



THE PROBLEMS OF A DIVIDED SOCIETY  
THE CONFLICTING CULTURES OF GUATEMALA

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All good people agree,  
And all good people say,  
All nice people, like Us, are We  
And every one else is They:  
But if you cross over the sea,  
Instead of over the way,  
You may end by (think of it!) looking on We  
As only a sort of They!

*Rudyard Kipling*

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## ABSTRACT

Guatemala is a country with a very special problem. It has two distinct cultures: the Indian and the Latin. These peoples have different backgrounds, and their cultures differ greatly. They are a people largely misunderstood.

The Latins are the controlling class. They are the businessmen, the landowners, and the political leaders. They feel that they are socially superior to the Indians.

The Indians are the suppressed portion of the society. They make up the labor force. They are the farmers and the producers of textiles. They are dependent on the Latins for legal rights, although they receive far fewer real rights than the Latins receive. Most Indians are poorly educated, and they find it difficult to compete with the educated Latins in Spanish. This condition of suppression and exploitation is reason for resentment toward the Latins.

Indians and Latins live together in the same towns. Indians and Latins who are neighbors may become very good friends, but the Indian seldom has the desire to abandon his culture and adopt the Latin ways. They also refuse to give up their Indian tongue in exchange for Spanish. While they may learn Spanish and speak it among the Latins, they continue to speak their native tongue among members of the in-group.

The culture of the Indians continues, despite predictions that it would merge with the Latin culture and die out. Their language, dress, and other cultural inheritances are too much a part of them to leave behind.

# THE PROBLEMS OF A DIVIDED SOCIETY

## THE CONFLICTING CULTURES OF GUATEMALA

### I. INTRODUCTION

Guatemala is a land of enchantment. It is enchanting because of its ancient ruins, its beautiful mountains, and its crystal-blue lakes-- but most of all because of its people. But it is sad to say that Guatemalans are largely not understood, even among themselves.

The country has two major cultures: the Indian and the Latin. These cultures differ greatly, even though they are found in the same country, and often within the same town. They may be confusing and lead to many misconceptions if they are not appreciated and understood properly. Those who interact with the people of Guatemala often make social and cultural blunders because they do not adequately understand the people. Even those who have lived in Guatemala for some time are often surprisingly ignorant of some basic cultural facts.

This paper discusses several cultural issues that are of benefit to anyone who wants to understand Guatemalans. These observations are the result of years of research and experience by psychologists, sociologists, statisticians, Guatemalans themselves, missionaries, visitors, and myself.

### II. THE PEOPLE OF GUATEMALA

The people of Guatemala are either Indians or Latins. The Indians are the descendants of the pre-Colombian inhabitants of America who have not adopted the characteristic features of the modern Western world.

Latins are simply non-Indians. These include descendants of the Spanish conquistadores who intermarried with Indians, and also Indians who have abandoned their native tongue, dress, and ceremonial observances, who have learned Spanish, and perhaps have moved away from the Indian community to a larger town. The distinction of the Indian and the Latin is more dependant on cultural characteristics than on racial features.<sup>1</sup>

These two peoples stand in a dependency relationship. The whites are dependent on the Indians for simple artifacts, for work, and raw products from their farms. The Indians are dependent on the whites for legal rights, for education, and many manufactured articles. They are in a mutually beneficial relationship, with the whites being largely parasitic on the labors of the Indians. This arrangement, involving dependency and exploitation, understandably produces great anxiety and resentment.<sup>2</sup>

### III. THE INDIAN

Indians are descendants of the powerful ruling nobility, the ancient mighty warriors, artists, and astronomers of the pre-Colombian American Indian empires who were destroyed by the Spanish conquest. It was only the common people who survived. During the 400 years since that time, they have survived unrelenting oppression which has led to a new way of life.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Whetten, Guatemala, the Land and the People, pp. 44-46.

<sup>2</sup>Nida, Communication of the Gospel in Latin America, pp. 54-55.

<sup>3</sup>For a complete history of the Indian, see Kelsey and Osborne, Four Keys to Guatemala, pp. 17-18; Whetten, pp. 44-48; and Introduction to Guatemala.

The Indian is very formal in his relationships with people outside his culture. His social relationships are impersonal, and outsiders are considered a threat to the closed Indian community. Indians consider respect for their elders to be a very important quality. The simple way of life is considered the best. Work is honorable and desirable. Indians are industrious and are not wasteful. Not keeping one's word is a cardinal sin to them. Gossip is also frowned upon, but indulged in to a great extent.<sup>4</sup> Their life style is guided by custom and tradition. Few know why; all know they should.

#### IV. THE LATIN

The Latins are, for the most part, the upper class. They are the businessmen, the owners, and the controllers. They own most of the land, being the descendants of the Spanish *conquistadores* who took possession of the whole of Guatemala. They do little manual work and have more actual rights than the Indian. The Latin society lacks the close traditional integration of the tribal Indian society.

The Latin is characterized by his emphasis on personal relations. Friendships are very important to him and are used as a way to gain influence and prestige. The Latin is sensitive, often touchy, changeable, and concerned with his own position and reputation. He is hospitable. Guatemalan Latins feel that they are socially superior to the Indians and seldom question the fact.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Emery, Protestantism in Guatemala, pp. 6/20-6/23.

<sup>5</sup>Emery, p. 6/17.

V. LANGUAGE

Spanish is the official language of Guatemala. It is the language of government, politics, legal contracts, and newspapers, but it is not spoken by all the people in the country, nor is it the mother tongue of about half of them. In Guatemala, there are about 20 Indian languages, of which there are about 45 dialects.<sup>6</sup> The Latins speak Spanish and the Indians speak one of the Indian dialects.

Many of the Indians can carry on a simple conversation in Spanish, however, even though it is not their mother tongue. Of those that can speak Spanish, their vocabulary is very limited, and many of the Spanish words they use have different semantic meanings for them than they do for the Latins. A survey by G. W. Hill and M. Gollas of the Land Tenure Center at the University of Wisconsin suggests that 86 percent of the male Indians can speak Spanish as well as the Indian dialect, while only 29 percent of the women can speak Spanish.<sup>7</sup>

This diversity of language causes many problems in communication and widens the gap between the Latins and the Indians. Language is a model of culture. Eugene A. Nida said, "Language is not only a part of human activity, it is the most characteristic feature of human behavior, and the possession of distinct languages is certainly one of the most obvious features which distinguish human cultures."<sup>8</sup> "If languages are a part and a mechanism of culture, they are also, in a sense, a model

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<sup>6</sup> Seminario de Integración Social, "Mapa de las Lenguas Indígenas Actuales de Guatemala."

<sup>7</sup> Hill, The Minifundia Economy and Society of the Guatemalan Highland Indian, p. 71. See Appendix A.

<sup>8</sup> Nida, Custom and Culture, p. 211.

of culture."<sup>9</sup> These language differences between the Indians and the Latins, then, reflect the differences in their cultures. This also leads to estrangement through lack of communication.<sup>10</sup>

Both Latins and Indians use some sign language in their speech. This consists of gestures made with the hands and other parts of the body.<sup>11</sup>

## VI. DRESS

One of the world's most outstanding folk arts are the costumes and textiles of the Guatemalan Indian. There are about 275 different costumes in Guatemala.<sup>12</sup> This is the everyday attire of the Indians and is distinct in every Indian town. You can determine where an Indian is from by his dress. This gives the Indians a sense of value and identity. It also distinguishes them from the Latins. There is basically no difference between the dress of a Guatemalan Latin and someone from the United States.

For the Indian, the traditional village dress is distinct from that of other villages by the colors, designs and patterns, or by the way of wearing the clothing.<sup>13</sup> Traditionally, the Indian women weave their own huipil (comparable to a blouse, it is a square piece of cloth with a hole cut for the head, and joined under the arms). The huipil is the most distinctive feature of the dress. Having no set rules to work by

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<sup>9</sup>Nida, Custom and Culture, p. 213.

<sup>10</sup>For a further discussion, see "The Relation of Language on Cognitive Processes", an unpublished paper by Larry Richman, March 1977. It includes a useful bibliography.

<sup>11</sup>See Appendix B for a glossary of some of this sign language.

<sup>12</sup>Fergusson, Guatemala, p. 152.

<sup>13</sup>Muñoz, Guatemala Ancient and Modern, pp. 171-209.

other than their own memory, they will weave in old tribal symbols and colors. The more modern huipils carry embroidered designs of flowers, birds, and animals.

As a rule, the clothing is heavy and modest. In Patzicía, San Martín Jilotepeque, and other cold places, an extra huipil will be worn for warmth. The huipils, skirts, belts, and sashes are all symbolic-- the meaning of which has been forgotten in most cases.<sup>14</sup>

The skirts have no doubt maintained their originality throughout the ages. They are of varying lengths: short, to knee length (as in Chichicastenango and Zunil); half-way down the calf (as in Sacapulas and Palín Soloá); long, to the ankle (as in Totonicapán, Nahualá, and San Antonio Aguas Calientes); or long, to heels (as in Santa María Chiquimula, San Pedro La Laguna, and Santiago Atitlán). Some are overlapped in the front (El Quiché), overlapped on the side (San Antonio Aguas Calientes), overlapped on the back (Palín), twisted and rolled around the waist (Santiago Atitlán, Nahualá), or even pleated (Xelajú, Cobán, Senahú Alta Verapáz). In Todos Santos, the sash overlaps to form an extra three-quarter skirt.<sup>15</sup>

Women often wear colored cloth twisted and braided in the hair. In Chichicastenango, the women wear one single strand of black wool twisted tight around the braid of hair. In Cobán, the colored cloth is worn in turban style around the head.<sup>16</sup>

The dress of the men is usually not as traditional or as distinctive as that of the women. Many Indian men have adopted the Latin way of dress: a shirt and trousers. In some of the villages, however, the

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<sup>14</sup>Muñoz, pp. 171-209.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*

traditional dress for the men is still used. In Patzún and Sololá, for example, the men wear heavy woolen aprons over their long pants. The pants may be of varied lengths, designs, and colors. In Todos Santos, the trousers are stripped. In Santiago Atitlán, the trousers are only knee-length, and are stripped purple and white. The men in all towns almost always wear a hat, which is used to keep off the hot sun during the day, and is worn as a matter of habit at night. They are usually an inexpensive factory-made variety. There are also ceremonial hats, such as those in Sololá and Chichicastenango, which are made of black tinted palm-leaf with a flower-embroidered black ribbon which dangles from the hat.<sup>17</sup>

Some wear native shirts, such as in Almolonga. Others wear capes, such as in Todos Santos. Some men fold a piece of cloth crossways, roll it, and tie it around their hats, such as in Nahualá. In Todos Santos, San Pablo La Laguna, and San Antonio Palopó, the men roll a piece of cloth and tie it around their heads.<sup>18</sup> Nearly all Indians wear sandals. They are often crude and home-made, but in some towns are quite elaborate works of art.

Some towns have typical coats, such as the short ones in Sololá, or the long ones of Aguacatán. The coats of San Pedro Sacatapéquez are as red as those of a hotel bellhop.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

VII. MACHISMO-HEMBRISMO

All cultures have a masculine-feminine opposition. In Latin America, however, this contrast has assumed unusually dramatic dimensions. It is probably more accentuated in Mexico than in other parts of Latin America, but it holds true among the Latins in Guatemala nonetheless. As Abelardo Villegas<sup>20</sup> has said, the average Mexican may regard the European as having more culture, the North American as having more money, but the Mexican as being more masculine. The Spanish term for this is *machismo*, which comes from the word *macho*. This Don Juan complex manifests itself in many ways: the number of women a man has "conquered", the quality of his mistresses, and his role as the supreme head of his household.<sup>21</sup>

This strong emphasis on *machismo* inevitably produces the complementary *hembrismo*, or extreme female subjection. This calls for the female to be passive, enduring, and self-sacrificing. This does not mean that the females are puppets. Latin women are often quite strong-willed and manage to dominate, though usually not overtly, within their passive role. Today they are finding themselves able to compete in the business world much more than they have been able to do in the past.<sup>22</sup>

*Machismo*, although indicating male dominance, also implies considerable dependence on females. They constitute the stage on which the male acts out his dominant role. A lack of sexual fulfillment becomes almost a disgrace for a Latin man or woman. For the male, it means a lack of proper self-expression, and he feels that he has somehow cheated the world

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<sup>20</sup> See Abelardo Villegas, La filosofía de lo mexicano (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1960), p. 126.

<sup>21</sup> Nida, Communication, pp. 115-129.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

of his potentiality. For the woman, lack of sexual fulfillment is practically immoral, for she has deprived the male of his rights to self-expression.<sup>23</sup>

The male's aggressiveness towards women is based on a double standard. The male who "conquers" women is never considered debased by the women he conquers. On the other hand, a woman once conquered is regarded as contaminated.<sup>24</sup>

*Machismo* also leads to isolation. The male cannot expose himself by confessing his problems, for to do so would expose his dominant role and make his weaknesses evident. He certainly cannot confess this to a woman. This is why males frequently prefer the companionship of males rather than of females, congregating in bars and in parks to brag of their conquests without danger of being exposed.<sup>25</sup>

On the social level, *machismo* may express itself as aggressiveness towards society in the form of crimes. Gangs of young boys often are found robbing, indulging in Don Juan escapades, jeering and escaping from authorities, and showing an emphasis on *machismo* values in dress, speech, and actions. *Machismo* also emerges as loud speech, arguments, and exaggerated and absurd humor.<sup>26</sup>

Another social aspect of *machismo* is the strong judgement against homosexuality. Anything effeminate about a man is laughed at by men and women alike. Although there may be a good deal of latent homosexuality in Latin America, it is not expressed to the extent that it is in North America.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

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

Most Indians are not bothered with this *machismo-hembrismo* dichotomy. For the Indians, marriage is a "continuous interdependence of complementary roles. Moreover, marriage itself is looked upon as economic cooperation more than as sexual conquest...."<sup>28</sup>

#### VIII. RELIGION

To be Latin is to be Catholic. About 90 percent of all Latins are Catholic.<sup>29</sup> Latin America was settled by the Spanish and Portuguese who brought Catholicism to this area of the world. At that time, the Church and State were one and the same. Even though this is no longer true, it is so much a part of their history and heritage that even those who are not Catholic today follow many Catholic customs, such as funeral traditions, the use of religious pictures in the home, and the observance of religious holidays.<sup>30</sup>

Before anyone can truly understand the significance of religion in Latin America, he must first appreciate some of the traditional features of the Latin Roman Catholic church. Dr. María Bermúdez<sup>31</sup> has bluntly stated the basic characteristics of traditional religion as being magic and superstition for the peasant, a matter of convenience for the middle class, and a source of boastful display for the rich. Emphasis on the role of the Virgin Mary, preoccupation with the function of the saints, and an almost morbid preoccupation with symbols of death have left many

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<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>29</sup>Latin America, p. 15.

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

<sup>31</sup>See María Elvira Bermúdez, La Vida familiar del Mexicano (Mexico City: Antigua Librería Robredo, 1955), p. 115.

in the Catholic church with only empty forms.<sup>32</sup>

For them, the figure of Christ has traditionally been a symbol either of death or of a small child dependent on the care of his mother. As a symbol of death, they cannot identify with him, and as a child, it tends to focus attention to his mother Mary who cares for him and by implication is prepared to care for all believers.<sup>33</sup>

It is no wonder that the Mary symbol has become a psychological necessity in the Catholic church, because people need a symbol of life. Their symbol of life is the mother Mary, the mediator between them and an omnipotent God, a reflection of the role of the Latin mother as a mediator between her children and their stern father.<sup>34</sup>

The dominant figure of traditional Roman Catholicism in Latin America is the female symbol of the interceding Virgin, not the masculine symbol of the living Christ. The Virgin is also the symbol of the ideal mother who bears her children without having been conquered. The Virgin symbolizes an emotional attachment to her son, and not to her husband, just as the Latin mother is often more attached to her own loyal son, and not to her wayward husband.<sup>35</sup>

Men identify the Virgin with their own mother, the intercessor with their stern father, and the emotional stability of the home. In discussions with most Latins, you can "readily challenge almost any doctrine of the Roman Catholic church without producing any special reaction, but even persons who are strongly anticlerical often react

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<sup>32</sup>Nida, Communication, p. 83.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 17-25.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 135.

almost violently to any statement which seems to belittle the role of the Virgin."<sup>36</sup>

"To say that the vast majority of the population is Roman Catholic, however, implies a uniformity within the nation that does not actually exist."<sup>37</sup> Today Catholicism and paganism are so well blended in Guatemala that it is difficult to separate one from the other. Religion permeates all aspects of a Guatemalan's life: politics, social life, personal affairs, vocation, etc.<sup>38</sup>

Religion is also extremely local. Each town has its own adaptation of what they feel religion should be. Prayers, myths, legends, and celebrations differ from town to town. Each city has its own patron saint, and the day he is honored is a holiday for everyone in the town. Catholics and non-Catholics alike join in the celebration. Guatemala celebrates many times more holidays during the year than does the United States. Most of these are religious celebrations.<sup>39</sup>

Many Indians still practice idol worship and witchery. Many climb a hill near Chichicastenango each day to worship rock idol-gods. Witches are common in every town, and the people are very cautious not to offend a known witch lest she practice black magic on them. They are reported to work a great deal of black magic. There are also many witch doctors to whom Indians will take sick family members to be healed. They often heal through the use of herbs or magic.

There are more Latin leaders in the churches than Indian leaders.

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<sup>36</sup>*Ibid*, pp. 135-136

<sup>37</sup>Whetten, p. 286.

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

<sup>39</sup>Latin America, pp. 15-16.

This is another source of conflict between the races.<sup>40</sup> Latins are reluctant to relinquish any position of importance to an Indian, for to do so would relinquish the Latin's individual position and status, and would go against his belief that he is socially superior to the Indians. This is why many towns have both Latin and Indian churches. The Catholic churches are run almost entirely by Latins. Indians have formed break-off groups of the Catholic church which they run themselves. These are usually a mixture of Catholicism and Protestantism.

Latins are usually quite touchy and offend easily if they are not treated with the respect they feel is proper.<sup>41</sup> Religiously, the Latin male is not as active or concerned with religion as is his wife. The men typically attend church on special occasions and holidays. The Latin women often make up the fanatic fringe of Catholicism.<sup>42</sup> Among the Indians, however, religion is chiefly the concern of the males.

Advancement in the church for the Indians is based on experience, wisdom, and faithfulness. Among the Latins, church positions are usually a result of being born into the right family. The Indian protestant leaders bear strong resemblances to the roles of the Indian tribal leaders in the Indian communities.<sup>43</sup> Gossip is also frowned upon, but it is very prevalent nonetheless.<sup>44</sup>

Besides the traditional Catholic church, there are several protestant religious groups. Appendix C is a map of Guatemala showing the general populations of these groups. In addition to these, there are many

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<sup>40</sup> Emery, p. 6/18.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6/19.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6/21.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6/22-6/23.

thousands of members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, as well as members of other non-protestant denominations.

Many of the funeral customs followed by Latins and Indians alike have Catholic beginnings. The night before the burial, friends will go to the house of the deceased to burn candles, pray, and be of support to the surviving family during the entire night. Food and beverages are served to the guests. Intoxicating beverages are often served to relieve the grief, and before the night is over, the people often become quite intoxicated.

The Indians will often hold several funeral services at the home of the deceased. Food and beverages are served at each of these meetings. They will often place in the coffin some of the deceased's personal belongings for use in the next life.

A funeral procession accompanies the deceased to the Catholic church for a ceremony, if the deceased or his family are Catholic. The procession will then continue to the cemetery. Those that can afford to build a sepulcher will bury their dead above ground. The poorer people are buried below ground.

#### IX. MARRIAGE

The majority of the couples living in marital union have either never gone through a civil ceremony, or have lived together a number of years before being legally married.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>See Whetten, p. 244.

The traditional Catholic church places a stigma on divorce. Because of this, obtaining a legal divorce in Guatemala is a very costly, lengthy, and difficult process. Therefore, many Latins simply do not legally marry. Later, if they decide to break the union and "marry" someone else, there are no legal problems involved.

No more Indians are legally married than Latins, although for different reasons. Many of the Indians believe that the civil ceremony is merely a legal prerequisite to a church wedding. Priests are sometimes scarce in the remote Indian villages, and they charge for the ceremony. Some isolated areas have traditional rituals which give local recognition to the union of the couple. These have more meaning to the Indian than a civil ceremony or even a church wedding. The government, and often the church, is so remote to them that official recognition of marital status actually means very little.<sup>46</sup>

Marriage in Guatemala, then, may take place in one of three ways: by a civil ceremony, either with or without a church wedding, by rituals performed according to local traditions, or by common-law unions.<sup>47</sup>

In 1947, a legislative decree made it possible for a couple living in a common-law union to have it legalized by local authorities. They could do so after having lived together as man and wife for three years. The law states that Indians who have been so united through traditional rituals need not wait the three years. The number of people availing themselves of this right has increased, but the percentage of unions which are not legal is still very high. In 1954, 17.9 percent of all legally recognized marriages were previously these de facto unions.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>For a further discussion of the subject, see Couffon, El Problema Social del Indígena, pp. 67-69.

<sup>47</sup>Whetten, p. 240.

<sup>48</sup>See Dirección General de Estadísticas, Boletín mensual, 56 (1955), pp. 2-3.

Because of the large number of common-law marriages, an overwhelming majority of the children born in Guatemala are technically illegitimate. But this classification does not carry the same social implications that it does in the United States.<sup>49</sup>

For the most part, young Guatemalans may chose their own spouses. This is particularly true among the Latins. There are cases where the parents chose mates for their children, but in such cases, they take into consideration the wishes of their children.

Among the Indians, when a young man decides to marry, he will sometimes call on a spokesman, one who is respected in the village for his persuasive prowess in speaking, to go to the father of the bride-to-be to ask permission for the marriage to take place. If the husband receives a plot of ground from his father as an inheritance at the time of the union, he will build and live there. However, newly united couples will often live at the home of the husband's family for the first few years and later establish a home of their own.

The common age for men to marry in Guatemala is in their early 20's, and for the girls, it is about 15-19.<sup>50</sup> Appendix D is a table showing marriages in Guatemala for urban and rural populations and for Indians and Latins.

#### X. FAMILY LIFE

Ideally, the Latin father is the supreme head of the household, but in reality, the mother is the real emotional center of the family. The

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<sup>49</sup>Whetten, p. 247.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 244.

father has the authority, although he may not always carry the responsibility for the support of the family. Thus in many poor Latin households, there may be a succession of men and the mother is left as the only stabilizing force for the family.<sup>51</sup>

"So acute becomes the difference between the real and ideal roles in the family structure that many wives simply do not expect love and marriage to be synonymous--a fact cynically expressed in the saying: *Que mi marido me dé a mí los pesos, y a otra los besos* 'Let my husband give the money to me, and the kisses to someone else'.<sup>52</sup> There is probably no less marital infidelity in the United States, but it usually takes on different forms.

Family relationships are often much broader to Latins than to those from the United States. Their "family" not only includes mother, father, and children, but in a very real sense includes aunts and uncles, in-laws, grandparents, and even third and fourth cousins. They keep track of each other and are quite close. This system includes godparents and godchildren. In time of need, the family feels a social obligation to help their kin. In fact, the family may be the only place to turn in a crisis, as most of the Latin American governments have no welfare system as we know it in the United States. If someone in the extended family has a good job or a nice home, he considers it his obligation to share it with the rest of the extended family.<sup>53</sup>

In the upper-class Latin family, the wife has little other recourse to her husband's actions but to tolerate them. She tries to maintain an outward appearance of a united family, even if her husband is keeping a mistress or two on the side. Lower-class Latin wives and also Indian

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<sup>51</sup> Nida, Communicating, pp. 112-113.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>53</sup> Latin America, pp. 17-18.

wives have more recourse to their husbands' actions in that they play a bigger role in the economic organization of the family. Where as in the upper-class society all housework is performed by maids, in the lower class, the majority, if not all, of the work is done by the wife.<sup>54</sup>

The Indian family is generally not bothered with this conflict of the ideal and the real that exists in many Latin homes. The Indian wife typically has more say in the government of the family than does the Latin wife. Indian family ties are strong, although emotion and affection are not displayed in public, nor even among the intimate family. Indians generally do not move from the town where they are born, and therefore have many relatives in the small villages where they live. They also keep track of and care for their extended family. Indian men generally fulfill their responsibility toward the family, and provide an adequate father figure for the children. Respect for elders and family harmony are principles universally held among the Indians. Family problems are hidden when possible to give the appearance of harmony in the home.<sup>55</sup>

## XI. INJUSTICE

In 1923, Miguel Angel Asturias wrote a thesis on the social problem of the Guatemalan Indian, pointing out the injustices that have victimized the Indians.<sup>56</sup> In 1971, that thesis was reprinted by Claude Couffon entitled *El Problema Social del Indio*.<sup>57</sup> In a preface to this edition,

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<sup>54</sup>Whetten, pp. 255-256.

<sup>55</sup>Emery, pp. 6/20-6/21.

<sup>56</sup>*El Problema Social del Indio*, tesis por Miguel Angel Asturias, Guatemala, diciembre de 1923.

<sup>57</sup>See Couffon.

Miguel Angel Asturias stated that the situation of the Guatemalan Indian had not improved since that time.<sup>58</sup>

A study by the Comité Interamericano de Desarrollo Agrícola points out the injustices which have demoralized Indian life: social and economic exclusion, racial discrimination, fraud, and exclusion from government credit and technical aid programs.<sup>59</sup>

Article one of the Carta Magna establishes Guatemala as a free and independent republic, organized to assure its inhabitants freedom, liberty, well-being, and economic and social justice. But the Latin sector runs the government, controlling all the high government offices.<sup>60</sup> In Guatemala, a citizen does not have the confidence in the judicial system that citizens of the United States enjoy. The Guatemalan judicial system often favors those who are rich and influential. This is unfortunate for the Indians, who become the exploited through such a system.<sup>61</sup>

Before 1950, laws were made on the national level by Latins who seemed to have little appreciation for the problems of the Indian.<sup>62</sup> Recently, more legislation has been passed in favor of the Indian<sup>63</sup>, but it has not proved to help the Indian much.

For example, article 150 of the constitution reads that all Guatemalans are obligated to serve in the military of the country.<sup>64</sup> The statement

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>59</sup> Hill, pp. 68-69.

<sup>60</sup> Linares, El Problema Indígena en Guatemala en función de la democracia, pp. 32-35.

<sup>61</sup> Adams, Crucifixion by Power, p. 407.

<sup>62</sup> Whetten, p. 64.

<sup>63</sup> See Skinner-Klée, Legislación Indigenista de Guatemala, for a list of legislation passed in favor of the Indian.

<sup>64</sup> Linares, pp. 35-37.

implies equity and fairness; but today's army is composed of Indian soldiers, with Latins as officials and higher superiors.

In the Latin-oriented business world, the Guatemalan Indian finds it extremely hard, if not impossible, to get credit. A research paper by George Hill and Manuel Gollas of the Land Tenure Center at the University of Wisconsin states that the average cash costs of farm production were \$53 per farm. Only 19 percent of the farmers surveyed made use of credit, and the average value of credit advanced was \$16.<sup>65</sup>

## XII. LAND OWNERSHIP

Latins own most of the land and rent it to the Indians. Many Latins can live comfortably on the rent income from the land they own.

Among the Indians, land is usually acquired by inheritance.<sup>66</sup> The custom is that the father will divide up his land among his sons, and often among the daughters as well. This land will be given to his children as they reach adulthood, or at the death of the father. These transfers may or may not be legally registered.<sup>67</sup> About 90 percent of the Indians claim to own all or part of their land, but many of their documents are not valid.<sup>68</sup> Many own their farms because of rights recognized by the local mayor, family members, and local communities, but would not hold up in a court of law were the ownership ever challenged.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>Hill, p. 81.

<sup>66</sup>See Appendix E for a table listing manner of inheritance.

<sup>67</sup>Hill, p. 27.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 29-31.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*

Indians prize land ownership, but when obtained it is usually in separate plots so that no one will know how much land they actually own. Money and possessions are not flaunted, but are kept secret to avoid the envy of neighbors which may lead to the practice of black magic against them.<sup>70</sup>

### XIII. EDUCATION

In the urban centers of Guatemala, schools are plentiful: primary and secondary schools, universities, and other trade and technical schools. The majority of the schools are government sponsored, with lesser numbers of private and Catholic schools.<sup>71</sup> Education is good in the urban areas, which are mostly populated by Latins. However, in the rural areas of Guatemala, schools are not as plentiful, nor is the quality of education as good.

Seventy-five percent of the population of Guatemala is rural.<sup>72</sup> Of that rural population, 82 percent are illiterate, compared with a 41 percent illiteracy rate for the urban population.<sup>73</sup> Three reasons why illiteracy is so high in the rural areas are: the lack of finances to send children to school, the lack of desire to send children to school, and the language problem in the schools.

Many parents simply cannot afford to send their children to school. They must pay an enrollment fee, as well as expenses for school supplies

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<sup>70</sup>Emery, p. 6/22.

<sup>71</sup>See Appendix F.

<sup>72</sup>Melville, Guatemala: The Politics of Land Ownership, p. 294.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 295.

that the child will use. The great majority of the rural inhabitants have small farms on which the families themselves do all or almost all of the work. Parents must consider not only the cost of the schooling itself, but also the man-hours lost by sending children to school instead of having them work on the farm. Many parents find it financially impossible to send their children to school, and when they do, family responsibilities often make it difficult to attend regularly.

The lessons taught in the schools often are not consistent with the life style of the rural population. Often, "values which the child is taught in school are not consistent with those he finds prevalent in his home. His parents see little use for the information taught and they may react against sending their child to school. The child fails to see any connection between what he learns at school and the role he is expected to perform in his home or even in his municipio. He may with great difficulty learn to read Spanish, to do simple arithmetic, and to memorize historical facts; but he finds nothing in his social environment that calls for such newly acquired skills. In the home he finds no books, no magazines, no newspapers, and no writing materials. None of these mysterious facilities are used by his relatives, friends, and neighbors. How then can he hope to use or to retain his newly acquired information?"<sup>74</sup> In many cases, Indian parents think it more profitable to teach their children a trade than to send them to school.

Another reason for illiteracy in rural Guatemala is that the Indian children who attend school find a very difficult language barrier. Most rural schools are taught in Spanish, which is not the mother tongue of most of the young students. The young Indian who knows only an Indian language

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<sup>74</sup>Whetten, pp. 269-270.

finds it very difficult to understand the teacher. He will usually spend the first few years adapting to the new language, and literacy is not attained until after the first several years. The majority of the Indian children who attend school do so for only a few years, and literacy is often not attained. This language barrier inhibits creative thinking, stifles self-expression, and slows down the educational process.

Some progress is being made in this area, however. Many studies have been made which show that the schools must be taught in the mother tongue of the students for the learning process to be effective.<sup>75</sup> Lack of education is one of the biggest reasons why the Indians have not progressed as much as their Latin counterparts.

The study by the Land Tenure Center of the University of Wisconsin made among Guatemalan Indians found that "26 percent of the children older than seven years were attending school, 54 percent had not received any schooling and the remaining 20 percent had dropped out of the schooling system."<sup>76</sup>

The table in Appendix G shows that 62.5 percent of the Indian family heads are totally illiterate and 92 percent of their spouses are illiterate. The chart in Appendix H shows the education level of male heads of households and spouses in the Guatemala highlands.

#### XIV. CONCLUSION

Despite the many obvious differences, there are certain very important ways in which Indians differ from Latins in their outlook. In the first

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<sup>75</sup> See Richman, The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education, and also Fishman, Readings in the Sociology of Languages, pp. 688-716.

<sup>76</sup> Hill, p. 81.

place, the Indian society is simply not structured in terms of a pyramid, with a few people commanding the rest. To them, life is more like a ladder, with people climbing to different levels of authority with corresponding levels of responsibility. Furthermore, physical work is considered a normal and honorable way of life for all levels. The Indian is not bothered with the conflict between the ideal and the real, because he lives close to the realities of his existence.<sup>77</sup>

Indians are concerned with preserving the balance in nature and the balance between people. "One must not scratch the belly of mother earth too deeply, or destroy the protecting humus compost that lies rotting about, or dig out the trickling spring, for to violate nature is to destroy her capacity to continue nourishing the people who are dependent on her. Thus one does not conquer nature or exploit it. Rather, one must work carefully with nature, lest the spirits be angry and the fields no longer produce."<sup>78</sup>

It is quite understandable that the Indian should be withdrawn, resistant, and defensive. Had he not been so, he would have been overrun years ago. Only by withdrawing could he protect himself. As a means of self-preservation, he has developed two faces to wear in social relations. The one he wears with those of the dominant Latin culture is unconcerned and uncommunicating. The other is friendly and open, and is worn in relationships with Indians of the same in-group.<sup>79</sup> Those who are successful among the Indians are those who have gained their confidence and who have overcome the barriers and have experienced the friendly, open face of the in-group.

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<sup>77</sup>Nida, Communication, pp. 130-131.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*

APPENDIX

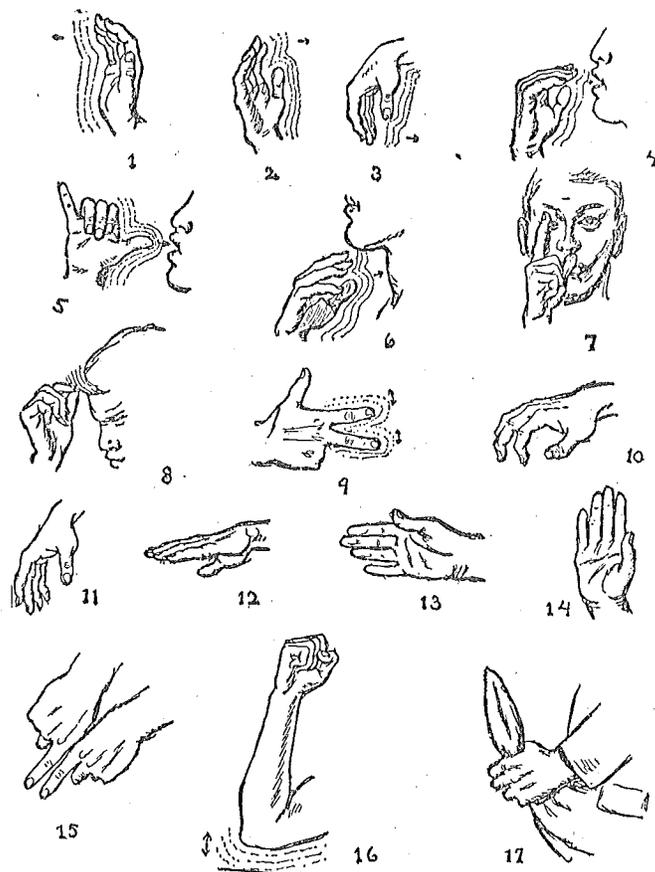
APPENDIX A

Languages Spoken Outside of Home by Heads of Families and Wives, by Tribal Origins.

Language Group	MALE HEAD			SPOUSE		
	Only Tribal Dialect	Tribal Dialect and Spanish	Total	Only Tribal Dialect	Tribal Dialect and Spanish	Total
	No. Percent	No. Percent	No.	No. Percent	No. Percent	No.
Cakchiquel	19 14.1	116 85.9	135	95 74.8	32 25.2	127
K'iam	2 6.5	29 93.5	31	26 86.7	4 13.3	30
Quiché	24 16.6	121 83.4	145	105 73.9	37 29.1	142
Kanjobal	2 16.7	10 83.3	12	2 16.7	10 83.3	12
Mixture Spanish preferably	- -	19 -	19	- -	9 -	9
Total	47 13.7	295 86.3	342	228 71.3	92 28.7	320

SOURCE: The Minifundia Economy and Society of the Guatemalan Highland Indian by George W. Hill and Manuel Gollas. Land Tenure Center, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, 1968, p. 71.

APPENDIX B



SIGN LANGUAGE GLOSSARY

GUATEMALAN INDIANS have such a perfect sign language that it is possible for two of them to carry on a conversation a quarter of a mile apart without either opening his mouth. Even white Guatemaltecos can rarely express certain ideas without using the corresponding Indian sign for them. To give a few useful examples: 1. Hand waved *away* from one's self: Come here. 2 and 3. Hand waved *towards* one's self, held either up or down: Go away; good-by. 4. Eat. 5. Drink. 6. *Yo no soy tu gueguecho* (I'm not your goiter): You can't stuff *that* down *my* throat. 7. *Yo*, or *Ojol!*: I, or Take care! 8. *Echar una cana al aire* (to throw a white hair to the wind): To commit an indiscretion. 9. *Alfilar sus tijeras* (to sharpen your scissors): Gossip. 10. *Puños muy largos* (large claws): grasping; thieving. A similar sign means *tocando el piano* (playing the piano): light-fingered. 11. A chicken is so high. 12. A pig is so high. 13. A horse is so high. 14. A person is so high. (To indicate a person's height by sign No. 12 is very insulting, as it compares that person to a pig.) 15. *Juntos*: together. 16. Knocking elbow while keeping fist closed: Stingy. (Knocks without opening.) 17. Corner of coat or table cloth formed like mule's ear: Change subject, someone is eavesdropping.

SOURCE: Guatemala Profile by Addison Burbank, 1939.

APPENDIX C



SOURCE: Protestantism in Guatemala by Gennet Maxon Emery, 1970, p. 7/11.

APPENDIX D

1950

POPULATION FOURTEEN YEARS OF AGE AND OVER, BY MARITAL STATUS, BY ETHNIC GROUP, AND BY RURAL-URBAN RESIDENCE

Marital status	TOTAL INHABITANTS					
	BOTH ETHNIC GROUPS		INDIAN		LADINO	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
TOTAL	1,675,146	100.0	890,883	100.0	784,263	100.0
Single	616,754	36.8	280,118	31.4	336,636	42.9
Married	309,506	18.5	126,005	14.1	183,501	23.4
In common-law union	660,421	39.4	436,238	49.0	224,183	28.6
Widowed	84,191	5.0	47,743	5.4	36,448	4.6
Divorced	4,274	0.3	779	0.1	3,495	0.5
			RURAL INHABITANTS			
TOTAL	1,224,211	100.0	768,417	100.0	455,794	100.0
Single	415,463	33.9	234,362	30.5	181,101	39.8
Married	197,928	16.2	96,144	12.5	101,784	22.3
In common-law union	549,229	44.9	397,350	51.7	151,879	33.3
Widowed	60,156	4.9	40,037	5.2	20,119	4.4
Divorced	1,435	0.1	524	0.1	911	0.2
			URBAN INHABITANTS			
TOTAL	450,935	100.0	122,466	100.0	328,469	100.0
Single	201,291	44.6	45,756	37.4	155,535	47.3
Married	111,578	24.8	29,861	24.4	81,717	24.9
In common-law union	111,192	24.7	38,888	31.7	72,304	22.0
Widowed	24,035	5.3	7,706	6.3	16,329	5.0
Divorced	2,839	0.6	255	0.2	2,584	0.8

SOURCE: Guatemala, the Land and the People by Nathan L. Whetten, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1961, p. 241.

APPENDIX E

Manner in Which Land was Acquired

Process	Number	Percent
Inheritance	142	40.8
Inheritance and Purchase	93	26.6
Purchase	87	25.0
Donation	14	4.2
Unknown	12	3.4
Total	348	100.0

Source: The Minifundia Economy and Society of the Guatemalan Highland Indian by G. W. Hill and M. Gollas, Land Tenure Center, University of Wisconsin, 1968, p. 29.

Note: This table is based on a study of 348 farms in the Guatemalan highlands.

APPENDIX F

Schools Sponsored by the Catholic Church

Diocese	Primary		Secondary		Normal		Technical		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Esquipulas	3	2.0	1	1.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	2.0
El Petén	1	0.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.7
Jalapa	3	2.0	3	5.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	2.0
Zacapa	6	4.0	2	3.3	1	4.3	0	0.0	7	4.6
San Marcos	4	2.7	1	1.7	1	4.3	1	7.1	4	2.6
Verapaces	9	6.1	3	5.0	1	4.3	0	0.0	9	5.9
Quezaltenango	18	12.1	9	15.0	3	13.1	2	14.3	19	12.5
Sololá	9	6.0	1	1.7	1	4.3	0	0.0	9	5.9
Huehuetenango	13	8.7	4	6.7	1	4.3	0	0.0	14	9.2
Guatemala										
Total	83	55.6	36	60.0	15	65.3	11	78.6	83	54.6
(Guatemala City)	(63)	42.2	(33)	55.0	(15)	65.3	(10)	71.4	(63)	41.5
(Guatemala Outside City)	(20)	13.4	(3)	5.0	(0)	...	(1)	7.1	(20)	13.1
Total	149	99.9	60	100.1	23	99.9	14	100.0	152	100.0

SOURCE: *Boletín Informativo*, No. 7, IX Congreso Interamericano de Educación Católica, Mimeographed, San Salvador, El Salvador, n.d., Table 1.

NOTE: The total is of named schools; in all but a few instances, primary schools are connected to higher schools, and the combination is counted as a single school in this table.

Private Schools in Guatemala, 1966

Level	Private School		Catholic		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Primary	1,019	87.2	149	12.8	1,168	100.0
Secondary	223	66.0	88	34.0	311	100.0
Normal	51	66.2	26	33.8	77	100.0
Technical	48	76.2	15	24.8	63	100.0
Total	1,341		278		1,619	

Students in Guatemalan Schools, 1966

Level	Official Government Schools		Private Schools		Catholic Schools		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Primary	357,953	80.8	52,579	11.9	32,620	7.4	443,152	100.1
Secondary	16,346	45.0	12,316	33.9	7,647	21.1	36,309	100.0
Normal	3,625	53.6	1,933	28.6	1,198	17.8	6,756	100.0
Technical	4,125	62.4	1,864	28.2	629	9.5	6,618	100.1
Superior	7,547	93.4	—	—	533	6.6	8,080	100.0
Total	389,596		68,692		42,627		500,915	

SOURCE: Crucifixion by Power by Richard N. Adams, pp. 306-307.

APPENDIX G

Educational Attainment of Parents Compared With Offspring, 17 Years and Over

Category	Never Attended School		Highest Grade Achieved in School										Total		
	Can Read and Write		Totally Illiterate		First		Second		Third		Fourth			Fifth or Higher	
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent		No.	Percent
Family Heads	53	15.5	214	62.5	10	2.9	32	9.4	23	6.7	7	2.0	4	1.2	343
Sons	22	7.5	156	53.4	8	2.7	55	18.8	33	11.3	7	2.4	11	3.8	292
Spouses	10	3.1	294	91.9	3	0.9	7	2.2	3	0.9	1	0.3	2	0.6	320
Daughters	2	1.0	155	79.5	6	3.1	14	7.2	13	6.7	3	1.5	2	1.9	195

SOURCE: The Minifundia Economy and Society of the Guatemalan Highland Indian by George W. Hill and Manuel Gollas. Land Tenure Center, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, 1968, p. 74.

APPENDIX H

EDUCATION LEVEL OF MALE HEADS OF HOUSEHOLD AND SPOUSES

MALES

Age Group	Literate						Never Attended School	Total	Non-Literate	Total
	Highest Grade Attended at School									
	1	2	3	4	5	Subtotal				
20 - 29	4	9	8	3		24	8	32	30	62
30 - 39	3	12	7	2		24	22	46	52	98
40 - 49	2	7	3		2	14	12	26	52	78
50 - 59	1	3	3	2	1	10	10	20	46	66
60 +		1	2		1	4	1	5	34	39
Total	10	32	23	7	4	76	53	129	214	343
Percent	2.9	9.3	6.7	2.0	1.2	22.1	15.5	37.6	62.4	100

SPOUSES

Under 20		1				1		1	9	10
20 - 29	1	5	1		1	8	6	14	70	84
30 - 39	2		1		1	4	2	6	98	104
40 - 49			1	1		2	1	3	66	69
50 - 59							1	1	36	37
60 +		1				1		1	15	16
Total	3	7	3	1	2	16	10	26	204	320
Percent	0.9	2.2	0.9	0.3	0.6	4.9	3.1	8.0	92.0	100

SOURCE: The Minifundia Economy and Society of the Guatemalan Highland Indian by Hill and Gollas, The Land Tenure Center, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, 1968, p. 72.

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