, lo que nos hizo aprender es la unidad con otras lenguas. Por ejemplo, nunca hemos conocido el Mam, el Kanjobal, nunca hemos conocido el Jacalteco, nunca hemos conocido otras gentes. Es extraño para nosotros cuando entramos a Mexico. Cuando llegamos, al principio, había mucha gente. Nosotros nos hemos hallado aquí en el refugio con personas de otras lenguas. Eso yo siento que es algo, que es una experiencia. Hemos conocido distintas personas, distintos compañeros. Como que los vemos que no es lo mismo. Pero somos indígenas todos. Tenemos lenguas todos y no debemos, siento yo, vivir como en Guatemala donde solo se existe con su lengua. Eso es muy extraño para mi porque yo en lo que he estado en el refugio siempre he estado integrada en grupos de mi gente K'eqchi. Siempre estoy en grupos donde no existen K'eqchis solo nosotras tres familias. Mam, Kanjobal, Chuj, K'akchiqueles,

"I came here without ever having studied anything. I came here without knowing one word in Castilla. What made us organize and what made us learn is the union with other languages. For example we had never known of the Mams, the Kanjobales or the Jacaltecos. We had never met other peoples. It was strange for us when we first came into Mexico. There we saw many peoples when we first came. We have met with peoples of many different languages in exile. I think that is something, really an experience. We have met many people many different compañeros. We have found out that it is not the same but that we are all indigenous. We all have different languages and we shouldn't, I think, live like it is in Guatemala, where you only live where your language lives. That is very strange for me because in refuge we have always lived integrated in groups. My people are K'eqchí but we are always in groups where there are no K'eqchís only our three families. There are Mam, Kanjobal, Chuj, Kakchiqueles

Castellanos allá. Hemos and Castellanos there. We have
tenidos muchas experiencias." had many experiences." -Carla.
-Carla.

For Carla, ethnicity is represented by language, thus, she includes the "Castellanos" as one of the many language groups with whom she has achieved relationships in the situation of refuge. Language is a particularly strong marker of ethnicity in the refugee context partly because of the need to understand other 'campesinos' who have been through similar life experiences. Additionally, in the refugee situation, language becomes a means for physical survival as it is essential for obtaining access to official services, and access to organizations that provide political and emotional support for refugees. One final explanation for the use that Carla makes of language as a metaphor for ethnicity may be the need to address the difficult issues surrounding ethnicity in the general Guatemalan context. There is generally an unwillingness to discuss issues surrounding ethnicity without the use of metaphors. While this objective is more obvious in discourses made by Rigoberta Menchú and other politicized leaders, it cannot be discounted from Carla's discourse, as she was very aware that she was being interviewed by a 'ladino' Guatemalan.

The use of language as a metaphor for ethnicity also leads to a new conception of ethnicity based on the refugee experience of unity between different language groups. Through the understanding that comes in what many women simply term 'learning to speak',²⁵ it seems there is a cementing of a broader category of unity and ethnic ascription: the Mayan "indígena" campesino. In Guatemala, where no one indigenous language was standardized to serve as a basis for colonization, Spanish seems to work not only as an mechanism of subjugation but also as a means of ethnic liberation.²⁶ In gaining an understanding of the official language women feel that they gain more control over their self determination. This process is paralleled in popular organizations

where indigenous women learn to speak Spanish and to read and write they are able to gain self-sufficiency and thus self-control (Radcliffe, 1993:55).

Like Carla, Mariana also uses language to denote ethnicity in her description of the refugee situation. Although language is in her case not the only intrinsic marker of ethnicity, there is an emphasis on this aspect.

"Yo, o sea que yo soy Mam de Ixtahuacan. Bueno donde nosotros estamos- yo vivo en el campamento Nuevo Jardín y la mayoría son Kanjobales los que están ahí pero no es por decir que no son paisanos y no los quiero, pues. Todos somos hermanos, pues. Es nada mas por la etnia y el hablado de su costumbre de como uno se viste que uno se diferencia. Pero todos somos hermanos. Veo yo que no es así. No hay que meter una división y discriminar a otros porque sabemos que en Guatemala hay varias etnias y no vemos, pues, así que sea malo. Es necesario. Nosotros cuando estábamos en Guatemala era por aldeas, si? Así juntos como Mames. Luego el refugio cuando salimos ahí no se trato así por aldeas si no por el miedo nos fuimos revolviendo y ya no se ve pues cuales son y así nos fuimos regando. Pero ya por medio de eso, ya como que si sentimos que si es bueno estar revueltos porque muchos no saben que así hablar en Castellano y por medio de eso así pudimos aprender. O sea que compartir ideas con los otros. O sea que así tuvimos que aprender algo así entre nosotros. Entonces se ve que es bueno que estamos así revueltos de diferentes

"Well, I am Mam from Ixtahuacan. We are living in the camp called Nuevo Jardín where most people are Kanjobal but that doesn't mean that they are not compatriots and that we do not like them. We are all brothers. Its only the ethnic group, the language or the way of dressing that makes one different but we are still all brothers. I believe that we shouldn't divide and discriminate others because we already know that in Guatemala there are many ethnic groups and that is not a bad thing. It is a necessary thing. When we were in Guatemala we were organized into towns together those that were Mam. Afterwards in refuge, we began to mix together because we were scared and we didn't distinguish between one group and an other. But through that, we now feel that it is a good thing to be mixed up because many people didn't know how to speak Spanish and through this we were able to learn. In that way we can share ideas with others. So, we have seen that it is a good thing to be mixed up here with other ethnic groups." - Mariana.

etnias." -Mariana.

Mariana does replace 'etnia' for what Carla would term 'lenguas'. Mariana's discourse is clear on the need for ethnic unity and for an understanding that spans beyond a linguistic comprehension. It is the situation of refuge what has brought her to think about ethnicity in the first place. Her purpose in keeping the multiethnicity of camp life on the return to Guatemala was explicit in further conversations. The process of learning together in cohabitation had a lot of potential in making her 'ethnic consciousness' come forth.

A reconceptualization of ethnicity is also manifested in the reduction of income that exile signified for most refugee families. This is particularly evident in the use of traditional clothes. Here, an economically deficient position results in a reduction of the daily wear of such clothing. Such a statement does not mean to inscribe the discussion into a judgmental position that favours a static culture where everything is expected to remain the same. Rather, it does aim to place the Guatemalan experience as an example of the cultural devastation that can be caused by imposed rapid cultural change through economic chaos and genocidal violence.

An illustration of this situation is found in the following passage where Carla responds to my question: "¿Cómo siguen haciendo los trajes o ya no los hacen?"²⁷

"Bueno en el caso de nosotros porque yo así como Mam que soy. Yo si no nunca he olvidado así de tejer. Porque el traje nuestro es tejido y nosotros mismos lo hacemos tejer. Pero en Mexico no mucho hay hilo pues. Esta muy caro y no tenemos dinero así como para comprarlo. O sea, no es que lo estamos perdiendo. Lo ponemos pero no es suficiente

"Well in my case I am of Mam origin. I have never forgotten how to weave because our traditional dress is woven and we weave it ourselves. But there is not much thread in Mexico to weave. It is very expensive and we don't have the money to buy it. So it doesn't mean that we are losing it. We wear our traditional dress but it is

porque no hay hilo, pues. Bueno la forma de hablar eso sí no lo perdemos, pues. Sigue todavía nuestro hablado todavía lo llevamos y eso no lo podemos perder. Pero ya así en el caso de poner nuestros trajes si se ve como que si no mucho lo ponemos porque no hay hilo ni donde traer el dinero. Pero ya llegando a Guatemala porque de allá esta la mata, pues, y de allá somos y sabemos que ahí nacimos y tenemos derecho de ponernos esos trajes. Ahí se vende el hilo y que tejiendo pues y la mayoría se ponen los trajes. Algunos se que no tienen donde buscar para hacer que comprar el hilo pero hacen el esfuerzo de no perder. Aunque con una modada.-Y como hacen Uds. así en su casa para mantener la cultura?

Bueno en el caso de nosotros o sea que uno de nuestros objetivos es fortalecer nuestra identidad cultural dentro de los objetivos de nosotros esta eso. Pero en el caso del estado de Chiapas donde yo vivo casi que la mayoría no lo pierden pues, sus culturas su forma de vestir. Pero algunos sí en cuanto los jóvenes que si no lo quieren reconocer sus formas de vestir o hablar. Ellos se sienten muy grande y hacen discriminar a otros que nunca han olvidado sus formas. Así se esta perdiendo en cuanto a los jóvenes que si ya no quieren aprender de sus padres. O sea, que no quieren ponerse todo lo que es el traje, pues. Eso se esta viendo, pues, para fortalecer y no dejarlo. Es

not enough because we don't have enough thread to weave more. What we don't loose is our way of speaking. We still speak in the same way and we can't loose that. Well, in the case of our traditional dress, you can see that many people don't wear it because they do not have thread or a place where they can get money to buy it. When we go back to Guatemala we will be able to make them again because the plants grow there and we are from there and we have a right to wear that dress there. They sell the thread there and we can weave and most people wear their dress there. Some people here can't get thread and still they make an effort not to loose their dress even if it is with only one set.

What do you do at home to maintain your culture?

Well in our case one of our objectives is to strengthen our cultural identity. In the case of Chiapas the state where I live most people do not loose their culture and their way of dressing.

Some do loose their culture especially young people who do not want to recognize their dress or their language. They feel they are very big and they discriminate others who have not forgotten their ways. This is a way that we are loosing because young people do not want to learn from their parents anymore. That means they do not want to wear what is their traditional dress. That is what we are looking into so that we can strengthen it and not leave it

bueno aprender así a hablar el castellano pero no se deben terminar todas las costumbres o las forma de vestir que tienen cada persona." -Carla.

behind. It is good to learn to speak Spanish like this but we can't cut off the customs or the ways of dressing that each person has." -Carla.

Carla discusses the impoverishment that has occurred as a result of the situation of refuge. While she is clear to emphasize that a destruction of material culture does not denote a destruction of culture itself she does put forth an association between poverty and cultural deterioration. In Carla's discussion of traditional wear she is redefining for herself the elements of ethnic identity. The dress is not what is important, rather ethnic identity is based on the knowledge of weaving and the maintenance of indigenous languages in conjunction with learning and functioning in Spanish. Thus, for the indigenous refugee population a **castellanización** does not entail an incorporation into the national culture. Rather, ethnic identity having stood the test of near-total physical destruction is strong and able to use aspects of national culture for its own ends.

C. The Government Father- The Meeting of Gender and Ethnic Relations:

The loss of confidence in government authority is one of the most important changes in the world vision of indigenous peasants. As seen in chapter two, Don Pedro understood of the marginalization of indigenous peasants even prior to the crisis of the 1980s. However, it is not until after the crisis that the implicit trust in the plausibly benevolent intentions of the paternalistic elites was broken. In exile, trust in government was lost as a result of violent counterinsurgency policies. The loss of confidence in government authority puts forth an interesting metaphor where changing gender and ethnic relations intersect. The father-child metaphor discussed below will show just one of the areas in which different social relations intersect and

intertwine.

In the account that follows, Marcela uses a commonly used father metaphor for the Guatemalan government. However, her perception of the government father was radically changed by the unnecessary punishment of exile.

"Nos dimos cuenta que no podíamos reunirnos porque el gobierno nos tenía bajo su control. Nos desanimamos, pues.

El gobierno decía, pues, que no tenía porque vernos haciendo cosas- como éramos sus hijos. El es el papá de todos los que somos Guatemaltecos y todo lo que el dice lo tenemos que respetar. Así nos tuvo, pues.

Nos dominó mucho. Nos controló para que no pudiéramos hacer nada... por eso no nos organizamos y no pudimos reclamar nuestros derechos en el país y el nos hizo lo que quiso y hasta que nos hizo correr y nos sacó del país. Eso es lo que hemos pensado nosotros. Que es igual a que nuestros papas se peleen con nosotros y nos pegan y nos golpean y nos corren de la casa. Así nos hizo el gobierno nos sacó del país. Porque aquí empezábamos a analizar cómo era posible que el Gobierno nos hubiera dominado. El gobierno es una persona y nosotros también lo somos. Nosotros ahora creemos que podemos levantarnos y así empezó a nacer la organización." - Marcela

"We realized that we couldn't meet because the government had us under its control. We lost our morale.

The government said that it shouldn't see us doing things- you know, as if we were its children. He is the father of all Guatemalans and we have to respect everything that he says. It made us feel like that.

It dominated us a lot. It controlled us so that we couldn't do anything... so that is why we didn't organize and we couldn't ask for our rights within the country. He did what he wanted with us. He even kicked us out and chased us out of the country. That is what we have thought. It is the same as when our parents fight with us and they hit us and hurt us and kick us out of the house. That is what the government did when it kicked us out of the country. Here we have begun to analyze how it was possible for the government to dominate us. The government is a person and we are also people. Now we believe that we can get up and that is how the organization was born here." -Marcela.

Two aspects of Marcela's account are worth noting. The first is the emphasis that Marcela makes on process of violent estrangement mirroring the father-child relationship with the relationship of

the Guatemalan government and the refugees. Here it is the father's abuse of power that enables him to wield his command, but also subsequently induce the rebellion of his child. As a result of the process of estrangement, Marcela realizes that the government and the people that are governed are of equal status: both are groups of individuals and neither have inherently superior powers.

Second, for Marcela the government's abuse of power is comparable to paternal relations in her society. She presents us with the metaphor of familial relationships- the government is the father and we are the children- and assumes that we can recognize and accept the existence of the codes that maintain the paternal relationship. She doesn't challenge the inequality of the father child relationship and only uses it to make the interviewer understand her perception of government actions. Marcela uses familial relations in which gender relations are played out as a pre-established category through which violent or unjust actions are commonly explained or represented. This argument is supported by the following comment explaining the government's treatment of refugees.

"Está haciéndonos como si fuéramos chamaquitos. Nos dá un dulce y nos conformamos con eso. No quiere que vayamos a reclamar lo que ha hecho antes. Toda la represión y la impunidad que tienen. No se ha castigado a los responsables. Fíjate lo que nos da coraje ahorita: Ese Rios Montt diputado otra vez ahora." - Francisca

He is treating us as if we were children. He gives us candy and we are happy with that. He doesn't want us to go and find out what he did before. All the repression that they are responsible for and all the impunity that they have. Those responsible have not been punished. You know what gets us mad now? Rios Montt is in congress again." -Francisca.

Francisca continues to view the government as a paternalistic figure. As in Marcela's account, the government is represented by Francisca as a parent figure, but without legitimacy. The

establishment of paternalistic relations in Guatemala between the urban elites and the rural indigenous population is not new and it has served for centuries to maintain the marginalization of these populations. Implicit in Francisca's account is a change in the attitude towards paternalistic relations. Francisca demonstrates her resistance to the imposed father-child relationship between the government and the people it aims to govern.

Francisca's account leads us to explore why the government's use of gender relations to perpetrate and legitimize violence is no longer accepted by its subjects. For Francisca, it is the government who insists on the use of established paternal relations with its subjects. The use of gender relations by governments to perpetrate and legitimize injustices has been studied in the case of Nazi Germany by Gisela Block in "Equality and Difference in National Socialist Racism". According to Block, Nazi race policy used widespread gender roles perceptions to develop genocidal policies that specifically targeted women (1992:101).

While this is not necessarily the case in Guatemala there are similarities with the Nazi example that are worth mentioning. Both cases show that if gender relations are accepted as cultural norms they will not be challenged when used in the political sphere. Nazi propaganda's success rested in the fact that it struck a cord with established cultural norms. This agreement allowed for potentially controversial political policies to prosper. Block reminds us that two thirds of the German Jews killed in concentration camps were women (1992:103). To legitimize this specific violence against women, the Nazi regime played on established conceptions of women as the creators and reproducers of peoples. According to Himmler's propaganda, it was precisely these members of the inferior races that should be destroyed in order to ensure the triumph of Germanic peoples in the natural race struggle of the National Socialist vision (1992:104). Block tells

us that while German society did not favour killing women, it did understand that women in all races were the main keepers of culture.

The Guatemalan government aims to identify itself with the established unquestionable authority of the patriarch in traditional Hispanic cultures. As such, its violent actions would be legitimized in principle as patriarchal wisdom that cannot be challenged by its children. What was not expected was that there would be opposition to traditional ethnic and gender roles as it has occurred in the refugee population. The challenge to government authority cemented in an implicit challenge to established gender roles and ethnic relations is a key change in the world view of indigenous peasants and in the social relations of the refugee society. In this example refugees are reacting simultaneously to challenge two established relations: the marginalization of indigenous peoples and the predominant power of the father figure. Challenging these established authorities is a prime example of the reactive conscience that is built throughout the refugee experience. In redefining their values and cultural norms, adaptations are made in order to redefine identities and select those adaptations that are best suited to survive and prosper in the refugee situation.

In Guatemala, women are reacting negatively to the father-child relationship primarily in its metaphoric level. However, exile did induce real changes in cultural norms from which a first criticism of paternalistic relations has begun. This change in cultural perception is not a simplistic rejection of paternalistic relations altogether. Rather, it is a first step towards rethinking gender relations at all levels. As will be seen in the chapter that follows, many of the changes in gender relations begin with the increased political conscience of refugee women and are only later internalized into familial or personal restructurings.

Endnotes to Chapter 4:

"Multiethnic" refers to the varied ethnic origins of the refugees in Mexico. It refers to both peoples of Mayan descent and peoples of mixed indigenous and Spanish descent.

Catalina. Interview. October 1994.

Field notes. Campeche, 1994.

According to United Nations sources, their second multi-annual programme beginning in 1989 and ending in 1992 allowed the resident populations in the refugee camps located in Campeche and Quintana Roo to attain self-sufficiency (UNHCR, Appendix 14). As self-sufficient settlements, the camp residents were no longer entitled to United Nations food aid. As a result, when crops failed both in 1993 and 1994, many of the residents of Quetzal Edzná had to borrow beans and corn for seeds and food from the Mexican Commission for the Aid of Refugees (COMAR). This debt has placed a financial burden on many refugees since the loan in kind must be repaid in cash from the next crop harvest that are usually insufficient, even for family subsistence.

Signing an amnesty entailed for the repatriated refugee the acceptance of criminal responsibility for acts committed prior to exile. This admission of guilt was apparently of limited value since an official pardon for criminal activity was issued simultaneously. The amnesty charges included conspiring against the Guatemalan state through members of insurgent military organizations.

The Central American Report in August of 1992 claims that repatriations were difficult because government officials did not provide aid to those repatriated and resettled them in areas where they were not willing to go. Newspaper reports from Guatemalan sources deny these claims.

Interview with Refugee Representatives, October 1994.

The return to El Quetzal of over 2 000 people took place from April 5th to April 17th, 1995 when they arrived by plane in Guatemala and stopped in Tikal for a cultural event before proceeding to the cooperative (La Republica, Lunes 10 de Abril, 1995:7).

Both the refugee camps and the returnee communities are self-defined as multiethnic because they are made up of a number of ethnic groups including K'ekchi, Tzotzil, Jacalteco, Mam, K'iche, Chuj, K'akchiquel, Ixil and ladinos or mestizos (Catalina, 1995:3).

CCPP representative. Personal interview, October 10th, 1994.

The funds for the purchase of the agricultural cooperative 'El Quetzal' were made possible by the Fund for Productive Labour Reinsertion (FORELAP) and it was administered by the International Organization for Migrations (OIM) (Siglo Veintiuno, 10 de marzo, 1995). The fund that provides refugees access to land has been

plemented through bilateral non-refundable contributions. Among these is Japanese contribution of 3.8 million U.S. dollars (Siglo Veintiuno, 29 de marzo, 1995).

Ixmucane and Ispiyacoc are two ancestral mythical figures from the Mayan Pantheon.

In planning the return to Guatemala, the refugee communities aim to train and organize skilled and trained persons who would be responsible for establishing and running a school, a health facility, women's income development projects, and the urbanization of the central settlement area. Additionally, the refugees plan to establish advocacy and services particularly in the area of land reform and recuperation. These services and institutions are projected to serve not only the returnee population, but also the already established populations in the surrounding areas. The returnee school at the returned community of El Quetzal was opened in May 1995 and is serving the former refugee children and children from surrounding settlements. (Information obtained through personal interviews at the Vertiente Norte's General Assembly in December, 1994, in a private meeting between refugee representatives and Canadian Development and Peace in December, 1994, and through information obtained from the Centro de Apoyo a Refugiados.)

"Because now more than ever the return is a struggle and not a resignation".

"What would you like others to know about your experience as a refugee?"

Daphne Patai describes the use of the past in view of the future in her analysis of a woman's narration by a Brazilian woman. She posits that in the woman's story a her narrative is made to "respond to her situation in a positive way and create a self that confronts the conditions of her life" (1988:2). Patai describes the woman's story as an adaptation in view of her present. I would argue that an individual's effort to adapt is a self that incorporates not only her reaction to the present, but, constantly, her hopes towards the future.

"And what do you consider yourself to be?"

Refer to Map 3.

In 1992 two new camps were established in Campeche: Keste and Los Laureles. More than 50% of the population of the original camps, Maya Tecun and Quetzal Edzná, moved to these new settlements. When asked about why they moved to the new settlements the people who were interviewed mentioned the need to follow their group of ethnic regional origin.

A similar process is seen in the aftermath of the 1930s Chaco war in Bolivia. The situation of war radically altered the world view of the soldiers who participated in the ranks. During this war individuals from different ethnic groups and social classes participated together in a war that had a

"nationalizing effect on the conscience of the Bolivian

population. The prolonged contact between combatants of indigenous and criollo-mestizo origin from all of the country's regions, in the the forced democracy of the trenches resulted in a new critical conscience with regards to the country's unresolved problems, and a sharpening of a social conscience" (Rivera Cusicanqui, 1986:45).

The Guatemalan experience is comparable to the Bolivian process of conscience nationalization, described by sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, that resulted from the meeting and cohabitation in exile of peoples from very different regional and ethnic backgrounds. As with the Bolivian case, in Guatemala this forced union is destined to result in a rethinking of state-individual relations, ethnic ascriptions and class associations and definitions.

The Peace Process began in Guatemala after the signing of a bilateral agreement in Madrid, Spain, between the Guatemalan government and URNG representatives in 1996. After this agreement, several negotiations between the aforementioned parties followed to ensure a military ceasefire. Parallel to these negotiations, popular organizations began to play a role in the restructuring of Guatemalan society through direct and indirect participation in the National Commission for Reconciliation (Aguilera et al., 1994:53).

The Societal Sectors Arising from Violence is a collection of popular organizations, including the Group of Mutual Support (GAM), the representatives of internally displaced persons (IDP), and the Council of Ethnic Communities - Runujel Junam (CEC) began to work together in 1991. Previously, the refugee representatives were part of the Commission of those Afflicted by Violence (Bastos, 1993:93).

According to Richard Adams language is not only an important marker of ethnicity but it is also a cognitive framework and a tool for self expression (1991:191). It is not surprising that women use language learning as a metaphor for the process of changing ethnic relations.

"Castilla" is a term often used by indigenous people interviewed to mean Spanish.

Many women speak of the processes of learning Spanish as "cuando aprendimos", or before they spoke Spanish "antes supieramos hablar".

It is necessary to qualify this statement limiting it strictly to the refugee population. Within the Mayan struggle for the respect of ethnic identities in institutional and social contexts, the recognition and proliferation of Mayan languages is a key demand. The Guatemalan Academy of Mayan Languages (ALMG), since its creation, has as its main purpose the development of Mayan languages as the mechanism to achieve a recuperation of indigenous identity (Bastos, 1993:151).

Are you still making your traditional dress or don't you make it anymore?