

**The Police Reform and the Peace Process in Guatemala:
the fifth promotion of the new National Civilian Police into action.**

**Drs. Marie-louise Glebbeek
Department of Cultural Anthropology
University Utrecht
The Netherlands**

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Introduction

With the signing of the peace accord between the Guatemalan government and the former guerrilla group *Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca* (URNG) in December 1996 a thirty-six year civil conflict was not only ended, but a foundation for extensive reforms was laid as well. One of the reforms agreed upon in the “Accord on Strengthening Civil Power and on the Role of the Army in a Democratic Society”, was the creation of a single National Civilian Police and the promotion of amendments that would establish a clear separation between police and military roles. Police reform and this separation of roles are essential for the construction of democracy and the rule of law in Guatemala. A better-functioning police is urgently needed to help control the organized and common crime that is currently sweeping the country. Those involved in illegal activities should be arrested and prosecuted to finally end arbitrary use of violence and crime by security forces themselves, to end the impunity they have and to restore the faith of Guatemalans in their security forces.

In this paper I will explain why a transition to democracy and the weakening of the army was a necessary prerequisite for the police reform that started after the peace accords of 1996. How attempts to reform the police before this time were directly blocked by the army or could not succeed because of military influence. I will describe the major public security reforms signed up in the accord on the “Strengthening of Civil Society and the Role of the military in a democratic society” and the problems encountered when implementing this reform.

Much is expected of the new recruits of the *Policía Nacional Civil* or PNC, and in this paper the development of one particular group of civilian PNC members is followed: the fifth promotion of the Police Academy. Their recruitment, training and deployment will be discussed as well as their motivation to join the PNC. If they are the ones who will change the police force, then close examination of these new members is necessary.

A history of violence

During the armed conflict between the army and the insurgents, over 200,000 people were killed or disappeared as a result of political violence. According to the Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH) set up under the peace accords, 93 percent of human rights violations were committed by government forces and related paramilitary groups. During the conflict, the military institutions monopolized their institutional strength against all organized segments of civil society, against the public sector, against the political parties and social movements, gradually producing a hybrid civil-military political regime of violence and repression.¹ Over the years a system of repression developed towards civil society in which the use of terror and the dominance of fear became “normal”. The Guatemalan National Police (*Policía Nacional* or PN) played a significant role in these violations.

Although the police forces were manipulated before by different powerful actors it had always

¹ Koonings en Kruijt 1999: 45

succeeded to retain a certain level of autonomy. During the armed conflict this partial autonomy was lost when the army took over the control of the police forces. The police was used to carry out counterinsurgency operations.

The Army High Command's Directorate of Intelligence (*Dirección de Inteligencia de Estado Mayor de la Defensa* or EMP) directed Military intelligence. Commonly known as the G-2, this directorate maintained units in all brigades, battalions and companies. Even when regular police and military personnel conducted kidnappings and assassinations, the G-2 was clearly involved in the selection of targets and the planning of these crimes.²

The police served the G-2 and worked under command of the military unit G-2. Like an ex-member of the G-2 testified: "what the G-2 says is what the National Police does, they carry out military orders, only they do it much more dirty".³ The leaders of the police in the capital were under direct control of the Army High Command's Directorate of Intelligence. In other regions the police functioned under the command of the G-2 based in military zones.

For many years the directors and sub-directors of the police were army officials. Sometimes they had two positions at the same time, one in the police and one in the army. Like Coronel Julio Enrique Caballeros Seigne who was at the same time Director of the notorious *Archivo*, a military intelligence unit within the EMP, and Director of the National Police during the first months of the Cerezo government.⁴

Even ordinary personnel like police officers and agents often had double functions and worked at the same time for military intelligence units and for the National Police. People were mentioned in both personnel registers. Pictures were included in these registers on which the uniforms the people wear correspond with the unit they were registered for. So the same person wore a military uniform in the military register and a police uniform in the register of the *Policía Nacional*.⁵

Under military command the police forces formed death squads responsible for many killings and disappeared people during the armed conflict. The objective of these death squads was to eliminate alleged members, allies or collaborators of the "subversives" using the help of civilians and lists prepared by military intelligence. The concepts of public security and military defense were fused. The distrust people partly still have these days finds its causes in the severe history of the police forces through their involvement in human rights violations and corruption.

² Wola 1995: 3

³ Guatemala Memoria del Silencio, Tomo II 1999: 93/ 1013

⁴ See Appendix I for a list of Police Directors from 1978 till 2000

⁵ Guatemala Memoria del Silencio, Tomo II 1999: 94/ 1015

Democracy; a period of aborted reforms

Since the entry of the first civilian government in 1986 several attempts have been made to reform the Guatemalan police. All of these attempts made between 1986 and 1996 have failed due to an inability to confront corruption, military control and intimidation. Initially many international donors were interested in the Guatemalan police reform and Guatemala received some international assistance during those years but out of the continuation of corruption, violations, military control and lack of real progress many of these donors withdrew their support in the end.

While taking office in 1986 the Vinicio Cerezo government made plans to reorganize and modernize the police. The police reform program which was published in 1988 says: “. . . the technical and administrative reorganization of the civilian security forces, their reform, the instilling of moral principles in them, and the development of them into a professional body, are our priority tasks”.⁶ There existed a lot of international support for these police reform or “Citizen Security Program” as it was called. Donors from Spain, Germany, the United States and Mexico were mentioned. The Guatemalan government reported that 69% of the “citizen security” budget would come from international cooperation.⁷ Some progress was made with the establishment of a Police Academy and the “Office of Professional Responsibility”, charged with investigating internal wrongdoing. All this foreign aid for the police reform raised concerns within the military that the Cerezo government was creating a source of armed power independent of them. This discontent of army forces was apparent from the occupation of the Police Headquarters during the May 1989 coup attempt by the “Officers of the Mountain”, a military faction within the army. While the Cerezo government survived the coup attempt, many of the demands these rebel officers made were granted. One of them was to tighten military control over the police forces.⁸ Due to hardly any progress in real reform, many of the foreign cooperation was suspended or cut-off.⁹ International pressure of discontent at the end of 1988 and the beginning of 1989 increased and for the first time a civilian, Cifuentes Echevarria, was named as General Director of the National Police in May 1989.

In 1991, Serrano was inaugurated as president of Guatemala. Despite his promises to establish rule of law in Guatemala, human rights violations by security forces continued during his presidency.¹⁰ By 1992 street crime was rising, especially in Guatemala City and the Serrano government announced a new campaign called “Immediate Tranquility for the Citizenry” (TIP). This campaign promoted joint police-military operations through the *Hunapú* anticrime force established by Serrano in March 1992. The *Hunapú* task force coordinated operations of the different police forces: the National Police, Treasure Police, Mobile Military Police, and the Military Police based in Guatemala

In May 1991 a cooperative agreement was signed between the Guatemalan and Chilean government. The Chilean *Carabineros* would be involved in training and technical assistance of

⁶ Police Reform Program, Ministry of the Interior Republic of Guatemala 1988: 3

⁷ Idem 1988: 16

⁸ Barry 1992: 61

⁹ Unpublished notes of Rachel Garst

¹⁰ Barry 1992: 29 (figure 1d)

the Guatemalan police force. The *Carabineros* criticized the overlap of police and military functions in public security and maybe due to their influence a civilian was named as head of the National Police. In 1992 military reestablished control over the police reform through the appointment of a number of army officers to form a special advisory corps to help the Chileans with their police reform. A letter was written by the Minister of Interior to the National Police about this commission: "I want to express to you my satisfaction for the help (...) the Guatemalan Army is giving one more time to the National Police, conscious that in much they will advance in the process of reorganization and institutional consolidation, without false prejudgments we want to give our institutional help, only to improve our capacity to control and combat crime in a framework of respect of human rights, which is a firm policy of President Serrano."¹¹

The Serrano government ended in a self-coup attempt in May 1993. This resulted in the appointment of former Human Rights Ombudsman Ramiro de Leon Carpio as the new president of Guatemala. Leon Carpio made some initial efforts in demilitarizing the political arena by appointing reform-minded civilians as Minister of the Interior and director of the police and by announcing the dissolution of the Presidential Military Intelligence Unit (*Estado Mayor Presidencial*). Cifuentes Echevarria, director of the National Police during the Cerezo government, was appointed again as director of the National Police.¹² Cifuentes carried out a series of reforms to lessen the influence of the military within the police. These reforms included the removal of several military men from police posts, the appointment of civilians as head of all departments, the dissolution of the joint military-civilian unit *Hanapú*. In the end these reform efforts could not stop the escalating delinquency and political violence, accompanying the period around the peace talks in January 1994. Many army officials declared that the police was incapable of doing its job properly, justifying that the military should reassert its control over the Guatemalan police. An army attempt to remove Cifuentes was blocked by the reformed-minded Interior Minister, Ortiz. The latter was forced to resign only one month later. A new Minister of Interior was appointed and a former head of military intelligence was named as Vice-minister in charge of public security. The president suddenly fired Cifuentes one month later.¹³

International observers suggested that the growing violent climate in Guatemala was created or at least enhanced by the military. Especially violence against foreigners grew. According to some journalists, military elements would deliberately provoke the population to attack foreigners to make it more dangerous for international observers to come to the country to verify the implementation of the peace accords and to get even with the US Ambassador who critiqued the human rights violation of the army. More important, by creating these disturbances the military could show the incapacity of the police to act and justify their own role in internal security.¹⁴

¹¹ Letter from the Minister of Interior, Hurtado Prem, signed by Serrano and the Minister of Defense, to Melendez Garcia, director General de la PN, 11 June 1992 "Debo expresarle a usted mi satisfacción por el apoyo que en este sentido el Ejército de Guatemala, brinda una vez más a la Policía Nacional, conscientes que en tanto se avance en el proceso de reestructuración y consolidación institucional, sin falsos prejuicios debemos dar nuestras de apoyo institucionales, sino mejorar nuestra capacidad de control y combate a la delincuencia dentro del marco del respeto a los derechos humanos, que es una firma política del Presidente Serrano."

¹² Unpublished notes of Rachel Garst 1995

¹³ Idem

¹⁴ Idem

Another civilian and lawyer Salvador Figueroa replaced Cifuentes as the director of the National Police. Although the post of General Director remained in civilian hands, military intelligence people soon filled the other ranks of the PN again. Many people involved in human rights violations, cases of corruption and coup attempts gained high positions within the PN. Although Salvador Figueroa was in name director of the PN, it was reported that the PN took instructions directly from the Vice-Minister of the Interior, Colonel Merida.

After continuous national and international complaints about a military man having control over a civilian police, President De Leon removed Merida from his post at the beginning of 1995. A civilian replaced Merida and the lawyer Conte Cojulún was appointed General Director of the Nacional Police. Conte started his career as director by taking some measures against police corruption.

In 1996 the Arzú government took office. This government initiated yet another police reform. In early 1996, Minister of Interior Mendoza dismissed 118 members of the police, including many commanders. He invited the Spanish Civil Guard (*Guardia Civil Española*) to provide advice and training, and announced that Guatemala would adopt their model of policing. The Arzú government made significant progress in the peace negotiations and in December 1996 the government and the former URNG signed the peace accord.

Although Guatemala returned to democracy in 1986 with the Cerezo government every attempt to reform the security systems were either directly or in a more subtle way blocked by the military. They were afraid to lose control over internal security affairs. But finally the military were forced to negotiate and open the political arena because they needed international support, especially economic support, and needed to improve the bad image they had. Not until the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in December 1996, which included the accord on the “Strengthening of Civil Society and the Role of the military in a Democratic Society”, could a real effort to reform the police start.

Police reform and the Peace Accords

At the signing of the Peace Accords, some 12,500 to 13,000 police agents were working in the National Police. If subtracting the personnel on administrative duty, there was only one operative agent for each 4,500 to 5,000 Guatemalans. In 1997 it was estimated that over 60% of Guatemala’s 330 municipalities had no or very little police presence.¹⁵ This overall weakness made the police more dependent on the military for help in public security.

In September 1996 the “Agreement on the Strengthening of Civilian Power and on the role of the Armed forces in a democratic Society” was signed, part of the Comprehensive Peace Accord signed on 29 December 1996. In this Accord was laid down that a new national civilian police force would be created. This new National Civilian Police (*Policía Nacional Civil*, PNC) would be based on civilian and democratic concepts of security and would be free of ties to the old institution, the PN. The main public security reforms included in the September 1996 Accord are:

¹⁵ WOLA 1998: 31

- an expansion in the number of police, from the current 12.000 to 20.000 by the end of 1999;
- constitutional changes to remove the military from internal security and give a single PNC force that responsibility;
- a government commitment to revamp public security laws and structures with the support of MINUGUA and the international community;
- a government commitment to establish a formal police hiring and promotions policy, including the requirement that new members of the PNC receive six month at the Police Academy;
- the involvement of local communities in the recruitment process, and a commitment that the police reflect the multiethnic character of the country;
- an increase in police salaries and of the public security budget.¹⁶

One of the first decisions made by the Guatemalan government and accepted by the URNG during the peace talks was, to incorporate most members of the old police force into the new PNC. This decision protected Guatemala against a crime wave which could have arisen when the old forces were dissolved before a new force was up to strength, like happened in neighboring country El Salvador. It allowed the PNC to grow fast but on the other hand it meant that the PNC in the beginning existed exclusively out of personnel of the old police force, notorious for their corruption, abuse and incompetence. Besides recycling old personnel through an academy course of three months, the government decided to undertake significant recruitment from civilian sectors. According to the “Agreement on the Strengthening of Civilian Power” the new National Police force should have at least 20.000 members and would be functioning throughout the country at the end of 1999.¹⁷ Although the Peace Accords provided an important framework and opportunity for actual reform hardly any details were given on how this reform should be done.

The reform so far

The Arzú government started quickly to restructure and strengthen the Guatemalan police; even before the peace accords were signed. The government passed some new legislation’s, doubled police salaries, retrained previous National Police and Treasury Guard personnel, recruited and trained new PNC agents, and purchased weapons, vehicles and communication equipment. At the end of July 1999 the PNC was deployed in all twenty-two departments of Guatemala. By October 1999 the PNC had 17,330 members deployed, of whom 36.5 percent were new recruits.¹⁸

In May 1998 an assistance program was signed between Guatemala and the European Union (EU). The EU will provide approximately thirty-two million US dollars between 1998 and 2003 for training, administration, vehicles, construction or rehabilitation of Academy and police station installations, and other needs. From 1998 and onwards part of the costs are financed by the European Union. The European Union made the Spanish Civil Guard (Guardia Civil de España, or GCE) the technical assistance component of the project.

¹⁶ Garst 1997: 2

¹⁷ Art. 30a, “Agreement on the Strengthening of Civilian Power and on the role of the Armed forces in a democratic Society,” Translation by Minugua, homepage: www.minugua.guate.net.

¹⁸ Byrne, Stanley and Garst, 2000: 1

Significant changes are visible when comparing the new forces with the old corrupt and inefficient Policía Nacional. The new force has a more service-oriented spirit and was received well by the majority of the population. They are better paid, better trained and seems to be more effective than their predecessors: the arrest rates are up and violent death and kidnapping rates are down.¹⁹

The Arzú government severely underestimated the problems of violence and criminality stating in its first pronouncements to the nation, after winning the presidential and congressional elections, that it would solve the problem in 180 days. In an effort to respond immediately to the serious security problem in Guatemala, the Arzú government took some shortcuts, rapid deployment took precedence over deeper measures needed to ensure the long-term quality, professionalism and efficacy of the PNC.

According to the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) report: “Rescuing Police reform” (2000: 2-9) problem areas are:

- The composition of the police: incorporation of member of the old forces in the PNC. Selection and screening of former police personnel applying to recycling courses has been lax;
- Recruitment and selection: recruitment efforts are extremely weak, with little publicity given to Academy course openings (when focussing on the fifth promotion and their recruitment I will argue against this) and there is no adequate pool of applicants for the selection. The selection board (*Junta Evaluadora*) is understaffed and disorganized;
- Education and training: training requirements were pared back to speed up the deployment process. Three months of training for old National Police members is insufficient to inculcate new values and adequate skills. Poor quality of teaching skills of Academy instructors.
- Leadership: initially the entire PNC officer corps consisted of recycled officers who received just three months retraining. International donors complain about poor quality leadership. Old-guard leaders make it difficult to forge a new doctrine and institutional culture, to weed out elements inappropriate to a professional, democratic police force.
- Internal and external control: regulations for internal discipline are extremely complex, few officers or agents know or understand the regulation. The Office of Professional Responsibility (ORP) cannot initiate its own investigation or take complains for the public. It performed poorly, has half the staff needed and is concentrated in the capital. A police force made up largely of recycled elements of dubious quality and ethics has a system of controls grossly inadequate to the task of preventing and punishing corrupt, abusive, and unlawful conduct;
- Conduct: although initially the PNC has been received well in the communities there has been growing concern with police abuse;
- Criminal investigations: the Criminal Investigation Service (*Servicio de Investigacion Criminal* or SIC), who has primary responsibility for criminal investigation under the direction of prosecutors from the Public Ministry is seriously understaffed. The SIC includes 500 investigators, roughly one-third of those needed and only 150 have taken the new course organized by US International Criminal Investigative Training (ICITAP) and 100 have no previous investigative experience. Personnel have not been adequately screened, nor selected according to their analytical skills or investigative vocation. Recent denunciations of torture have focussed on this unit;

¹⁹ Idem, 2000: 2

- Building a multiethnic police force: with the sole exception of a MINUGUA-supported pilot program in the Ixil region, little effort has been made in recruiting indigenous personnel. Inappropriate selection tests, discriminatory height requirements and high cost of medical exams are serious barriers for indigenous aspirants;
- The role of the military in internal security: the Arzú government made ample use of military personnel in ‘joint patrols’ with the police. No civilian intelligence capacity (as required under the accords) was set up instead military intelligence was used to help investigate kidnappings and other high profile crimes. Former military personnel were also allowed to enroll in a course for junior officers at the Police Academy. The separation between police and military function would be consolidated in a constitutional reform, but were defeated in May 1999 nation-wide referendum held on 50 proposed reforms. Thus the Guatemalan military continues to have the Constitutional authority to be involved in internal security, and the future division of roles remains unclear;
- International cooperation: international oversight of the police reform has been weak, and coordination between donor’s poor.
- Role of civil society: given the traditional weakness and corruption of police, prosecutors and the courts, Guatemalan citizens are used to taking the law into their own hands. The public call for stronger measures against crime has been an important factor in the government’s political decision to focus on rapid deployment at the expense of other police reform measures.²⁰

The Guatemalan government appears to have approached police reform more as a short-term political challenge rather than as a long term, institution-building effort that is crucial to the consolidation of democracy in Guatemala.²¹

An import focus of the reform was directed towards police training. The education and training of new recruits and the retraining of members of former security forces in the values and skills required by professional policing is essential in building the New Civilian Police.²² Police member need to be trained to learn new procedures, policies and practices. With the creation of the New Civilian Police in the peace accords this point of view was endorsed. The “Agreement on Strengthening of Civilian Power (...)” states: “All members of the new police force shall receive training at the Police Academy, where they will be given extensive professional preparation and imbued with a culture of peace, respect for human rights and democracy, and compliance with the law.”²³

Many Guatemalan citizens have focussed their hope for a better police and less criminality on the new members of the PNC. Little is known about these new members of the PNC. Who are they and where did they come from? It is important to know something about the background of the people who will form the “new” police force. Why did they choose to join the police and what are their ideas for the future of the PNC. To know more about them enable us to draw some preliminary conclusions about the future of the National Civilian Police. Are they really capable to

²⁰ Byrne, Stanley and Garst, 2000: 2-6

²¹ Idem, 2000: 59

²² Idem, 2000: 29

²³ “Agreement on the Strengthening of Civilian Power and on the role of the Armed forces in a democratic Society,” Translation by Minugua, homepage: www.minugua.guate.net.

change the bad image of the old security forces? This is why I started my research by examining a group of new recruits at the Police Academy, who I will follow during their work as police agents over the next two years.

The Police Academy

According to the “Agreement on the Strengthening of Civilian Power and on the role of the Armed forces in a democratic Society,” the Police Academy shall:

“...oversee admission to the police profession, and advancement and specialization within it. It must guaranty objectivity and equality of opportunity in its selection of candidates and the suitability of the recruits for the performance of their duties as professional police officers. (Art. 28)

The Police Academy shall train the new police personnel as officers, inspectors, commanders and chiefs and retrain the current personnel, providing them with sufficient resources to carry out their assignment. Basic police training shall last a minimum of six months” (Art. 29).²⁴

Already before the signing of the assistance agreement with the European Union the Ministry of Interior spent over one and a half million dollars in the improvement and rehabilitation of the buildings to enhance conditions for studying, dormitory and service. The Police Academy was expanded by using the remodeled offices of the dissolved Mobile Military Police (PMA). The Spanish Civil Guard assisted in the establishment of the Academy and helped with initial training, through a \$0,9 million technical assistance program running from September 1, 1996 to December 31, 1997.²⁵ From 1998 and onwards part of the costs are financed by the European Union. Many observers have questioned whether the militarized policing model of the *Guardia Civil* is the most appropriate to move from militarized policing to civilian policing in Guatemala. Why the Guatemalan government chose the *Guardia Civil*, as their assistant in the police reform remains unclear. Many different reasons are heard. Guatemalan government leaders claimed they wanted to avoid the Salvadoran model of multiple donors and the mixed messages they said came from this approach.²⁶ The *Guardia Civil* themselves explain this decision out of their longstanding relationship with the Guatemalan police and government.²⁷ Some argue that the choice for this militarized donor was made through military influence, to maintain the military policing in the PNC.²⁸

The location of the new academy is not the most appropriate as well since the former PMA location was notorious for the murder and torture that took place here. Many people who entered these buildings as prisoners were never seen again. Several stories about the existence of clandestine graves circulated in and outside the Police Academy. In December 1998 with the

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²⁵ Byrne, Stanley and Garst 2000: 53

²⁶ Idem

²⁷ Interview with Arnaiz, Guardia Civil de España, July 1999.

²⁸ Interview with an International observer, May 1999.

rehabilitation of the buildings, construction workers came across supposedly human bones buried less than a foot under the surface of the site. The news of the finding was only made public in July 1999.²⁹ At the beginning of October 1999 a Forensic Anthropological Team started an excavation. The publicity of the bone discovery coincided with my staying at the Police Academy. The director of the Academy did not leave the Academy without an Uzi and a team of bodyguards because he had received several death threats that week.³⁰ The students talked a lot about it and believed the story of the construction workers. They talked about a guerilla man and his wife and that someone had seen the bones and they were wearing clothes. They even said the ghosts of these people were spooking around the dormitory at night and hit the mattresses on the bottom. During the excavation many bones were found but none of them were human remains.³¹ Many questions remained unanswered like: were there really human bones, if so what happened to them, if not who made up this story and why? A fact is that the location of the Academy will be always associated with the torturing and murder of suspected guerrilla sympathizers and social activists.

Besides the questionable choices made, the Police Academy started its first courses in April 1997. The retraining of old personnel and the recruitment, selection and training of new ones could start. Exactly two years after the new opening of the Academy, at the beginning of April 1999, a group of about 1,500 students entered the Police Academy for a basic course of six months. They were called “*La Quinta Promocion*”, the fifth promotion; four groups of new students had finished before them. I had the opportunity to follow a group of fifty-eight students, who formed one of the many classes of the fifth promotion. With some exceptions, most of them did not know each other before entering the academy; they just happen to have a name that started with the same letter in the alphabet.

The applicants

Police work in Guatemala and probably all over the world is still a male dominated profession. In the former National Police about fourteen percent (in 1991) were women and who were often assigned to administrative jobs at the police offices.³² Five hundred and sixty female PN members were recycled into the new PNC.³³ Participation of women in the PNC is still very limited, only seven percent,³⁴ and many of them are still doing only office work, even in some cases keeping clean the police offices. According to MINUGUA the authorities do not see the potential change and improvement the incorporation of more women could bring to the institution, since a large group of women who enter the PNC have a high educational and professional level. There are even cases known by MINUGUA where promotions to Inspector or Official were resisted because of gender. Police stations many times do not have a proper infrastructure to house female officers, like separate bedrooms and sanitary rooms.³⁵ From the fifty-eight students I followed only ten

²⁹ Cerigua Weekly Briefs, Number 27, July 15 1999.

³⁰ Interview with Brigido Fuentes, director APNC, July 1999

³¹ “Hallan huesos en la ex PMA. Antropólogo dice que restos no son humanos”, Prensa Libre, 6 October 1999.

³² Aguilera 1996: 304

³³ “...del curso de retroalimentación –reciclaje- egresaron 560 mujeres, de 6,648 agentes de la antigua Policía Nacional”, in “Seguridad en manos de mujeres,” Prensa Libre, 13th December 1999.

³⁴ “1,155 mujeres integran las filas de la PNC –7% de los agentes-“ in “Seguridad en manos de mujeres”, Prensa Libre 13th December 1999.

³⁵ MINUGUA 1999: 9.

were women. In the whole fifth promotion a hundred and sixteen women participated.

All students were between the age of eighteen and thirty like the requirements prescribe although most of them (almost 70%) were under twenty-three.³⁶ Arrays of professions were practiced before joining the police. Some of them already worked in security forces like the army (7%) and private security firms (12%) and mostly changed of institution because a better salary and a better career were offered in the PNC. Another large group were farmers (20%) and those who quit their study to join the PNC (13%). Another 20% were people who had worked in technical professions, as mechanical, construction worker and blacksmith. A few worked in shops or had administrative jobs, like accountants and secretary. Other jobs mentioned were: firemen, driver, waiter, tourist guide, teacher in karate and even a first vocalist. The majority did not have jobs that were closely related to the police work, only those who worked in security before.

The students came from all over the country. Most departments were even represented although the amount of people from the departments Santa Rosa (8), Jutiapa (7) and El Progreso (6) were higher compared to the others. It seems to be a kind of tradition that many police officers come from these three departments, showed by the high amount of officers in the National Police from these regions. In other departments joining the police is not very common. Especially not in those departments hit by the violence of the armed conflict. Departments like Huehuetenango, Totonicapán, Izabal, Jalapa and Suchitepéquez were not represented at all. Although the peace accords explicitly calls for the PNC to reflect the ethnic, cultural and linguistic character of the country, besides a pilot plan of MINUGUA little effort has been made in this regard. Inappropriate selection test, height requirements (1.58 for men and 153 for women in 1998; indigenous people are often smaller) and high costs for medical exams are some of the barriers indigenous aspirants face. The police academy does not give any value to indigenous identity and give no special support for often disadvantage indigenous recruits. An indigenous police agent told that during his course there was hardly any contact with non-indigenous students besides other students called them many times “*guerrilleros*”.³⁷

Police officers can hardly choose where they will be stationed. Many times they are stationed far from their department of residency. They work many hours a week. For eleven days they work eight hours, have eight hours rest and work eight hours again. This means that they work every other day sixteen hours. In eleven days they all make hundred and twenty eight hours; it does not matter if you are working at the office or on the street. After these eleven days they have five days off. There is little time to visit their families although most of them try to go home. Some travel over one day to reach their families. They see their families seldom and leave the raising of their children almost entirely to their spouse or family. Adultery is very often committed by the police officers or the one who is staying behind, not seldom resulting in more children and a lot of problems. The group I followed is relatively young, most of them were still single and without children which makes it easier to join the police force and be away from home for such a long time.

³⁶ For requirement details see Appendix II

³⁷ Interview with Pablo May 1999.

The educational level is an often-discussed point when criticizing the PNC and the old National Police. In 1977 the requirement to enter the National Police were for the first time regulated in a Governmental Degree. The requirement concerned with education were sixth grade primary school and to finish the course given at the Police School. In reality these requirements were not used and many people joined the National Police without any education at all. In 1995 only thirty percent of all the personnel within the National Police finished this course at the Police School.³⁸ While recycling these old police officers in the new PNC this lack of education caused many problems especially since some of them did not even know how to read or write. At first the minimal educational requirement to enter the PNC was sixth grade primary school like during the last years of the PN. But after much complain of observers and a high amount of Police Academy students who were not able to follow and pass the academy courses, the minimum standard was raised to third grade secondary school. WOLA was one of the institutions criticizing the low education level. They argued: “ Police, who must know and apply numerous laws, among other duties, need a relatively high educational level.”³⁹ Although WOLA also admits that by making the requirement this low the entry of indigenous aspirants was facilitated, given the typically low level of education of most Guatemalan indigenous peoples. Compared to neighboring countries like El Salvador and Haiti educational standard in Guatemala remain low. In El Salvador 12th grade is required and in Haiti 10th compared to 9th grade in Guatemala (equal to third grade secondary school).⁴⁰ A little more than half of the fifty-eight students finished primary school like the requirement asked when they entered the academy. The others finished secondary school en a few finished a professional education.

An interesting point was how the students knew about the selection of new recruits by the Police Academy. Many students (19) answered that friends and family who already work in the PNC informed them. A large number (36) answered they knew about it from television, radio, read about it in the newspaper or saw a poster. This is rather surprising because many international observers of the police reform criticized the public campaign of recruitment, especially through mass media. In early 1999, one observer stated: “to date [the government] has not made any call via the mass media, though in the reports of activities of the [Interior] Ministry they indicated that they have produced TV ads, radio spots and posters.”⁴¹ Although recruitment efforts may seem weak, results are being made when observing the high amount of students who knew about the recruitment through mass media. Some (10) did not even need this mass media publication because they knew about the recruitment from the official PNC Bulletin, which is available at the different police stations. Others were informed by the governments of their department and a few answered: “I just went to the academy for information and I stayed.”

The reasons for entering the police

It is important to know the motivation students have to enter the police and what expectations they have. If they all wanted to join the police because, as some answered, they like the power and weapons, little improvement of the police force can to be expected in the future. The students had

³⁸ MINUGUA 1995: 77.

³⁹ Byrne, Stanley and Garst 2000: 28.

⁴⁰ Idem

⁴¹ Idem 2000: 24.

many different reasons for wanting to be a police officer but some similarities were visible. Most mentioned reasons were: to serve the country, to serve the people, to improve their (economical) position in life, to fight crime, for respect and authority, out of love for the profession, for the adventure and for God. Many patriotic answers were given like: “I want to serve my beloved Guatemala”, “to be proud of my beautiful Guatemala” or “to serve my fatherland because it is my obligation to protect her.”⁴² Many mentioned the economic aspect or the aspect to improve their life: “I want to improve my life and that of my family” and “it is an economical need.”⁴³ Some of them agreed just to have entered because of the salary:

*Well, first I entered the police only for the attractive salary. I read about the recruitment in the newspaper and decided to apply. I did not know anything about the profession and did not know anyone in the police. Now that I am here, at the Academy, I started to like the profession and I am proud to be a member of this institution.*⁴⁴

Some wanted to enter the police to fight crime: “that Guatemala will be a country clean of delinquents.”⁴⁵ To find respect and authority: “Since I was a child I have dreamt to be an authority” or “because I like to respect and to be respected.”⁴⁶ Some have chosen to be police officer out of love for the profession:

*From my childhood and onwards I always liked the police institution and that is why I have chosen for this career, out of my wishes to be a police officer. Because from the moment they expanded this institution it is working well, like the citizens expected.*⁴⁷

More people mentioned the improved functioning of the PNC as a reason to enter the police:

*Okay, in the first place I always wanted it, but with the image of the old police it was not possible. But these days everything is very different. The PNC is great and I like it.*⁴⁸

Others mentioned the action as motivation for becoming police officers, like: “I always liked the danger”, “I like the risk”, “I like the action”, or “I like fire weapons”. Two students mentioned to serve God by becoming a police officer:

Well, the truth is I very much like to carry a gun and I am tired of working on the land; it is very tough and has no profits. So, here I like to earn what all policemen earn. I want to be a police officer because, to be true, it is an institution, which is there to serve the community,

⁴² “para servir a mi querida Guatemala”, “quiero tener un orgulloso para mi bella Guatemala” and “siverle a mi patria porque es mi deber defenderla”

⁴³ “quiero superarme a mi mismo y a mi familia” and “por la necesidad economica”.

⁴⁴ Interview with a student on 21th July 1999.

⁴⁵ “para Guatemala sea un pais limpio de delincuentes”.

⁴⁶ “desde pequeño soñaba que iba a ser autoridad” and “porque me gusta respetar y que me respeten”.

⁴⁷ “a mi la institucion Policíal desde que estaba pequeño me ha gustado siendo a si fue e descogido la carrera Policíal y mis deseos es ser Policía. Desde ampliaron esta institución si ha trbjado bien asi como la ciudadanía lo esperaba.” Alfonso, July 1999.

⁴⁸ “Bueno en primer lugar siempre quise hacerlo, pero con la mala imagen de la anterior policia no fue posible. Pero hoy en día todo es diferente. La PNC esta exelente y me gusta.” Maria, July 1999.

*and maybe to give life for them and that will make me proud, because only Jesus Christ gave his life for us. By being a police officer it is clear that I am a soldier of Jesus Christ. The truth is I want to be a police officer and with everything they are teaching me here, I believe that I am more then convinced to be a police officer and disciplined.*⁴⁹

Some entered for the opportunities and facilities the institution offered: “they have good weapons, nice uniforms, more education, good salary, nice installations and good opportunities to grow.”⁵⁰

One woman had a very special reason to join the police. Silvia visited the local police station very frequent to make official complaints against her abusive husband. She became acquainted with the police who worked at the station. After he beat her up another time the police advised her to join the police so she could protect herself. They gave her a lot of information on the recruitment procedures and with money borrowed from her parents, to be able to pay for the expensive medical tests, she decided to take her chances.

When I confronted the students with the bad reputation the police force had and probably still has, they confirmed that the institution had a bad reputation but “today people are from a different quality, before you could not be proud to be a police officer but now you can”⁵¹ or, as another woman said:

*I want to change the reputation of the police. Really helping people. Not by saying, if they ask me something, “I don not know” and walk on, like many are doing now. I want to be different.*⁵²

When the students were asked to mention some negative aspects of the institution, most students complained about the functioning of some police officers. Among other things they mentioned: “to work with bad colleagues who rob and are corrupt”, “that some police officers are abusive”, “treat citizens bad”, “they commit big mistakes”, “the bad education” and “to commit the same things as delinquents.”⁵³ They admit they can do little about it: “they will be your colleagues so you have to respect them”, but still have their hopes to change them: “we have to show them that you can work without being corrupt or abusive.” If all students would think like one student, Hugo, and make their words come true there is certainly hope for a much-improved police force in the future.

⁴⁹ “Pues la verdad me gusta mucho portar un arma y tambien yo ya me canse de trabajar a la tierra ya que es muy duro y no trae cuenta, pues aca me gustaria ganar lo que gana todo Policia, y quiero ser Policia porque en verdad, es una institucion que esta para servir al pueblo incluso quizas dar la vida por ellos, y eso me llena de orgullo ya que solo Jesucristo dio la vida por nosotros, y el ser Policia me consta ser un soldado de Jesucristo, en verdad deseo ser un Policia con todo lo que aqui me enseñan creo que mas me convencen a ser Policia y disciplina.” Elio, July 1999.

⁵⁰ “Tiene buenas armas, bonito uniforme, mas education, buen salario, buenas instalaciones, buenas oportunidades para superacion,” Benito, July 1999.

⁵¹ Hanna, July 1999.

⁵² Marcela, July 1999.

⁵³ “trabajar con malos compañeros que le guste el robo y corrupcion”, “que los Policías sean bulgares abusivos”, “tratar mal el ciudadano”, “cometer faltas muy graves”, “la mala educacion de los agentes y oficiales” and “algo mas de lo que ha cometido el delincuente” Interview July 1999.

Hugo said: “We can not do what the old PN did because now we are new and we have to represent the PNC like a police which is helpful and strengthens to become better every day.”⁵⁴

Selection

To establish an effective and professional police force a good selection of people by certain criteria is necessary. To enter the basic course at the Police Academy aspirants have to meet certain requirement and pass some examinations.⁵⁵ These exams are taken at special selection days that are organized in different departments of the country. I witnessed a few of these selection days, which were held in October and November 1999 at the Police Academy in Guatemala City. The overall impression of these days was, that it was very chaotically organized, if at all organized. Hardly any staff was seen and nobody knew what was going on. Exams took forever and results were not very clear. People had to wait a long time before they could finally do their exams but no official breaks were made, which made it almost impossible for aspirants to score the best they could. I will summarize two selection days.

The day “started” at seven thirty and I estimate that about a hundred to a hundred and fifty people were present; five of them were women. They were divided over two classrooms. A very short explanation followed about the program from the Selection Board (*Junta Evaluadora*), a unit within at the Police Academy, responsible for the selection of students and some paperwork was done. After this they were sent for the medical exam, all at the same time. An about two meters long line was formed in front of the clinic and after two hours of waiting the first person was allowed to enter the clinic. To make it even worse the special riot police unit, the FEP, had its selection day at the same time and the students who want to enter the FEP joined the line for a medical exam. First no doctor was presents, only one nurse. After half an hour the doctor and two other nurses joined the nurse. The nurse measured the blood pressure and the doctor held a brief examination of the aspirants. The doctor also checks the body for tattoos. Tattoos are not allowed although I saw many students and just graduated students with tattoos. When questioning an official about these tattoos, he explained they made a distinction between two categories of tattoos. The so called love category which said “I love Julia” or “I love Jesus” and which were not forbidden, and the tattoos with names that could suggest a name of a gang, like “the monkeys” or “the witches”, which were forbidden. Weight and length were not measurement but simply asked. This resulted in funny situations. After a boy with a little overweight, the nurses asked a skinny boy for his weight. He did not have a clue and remembered the weight of the boy before him and gave the same answer. Everybody started laughing. The nurse subtracted twenty pounds of the amount the boy mentioned and wrote this down. Most of the aspirants had more luck with guessing their weight. After three hours waiting the first person completed the medical exam; over a hundred were still waiting.

After the medical exam it was time for the physical exam. At one o'clock a group of sixteen was waiting to do the physical exam. There was no time for lunch and some of them had not even have eaten breakfast and started the exam with an empty stomach. The exam was not easy. It was

⁵⁴ “No podemos hacer lo que la antigua PN hace, porque ahora somos nuevos y tenemos que representar la PNC como una nueva Policía que ayuda y se esfuerza por ser cada dia mejor.” Hugo, July 1999.

⁵⁵ These requirement are listed in appendix II

allowed to fail on one test but most of the aspirant failed two tests and for instance all the women failed two or more tests.

Right after the physical test the thirty students who completed it (failed or passed) did the knowledge test and the psychological test. There was half an hour for the knowledge test and twenty-five minutes for the psychological test. There have been serious criticisms of the academic and psychological test used for the selection. The academic tests in Spanish, natural sciences, geography, history, and general culture have been criticized as testing only rote learning rather than the analytical and judgement skills call for in professional policing. The psychological test have been assessed as more appropriate to an urban reality rather than for people living in rural and largely indigenous areas.⁵⁶ During the exam a calculator was not allowed but the observers did not see or hear the watches that were used as calculators. A little after five the exams were finally over for these 30 students. Very tired and hungry they went home. The remaining aspirants had to come back the next day to finish the exams.

The second part of the selection was on the 22nd of November. The same aspirants had to do another academic exam, adapted to third grade secondary school. The *Junta Evaluadora* had a list of a hundred and fifteen aspirants. On their selection day in October the aspirants had received a paper with topics they had to study for the academic exam. Only three of the five women were there. The exam took one and a half hour. Some of them were ready in half an hour and told me the exam was very easy but most of them needed the one and a half hour. Most of them complained that none of the material they had to study was asked at the exam and that it was very difficult. Finally they had finished all the exams and had to wait till the results would be ready and available at the Police Academy.⁵⁷

After witnessing this selection day the following conclusions can be made. The selection day appeared to be very chaotic and unprofessional. Hardly any officials or instructors were seen. No explanations were given. Test results were not given to the instructors of the next exam. For example if you fail the medical exam there is no use in doing the other exams since you will not be allowed to enter the academy course anyway. It made me wonder how serious the results were taken as I saw many aspirants at the final selection day that failed the physical exam. It could be that many aspirants who fail their exams still enter the course since the Police Academy has big problems finding enough aspirants for their selection days. According to international standards there should be three aspirants for every available place.⁵⁸ With good selection procedures hardly any students would survive and the goal of 20.000 PNC members set forward in the peace accord will never be reached.

⁵⁶ MINUGUA 1998: 9

⁵⁷ While writing this paper, results were not yet available

⁵⁸ MINUGUA 1998: 6

Training

Police training is essential when creating a new police force. Without a certain amount of training changes within the police force are hardly possible. Many international observers criticized the length of the course for members of the former police force or PN personnel. The three months of training they get is too short to make them more professional and change their attitude. The training, which former PN personnel receive, is exactly the same as the one that the new members get; only the amount of sessions is reduced to half. There is no special program for them. Both new students and recycled personnel will receive classes and physical training. Civilian teachers and police personnel give the classes. With the exception of the classes by civilians, the whole academy is organized in a very military way.

After one week of taking classes at the Police Academy I found out that the quality of the classes the students received were very unequal. Some classes were of good quality but others were embarrassing bad. The whole system maintained at the Academy, a military discipline, seems to me very demanding and stressful for the students. But after having asked them about this, the most they like about the police academy is precisely this discipline.

The students who enter the PNC for the first time receive six hundred classes in six months. These six hundred classes are divided in six areas. (For a detailed program see Appendix III) These areas are Police Techniques, Law, Humanistic, Police Administration, Physical Education and Practice and Complementary classes like first aid and driving. One class takes forty-five minutes and the students receive six classes a day. The group I observed received the following classes a day: techniques of expression; law; police methodology; investigative operations; contraband regulations and organization and functioning of the PNC. Every day they receive the same classes, for instance “techniques of expression” from eight o’clock until nine, until all 25 sessions were finished. After an examination a new class would be started.

The quality of the classes depends mostly on the skills or the lack of skills of the instructors. Classes at the Academy are given by civilian teachers as well as by police officers. There is hardly any contact between the civilian and the police instructors. In general they do not talk to each other and do not mingle in common rooms, like when having lunch. Besides one does not have a high opinion of the teaching skills of the other. The civilian instructors accuse the police instructors of not having any teaching and pedagogical skills and of just reading (or screaming) the book aloud. And police instructors accuse the civilians of not having any experience in police matters and because of this they are not able to give the students useful information necessary for their police work.⁵⁹ For the students the division between the police and the civilian instructors is clear as well. According to some students the civilians are less strict and it is easier to crib during exams. “Civilians do not bother us like the police ones”, says Alejandro.⁶⁰

Although the skills of the instructors are the main reason for the quality of the classes, the skills of the students influence the quality as well. As written before the minimum requirement to enter the PNC is primary school but there are also students who finished secondary school and some even

⁵⁹ Several interviews held on the police academy July 1999.

⁶⁰ “no molestan como Policiales” Alejandro July 1999.

have a professional education. This results in a very diverse level of knowledge at the side of the students. The classes, which are given at the Academy, have to be understandable for all; so many classes are very simple. During the classes of Techniques of Expressions for example the very basic Spanish grammar rules are explained. And even with the easiest conjugations some students had problems. Many times students were laughed at by others. Once a teacher told me in English: “they do not want to learn, they just want to drink a beer.”

Some instructors, mostly police instructors, do not take their classes very serious. One example is the investigation class. The teacher entered the classroom with a little suitcase and after about ten minutes chatting with some students and looking very bored, he removed one object of the suitcase and passed it down. In the meantime he was hanging on a desk of one of the female students. She was admiring his golden necklaces. About ten minutes later a special brush to take fingerprints is passed down and when everybody has seen it, he packed his suitcase again and hung around till his forty-five minutes were finished. Next class he would explain how to use the brush. The second day some student can practice how to take fingerprints. Again a lesson of about ten minutes. Of course we need to take into consideration that there are fifty-five sessions of operative investigation, so the teacher has to take it easy not to be ready in ten sessions.

The military discipline is visible in every activity on the Academy. Although the classes start at eight o'clock the students have to get up at five o'clock in the morning to do physical exercises and practice the marching. The only place where the students do not have to line up and march in formation is in the sleeping barracks. But if they want to go for lunch or to their classrooms they have to line up en march with their platoon to the place of destination. When entering the Academy students receive hundred points from which an amount of points is subtracted for every mistake they make. The mistakes are divided in small mistakes, middle and big mistakes. The differences between the levels are not always very clear. For a small mistake three points are subtracted and for a big one ten. Besides students have to stay one day or the whole weekend at the Police Academy as punishment; they are “arrested”. These mistakes are not very hard to make. Mistakes, small and big ones are for instance: not wearing a complete uniform like missing a button, not wearing your cap, eating in the classroom, not saluting to an official properly, to talk to a students of the other sex outside the classroom (this is a middle or big mistake), a relationship between students or students and officials. This last point is forbidden but frequently practiced in secrecy. Especially female students with male officials. Because of the hard discipline many of the female students searched for a relationship with an official, which was not very hard to get, and so they had more freedom and would be less punished. This reduced the equality and solidarity between the female students and resulted in jealousy, telltale and gossip.

During the classes standing up and saluting is obligatory when an official enters or leaves the classroom. Some instructors expect their students to stand up when answer a question. Although some students complained about the abuse of power by officials, hardly anyone complained about the strict discipline at the Police Academy. Most students could not mention one thing they did not like about the academy. Most of them agreed with the strict discipline at the Police Academy. A students opinion: “I like the strictness with us because it is for our own sake”⁶¹ and “they keep it

⁶¹ “Me gusta lo estricto que son con nosotros por que es para nuestra bien,” Maria July 1999.

stressful here to prepare your for your work; it is the same later in the field.”⁶² Most opinions were more or less the same as the followed: “ The police Academy is a great study center in which they teach us to have social, moral and spiritual values” and “it is here were one learns to behave in the society to put in practice what you have learned.”⁶³

Despite the observed limitations in the education most student were satisfied with the training they received. Although they find the military discipline stressful, they considered it a necessary training for the work on the street.

“La Quinta Promoción” on the street

The fifth promotion graduated at the end of October 1999. Not all of them graduated. Some left out of personal problems, a few were fired and a few girls ended up pregnant and had to leave the course as well. The graduation at the Police Academy is a big celebration. The students are already weeks ahead busy with measuring heads for the cap and taking picture for their badge. For weeks they practice the end ceremony on the soccer field. Everything has to be prepared perfect because many hotshots will be present at the graduation. Many ministers, embassy people, the press and other national and international observers and many family members will be there. The day will be opened with the national anthem after which several speeches are held, by the minister, the director of the PNC and others. All the students will pass under the Guatemalan flag that is held high by two students. A special cross is given to the best student of the promotion and the certificates are symbolically handed to the students. Police officers who have given their lives during service are commemorated by the song “the death is not the end” and a few minutes of silence. At the end of ceremony they are officially agents of the National Civilian Police. After one year of working in the field they can apply for an officer training.

The day before the graduation everyone was told their destination and the day after the graduation the former students leave for their police stations. Most of the fifty-eight students followed stayed in Guatemala City (72%). A large group (28) joined units like the Department of Anti narcotic Operations (DOAN or *Departemento de Operaciones Antinarcotica*), the Special Police Forces (FEP, *Fuerza Especiales de Policía*), a combination of riot an rapid strike police forces. They continued following class for this specialization’s, two months for the FEP and one for the DOAN. One is following a course to become a fiscal expert and two joined the NUCLEO, a small riot police unit that every police station has. The others joined fifteen different precincts of which five in the Capital.

As mentioned before students hardly have any influence on the place were they will be stationed. During their course they can give their preference but at the end this is very easily ignored. Some police officials’ explanation is that it is dangerous for policemen to work in their department of residence because many problems arise with both friends and enemies, besides student hardly choose to go to their own department. It is true that half of the students prefer to work in a

⁶² Hanna Interview July 1999.

⁶³ “La Academia es una excelente centro de enseñanza Policial en la cual nos enseñan a tener valores sociales, morales and espirituales” and “es donde una aprende como de comportarse con la sociedad para poner en practica lo que aprende.”

department close to theirs but not the same for reasons just mentioned. But still half of the group chose to go to their department of residence. Only nine people are actually working in their own department. Nine as well (not the same nine though) are working in the department of their choice. In general this is not easy because the deployment is done by department. The first deployment till October 1998 was done in the departments Guatemala, Escuintla, Quetzaltenango, Quiché and Peten. Five other followed at the end of 1998 and the beginning of 1999, but it was not until the graduation of the fourth basic course promotion that the whole Guatemalan territory was deployed at the end of July 1999. Students from the courses after July 1999 are mostly sent to precincts where are still places available. Still a high amount of places are available. According to a counting done by the Spanish Civil Guards still nine hundred places are available only in Guatemala City in July 1999.⁶⁴

Little is known about the functioning of these fifty-eight students in the field. My next fieldwork will focus on this phase. Three students of the fifth promotion were mentioned in the newspaper. One of them, working at the DOAN and belonging to the group of fifty-eight, was shot during service. He was badly wounded but survived. This accident happened only one and a half week after the graduation. An alarming detail is that he was, at the moment of the shooting, working as a DOAN member but he still had to start his course the week after the accident. How serious are the courses taken if people are doing the same work without it? The two other students of the fifth promotion were involved in the very recent murder on a Guatemalan street vendor. The Office of Professional Responsibility (ORP, *Oficina de Responsabilidad Profesión*) is investigating their involvement and that of four others and they can be sanctioned with a dismissal or a suspension of one-year minimum.⁶⁵ Next fieldwork period will be dedicated to the fifth promotion into action.

Conclusions

The Guatemalan government appears to have approached police reform more as a short-term political challenge rather than as a long term, institution-building effort that is crucial to the consolidation of democracy in Guatemala. Reform of the Guatemalan police forces was never easy because of the violent history the old force and influence the army had to block important reforms. Although the Peace Accords provided an important framework and opportunity for actual reform hardly any details are given on how this reform should be done.

When the Arzú government took office public insecurity was one of the main problems of Guatemala. The government decided that fighting this crime would be their biggest challenge. In an effort to respond immediately to the serious security problem in Guatemala, the Arzú government took some shortcuts, rapid deployment of the PNC took precedence over deeper measures needed to ensure the long-term quality, professionalism and efficacy. One of the first decisions made by the Arzú government to increase the size of the new police forces was to incorporate the old PN personnel into the PNC. It meant that the initial PNC existed exclusively out of agents and officers from the old police force infamous for their corruption, abuse and incompetence. Although an import focus of the reform was directed towards police training most

⁶⁴ Interview Spanish Civilian Guard July 1999.

⁶⁵ “Accion realizada por seis policías contra vendedores amerita a la baja”. Prensa Libre, 9 February 2000

shortcuts were made here. Old National Police members received only for three months training. Three months is insufficient to inculcate new values and adequate skills. Some other questionable choices were made like the notorious PMA location for the new Police Academy and the adoption of the highly militarized “Spanish Civil Guard Model.” By chaotic selection days and low educational requirements many people were allowed to enter the PNC who could not have entered through a well organized and professional selection process.

The extensive use of joint military and police patrols and the use of military intelligence is another example of the short-term changes the Arzú government made. Like mentioned in the Accords the military should not have a role in public security and extensive use of them is no solution to fight crime in the end. Although the government officials said this joint patrols were only temporary till the PNC was strong enough to fight crime by themselves this patrols continued throughout the Arzú years. In February the Portillo government decided to dissolve the joint patrols explaining that the PNC had sufficient members; according to official numbers more than seventeen thousand police officers in three hundred and five of the three hundred and thirty one municipalities of Guatemala.⁶⁶

The government of Arzú was more concerned with passing laws and the number of police men trained and deployed; solving the problem in 180 days like he announced while taking office. The new Guatemalan government will be challenged to turn the PNC into a professional and efficient civilian police force which members are well trained and educated and respectful of human rights.

⁶⁶ “Ejercito abandonará las calles por decisión del Gobierno,”Guatemala Hoy, 17 Februari 2000 (Http://www.c.net.gt)

Appendix I

Directors of the Guatemalan police force from 1978- 2000

1978 – 1982	Coronel Ricardo Escalante; Coronel Mario Gustavo Cardona; Chupina Barahona
June 1985	José Felix Alvarez Arévalo
1986	Coronel (retired) Rubén Suchini Paz
July 1986	Coronel Julio Enrique Caballeros Seigne
1988	Carlos Anibal Mendez Cabreara (replaces Seigne, temporary director)
1989	Capitán Guevara Reyes
1989	Lic. Mario René Cifuentes Echeverría
1990	Coronel Geovani Valerio Cárdenas
1990	Coronel Caballeros Seigne (again)
1991	Coronel Mario Enrique Paiz Bolaños
till 1993	Teniente Col. Luis Hernandez Ligorria
1993	Mario Rene Cifuentes Echeverría (again)
1993	Salvador Figueroa
1995	Lic. Angel Conte
2000	Lic. Baudillio Portillo Merlos

Appendix II

Recruitment Process of the PNC:

Requirements for the fifth promotion (1998)

- Be a Guatemalan by birth;
- Be 18 years old and under 30 years old on the date of 4 January 1999;
- Be taller than 1.60 meters for men and 1.55 for women (for the Occidente and Peten 1.58 meter for men and 1.53 for women);
- Graduated from primary school (6to grado primaria) at the minimum
- Have no court, police or criminal record;
- No pregnancy at the moment of entering the police or during the course;
- Have no contagious diseases nor physical disabilities;

For recruitment at the end of 1999 some things were changed or added:

- Instead of primary school, educational requirements were changed in secondary school (3ro grado basico);
- Have no tatoes in vissible parts of the body;
- To stay in the institution for a minimum of two years after the appointment as Assistant police officer

Documents:

- Certificate of residence (cedula de vecindad)
- Primary school certificate;
- Court and police certificate affirming lack of record;
- Three letters of recommendation;
- Medical test reports.

Process:

Candidates must then pass different tests at the academy:

Physical test: a sprint of 50 meter to be completed in 9 seconds for men and 8 sec. for women; 20 push-ups (15 for women); jump in the air for men 40 cm and women 35 cm; run of 1000 meters to be completed in 4 minutes and 30 seconds for men and for women in 5 minutes and 30 seconds;

Medical examination: a basic physical examination including taking blood pressure, body check for tatoes, information like length and weight is written down not measured.

Written examination: a multiple choice knowledge test and a psychological test.

The results of the exams can be found at the local police stations and at the Academy together with a date on which the course will start.

Appendix III

Basic police training (six months)

I	Police techniques	1. Armament, shooting and signals	28 sessions
		2. Police methodology	55
		3. Organization and functioning of the PNC	55
		4. Criminology	34
		5. Investigate operations	55
		Total	229
II	Juridical Area	1. General Law elements	80
	Total		80
III	Humanistic	1. Human Rights	35
		2. history, social-cultural aspects and economics of Guatemala	25
		3. Police Psychology	25
		4. Professional Ethics	25
		5. Techniques of expression	25
		Total	135
IV	Police Administration	1. Narcotic Law	10
		2. Traffic standards	10
		3. Status of foreigners	10
		4. Regulations on weapons and munitions	10
		5. Environmental regulations	10
		6. Contraband regulations	10
		Total	60
V	Physical Education and Practice (extra time)	1. Personal defense	26
		2. Physical education and sports	26
		3. Reunion orders (orden cerrado)	17
		Total	69
VI	Complementary area	1. First Aid	15
		2. Driving	12
		3. Unit practical	
		Total	27
Total of all sessions			600