

Panel 182 DEM
**Armed Actors: Security Forces, Militias, and the Guerrillas in
Latin America during the 1990s**

**Civil Patrols, Memories and the Reconstruction of
Local Civil Society in Guatemala**

Drs. Simone Remijnse
Department of Cultural Anthropology
University Utrecht
The Netherlands

Draft paper: please do not quote

**Prepared for delivery at the 2000 meeting of the Latin American Studies
Association, Hyatt Regency Miami, March 16-18, 2000.**

Introduction

In 1996, after 36 years of civil war a Peace Accord was signed between the guerrilla forces and the Guatemalan government. One of the stipulations of the Peace Accord was the dismantling of the civil defense patrols. Although the civil patrol structure was officially dismantled in the months before the signing of the Peace Accord, it is clear from newspaper articles, human rights reports and daily conversations that the role civil patrols played in the local power structures in the villages of the Western highlands is not over yet. In many areas former patrol commander still seem to wield a certain amount of individual power or locals fear a possible revival of the civil patrols.¹ Although civil patrols had been set up initially as a military instrument to help win the war, they have evolved through time into a local power player of their own.

In this paper I want to look at the impact of civil patrols on existing power relations in Joyabaj², using the different memories locals have of the violent past as an analytical tool. Many social scientist argue that memory is not a residue of what ‘really’ happened in the past but a narrative about the past constructed in the present.³ This causes people to experience and remember events in different ways. In the first part of the paper I will present a short overview of the violence in Joyabaj during the civil war, paying special attention to the role of civil patrols. This reconstruction of past violence will then be used as the background from which *Joyabatecos*⁴ at the time of the research (1998 & 1999) looked back and remembered different violent episodes in which the civil patrols were involved. How easily do people talk about patrol violence, what do they tell and what do they leave out, which words do they use to describe it, who tells what? What do people still remember and what do they not (want to) remember? Do *Joyabatecos* nowadays still regard former civil patrols or civil patrol commanders as a powerful presence in their communities? The answers to these questions give an idea of the amount of influence civil patrols have had on daily life in Joyabaj and apparently in some way still have. Memories shape people’s perceptions of and actions in the present and the future.⁵ That is why memories of past violence and its perpetrators and the way in which people nowadays see these persons and institutions may have significant repercussions for the post-Peace Accord reconstruction of Guatemalan society.

Civil patrols as part of a wider counterinsurgency strategy

The history of Guatemala has been a violent one. From the early 1970s on, the guerrilla and the counter-insurgency campaigns of the military put Guatemala in a continuous state of low intensity civil war. At the beginning of the 1980s the fighting, and especially the military repression, intensified. The indigenous population in the western highlands where the guerrillas were most active was hardest hit. In the period between 1981 and 1983 the military used so called ‘scorched earth’ tactics. This resulted in more than 400 villages being destroyed, 75,000 people being killed and more than 1 million people fleeing their homes. At the same time the military institutionalized its control over the western highlands through the creation of ‘model villages’ and development poles⁶. The indigenous population that

¹ See: Minugua reports and newspaper articles from Prensa Libre and Siglo XXI (from December 1996 onward).

² A municipality in the southern part of the Quiché department

³ See for example Boyarin (1994), Connerton (1989), Fentress & Wickham (1992), Crombag & Merckelbach (1996).

⁴ People born in Joyabaj are called Joyabatecos; *indígenas* as well as *ladinos*.

⁵ Bloch (1998)

⁶ *Polos de desarrollo*. See CEIDEC (1990) for an extensive overview of the *polos de desarrollo* in different departments of Guatemala.

remained alive after the ‘scorched earth’ campaign was forced to relocate into these easily controllable model villages. A key element of the military’s counter-insurgency campaign was the creation of the civil patrols (*Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil – PAC*).

The civil patrols were created in the Guatemalan countryside by the military in the early 1980s. The introduction of civil patrols in different areas depended for the most part on the intensity of the guerrilla-army conflict in the area and the assumed sympathy of the villagers for the guerrilla. The more conflictive the zone, the more civil patrols were set up and the stricter military control over them was.

Officially they were set up to defend the villages against guerrilla attacks, and participation in the patrols was *supposedly* voluntary. Unofficially, however, participation was obligatory for all males between the ages of eighteen and sixty, on penalty of severe punishment or even death. The patrols were used as an extension of the military’s control of the Guatemalan countryside. They acted both as an information network for the military, as well as taking over military tasks as sweeping areas for guerrillas and attacking so-called subversive villages. The patrol was headed by a civilian patrol commander or patrol chief, under control of the military commander at the local garrison and the military commissioner. The military commissioners were villagers themselves, mostly ex-military men, acting as ears (*orejas*) for the army and rounding up enough conscripts for military service. Sometimes they also worked as secret agents (*judiciales*) for army intelligence (Paul & Demarest, 1988:150). Many civil patrollers, especially the patrol commanders and the military commissioners, were involved in massacres and other human rights abuses throughout the civil war.

The civil war in Joyabaj

Joyabaj is a municipality situated in the southern part of the Quiché department, which was hit hard during the civil war. The majority of the population (85%) is *indígena* who mostly live in the sixty or so small villages and hamlets surrounding the municipal capital, Joyabaj. Good access roads to the outlying hamlets are virtually absent, as are electricity or running water. The villages north of the municipal capital are situated on higher and therefore colder grounds (*tierra fría*) and produce mainly maize and beans on small subsistence plots. It is too cold for the commercially more profitable crops like sugarcane and vegetables, which are grown in the warmer areas (*tierra caliente*) south of Joyabaj. *Ladinos*, 10% of the population, mainly own land in the south, while the *indígenas* live in the northern villages. Although a minority, *ladinos* have always had a powerful economic and political presence in the municipal capital itself.

Like in most towns in the southern part of the Quiché department the civil war closed in on Joyabaj in 1980, when the local parish priest Padre Villanueva, was killed on church grounds by security forces. It was not the first murder in Joyabaj during the civil war, but it had a big impact on the whole community and left people ‘. . . *con incertidumbre, miedo y tensión*’, according to a former mayor of the progressive Christian Democratic party (*DCG - Democracia Cristiana*)⁷. Padre Villanueva was not the only priest killed during the civil war. Fifteen parish priests were killed or kidnapped in the first half of the 1980s, and more than a 100 priest, nuns and religious laymen were threatened or even expelled from Guatemala.⁸ The progressive catholic church was seen as communist and subversive by the military. In Joyabaj, as in the rest of the Guatemalan highlands, not only church leaders but also peasant leaders, community workers, cooperativists and people working with Alianza, a local NGO, were killed or had to flee because they began receiving death threats. A former indigenous leader who had worked with Alianza and the catholic church in the late 1970s and survived the war because he fled to Guatemala City told me the following ‘*Cuando se empezo . . . la*

⁷ Interview 20-99 (5/7/99)

⁸ Diocesis del Quiché, 1994: 147-157

*violencia . . . fueron a perseguir a todos los líderes de Acción Católica, de los políticos, por ejemplo si uno trabaja así al nivel comunitario, entonces lo dicen que es comunista.*⁹ Blacklists, supposedly drawn up by local *ladino* leaders who were connected with the MLN (*Movimiento de Liberación Nacional* – Movement of Nacional Liberation) a right wing political party, started circulating during this period. At the same time the guerrillas paid various visits to Joyabaj, mainly distributing propaganda and holding town meetings. These visits remained peaceful until one day in October 1981, when the guerrillas tried to kidnap several former *ladino* mayors, and succeeded in kidnapping the son of a powerful *ladino* family and murdering one former *ladino* mayor. Until then the violence had come mainly from the side of the military and death squads connected to the MLN party on the one hand and the guerrillas on the other hand.

This changed when, at the end of 1981, the military set up a permanent base in Joyabaj in the convent and other church buildings. Quickly after the military settled down they started organizing the civil patrols. One informant remembered ‘*Vino el ejército, con helicóptero, disparando por el monte . . . desde allí empezó el tiempo duro en Joyabaj.*’¹⁰ Local authority was suspended and the military appointed their own trusted people as mayor and municipal secretary. One of these former appointed mayors remembered his position as ‘. . . *daba dolor de cabeza . . . los alcaldes eran candidatos por la muerte.*’¹¹

The military, together with the civil patrols carried out various massacres in the hamlets surrounding Joyabaj. Somewhere between eight to ten massacres are documented for the Joyabaj area, during which several hundred men, women and children were killed.¹² Most of the massacres took place in the indigenous villages north of Joyabaj¹³ where, since the 1950s the Catholic church was actively promoting development projects and organized production and savings cooperatives. In the process many local indigenous leaders had been trained. Also reconstruction efforts from NGOs who came in to help rebuild Joyabaj after the 1976 earthquake centered on the villages north of Joyabaj. This were also the villages who voted for the Christian Democratic party and had backed the first mayor of mixed descent who came to power in 1978. Responsible for these massacres were the military together with civil patrollers from surrounding villages and from the municipal capital itself.

After this wave of massacres in 1981 and 1982 that seemed to concentrate on a few villages, the violence also spread to other communities north and south of Joyabaj, *ladino* as well as indigenous communities. Violent actions were no longer initiated mainly by the military to combat subversives, but used more and more by individual patrol commanders for their own purposes - to better their own economic position in the village by confiscating land and cattle from disappeared or fleeing neighbors, for example. ‘*Así muchos terrenos se cambiaron de dueño. Se veían que había muy buen terreno . . . y lo quitaron.*’¹⁴ Old problems between families or villages were also used to justify civil patrol violence. In a few cases violence erupted between civil patrollers themselves. In the case of the *ladino* village of *Boqueron* for instance, where a group of twenty local civil patrollers were killed during a local *fiesta* by the civil patrol from the neighboring *ladino* village of *Las Lomas*, who felt threatened by the powerful position of their rivals. A *ladino* man who worked in *Boqueron* at the time of the massacre told me that ‘*Mientras la marimba estaba tocando arriba, abajo estaban matando a los PAC de Boqueron.*’¹⁵

⁹ Interview 28-99 (18/9/99)

¹⁰ Interview 14-98 (19/6/98)

¹¹ Interview 5-98 (20/7/98)

¹² Massacres mentioned in REMHI (1998), the truth commission report from the Catholic Church and CEH (1999), the official truth commission report.

¹³ Amongst others the villages of Chorraxaj, Patzulá, Xeabaj and Chicotón.

¹⁴ Interview 15-98 (13/7/98)

¹⁵ Interview 2-99 (14/7/99)

The situation calmed down somewhat after a democratically elected president came to power in 1986. Village massacres in Joyabaj made way for selective violence, targeting upcoming community leaders, returned refugees, people protesting against civil patrol duty, local members of different human rights organizations and others who confronted the local power of the civil patrol commanders and their collaborators.¹⁶

Civil patrols and local diversity

Civil patrols were not static entities, but locally were very diverse. Although set up by the military as part of a wider counterinsurgency strategy and having basically the same organizational structure, across and even within regions the differences between civil patrols were enormous. Civil patrols differed in background, the type of functions they performed, and their level of military activity. Civil patrol members also had widely different views of civil patrols and what they stood for. In one area a civil patrol could be highly hierarchically organized, heavily armed and in constant close contact with the military. However, in another area civil patrol members might hardly be armed at all, might do only some shifts on night watch, might have had little contact with the local military commander and might have regarded civil patrol duty as a minor obligation. Between these extremes there is ample room for endless variation, depending on such factors as the level and history of violence, and/or military presence and guerrilla activity in the area.

This diversity is partially a result of introducing civil patrols in widely different settings (areas, municipalities) which had experienced history in different ways. One of land disputes, one of *ladino* rule, one of municipalities ruled by *indígenas*. Joyabaj has always had a *ladino* minority that controlled most of the political and economic positions in town. Although the indigenous population was and still is in the majority, until 1978 they had not been part of the political elite who normally occupied all positions in the municipality. The only group of *indígena* leaders that came close to local party politics was the one backing the right wing political parties of the *ladinos*, especially the anti-communist MLN. It looks as if these indigenous pro-MLN villages were places where the civil patrols were first set up. They were also among the most aggressive.

Another factor influencing the diversity of the civil patrols was the degree of military influence in an area; was it a conflict area, was there a local military base, how were the communication lines between the military and local patrols and military commissioners. This variety seemed to have had a major impact on the way civil patrols acted and carried out their surveillance tasks. The *ladino* population of Joyabaj has a long military tradition with several family members on active duty in the military command structure. Ties between *ladinos* and the military were already close before the civil war broke out. Several *ladinos* were connected with military intelligence. A *ladino* told me that ‘. . . *el problema era que mucha gente gustaba las actividades de judicial . . . entonces muchos colaboraron con la G2 o al ejercito. Les mandaban una tarjeta de identificación y la gente se sintían con el mando de poder.*’¹⁷ So contacts with the military of G2, the military intelligence section, were used as a way to attain local status and authority. When the fighting started in the Joyabaj area around 1980, the *ladinos* felt threatened and used their close ties with the military to request military presence in the village.

After the military settled in Joyabaj at the end of 1981 the civil patrols were set up and patrol commanders were appointed. Naturally the military chose military commissioners and other locals already connected with the military to occupy these positions. A closely connected factor was the central economic and political positions certain *ladino* families or

¹⁶ See: ODHAG (1994), PDH files (1989-1996), bulletins from CUC and CERJ (various years) and REMHI testimonies (1996). See appendix for abbreviations.

¹⁷ Interview 38-99 (19/8/99)

individuals occupied in the community. The *ladinos*, especially the Sánchez family, had occupied many important political, military and economic positions in Joyabaj since the end of the 19th century. At that time much of the indigenous communal lands were divided and sold to *indígenas* as well as *ladinos*. Much of the land that was sold to indigenous people however was resold shortly afterwards to *ladinos*. That way a few *ladino* families, like the Sánchez family, acquired vast amounts of land north and south of the municipal capital. Not unexpectedly, this land was to become the most important economic and political power base for a few *ladino* families. Besides the Sánchez family had been supplying mayors for the last century and also had family members on high ranking military positions. When the highest position in the patrol command structure in Joyabaj had to be filled, another member of the Sánchez family was appointed, Gerardo Sánchez. He had received military training and two of his brothers were supposedly working as informers (*judiciales*) for military intelligence.

It can be said that the civil patrols in Joyabaj were closely connected with the military through the already existing ties between important *ladino* families and the military from before the civil war. Although patrolling in the municipal capital itself stopped around 1986, the civil patrols in most surrounding hamlets continued up until 1994/1995, when national and international protest against the civil patrols became massive. Especially in villages where civil patrol commanders had turned the civil patrol into a personal power base and where the patrols were responsible for various human rights abuses, opposition to the patrols was suppressed violently. These were the civil patrol commanders that stood to lose most with a dismantling of the civil patrols.

Multiple memories

In social theory a debate is being waged about memory. The main current, mentioned in the introduction, sees memory as a dynamic construction, and not as a factual account of what actually happened. People remember things differently at a different moment in time. Depending on for example the time of conversation and the context in which it is told, memory changes constantly.

The fieldwork took place almost seventeen years after most atrocities in Joyabaj were committed and both *ladinos* and *indígenas* had come up with a variety of explanations of *el problema* (the problem); words many of my informants used when referring to the civil war period. The different backgrounds people have (ethnicity, sex, schooling, age) causes people to experience and remember events in different ways. People remember events in their own way, as a bystander or a participant, or as having read or heard about it. Also time plays a crucial role in remembering. Asking the same person the same question after some time can result in very different accounts of the same event. There is another very important factor that influences memories and perceptions of the past and present, namely local power relations. Which group or which individuals wielded power in the past and in the present, what was their role in the civil patrols and what is their position in town nowadays.

But not only did memories of the recent civil war differ, but so too did memories of a more remote past. During my many conversations with them, *ladinos* and some *indígenas* kept referring to earlier times remembering former Presidents like Cabrera, Ubíco, Arévalo and Arbenz. They mentioned military training on Sundays, political factionalism between *ladinos* and the need of a strong hand in Guatemala because they were not yet ready for democracy. The former administrator of the biggest plantation in the area hammered the point that the Agrarian Committees that were set up under Arévalo and Arbenz really messed things up because they did not know what they were doing, while activists in these committees seemed to remember things quite differently.

Gradually a more complete but also more complex picture emerged. One of constant warring *ladino* factions in the municipality, one of a *ladino* elite that had multiple ties with regional and national political groups and organizations, including the military, one of a *ladino* elite that was gradually losing its power from the fifties onward. But also the civil patrol structure and their actions were subject to diverse interpretations depending on who told it to me, at what moment, and who else was present during the discussion.

Memories of civil patrol violence

The topic of violence was present in almost every conversation I had during fieldwork, although not always in such a conscious way. People themselves often started talking about the war and the violence in Joyabaj, without me having to ask them. On the whole I talked extensively about these topics with approximately forty people, both *ladinos* and *indígenas*, young and old, men and women.

The situation in which these conversations took place was one of ‘superficial tranquility’, as a local priest told me. The atmosphere was tense, especially during the second fieldwork period in 1999 because a forensic team had just arrived in Joyabaj to open up a clandestine cemetery that had been located behind the convent. The military had occupied these church buildings during the height of the violence. During this period many people who were accused of being a subversive were brought to the military in the convent and were never seen again. When the forensic team arrived, family members of disappeared people started to come forward, and the town was literally buzzing with ‘memory’ stories. Another influential factor was that during the research period civil patrollers in different parts of Guatemala were being brought to trial, and even convicted. In the nearby municipality of *Chiché*, a local *ladino* patrol commander was being tried for the third time, being accused of multiple murders and massacres. The first two trials acquitted him, but during the last trial he was sentenced to 220 years in prison. Many of the *ladinos* in Joyabaj knew this man quite well, and did not really know what to think of this sentence. They told me that they did not really believe he committed these crimes, and blamed them on another patrol commander from *Chiché* who had conveniently fled to the United States.

Because people express very different memories of patrols and their activities, I want to try to group some of them together. Of course they are not mutually exclusive; people use a variety of reasons to try and make sense of civil patrol violence and the war in general. The largest group of *Joyabatecos*, *ladinos* as well as *indígenas*, stresses the *forced* nature of the civil patrols. It was impossible not to participate, not to get involved. People only obeyed orders from the military or civil patrol commander and whatever they did when patrolling, it was not of their choosing. If you did not participate, you could get punished, killed or disappear. Many patrollers just did their job, patrolling the area and checking on people, but avoiding killing people and assisting in massacres. They tried not to confront people or just waited until things cooled down. They described to me their forced participation as merely being present, but not actively participating. In their stories, it is almost always the others that are doing the burning or the killing. They themselves were only present. This is especially apparent when *ladinos* start describing the already mentioned massacre in *Xeabaj*, which has left a lasting imprint on their minds. *Xeabaj* is an indigenous village north of the municipal capital, where about 500 civil patrollers from Joyabaj participated in the massacre of the villagers. The estimate people gave of the number of people killed during that massacre differed widely, ranging from 50 to 200 men, women and children. The massacre was a violent one, during which heads were cut off with machetes ‘y un río de sangre bajó de la montaña’.¹⁸ When telling the story, people keep stressing the fact that they were forced to march to the village during the night, that they were forced to watch everybody get killed but

¹⁸ Interview 14-98 (19/6/98)

that they *did not* kill anybody. *Ladinos* blame the people of a neighboring indigenous village for having carried out the killing.

A second large group also focuses on a negative aspect of the civil patrols, but from a different perspective, namely their *abuse of power* and sometimes excessive violence. Examples are multiple. Civil patrollers and civil patrol commanders stole livestock, land and other goods from refugees and trooped together as roaming bands, stealing cattle from nearby estates. Old problems between villages, hamlets and families, or even within one family, were fought out within the civil patrols.¹⁹ People were blackmailed into giving over their land titles or their cow when walking it to the market to be sold. Especially many *indígenas* mention the *envidia* (envy) between persons or groups of people when talking about the causes of war en civil patrol violence. It seemed to be common to settle old scores during the war, often by way of the civil patrols.²⁰ The mechanism was simple: either you gave in to the requests of the patrollers, or you were branded subversive and taken to the local military base. Sometimes people mention a few individuals in particular who reveled in their personal power and took advantage of it, but they speak of this only in cases in which the patrol commander is already dead or gone from the village. When people who committed these acts are still around town, most voices stay mute. This reflects the lasting impact of power relations. Anxieties are sharpened by the period of arbitrary violence.

But civil patrols are not only seen as having had a negative impact. A third and positive aspect people mention was the role of civil patrols as the *keeper of order and security* in the village. In the eyes of some people there was hardly any crime, not counting the human rights violations committed by patrollers and the military of course. When crimes were committed people were arrested, tried and sentenced by special tribunals set up by the Ríos Montt government. This is told within the current context of a justice system that, according to most villagers, is not doing a proper job. Criminals, including former civil patrollers, buy themselves free, bribe judges or blackmail them into letting them walk. In this way many older *ladinos* but also *indígenas* from pro-civil patrol villages talk in a very nostalgic way about ‘the good old days’ when law and order, although by decree and special tribunals, were carried out. The order and security issue is big nowadays, especially in the light of the many lynchings during the last couple of years.²¹ *Ladinos* as well as *indígenas* express this view.

A fourth group, mainly older *Ladinos*, also looks favorably on the past activities of civil patrols. They believed that their way of life was really threatened by either communist or *indígenas*, or both. They saw military action, including the installation of patrols as the only solution and protection against a communist guerrilla threat. They believed civil patrol violence was necessary. ‘*La gente que se murieron eran solamente comunistas y naturales.*’²² one *ladino* informant told me. Some *ladinos* expressed fears of an Indian majority literally flooding down from the mountain, demanding their rights, and intent on killing every *ladino* in sight. These *ladinos* are still grateful for the military intervention in the nineteen eighties that prevented such an imagined thing from happening. ‘*Desde el principio*’, an older *ladino* man told me, ‘*pensaban que la guerrilla era comunista y que eran mala gente. Que iban a quitar sus casas, sus mujeres . . . la gente tenían miedo de eso . . . mas que todo la gente ladino. Y cuando entraban a los PAC pensaban que iban a defender sus casas, sus familias.*’²³

Lastly there is a big group of people who do not remember or do not want to remember the civil patrols or the violent past and can not or do not want to express their

¹⁹ See denouncements in the PHD files.

²⁰ See Zur (1998) for a detailed study of *envidia* and the civil war among Quiché widows.

²¹ See Minugua report no. 10 (1999), on numbers of lynchings.

²² *Naturales* (naturals) is the degrading name some *Ladinos* use when talking about the indigenous population.

²³ Interview 38-99 (19/8/99)

views on the patrols. It seems to be a case of social amnesia,²⁴ not only denying the past but not even remembering it. Sometimes because they were not present at the time or they were only children or youngsters and never heard the stories because their parent never told them what happened. But even among grown-ups, who were present as victims or perpetrators, the past is not always welcome.

Perceptions on the present-day impact of civil patrols

When the research was carried out, the patrols had already been formally dismantled for the past two years. But dismantling the structure of the patrols does not automatically mean the dismantling of their power base. After the Peace Accord was signed in 1996, different human rights organizations declared that former civil patrol commanders throughout the country still had some say in local affairs and were involved in human rights abuses or other crimes. The different memories and perceptions of *Joyabatecos* gives an idea of the amount of the influence civil patrols have had on daily life in Joyabaj - and apparently in some way they still do. These views of past violence and its perpetrators and how people see these persons and institutions nowadays may have important repercussions for the rebuilding of civil society and possible future scenarios for Guatemala, as I will now explain.

Broadly four ideas or attitudes can be identified. First of all the idea that civil patrols have really and completely been *dismantled and disarmed* and that they do not have any power nor influence anymore and ‘. . . *son mala vista*’.²⁵ However, even after stating this opinion people often add that it is still wise to keep away from former patrol commanders and not to become too friendly with them. ‘*Cuando lo veo en la calle no hablo de cosas importantes, y tengo una sonrisa en la cara*’.²⁶

A more common attitude is that people say they *do not care*, because it happened a long time ago and everything has changed now. But this notion of not caring often seems to be closely related with fear. Fear of the past and fear of getting into trouble when thinking or talking about this past. When I asked a young indigenous woman who had helped gather testimonies for the truth commission of the Catholic Church why so many people in Joyabaj did not want to give testimonies about civil war violence she first said ‘. . . *no les importa . . .*’ After a short silence she added ‘. . . *porque tienen miedo todavía. Por eso dice que no les importa, porque no quiere problemas, no quiere meterse en nada*’.²⁷ Another example is that while pretending not to be interested, many people follow the court cases involving civil patrollers closely. Besides people secretly read the newspaper summary of the church truth commission report, looking up places and events they heard or knew about. While reading this summary at home, with me present, they denied doing so when other people were present. These were people who, in public, did not seem to be very interested in talking about the violent past, claiming that it had no more bearing on the present.

A third group sees the patrol as a structure does not exist anymore, but that certain individuals, be it former patrol leaders or military commissioners, still have a certain amount of *individual power*. One example is the way in which the courts treated one of the most important patrol commanders in Joyabaj, Gerardo Sánchez,²⁸ when he was brought to trial in 1993. He was, together with other civil patrollers, charged with the murder of a local peasant

²⁴ On the topic of social amnesia and forgetting, see for example: Burke (1989), Etnofoor (1993), Fentress & Wickham (1992) and Focaal (1995).

²⁵ Interview 3-98 (17/7/98)

²⁶ Interview 3-98 (17/7/98)

²⁷ Interview 22-98 (15/7/98)

²⁸ This is not his real name. In his case I use a fake name because he still lives in the villages and identifying him can not only harm my own safety but especially the safety of the people who were willing to talk to me.

leader,²⁹ who had been involved in a movement to abolish the civil patrols. He and his fellow patrollers were called in one afternoon to testify. They denied everything and were free to return home the same afternoon. No other witnesses were heard and the prosecutor³⁰ was not even permitted to ask questions to the civil patrollers. Another incident occurred in 1999, which involved the son of Gerardo Sánchez. Presumably the twelve-year-old boy accidentally killed an *Indígena* farmer. The boy was shooting birds with another child, using his father's guns. This case was hushed up immediately, with Gerardo Sánchez paying the family of the murdered man to stop them from going to the police or contact one of the human rights organizations in the departmental capital of Santa Cruz, like Minugua (United Nations Verification Mission for Human Rights) or the PDH (*Procuradería de Derechos Humanos* – Human Rights Ombudsman). No police was involved, nobody was denounced, and nothing was said. Only rumors flowed freely behind closed doors. These are only two examples of the personal influence, through connections and money of a man like Gerardo Sánchez. Of course this last example is not something new and not something that only happened after the civil war. Cases like these can be found throughout the history of some *Ladino* families.

A last attitude is *fear*, especially of a possible revival of patrols. Although the patrols do not exist anymore in a formal way, according to some people the structure is still intact and can be reactivated at will. A *ladino* said that the former patrol commanders '*. . . están en una espera, para ver si las cosas van a cambiar. Porque ellos tenían un poder real*'.³¹ But it are mainly *indígenas* from the northern villages that were hardest hit by the civil war that express this view, even more strongly if they were involved in political parties from the left or human rights organizations. One *indígena* told me that the civil patrols in *La Cruz*³², an indigenous village in the northern part of Joyabaj wanted to reorganize again, after an angry mob had lynched five robbers in the neighboring municipality of *Zacualpa*, in August 1999. In their eyes the police and other law enforcers were not doing a proper job at all, so they took justice into their own hands. The people in *La Cruz* also had problems with robbers and thought they could solve this problem by reorganizing the civil patrols '*. . . para que así nuestros comunidades sean limpios e estan controlados*'.³³ He continued saying that '*. . . avisaron a los viejos líderes de PAC . . . para que se organizaron ellos, para que todo el pueblo está controlada . . . unos comunidades dicen que no . . . otros que si. Si, esto es problema hombre!*'³⁴

Another issue was the possibility of the FRG (*Frente Republicano Guatemalteco* – Republican Guatemalan Front) winning the presidential elections. The FRG is a right wing political party, whose leader is Ríos Montt, a former dictator who was self appointed president in 1982 and 1983. He was responsible for many of the human rights abuses at that time. Allegedly former patrol members took to the streets in some indigenous villages north of Joyabaj after the FRG's victory during the first election round in November. They walked around, waving their guns they had not turned in when the patrols were being dismantled, and warning the rest of the villagers to wait and see until *they* would win the final elections in December 1999. It is unclear what has happened in Joyabaj after the last election round and if the threats made were also carried out. It is clear however that the perceived threat of a possible revival of the civil patrols, without actually being carried out, influences peoples thoughts and behavior and may waylay reconstruction of civil society in Joyabaj.

²⁹ His name was Tomas Lares Ciprian from the village of Chorraxaj. See ODHAG Informe Annual 1994 for more information on this case.

³⁰ The ODHAG, who accused Gerardo Sánchez of the murder of Tomas Lares Ciprian.

³¹ Interview 14-98 (19/6/98)

³² This is fictional name, to protect its inhabitants. The other place names are not fictional, because the incidents I describe have been mentioned in other (human rights) publications.

³³ Interview 28-99 (18/9/99)

³⁴ Interview 28-99 (18/9/99)

Conclusions

Initially civil patrols were set up as a military instrument to help win the war, but through time they evolved into a local power player of their own. On the one hand the installation of civil patrols influenced already existing power relations in Joyabaj, by sharpening and polarizing an already unequal power structure. Powerful positions of *ladinos*, like the Sánchez family, were enhanced and their control over the indigenous population affirmed. On the other hand civil patrols also opened up new avenues towards personal power, for individuals who never had been in a powerful position before. Patrols were used to improve economic positions and to attain political goals.

Although they have been officially dismantled in 1996 it is clear from the research in Joyabaj that civil patrols, their surviving members, and the memory of civil patrols still influence daily life. These memories of past violence and its perpetrators and how people see these persons and institutions nowadays have significant repercussions for the rebuilding of civil society and possible future scenarios for Guatemala. The continuation of social antagonism, fear, anxiety and distrust expresses itself in memories and continues to pose impediments to the reconstruction of society and the creation of new civil structures.

A common attitude in Joyabaj towards new initiatives from NGO's or other local actors, such as starting up a new cooperative or the setting up of a new political party, is one of distrust. Although mostly very well organized within the communities, outside organizations arriving to set up a project are often not easily trusted. People are afraid to participate and stick out their necks; they want to avoid problems at all costs. '*No quiero problemas*' is an often-heard expression in daily conversations in Joyabaj. A parish secretary summarizes the situation as follows '*. . . no quieren saber de ningun grupo . . . tienen miedo . . . y dicen que puede volver la violencia . . . que no se meten en otro grupo . . .*' She continues with the example of a man who refused to carry food aid from the main road into the village because '*. . . no quiero, porque saber de donde viene esta ayuda.*'³⁵

As long as people are still afraid of a possible return to the violent past, through the revival of the civil patrols or through other means and continue to distrust each other, it will perhaps take many years for people to overcome their fears and prejudices based on their memories of this past. But it is a necessary process if eventually everyone is to participate in the reconstruction of Guatemala's shattered society.

³⁵ Interview 22-98 (15/7/98)

Abbreviations

CEH	Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico Comision for the Historic Clarification
CERJ	Consejo de Comunidades Étnicas Runujel Junam Council of ethnic communities Runujel Junam
CUC	Comite de Unidad Campesino Committee of Peasant Unity
DCG	Democracia Cristiana Guatemalteca Guatemalan Christian Democratic Party
FRG	Frente Republicano Guatemalteco Guatemalan Republican Front Mutual Support Group for the Appearance of our Relatives Alive
MINUGUA	Misión de las Naciones Unidas para la Verificación de los Derechos Humanos en Guatemala UN Human Rights Verification Mission in Guatemala
MLN	Movimiento de Liberación Nacional Movement of Nacional Liberation
ODHAG	Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Arzobispado de Guatemala Archbishop's Human Rights Office
PAC	Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil Civil Defense Patrols
PDH	Procuraderia de los Derechos Humanos Human Rights Ombudsman
REMHI	'Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica' 'Recuperation of the Historical Memory'

Literature

Bloch, M. *How We Think They Think*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1998

Boyarin, J. Space, time, and the politics of memory. in: J. Boyarin. *Remapping Memory. The Politics of TimeSpace*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1994

Burke, P. History as social memory. in: T. Butler. *Memory. History, Culture and the Mind*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989

Casaús Arzú, M. *Guatemala: Linaje y Racismo*. San José: Flacso, 1992

Casaús Arzú, M. *La Metamorfosis del Racismo en Guatemala*. Guatemala: Editorial Cholsamaj, 1998

Carmack, R. M. *Harvest of Violence*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988

CEH. *Guatemala, Memoria del Silencio*. Tomo I – Tomo XII. Guatemala: UN, 1999

Connerton, P. *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Crombag, H. & H. Merckelbach. *Hervonden Herinneringen en Andere Misverstanden*. Amsterdam: Contact, 1996.

Etnofoor, jaargang 6, nummer 1, 1993. 'Herinneren en Vergeten.

Fentress, J. & C. Wickham. *Social Memory. New Perspectives on the Past*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.

Focaal, nummer 26/27, 1996. 'Historical anthropology: the unwaged debate'.

Focaal, nummer 25, 1995. 'Oorlog en vrede'.

Gevers, A. & H. Tak. 'Herinnering en oorlog'. *Focaal*, 25, 1995: pp. 5-14..

Handy, J. *Gift of the Devil. A history of Guatemala*. Boston: South End Press, 1984.

Handy, J. *Revolution in the Countryside. Rural Conflict and Agrarian Reform in Guatemala, 1944-1954*. Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994.

Jay, A. *Persecution by Proxy. The Civil Patrols in Guatemala*. Washington: Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human Rights, 1993

Jonas, S. *The Battle for Guatemala*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1991.

Le Bot, Y. *La Guerra en Tierras Mayas. Comunidad, Violencia y Modernidad en Guatemala (1970-1992)*. Fondo de Cultura Económica: Mexico, 1995.

McClintock, M. *The American Connection. (Volume II). State Terror and Resistance in Guatemala*. London: Zed Books, 1987.

Minugua. *Decimo Informe sobre Derechos Humanos de la Mision de Verificación de las Naciones Unidas en Guatemala*. Guatemala: Minugua, 1999.

ODHAG. 'Guatemala: Nunca Más. Guatemala: ODHAG, 1998.

ODHAG. *Informe Annual 1994*. Guatemala: ODHAG.

Piel, J. Sajcabaja. *Muerte y Resurreccion de un Pueblo de Guatemala. 1500-1970*. México: CEMC, 1989.

Popkin, M. L. *Civil Patrols and their Legacy*. Washington: Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human Rights, 1996.

Smith, C. (ed.). *Guatemalan Indians and the State, 1540-1988*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990.

Solomon, J. A. *Institutional Violence: Civil Patrols in Guatemala. 1993-1994*. Washington: Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human Rights, 1994.

Zur, J. *Violent Memories. Mayan War Widows in Guatemala*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1998.