

Indigeneity and Racialisation: The Anti-Maya Project in Guatemala

Introduction

This paper will explore the Guatemalan case of racialisation of the Maya peoples, predominantly through the systemic and institutionalised racism of the state. Exploring four politically-based dimensions, this report will conclude that immediate action needs to be taken, alongside international intervention, in order for the Guatemalan state to respect, represent and promote the equality of Maya communities. It is emphasised that agrarian reform, a controversial policy area in Guatemalan politics, should be an absolute priority in poverty alleviation for the indigenous peoples.

The ethnic make-up of Guatemala is diverse, with two groups making up the majority of the population; the indigenous and the ladinos. Xinca, Garifuna and smaller ethnic groups should also be noted as a part of the country's ethnic make-up. Both the main categories are a "composite of various sub-ethnic groups" with a degree of 'fluidity' between each, through 'assimilation' and self-identification (Caumartin, 2005, p.9).

Indigeneity has been conceptualised in a variety of ways, both utilised and rejected by different nations across the globe. The term has been historically used to "distinguish those who are 'native' from their 'others' in specific locales and with varying scope" (Merlan, 2009, p.330). In contemporary Guatemala, indigeneity is something individuals will often self-identify with. Two traditional and cultural pointers of indigenous ethnic identity in Guatemala are "wearing indigenous clothing and speaking indigenous languages" (Caumartin, 2005, p.10). These are not strict determinants of indigeneity however, as individuals who may not speak indigenous languages or wear traditional clothing may still self-identify.

Ladinos have been described as Spanish-speaking individuals of a 'European ancestry', and has gradually come to include "'assimilated' indigenous peoples" (World Population Review, 2015; Caumartin, 2005, p.11).

The vast majority of those who identify as indigenous are of the Maya people and, within this larger category, there are a variety of ethnic sub-groups; K'iche, Q'eqchi, Kaqchikel, Mam and other Mayan (World Population Review, 2015). The Maya are in no way an ethnic minority, as official statistics report that indigenous people represent around 40 percent of the population. However, there is speculation from native organisations about the reality of census figures, with some putting the 'real' figure at over 60 percent (see Valladares, 2012).

This report will be focusing predominantly on the Maya, as this high population percentage is one key element that makes Guatemala's ethnic discrimination unique. Whilst this report understands ethnicity as a social construct, the fact that the Maya are not an ethnic minority makes for an interesting case, considering how little power and influence indigenous and Mayan communities hold. Also, the Maya are a distinct group because of the racialisation and unlawful targeting they experienced during Guatemala's 36 year civil war. This paper will argue that racial stereotypes and negativity toward the Maya stemming from this conflict are still prevalent in contemporary Guatemalan society.

The UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, Doudou Diène, declared that in the case of Guatemala, “discrimination is essentially of a social and economic nature” and derives from a “failure to recognize the reality of racial discrimination and its pervasiveness throughout society” (2005, p.14). This paper will illustrate the everyday racialisation experienced by the Maya, with each aspect being interwoven in a vicious cycle of rural poverty. Such unrealised and unchallenged discrimination by the state proves as a major complication in the pursuit of a direct and “lasting solution” (Diène, 2005, p.14). However, this report will discuss potential recommendations and the value of these in working towards a bettered political environment for the Maya in Guatemala.

The four dimensions that will be discussed include firstly, a call for cultural respect by the Guatemalan state through an official recognition of the genocide and civil war atrocities committed in Guatemala’s 36 year conflict against the Maya. The second section will be an analysis of the economic standing of the Maya as a group, and how giving land back to the indigenous communities of Guatemala could help solve a multiplicity of problems for the Maya. Thirdly, there will be a section analysing contemporary Guatemalan politics and stressing the importance of inclusion and representation for indigenous groups in general. The last dimension will link together many issues discussed previously, and illustrate how these racialised inequalities interconnect and further exacerbate the poverty experienced by many Maya children.

To conclude, this paper will evaluate the significance and value of the recommendations made, before emphasising the degree of urgency required for their implementation. In addition, any links that Guatemala’s racialisation of the Maya has to the wider world will be discussed, with a consideration of what the future may hold for Guatemala and the overall situation of the Maya.

Violence: National Recognition of Genocide and Racist Intent in the Guatemalan Civil War

From 1960 to 1996, Guatemala suffered a 36 year civil war, where more than 200,000 Guatemalans were killed or declared missing during the tragic conflict (BBC News, 2012).

Formally defining this a genocide still remains highly controversial, as in the 30 years since the end of the civil war, the view of the people and stance of the state have often clashed. To illustrate this, Guatemala’s constitutional court have recently overturned a ‘breakthrough’ conviction of genocide against José Efraín Ríos Montt (a former dictator in 1982-82) in 2013. This would have been the first former head of government to be held accountable for the mass killing of Maya during the 36 year conflict. However, the court “threw out” the ruling on rather ambiguous grounds (Watts, 2013, no pagination – NP). Despite this, many academics and activist groups still confidently declare that genocide was undeniably “perpetrated against Maya peoples in Guatemala” within the 36 year civil war period (Martinez-Salazar, 2012, p.101). In 1999, it was officially concluded by a UN-backed commission that the “Guatemalan army had carried out a genocide” (CEH, 1999. P.17). However, little justice has been achieved since then for the victims, family and ancestry affected.

According to the Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH), armed confrontation broke out in 1962, triggering a devastating period of “enormous human, material and moral cost” (CEH, 1999, p.17). The origins of this military-dictatorship are hugely complex, with the USA and the rise of capitalism playing large factors in the early development of Guatemala’s civil war. The Guatemalan government’s stance on land reform did not satisfy the corporate interests of the USA, namely the market needs of United Fruit Company (Cooper, 2008). Farming land, previously belonging to predominantly Mayan communities, was reassigned in the name of corporate interests and American market needs. This became a major factor in the early stages of conflict, as the USA provided “substantial military aid” to a Guatemalan military dictatorship, with the intention to “eliminate opposition to the regime” (Cooper, 2008, p.171).

The CEH state that during this dictatorship, Guatemalan law was substituted by repression as military power and their tyrannical, “underground punitive system” took over. This consequently led to armed retaliation and the formation of a guerrilla movement, the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG), believed by rebel insurgents to be the only real political solution (CEH, 1999, p.18-19).

In following their objective to eliminate the opposition, the military forces treated the entire Mayan population as “the collective enemy of the state”, rather than exclusively targeting armed rebels. Despite most being innocent civilians, the army branded Maya communities as dangerous groups of “guerrilla allies” (CEH, 1999, p.23). In the height of the conflict, the entirety of the Maya population were branded as ‘Marxist insurgents’ and ‘terrorist guerrillas’ (Cooper, 2008; Martinez-Salazar, 2012). Between 1981 and 1983, Guatemala saw an especially brutal and violent period where Maya women, children and full communities were specifically targeted. Of the fully identified victims of military genocide, 83% were Mayan, and 17% Ladino (CEH, 1999, p.17).

These figures and this racial classification of the Mayan population both confirm that a disproportionate amount of the Maya were targeted in the civil war, again suggesting that racialisation played a large role. This further evidences the claim that this was a regime of ethnic cleansing by the state, acting to “obliterate the very existence of Maya families” (Martinez-Salazar, 2012, p.102).

According to Michael Mann, in modern democracies unity of ethnicity may sometimes outweigh the “citizen diversity that is so central to democracy”, as the people of a nation state are often “defined in ethnic terms” (2005, p.3). This can then lead to the exploitation of a less powerful ethnic group, as the oppressive group may have a perceived power over the other. Genocide can develop if the oppressors begin to “act in righteous outrage against the threat of having its ‘civilization’ overwhelmed with ‘primitivism’ from the other ethnic group (Mann, 2005, p.6). If there seems to be little physical or moral risk to their own group, the stronger side can force a cleansed state with fairly national coherence, making ethnic cleansing within nation states one of the most murderous and corrupt forms of genocide (Mann, 2005, p.7-8). This description of genocide within nation states, legitimated by democracy and underpinned by ethnic divisions, is clearly demonstrated by the Guatemalan case.

Further evidence of ethnic cleansing includes the utilization and appropriation of Maya culture in order to injure the Maya on a deeply personal and cultural level. Maya children for example were conceptualized by the army as a “bad seed” to instil fear and “penetrate the heart” of these communities. Seeds are a “cosmologically and spiritually significant” element in many Mayan cultures (Martinez-Salazar, 2012, p.102), exemplifying how the military’s intent was to erode the strength of the Maya community spirit and attack them on a shallow, psychological level.

Egla Martinez-Salazar (2012) asserts that the genocide in Guatemala was a deliberate act to eliminate the Maya ethnic group, purely due to their Mayan ethnicity. This racist intent, despite being carefully neglected from the written records of military operations, was the “hidden backbone” in the killing and disappearance of thousands of Maya peoples (Martinez-Salazar, 2012, p.103). She claims that the Maya were viewed by the state as anti-capitalist and culturally incapable of developing towards ‘civilized’ modernity, therefore genocide was used as a “tool to eliminate the racialised and politically undesirable” (Martinez-Salazar, 2012, p.101). This demonstrates further that Maya communities have been historically racialised by the state, classified through negative connotations of primitivism, non-conformity and traditionalism.

The civil war came to a close when the government and the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (Guatemala’s guerrilla movement, URNG) signed the ‘Peace Accords’. These agreements called for an “official recognition of Guatemala as a pluriethnic, multicultural, and multilingual country”. This was

particularly aimed at strengthening the guarantee of human rights for the Maya, as well as other indigenous communities (Carey Jr, 2004. p.69). Despite a ceasefire and thus definitive end to the conflict, the Maya remained a secondary class in society. This was signalled by a democratic rejection of a referendum, or *consulta popular*, which resulted in the refusal to promote equality for the indigenous population. This marked a “serious setback for the peace process in Guatemala” (Carey Jr, 2004. p.69) and further highlights the ethnic divide.

Considering this period of violence against the Maya, when combined with the contemporary evidence in this report, it can be understood that racialisation and racial stereotyping is still a prevalent force in Guatemala. The CEH concluded that during the conflict, the state repeatedly expressed a racist “doctrine of superiority”, making the existence of racism in the brutal military operations “undeniable” (CEH, 1999, p.24). The fact that racist intent has remained ‘unproven’ and is continually denied by the state has had a ‘devastating’ effect, furthering the frustrations for affected communities (Martinez-Salazar, 2012, p.106)

To honour the victims and their families, this report proposes that official recognition of genocide should be made and formal justice should be carried out by the state immediately. This will not only settle many communities’ frustrations, but will demonstrate a concrete message of respect for Maya culture, Maya history and encourage a feeling of equality for the indigenous people of Guatemala.

Historically labelled and treated as the ‘enemy’ in society, the Maya remain branded as an anti-modern hindrance to development. It can therefore be assumed that only thirty years on, such ideas surrounding indigeneity have not simply disappeared, and therefore still distorts the way the Maya are viewed and represented in Guatemala.

Economic Inequality: The Taboo of Agrarian Reform

Guatemala, as a “low-middle income” country, has one of the “most unequal distributions of income” and “highest poverty rates” in Latin America (Cabrera, Lustig, and Moran, 2015, p.263). Whilst Guatemala as a country has been claimed to be ‘accelerating’ in its economic growth (see McDonald, 2014), factors affecting the rural poor including “land inequality, labour exploitation and ethnic discrimination” are preventing this growth from reaching the poorest in society. Although agricultural trade is thriving in Guatemala, indigenous communities fail to benefit as the elite class and the unequal structures of power work to “perpetuate and exacerbate poverty” through exploiting indigenous workers (Krznicaric, 2006, p.111-12).

Throughout the course of the twentieth century, the state combined its strength of political and military power to make “indigenous land and labour available to the rapacious needs” of capitalist land owners (Grandin, 2000, p.111). As a consequence, this forced the “subsistence base” of many communities to collapse and intensified indigenous poverty, especially for Maya peoples (Grandin, 2000, p.111). Not only did these years of land dispossession create economic issues for the Maya, but the ownership of land is a “linchpin of cultural identity”. In Maya communities, land holds vital ancestral and religious associations (Sieder, 1997, p.72). Therefore, Mayans have been historically forced to pay both a financial and cultural price for the greed of the Guatemalan elite.

In 1953, the Guatemalan President of the time Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán aimed to dramatically revolutionize the economic, social and political structure of the country by way of agrarian reform. Politicians of the time came to the realisation that in Guatemala, “everything ultimately revolves around land” and it was decades of land dispossession that dragged so many of the population into poverty. No revolutionary ideals could come into full practice without a change in the “basic structure of land tenure”

and thus, significant agrarian reform would see the beginnings of Guatemala's transformation into a 'new' nation (Handy, 1988, p.675).

However, with agrarian reform comes an extensive overhaul of the country's power structure; both economically and politically. As a result, Arbenz's planned reforms faced a significant degree of opposition, "not just from large landowners", leading to the subsequent collapse of his administration and thus the breakdown of plans for agrarian reform (Handy, 1988, p.645).

In a critical analysis of the Guatemalan peace process of the 1990's, Rachel Seider states that the Guatemalan oligarchy have a "historical fear of agrarian reform" despite access to land still remaining the "key to economic subsistence" in Guatemala (1997, p.72). Despite its crucial advantages regarding the alleviation of poverty for the indigenous majority, the state have avoided taking any real action to combat land ownership inequalities. It seems that since Guatemala's revolutionary failure, the notion of reassigning land back to the indigenous communities to whom it first belonged has become deeply controversial.

In the Guatemalan Peace Accords, the rights promised to indigenous peoples regarding land reform policy are "far from guaranteed", as the state appear to merely acknowledge the problem; failing to "detail specific mechanisms" to alleviate poverty through the repossession of land (Sieder, 1997, p.72-3). Many of the rural poor must therefore become dependent upon either forced or largely exploitative agricultural labour in order to get by.

As of 2016, indigenous people make up 91% of agricultural workers in Guatemala (IACHR, 2016). One especially exploitative industry in particular is the Guatemalan coffee sector. *Verité*, an organisation working to investigate and improve the effects of globalisation on vulnerable workers around the world, carried out a research project investigating the indicators of forced labour in the Guatemalan coffee industry. Though the findings regarding labour exploitation cannot be generalised as "statistically representative of Guatemala" (Verité, 2012, p.57), it provides a detailed insight into the unequal experiences of contemporary Mayan coffee workers.

The majority of the workers interviewed identified as indigenous, whilst 86.3% reported a Mayan dialect as their first language. The study showed that this indigenous, and predominantly Mayan, majority in the coffee sector "earn less and suffer higher levels of discrimination than their Ladino counterparts" (Verité, 2012, p.50). 88.5% of these Mayan-speaking workers reported being "discriminated against", due to elements such as their low-level Spanish skills or the type of indigenous clothing they wear. *Verité's* researchers concluded that these workers' suffered higher levels of exploitation and discrimination than Ladino workers due to their ethnicity, not an inability to speak Spanish as the "vast majority spoke Spanish fluently" (2012, p.50). Regarding pay, the indigenous workers *Verité* interviewed earned, on average, 57.3% of the wages of Ladino workers doing the same job (2012, p.50). This demonstrates an undeniable inconsistency in the treatment of workers of different ethnicities in this circumstance.

Verité states that "indigenous Guatemalans have historically been repressed and subjected to forced labour in coffee fincas" (2012, p.50). Indicators of forced labour were found to be a 'lack of consent' (i.e. "non-payment of wages" or "retention of identity documents") and 'menace of penalty' (i.e. "physical confinement" or "deprivation of food and water"), as well as other issues of concern (Verité, 2012, p.5-6). Finding evidence of these concerns in a modern day coffee farming environment explicitly demonstrates how workers, and indigenous labourers in particular, are subjugated and sometimes even forced to remain in these exploitative jobs.

Elements of this may have marginally improved through the years, due to slight alterations in legislation and the state's slow-moving process of poverty alleviation. However, with such high levels of poverty in

Maya communities, this kind of economic exploitation appears only to work in the interests of the rich elites and of western capitalism. As many Maya communities do not own large amounts of land for farming, they must resort to jobs that may exploit them relentlessly, becoming forced to stay on the grounds that leaving might bear an even greater financial and psychological cost. Indigenous agricultural workers are therefore tied up in a cycle of dependency.

Seider proposes that the success of ethnic integration will depend on finding and implementing real solutions to Maya poverty and the “economic marginalisation of the indigenous majority” (1997, p.73). With so many issues closely related to land ownership, even down to food shortages and malnutrition (IACHR, 2015), agrarian reform is key to the transformation of indigenous lives. In order to combat the racialisation and exploitation of the Maya in Guatemala, as well as challenge the corrupt reputation of the current political system, the state must promote ‘pro-poor growth’ (Krznaric, 2006, p.111).

Racist attitudes towards the Maya and the evident societal divide may take a while to overcome, but if real economic change is to be made for indigenous communities, the Guatemalan state must take immediate action. Due to the ‘questionable’ political will of Guatemalan government however, the success of this implementation will require pressure and support from the “international community” and the activism of organisations from across the globe (Seider, 1997, p.73). The state needs to make vast improvements to labour conditions and pay equality, implement a “national landtitling programme”, and various “cultural programmes” to alter racialised attitudes toward “poverty and development” (Krznaric, 2006, p.111). Enforcing substantial agrarian reform and improved labour conditions will directly tackle the root of the problem. In doing so, the economic and social standing of Maya communities could be revolutionised.

Developing Guatemalan Politics: Assuring the Inclusion and Representation of Indigenous People

Throughout the decades, Guatemalan politics is said to both reflect and maintain the “exclusionary nature of the socio-economic order”. With little legal restriction, this political structure allows power to be concentrated in the hands of the elite (Caumartin, 2005, p.21).

It seems Guatemala’s political system has a history of both corruption and of maintaining inequality between the urban rich and rural poor. Evidenced by the military dictatorship during the 36 year civil war, and even as recently as 2015, corrupt political figures have been a persistent problem in Guatemalan politics. In 2007 the UN-backed commission, the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), was created as an independent body to “fight corruption in the country’s decaying institutions”, as demanded by the public. In late 2015, several cases of corruption within the Guatemalan governing body were exposed, leading to the resignation of former President Otto Pérez Molina. Though this is proving to be a ‘slow process’, the CICIG are making progress in combatting corrupt politicians and stripping them of their ‘power’ (Molina, 2015, NP).

Following Pérez Molina’s arrest, the new President of Guatemala Jimmy Morales was voted in by the Guatemalan electorate in late 2015. Morales is a well-known former comedian who won over voters by ‘capitalising’ on “widespread public disillusionment”, as the Guatemalan public are ‘fed up’ of corrupt candidates. He ran with the simple and reassuring campaign slogan, “not corrupt, not a thief”, yet ultimately lacked in promoting any clear policies (Lakhani, 2015a, NP). Despite this, Elena Toledo reports that “voters seem to have equated Morales’s lack of political experience with a lack of malicious intent” (2015, NP). This is a questionable assumption for the citizens of Guatemala to make for a number of reasons.

President Jimmy Morales is a member of the National Convergence Front (FCN-Nación). This is a right-wing party founded by military veterans allegedly linked to civil war crimes (Lakhani, 2015a), suggesting Morales has close ties with the military and retired generals involved in the genocide of the 20th century. Some media outlets, such as *Pan Am Post*, contest this negative portrayal of Morales however. They assure his credibility and distance from such military figures, claiming western media such as *The Times* are ‘lying’ to fuel an agenda of ‘guerrilla’ advocacy (Hecht and Landau, 2015, NP).

Morales is however arguably “best known” for his performance as his blackface character, ‘Black Pitaya’; a racial caricature still currently used on packaging for various haircare products. He upholds that Guatemala’s Garifuna (black) and indigenous Maya communities ‘adore’ the comedic figure (Lakhani, 2015a, NP). In addition, President Morales has openly denied that acts of genocide were committed during the civil war (Carasik, 2016, NP; Lakhani, 2015a, NP).

Despite his ladino popularity, it should be of great importance to question what kind of implications this new leadership might have for indigenous Maya and minority groups in Guatemala. Morales’ denial of genocide alone highlights a lack of empathy he may have for the Maya; those most affected by the civil war. Therefore, one can assume that Morales will not prioritise advocating indigenous rights over pandering to other urban and corporate interests.

In addition, with a racialised view of ethnic minorities and indigenous people being exploited for comedic value across Latin America (see Lakhani, 2015b, NP), it is clear that ‘casual’ racism is still a prominent issue in everyday society. This is a problem that could further distance indigenous or minority communities from the state, as this again represents a lack of respect for Guatemalan diversity.

The UN Special Rapporteur on racism and related intolerances, Doudou Diène, detailed that “deep historical roots of discrimination” are not clearly recognised in Guatemalan politics or by “dominant classes”. Diène determines that although some government officials take part in private consultations with indigenous representatives, their views are rarely taken into account in final decision making (Diène, 2005, p.14). This “marginal involvement” of the Maya voice and other indigenous groups in the country’s power structures, even almost a decade after the peace accords (2004), is illustrated by the lack of indigenous representation in Congress and the judiciary (14 out of 153 members of Congress, and no indigenous judges – Diène, 2005, p.2 & 14).

With the current social and economic discrepancies of the indigenous majority in Guatemala, political and legislative action needs to be taken. This immediate action needs to work to alleviate poverty for the rural poor and must promote equality in all areas of state legislation. This must then be followed by concrete enforcement of such policies and laws. However, without a representative government, it is unclear whether any proposed amendments to current legislation will be effective enough to make a genuine difference to the lives of indigenous people.

In order for the Maya and other ethnic minorities to be included and represented in Guatemalan politics, emphasis should be placed on promoting permanent representation of indigenous people in government. It should also be stressed that the electoral procedures themselves need to be modified. Taking into consideration language and cultural concerns will make it possible for more indigenous communities to participate in political decisions, possibly encouraging a more representative political system.

However, as the current electorate appear focused on political corruption, such efforts will be difficult to introduce as less emphasis is placed on the wellbeing of disadvantaged and racialised communities. Also, with the new President Jimmy Morales, it is tremendously difficult to predict what the future holds for Guatemalan politics and thus, representation for the groups who desperately need it.

Political Inequalities: The Vicious Cycle of Land, Education, Health and Poverty for the Maya

Due to the underrepresentation of the Maya and the racialised exclusion of indigenous groups in politics, social and economic policies are often ineffective in bettering the lives of the most vulnerable in society. From factors concerning economic, land and labour exploitation, to the racialised underrepresentation of indigenous people in politics, all the issues discussed interlink and exacerbate the overall struggle for the Maya in Guatemala.

When analysing Guatemalan fiscal policy, it is clear that Guatemalan economic policies do “very little to reduce inequality and poverty overall along ethnic lines” (Cabrera, Lustig, and Moran, 2015, p.263). The “limited retributive effect” of the fiscal system, when paralleled to the gap between the indigenous and non-indigenous population, (Cabrera, Lustig, and Moran, 2015, p.265) clearly demonstrates how policy decisions reflect racially based imbalances. Further perpetuating ‘deep inequities’ without any real focus on substantial change makes Guatemala a “textbook case” of powerful elite efforts to “block pro-poor tax reforms” (Cabrera, Lustig, and Moran, 2015, p. 276).

Through capitalist development, Guatemala’s transition towards a more ‘civilised’ and ‘modern’ way of life has “allowed for an intensification of ethnic identity” (Grandon, 2000, p.131). With the emphasis on corporate interests and expanding the agricultural industry, assuring the social wellbeing of the poorest in society seems to be of much smaller importance. By propagating the unequal treatment of the indigenous majority in this way, the Maya in particular can be seen to suffer in a multiplicity of interlinked ways. This causes somewhat of a vicious cycle where lack of land, access to education, unsatisfactory healthcare and crippling poverty are all interwoven in the struggle of ethnic inequality – a position that has still not much improved since the Guatemalan civil war.

To illustrate, lack of land ownership and high poverty levels for example have caused “chronic malnutrition” to affect 80% of indigenous children, as they have little access to adequate nutrition for healthy development. This inevitably lowers their productivity in school and subsequently leads to high dropout rates from education (IACHR, 2016, p.46), as disease or a need to work may take priority in order to survive. Developing health problems is a serious issue for many indigenous children, as the IACHR describe the health services of the locations with the largest indigenous populations as “obsolete”. These state health services lack the “human, financial and medical resources necessary” to provide adequate care, as well such being culturally inappropriate (IACHR, 2016, p.51-52).

Having a limited education, caused by the effects of bad health or crippling poverty, can cause a variety of knock-on effects that could be detrimental in gaining access to future opportunities. Without a decent education, limited skills in Spanish as a second language for example will directly hinder employment chances. Taking this into later life, low Spanish skills might perpetuate further discrimination by intensifying ethnic differentiation from non-indigenous citizens. The IACHR state that when educational opportunities are missed in early life, this creates “effects that are irreversible” (2015, p.46).

The right to education itself however is also limited for indigenous children. Access to education for indigenous communities has seen incremental improvements with an increase of teachers in rural schools. However, there is substantial progress still to be made regarding the quality, levels of cultural adaptation and the spread of teachers across rural communities (IACHR, 2016, p.48). It must also be noted that secondary school is an impossibility for many indigenous children, as these are generally in unaffordable urban areas, excluding indigenous youth from the prospect of higher education (IACHR, 2016, p.48).

Considering both the IACHR’s 2016 report and the issues discussed throughout previous dimensions, one can therefore conclude that there is a vicious cycle of inequality. Linking land ownership, to health, to

education and to poverty provide solid evidence of “structural discrimination” in Guatemalan politics and society (IACHR, 2016, p.45). The ‘ultimate goal’ of genocide committed during the war was said to be the ‘obliteration’ of Maya families and their existence as an ethnicity (Martinez-Salazar, 2012, p.102). Despite a shift away from such explicit racism, it seems indigenous people are still the target of racialised oppression. The state has not taken enough of a political stand since the peace accords to fully liberate the Maya and promote equality in all policy areas. The imbalance of inequality between the indigenous and non-indigenous community is no coincidence, and thus, the “exclusionary nature” of the political power structure must be challenged (Caumartin, 2005, p.21).

“Despite official statements recognizing multiculturalism, Guatemala clearly and overwhelmingly gives preference to its Hispanic identity” (Diène, 2005, p.11). In response to this, political figures need to take urgent action, beginning with land reforms, in order to efficiently promote pro-poor growth rather than exacerbate indigenous poverty (Krznic, 2006, p.111). It seems the first hurdle will be encouraging the support of current political powers. This will require “determined pressure” from the “international community” (Seider, 1997, p.73), in addition to considerable domestic efforts to make a serious and crucial impact on ethnic inequality.

Conclusion

Martinez-Salazar states that the explicit targeting of the Maya in the civil war was due to the “systemic racism” that stood as such a “central pillar in the organization of society” at the time (2012, p.103). This report has argued that this systemic racism is just as prevalent in Guatemalan society today; developed and warped from decades of racial conflict and racialisation of the Maya.

Evidence suggests that the advancement of a “political agenda” is currently favoured by the government over any serious and significant “implementation of the peace accords” (Seider, 1997, p.73); sending a punitive message to the indigenous and rural poor that they remain a lesser class. Racialised ideas deriving from their victimisation during the civil war period appear to remain a prevalent force in contemporary society.

Labour discrimination, lack of political representation and inadequate education and healthcare further the ethnic and class divide in Guatemala, as policy works mainly in interests of the rich and powerful. For Maya workers in particular, pressure to rely on agricultural work forces them to become almost fully dependent upon a state that exploits them physically, psychologically and financially.

In response to this ill treatment, indigenous resistance does sometimes occur. However, this tends to be aimed at a local level, rather than challenging the system as a whole (Stoll, 2008). With a new President that seems politically unrepresentative of Maya communities at the forefront of this system, the future for indigenous groups in general appears exceptionally volatile.

Tying this case into the global issue of racialisation, the legitimization of the Guatemalan genocide on the grounds of ‘fighting communism’ holds substantial similarity to the global ‘war on terror’. In both cases, the use of a particular discourse branding particular ethnic groups as the collective enemy appears to justify racialised violence. Something to learn from racialisation in Guatemala may be that marking an entire ethnicity or religious as the problem, rather than the specific source of the issue, can have detrimental and long-lasting consequences.

To conclude, one might argue that the recommendations made in this report are particularly bold. Though they may lack detail with regard to their practical application, such statements need to be made in order to stress the absolute importance of developing concrete policies concerning agrarian reform, for example.

The faster progress is made regarding the promotion of indigenous equality, the faster the government and related organisations can take on issues such as poverty and chronic malnutrition. Systemic, institutionalised racism in Guatemala produces the vicious cycle of interconnected problems that exacerbate poverty for the indigenous rural poor. If substantial effort is invested into the improvement of even one policy area, this could vastly improve the social and economic situation of the Maya in a variety of ways – setting the Guatemalan state on the long path toward cultural equality.

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