
Martin J. Wera

College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University

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NUEVO MÉXICO, ESCUINTLA: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE GUATEMALAN REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT PROCESS

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Martin Wera

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Nuevo México, Escuintla:
A Critical Analysis of the
Guatemalan Refugee Resettlement Process

Approved by:

Mari Felix Cubas-Mora – Professor, Modern and Classical Languages

Gary Prevost – Professor, Political Science

Jeff Anderson – Associate Professor, Peace Studies

Karen Erickson – Associate Professor/Chair, Modern and Classical Languages

Margaret Cook – Thesis Program Director

Mark Thamert OSB – Honors Program Director
It is a sad, sad people.

The Indian cries and the land dies of thirst.

The Indian cries and the land dies of hunger,

A people saddened by torment.

- Luis Sam Colop, “Elegía India”, Versos sin refugio
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INTRODUCTION

Near the end of a winding, beaten gravel road, the San José bus comes upon a scattered group of austere houses made of concrete and adobe. Men, women, and children all stop whatever job had occupied their attention previously to see the dilapidated vehicle pause briefly and then rattle on by. This small village, if it can even be called that, is known as Nuevo Mexico, but to those who have lived in this area of the southwestern department of Escuintla for any considerable time know it by its previous name, that of “La Providencia”. You see, as of five years ago, Nuevo Mexico did not even exist, for the people that now comprise its citizenry were in refugee camps in the southern Mexican State of Chiapas.

With the initiative of the Guatemalan government to resettle these refugees of the 36-year Guatemalan civil war these people found a home once more in their native land. This came about largely because of years of negotiations, international and domestic pressure and the “Agreement on Resettlement of the Population Groups Uprooted by the Armed Conflict”. Unfortunately, there is more to the story than just that, for in the past years the relationship between Nuevo Mexico and the government has mushroomed into a complicated web of broken promises, confusing negotiations, and political rhetoric.

In the following pages an analysis of the resettlement process will be offered. Starting will be a brief glimpse at the modern history of Guatemala. Following will be a detailed analysis of the “Agreement on Resettlement,” and to a lesser extent the and the “Agreement between the Representatives of the Guatemalan Refugees in Mexico and the Government of Guatemala.” This analysis of the accords is of the utmost importance because the resettlement process that will be studied stems from them. Furthermore, the resettlement process established by them has no precedence. Never before had a government acted as a land broker, buying private land and then selling land to refugees as they returned to their country. Finally, the actual case of Nuevo México will be examined, using it as a microcosm of the whole, giving special attention to the effectiveness of the resettlement process.

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When all is said and done, it will be clear that the resettlement process has not been effective due to two reasons. First is the utter lack of acknowledgement for the peasant’s reality when dealing with the implementation of the resettlement. Second is that there is an inherent conflict between the participatory ideals stated in the accord and the goals and objectives of the resettlement which focus more on long-term economic growth than a community’s immediate wellbeing. This is a product of policies created by “officials in a modern state” who are removed from the society they assess, focusing on typifications that cannot capture reality.¹ Both points can be explained in that there was little to no cognitive participation and/or cognitive respect for the refugees and their perspective. The integration of these two concepts is crucial for any public policy, including the resettlement process in question. Without these two components a policy is doomed to complications or, at worse, complete failure because it does not give space to bring the needs or interests of those involved into fruition.² One gets a policy that leaves both sides dissatisfied. The reasons behind this conclusion are held in the definitions of the two theoretical ideals. As Peter Berger writes, “[t]hose who are the objects of policy [sh]ould have the opportunity to participate not only in specific decisions but in the definitions of the situation on which these decisions are based.”³ This idea is at the heart of cognitive participation. By allowing the “objects” of the policy to work on the solution rather than having one forced upon them, a vested interest is fostered within the group and the decisions made represent the reality of those effected. This ought to be the goal of any good policy. Similarly, cognitive respect maintains that no one knows his or her specific situation better than the individual. For this reason, that knowledge must be valued and included if a policy is to be effective. Paired together, these two ideals will provide the theoretical framework of the critique of the refugee resettlement in Guatemala.

As will be shown, it is clear that these two basic precepts were not adequately incorporated into the resettlement process and the accords governing the process. What has resulted is almost five years of disagreement, little progress, and a resettlement process fraught
with turmoil. The greater portion of the fault for this situation falls upon the government, dominated by the commercial elite class. In their unwillingness to acknowledge the returnees’ point of view, the government has created a situation where it is in the best interests of the returnees *not* to agree to the land finalization agreement. In effect, the resettlement process has stalled because of the government’s refusal to recognize the peasants as equals.
HISTORICAL CONTEXT – THE PEASANT INDIGENOUS OF GUATEMALA

The history of the indigenous of Guatemala can largely be summed up in one word – oppression. Exploited by the Spanish during their colonial rule, the Mayan population dropped precipitously due to torture, disease and the abysmally poor working conditions. The abuse of the peasant class continued after the independence from Spain in 1821, as the country fell under one strong-arm leader after another. Mariano Gálvez in 1831 began the trend of attacking ejidal (municipal or communal) landholdings in villages in his attempt to send the country on a liberal course. Gálvez met with strong resistance from the peasant villages, which brought Rafael Carrera to power in 1839. A conservative, Carrera ended the practice of privatization of peasant land, and proved to be a protector of sorts of the peasant class through his tenure in office, which lasted until 1871. Nonetheless, Carrera could not stop the increasing influence of the Liberal party and in 1871, Miguel García Granados took power. However, García Granados never solidified his grip on power in the tumultuous political atmosphere of late nineteenth century Guatemala and in 1873 Justo Rufino Barrios took power.

Almost immediately after taking power, Barrios, who had made his fortune in coffee, enacted a series of decrees that ushered in an export-oriented Guatemala. In 1877, Decree 170 made all “idle” land (defined as land not cultivated with coffee, sugar, cacao or hay) national property. At the cost of the peasant’s livelihood, Barrios carved a niche for a commercial farming elite. Whereas fifty years prior, two-thirds of the land suitable for coffee cultivation was owned by municipalities or peasant communities, the 1890 census showed that 53% of the coffee crop was produced by privately owned plantations. A complete shift in land tenure patterns had occurred.

This shift in land tenure systems also came along with a shift in policy that reduced peasants to indentured servitude. Decree 177, ordered in 1877 also, required all laborers (peasants) to carry a libretó, a work pass that tracked any outstanding debts owed to other employers. Any peasant found to have an outstanding debt or, even worse, no libretó was
inserted into a labor draft where they were often put to work on plantations that benefited the local government. Essentially, the mandamientos program, as it was called, resulted in a forced labor group made up of a peasant class that no longer had any means to produce for themselves.\textsuperscript{4} A more recent example was the practice of labor quotas imposed by military dictators such as Ubico. Using what essentially was forced labor, the 1940s saw much of Guatemala’s infrastructure built while, much like Nero who fiddled as Rome burned, Ubico road his motorcycle around the countryside examining the quality of the roads, but ignoring the abuses being endured by the peasant class.

Coffee was not the only export crop that profited due to the exploitation of the peasant work force. Starting in the last years of the nineteenth century, banana production became a powerful economic and political force in Guatemala. Although the United Fruit Company (UFCo), by 1934, controlled 3.5 million acres of land along the Caribbean coast, only 115,000 of those acres were cultivated. In addition to this, the UFCo controlled the only railroad lines to the eastern part of Guatemala, essentially giving them a stranglehold on all occurrences east of the capitol. Needless to say, this empire was built through the complicity of the Guatemalan government and the abuse of the peasant class.\textsuperscript{5}

This brutal oppression has largely been perpetuated by three factors that play in to the class distinctions that still persist today. Fueled by racism, an incredibly disparate distribution of land and wealth, and an extremely diverse and divided indigenous peasant population, the authoritarian/oligarchic governments have had an easy time exploiting a group who technically forms the majority, with over 60% of the population. The only exception to this rule of discrimination was a ten-year window from 1944-1954 when the two successive civilian governments of Arévalo and Arbenz instituted limited reforms. Focusing on land reforms, they sought to ease the poverty that was running rampant among the indigenous population. In expropriating unused land from landlords and paying them in government bonds bearing interest, the Arbenz Administration had given 917,659 acres to over 100,000 families (or 500,000 people)
by June of 1954. Unfortunately, the legacy of “The Revolution of 1944,” as it is commonly known, was wiped away by a CIA sponsored coup in 1954 that installed, in its wake, Gen. Castillo Armas, another military dictator bent on the same elitist principles that preceded this brief sojourn into democratic government. The peasant’s lot in life worsened considerably in the second half of the twentieth century as they were excluded more and more from the political and economic life of Guatemala and trapped in the middle of a civil war.

It was in the early 1960s when a handful of dissatisfied military leaders broke away from the authoritarian government of Guatemala and formed the 13 Revolutionary Movement (MR-13). Although the Guatemalan military ultimately defeated the MR-13, from this modest start the Guatemalan guerrilla movement began as other groups appeared. Influenced (and funded) by the recently declared Marxist government of Cuba, these guerrilla forces carried the banner of armed revolution to the peasant Mayan villages primarily in the northern reaches of the country. This message of rebellion soon gained the attention of the Guatemalan government who had been influenced by the United States’ National Security Doctrine. Fearing the “internal enemy,” the military initiated what would turn out to be a 36-year bloodletting known as the Guatemalan Civil War.

The results of this war are staggering, and even more so when one considers Guatemala’s small size (roughly 11 million people presently). All told an estimated 200,000 died during the civil war. More shocking is the blatant violations of human rights that occurred. The Historical Clarification Commission (CEH), an independent fact-finding mission charged with the documentation of human rights violations and acts of violence connected with the armed confrontation, registered a total of 42,275 deaths, including men, women and children. Of these, 23,671 were victims of arbitrary execution and 6,159 were victims of forced disappearances. Eighty-three percent of fully identified victims were Mayan with the Guatemalan military committing 93% of the human rights violations. These facts only scratch the surface, for beyond the deaths, the Guatemalan Civil War created an entirely class of people with no home or roots.
A conservative number of these displaced persons (or “uprooted people”) had been set in 1998 by the Guatemalan government at 250,000, but various independent reports peg the numbers much higher. This mass population movement drastically changed the land tenancy patterns of Guatemala. Whereas the norm had been families and/or clusters of people widely dispersed across the country, it now became more common for people to live in more concentrated communities, changing the traditional relationships of land usage. Another result was the rapid growth of the urban centers in Guatemala, which also transformed Guatemalan society drastically.

The majority of these uprooted people were displaced during the height of the fighting from 1978-1983. The military, under the regimes of Gen. Lucas Garcia and Gen. Ríos Montt, attacked not only the guerrilla forces but also the pueblos in an initiative dubbed “scorched earth.” Paranoid in their belief that the rural villages held the roots of the Marxist guerrilla movement, the Guatemalan government created special task forces such as the Kaibiles as well as forming Auto-Defense Patrols (PAC) to keep the peasant population in check. Any attempt by a village to organize or affiliate themselves with peasant organizations such as the Committee of Campesino Unity (CUC) to counteract this militarization immediately drew the attention of the military and marked the village as insurgent. The results of these programs were horrendous as violence spread like wildfire across the mountains of northern Guatemalan in the departments of Huehuetenango, El Petén, Alta Verapaz, and El Quiché (especially around the municipality of Ixcan and Rabinal). Fleeing for refuge in Mexico in or around 1981, many were forced to leave everything behind and start anew in a foreign land.

On the whole, 65,000 people fled Guatemala for Mexico during the civil war period. Of these, roughly 67% settled in the state of Chiapas, while considerable numbers also settled in Quintana Roo and Campeche. Upon their arrival in Mexico, whose government grudgingly accepted the Guatemalans, the refugees quickly tried to establish themselves economically and put the past behind. Most began farming plots of land while others found jobs in local industry or...
commerce. Nonetheless, the call to live once more in their native country proved to be too much, as in 1984 the first recorded groups of returnees crossed the border. Initially these groups consisted of no more than two or three families at the most, while even some were simply brave individuals forging out on their own. Not until 1986, with Pres. Cerezo Arévalo as the leader of the first civilian government in over 30 years and the consequent founding of National Commission for the Attention to Repatriates, Refugees and Displaced People (CEAR) to oversee the repatriation/reinsertion process, did the first government assisted group of returnees crossed into Guatemalan territory – 355 people total. Over the next few years, the number of government aided returnees remained low. Due to the military’s mistrust of the refugee population, most returnees felt unsafe as they were resettled in highly militarized zones so as to allow the military to keep a watchful eye over them. Through 1992, an average of only 1,183 people per year crossed the border.

This changed, however, with the signing of the “Agreement between the Representatives of the Guatemalan Refugees in Mexico and the Government of Guatemala” on Oct. 8, 1992 (“Oct. 8th Accord”). This agreement articulated rights for the returnees and gave them a certain amount of security in their trek back to their homeland. Among these was the recognition of the Permanent Commissions (CCPP) as a negotiating group for the refugees, this way lending some organization and solidarity to the groups in Mexico as well as giving a supposed political voice to the refugees. Also mentioned was the right to private property to all citizens of Guatemala, citing Art. 39 of the Guatemalan constitution which declares that “private property is an inherent right to the human being.”

In connection to this “inherent right” of private property, the “Oct. 8th Accord” laid the foundation for refugees to regain their land that had been lost in their flight from the armed conflict. However, this required the refugees to have some sort of documentation of land ownership, which, of course, proved to be difficult for many who had left such things behind, or had never possessed such documentation. To deal with this situation of landless returnees, the
agreement named the government agencies of CEAR and the National Institute of Agrarian Transformation (INTA) as the institutions that would spearhead the resettlement process. Most importantly, it established FONATIERRA, a government fund through which acquisition of land to be sold to returnee groups was financed. The signing of the “Oct. 8th Accord” resulted in a dramatic rise in the amount of refugees coming back into Guatemala. According to CEAR figures, from 1992 to 1993, the amount rose by 300% to 5,135 people. Although monetary compensation for lost land or wealth and social services for the communities were not included in the agreement, resettlement of the returnees on land did include benefits such as “credit and technical assistance that guarantees [the land’s] possession and development” to the returnees.

Although the “Oct. 8th Accord” was a step towards amending the wrongs enacted during the civil war, it was weak in the area of implementation and lacked detail. Seeing the need for a more comprehensive agreement, representatives from the Guatemalan government and the Guatemala National Revolutionary Unity (URNG), the most prominent guerrilla group, met and on June 17, 1994 signed the “Agreement on Resettlement of the Population Groups Uprooted by the Armed Conflict.” This agreement picked up where the “Oct. 8th Accord” left off, articulating guarantees for the returnees and objectives for the government to aim for, thus pushing the resettlement process into the spotlight of the peace process. Following the signing of the “Agreement on Resettlement,” another increase of refugees crossing over the border into Guatemala. However, there still was a strong military presence in the rural areas as tensions between the peasants and the government forces ran dangerously high. What little trust was forming between refugees and the Guatemalan government because of the resettlement process came crashing down as the military attacked a resettled community in the department of Alta Verapaz. On October 5th, 1995, seven men, two women, and two children died at the hands of the Guatemalan army, and more than 30 people suffered bullet or shrapnel wounds in what has become known as the Xaman Massacre. Needless to say, further progress in insuring peace would have to be reached before the resettlement process could be continued successfully.
Finally in 1996, the “Accord for a Firm and Lasting Peace,” was signed ending the civil war. In response to this action, refugees crossed back in record numbers. On June 30, 1999, after nearly 13 years of repatriation, Pres. Alvaro Arzú stated that the government-assisted resettlement process had reached its conclusion and would, by the end of the year, be brought to a close. The number of returnees had reached, as of Oct. 15, 1998, a grand total of 40,003 people, leaving roughly 25,000 Guatemalans in Mexico.\textsuperscript{13} Although stressing that the ending of government assistance, by no means, signified the end of the immigration process, it did place a cap on those eligible to receive the benefits provided by the aforementioned agreements. All told, the government spent a total of Q92.9 million ($14.5 million using the 1998 exchange rate) to resettle refugees on 39 farms, equaling 17,756.55 hectares.

Needless to say, the resettlement of the refugees has been a costly undertaking and one that, thanks in part to Guatemala’s sluggish economy, has proved to be a difficult financial burden for the Guatemalan government. Guatemala in 1999 had a trade deficit of $860 million, and an external debt well over $4 billion dollars. Compounding this is the predicted Q1,147 million budget deficit ($179 million using the 1998 exchange rate) the government will run up in 1999.\textsuperscript{14} The private sector has also been hit as an economic recession has been worsened by continually rising interest rates and plummeting agricultural prices, especially coffee - Guatemala’s main export and source of income. Because of the lean economic times, foreign investment has had to play a prominent role in keeping the peace process moving, but has come up short according to the latest figures available. As of 1997, $90 million had flowed into Guatemala from foreign direct investment, about $29 per Guatemalan for “Official development assistance.”\textsuperscript{15} However, packaged along with this has been a string of austerity measures mandated by the international financial community that has limited the effectiveness of the money for the average Guatemalan.

Despite these setbacks, the proposed 2000 budget aims to comply with the commitment of the final peace accord signed in 1996 of assigning at least 12% of the national budget to the
peace process while at the same time implementing policies to curb the growing deficit. In comparison to the 1999 budget, the outgoing government of Alvaro Arzú Irigoyen and the ruling Party of National Advancement (PAN) showed fiscal restraint in drafting the 2000 budget. The PAN proposal expects a 7.3% drop in state expenditures resulting in a lower deficit. This drop is partly because many of the programs related to the peace process have been modified to be integrated with other sectors, lowering the overall cost for the government. In addition to lower spending, a series of reforms designed to improve tax collection are helping fill the government’s coffers. It was expected that these reforms would result in a 17.3% increase in government income from 1998 to 1999. All in all, Arzú stated that priority has been given to the peace process, but a continued effort to connect these programs to the needs of other government initiatives may adversely effect the implementation of programs in the rural areas, thus resulting in little change for the peasant population. In the defense of the government’s commitment to rural development, United Nations Mission for the Verification of Human Rights in Guatemala (MINUGUA) reported that the Guatemalan government has increasingly focused more funds to the countryside. Despite this encouraging statement, the report continues to affirm that although certainly better than past years, the attention paid to the rural areas by the government can still substantially be improved.16

This confusion over government commitment was amplified this past year with the election of Alfonso Portillo from the Guatemalan Republican Front (FRG) as President of the Republic of Guatemala. Portillo’s commitment to the peace process in general is suspect due to his allegiance to FRG leader Efraín Ríos Montt, the same man who carried out a brutal “scorched earth” campaign against guerrillas and peasants alike in the early 1980s. Despite this apparent conflict of interest, Portillo has promised to address issues of indigenous development with in the framework of the FRG’s “governability pact,” which stresses conservative fiscal policies and a revised privatization process.
In conclusion, by tracking Guatemala's history to the present day, it is painfully clear that the wounds opened during the colonial period are still not healed. Not only is there still a shocking disparity between rich and poor, Mayan and ladino, urban dweller and rural farmer; the political process has time and again maintained its elitist nature - resulting in a politically emaciated peasant class despite the peace process. It is the hope of the chapters that follow to examine more closely the nature of this political relationship with an emphasis on the effectiveness of the refugee resettlement process. By examining this part of the peace process it becomes clear that in maintaining the status quo, Guatemala is actually dooming itself to permanently bear the scars of oppression and civil war.
AN ANALYSIS OF THE 1994 “AGREEMENT ON RESSETLEMENT”

The 1994 “Agreement on Resettlement of the Population Groups Uprooted by the Armed Conflict” presents an interesting watershed in the relations between the refugees in Mexico and the ruling government of Guatemala, as it signified an attempt to remedy the tension between the two groups. As will be illustrated in the following pages, this attempt solely consisted of the resettlement of refugee groups on land for the purpose of inserting them into the economy and society of Guatemala once again, ignoring essential social necessities. It will be argued that this policy was thwarted by a glaring lack of cognitive respect and, more obviously, cognitive participation on the part of the government towards the refugee groups in the implementation of the accord. The most evident is the issuing of land as the only explored end to the dilemma of the refugees. However, this point of view has come at the cost of the stated needs of the refugee population where the true end to the resettlement issue lies. As was stated time and again in interviews, the returnees see their needs as twofold: 1) assuring that there is adequate health care and 2) making sure that there is sufficient food to feed everyone, especially the children. The two needs boil down to security, a value that can, but does not necessarily, bind itself exclusively to land ownership. This fact is denied by government implementation that focused on land ownership first before anything else.

This disparity between perspectives results in the self-defeating nature of the Modernist ideals driving the goals and guarantees of the accord when it is paired with the immediate needs of a community of subsistence farmers. This situation is inevitable, as the aim of Modernization is to “mobilize people for the purposes of productive work,” and doing so by focusing on simplifications made about a community in order to makes it, as James C. Scott puts it, “more legible” in the long run. However, in focusing on simplified schemes of economic productivity in the future, the resettlement process runs up against an obstacle, as it would mean transforming subsistence farmers into commercial farmers. This conflict runs deeper than simple training or know-how, but represents a cultural difference inherent between the two ideologies.
Modernization, by its very nature, builds upon development as the savior in an unknown future, assumes infinite growth, and values the “educated” opinion over those who “refuse to yield” to progress. This is in stark contrast to the peasant worldview, which is focused on the present, is rooted in tradition, and, as will be shown, values community wellbeing as a prerequisite to economic self-sufficiency.

The result of this conflict is an accord that does not address the needs of the parties involved. For Nuevo México, security, defined as being free of hunger and sickness, is the paramount need, not land (which, as came out in interviews, is viewed solely as a means). For the government of Guatemala, economic interest, which has turned into unloading the financial burden of the resettlement process (which equals roughly Q92.9 million), and international recognition and acceptance are the objectives. What results is an implementation process that has left almost all involved bitterly unfulfilled and searching for answers within a document that holds few answers due to the short-term outlook prominent in the document and implementation. In the following pages, a summary of the “Agreement on Resettlement” will be offered as well as an analysis of the accord and an explanation of why it was framed as it was. It is hoped that through this process, a clearer understanding of the discrepancy between the Modernization goals of accord and the cognitive respect and participation of the refugee groups can be attained.

The text of the agreement presents many guarantees and goals for the implementation of the accord. These stipulations range from issues involving land ownership to cultural considerations to legal rights and assurances and are grouped into three categories: “Principles,” “Objectives,” and “Guarantees.” The “Principles” section details the procedures that will govern the resettlement process. Leading the list is a declaration of the right of the uprooted people to live freely in Guatemala. In connection to this right, the government maintains its commitment to ensure proper conditions (i.e. maintaining human rights) to facilitate the resettlement process of the refugees to “their places of origin or to the place of their choice, in conditions of dignity and security.” Leading into the actual resettlement, it is stated that it should take place “in the
shortest possible time” while including not only the refugee’s physical reinsertion into
Guatemala, but also the social, economic and political life of the country. In a clear reference to
cognitive respect and cognitive participation, the accord states that the “uprooted population
groups shall participate in decision-making concerning the design, implementation and
supervision of the comprehensive resettlement strategy and its specific projects.” Although it is
maintained that the refugee’s input would be included in the resettlement process, none were
involved in either the framing of the accord or its ratification, not even among the representatives
from the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG).

On the heels of the validation of the peasant perspective comes a “Principle” squarely
dealing with the modernization of the refugee communities. The agreement establishes that part
and parcel of the reinsertion of the refugees is a concerted effort at developing a strategy for
“sustained, sustainable and equitable development of the resettlement areas.” This represents a
clear call for productive projects (an issue mentioned in greater detail later), but as of yet
specifics about size or type of programs are not mentioned. It is taken as a given that, first and
foremost, economic development through commercial farming is in the best interest of the
refugees. This point, along with the manner in which these productive projects are to be
established and then implemented, contradict cognitive respect and participation on the part of the
returnees. The text concerning the productive projects does not take into account the skills of the
returnees nor does it set up a feasible manner in which to fund these projects. They entail state-
employees conducting a study of the soil on each individual farm to determine what is feasible.

After designing a scheme for the projects to follow, infrastructure in the forms of roads or
access-ways to markets would be developed. Following this would be provisions for potable
water, sanitation, education, health, and nutrition. Clearly this pattern of development, first
economic profitability followed by social services, benefits the state more so than the refugees.
In addition, these projects undermine the peasant perspective as they are developed for the
returnee community, not with the community. Nonetheless, funding for these projects depends
upon the community payments for the land – payments which, implicitly, depend upon productive projects being implemented with the advice of professionals to generate profit. Here the Modernist hope in the future overcomes the reality of the present in that it creates a vicious circle which will ultimately trap communities who refuse to or cannot afford to pay the cost.

The area of “Objectives” outlines five goals of the implementation. The first goals allows the communities to form local government institutions to serve their own needs, while at the same time allowing some room for grassroots organizations to take hold that, in theory, would provide a channel to the national level of politics. In a roundabout way, the Permanent Commissions (CCPP), negotiating and representative bodies for the refugee groups created by “Oct. 8th Accord,” are allowed some political space to continue in their efforts to voice returnee concerns at the national level. The second goal of the reinsertion process is to make the returnees a “dynamic factor in the economic, social, political and cultural development of the country,” spanning the entire spectrum of what are the perceived needs of the refugees. The third objective states the government’s prioritization of the ending of poverty among the areas of resettlement. The fourth goal returns to the topic of democracy, developing and strengthening the democratic process through all the various governmental levels. Finally, a goal of reconciliation is offered, focusing on a culture of peace “based on participation, mutual tolerance, reciprocal respect and commonality of interests.” Again, the ideas of cognitive respect and participation appear in the wording of the agreement.

From this point, the accord presents a series of “Guarantees,” among them, an effort to develop social services in the returnee communities. Among the guarantees is the recognition of the “formal and informal” education and health training individuals received while in exile. Despite this recognition, there is no mention of any resources allocated for the “health promoters” (individual community members with some form of medical knowledge) to further there education or any way to check the quality of health services. In the area of educational training, the only resource mentioned is a partnership with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization (UNESCO). These guarantees indicate the low level of importance the Guatemalan government placed on social services for the returnee communities as well as hinting at the financial burden the peace process was becoming for the Guatemalan government.

Also addressed in the "Guarantees" is the issue of documentation of those being resettled and the land holdings of the communities. Closely tied to this point and the abandonment of land as a result of the civil war is a commitment by the government of Guatemala to "revise and promote legal provisions to ensure that such an act is not considered to be voluntary abandonment, and to ratify the inalienable nature of landholding rights." Tacked on is the "adequate compensatory solutions" guaranteed to those who lost land and property in their flight from the country." However, no further mention or a clear definition, appears as to what constitutes adequate compensatory solutions. Statements such as these serve to shift the focus of the policy from specific action to broad generalizations that consistently fall short of success. The framers of the accord are satisfied in being mired in uncertainty.

What has been written above represents what could basically be categorized as goals set forth by the accord dealing with: the resettlement of the refugees, cultural aspects of the resettlement, and ones concerning the autonomy of the communities once established. All of these channel into the economic arena with the third section of the accord which deals specifically with productive projects to be instituted in the communities. Included in this is an agreement that the government of Guatemala will fund projects designed to boost the profitability of the farms in question to break the cycle of poverty these returnees have known for so long. However, social services are viewed as a secondary priority in the resettlement process, taking a back seat to the adjudication of land. The goals put forth are a hope that the communities to not only be self-sufficient in that they can produce or purchase all that they need, but they will develop economically, in turn becoming a positive, if small, force in the economic health of the country as a whole. The payment of the land by the returnees is stated as a necessary factor for the initiation of the productive projects. Although never stated directly, the revolving credit plan,
which would direct land payments back into the community in the form of infrastructure and/or productive projects, is implicitly dependent on the ability of the returnees to pay the debt.

At this time, it is helpful to examine the context from which the accord (as summarized above) sprung forth. Only in looking at the context can answers be deduced as to why the accord was framed as it was. Consequently, in looking at this, it becomes clear that the 1994 “Agreement on Resettlement” has its roots in an accord that predates it by two years. The “October 8th Accord”, was signed in 1992 by the government of Guatemala and the leading guerrilla movement, the URNG, creating political room for the refugees to organize themselves under groups called the Permanent Commissions (which had been in existence since 1987). The groups involved in the framing of the accord hoped that by legitimizing the CCPP, the refugees would have a representative and thus insure that their wants and opinions could be expressed and acknowledged by those in power.22 The CCPP’s would be selected by an election of individuals in the refugee community and would include intellectuals. The accord also reiterated the right to private property, a declaration that translated for many refugees to mean that the lands abandoned in their flight from their homeland were awaiting their arrival. As a result, immediately upon the ratification of the “Oct. 8th Accord”, the flow of refugees back into Guatemala grew three-fold to 5,135 in the year 1992-93.

However, the accord did little to actually facilitate the resettlement of these refugees, for, as many found out upon their return, the crux in regaining their land laid in showing documentation of ownership – the bastion of private property. This, of course, proved to be difficult for many returnees, as they had never possessed such documentation. Be it because of traditional, unwritten land-holding agreements or the fact that the land had been under communal arrangements, many returned to their homes to find they had no legal right to till the land that once was their livelihood. In even more extreme cases, refugees returned to find their land in the possession of someone else, with legal documentation.
Also, the question of how representative the CCPP were of the refugee population plagued the effectiveness of this negotiating group. Soon after the signing of the “Oct. 8th Accord”, the CCPP split into three factions, each one corresponding to the three guerrilla armies of the URNG. The political power of the CCPP as a whole was later weakened by the creation of another wing that cut all ties to the guerrilla movement. Unable to reach a consensus among the various factions, a general dissatisfaction among the refugees grew. This was also the case with the community of Nuevo México as very few trusted the CCPP with the well being of village. Hermitaneo Mozón, the CCPP representative for the Costa Sur area, which includes Nuevo México, echoed this sentiment. However, the stage was set to usher forth the 1994 “Agreement on Resettlement,” and in response an influx of returnees. Although the “Oct. 8th Accord” set the ball in motion in addressing refugee needs and dilemmas, it almost hampered returnees as much as it helped. Not only were they required to acquiesce to the laws of private ownership, they were expected to do this in the face of growing disunity. Since the CCPP had such close ties to the URNG, many peasants viewed them as part of the problem rather than the solution. One must remember that the reason most refugees fled Guatemala was that they were increasingly being trapped in the fighting between the guerrillas and the military. No returnees interviewed expressed any liking or solidarity with the URNG, now a recognized political party, and most felt abandoned by the group as they saw the URNG pursuing their own political agenda separate from that of the returnees. The channels for cognitive respect and participation of the refugees were rapidly falling apart as the government and the URNG forged ahead regardless of the fact that neither group incorporated the peasant’s view fully.

This paradox was playing out in front of a growing international audience as the United Nations, some First-world nations, and the Guatemalan government turned their attention to finding a quick, comprehensive, and final solution to the refugees the Guatemalan Civil War had begotten. This attention took on an even more personal note with the growing number of accompaniers being dispatched to refugee camps to assist, as it were, the resettlement and
negotiations process. These companions, normally from North American and Western European nations and attached to non-governmental organizations such as the National Coordinating Office on the Refugees and Displaced of Guatemala (NCOORD). Firm in the belief that the military would be less likely to harass or violate the refugee’s human rights if there was an international presence with the community, the companions were still expected to maintain impartiality and non-partisanship while in village. Nonetheless, their presence with the returnees applied pressure to the Guatemalan government, who found themselves in a harder position the longer they vacillated on a comprehensive plan for the resettlement of the refugees in Mexico. In an effort to appease both sides of the situation, the following plan was initiated.

What the Guatemalan economy needed after 30-plus years of strife was a strengthened domestic market putting into production as much land as possible. What foreign and domestic business interests had been calling for, for years, was an end to the embarrassing and costly civil war that had created an enormous refugee population (and an even larger internally displaced population). However, thanks to a Guatemalan government that is still a bastion of commercial elite power, the reinsertion of the refugees had to be done in a way that did not disrupt their standing. Thus the idea was born to institute a comprehensive resettlement program to purchase land that had been privately owned and sell it to the groups of returnees, tapping into the inherent desire of the peasant class to have land of their own.26 Hoping that at the very least the returnee communities could add some productivity to the Guatemalan commercial agriculture, the resettlement marked the first time a government acted as a land broker in dealing with refugee resettlement.

Seeing as how this plan addressed the issues that concerned the Guatemalan government, the wheels were set in motion for the 1994 “Agreement on Resettlement of the Population Groups Uprooted by the Armed Conflict.” The framers of the accord (none of which were involved with the “uprooted” communities in Mexico nor in Guatemala) outlined what they viewed as the causes and the solutions to the refugee dilemma. From their vantage-point, they were dealing
with a collective group of people that, on the whole, had been subsistence farmers before their forced exodus from the country. Their existence had centered on land and agriculture, so it only made economic sense to resettle these people as soon as possible on farmland. Also, it was made clear through the channels opened by the “Oct. 8th Accord” that a great amount of interest existed among the refugees to once again return to their homeland.

However, the resettlement process could only be a financial help for the general Guatemalan economy if the refugees made the jump from subsistence farming to commercial production. This line of thought also follows very closely the thoughts of W.W. Rostow who argued that, “[a] society whose economic, social and political arrangements are built around the life of relatively small – mainly self-sufficient – regions must orient its commerce and its thought to the nation and to a still larger international setting.” With nearly 70,000 potential laborers and farmers in the refugee camps in Mexico awaiting resettlement, a labor force was certainly available. What was lacking for this “precondition for take-off,” as Rostow puts it, was enough capital and foreign investment (intervention) to institute successful productive projects on the resettled plots of land. This was the problem at hand and the spot from which the 1994 “Agreement on Resettlement” sprung from.

Unfortunately, as is often the case in dealing with public policy, the path toward the intended result is littered with complications. The 1994 agreement is no different. First on this list of obstacles was not the issue of who would overlook the resettlement process, which was addressed in the “Oct 8th Accord”, but how well could these bodies handle the task handed to them. The Guatemalan government had named in the 1994 “Agreement on Resettlement” the National Commission for the Attention to Repatriates, Refugees and Displaced People (CEAR) to handle the logistic issue of the resettlement. Since its inception in 1986 after the election of the first civilian government during the civil war, CEAR had dealt exclusively with the repatriation/reinsertion of refugees and could effectively deal with the resettlement process.
However, there was still the issue of the land sale, something CEAR had no resources to deal with. Since the Guatemalan government’s approach in acting as a broker in selling land to returnees had never been done before, numerous unanswered questions abounded. In the end, the National Institution for Agrarian Transformation (INTA) was held over from the “Oct. 8th Accord” to handle this aspect of the resettlement. This piqued the attention of many, for INTA, since its inception in 1962, had not acted as a bastion for the benefit of the majority peasant-farmer class, but for the small in number, but rich in money and power, commercial elite. For years the government institution had lackadaisically enforced an idle lands tax. At the same time, this turning of a blind eye prevented peasants from obtaining land as INTA also rarely enforced a longstanding policy of expropriation of idle lands.

The keeping of INTA as the body that would govern the land sale was greeted with mixed emotions, especially from those in solidarity with the refugee population. Although, the “Oct. 8th Accord” gave INTA the responsibility of financing the land sales, many vehemently called for a restructuring of the institution due to their sub-par showing with issues mentioned above. Even though the legislation that created INTA in the early 1960s stated that it was “responsible for the administration of the agrarian policy that the government promotes,” the body had been ineffective in enforcing the few government initiatives that had been beneficial to the peasant population.29 Furthermore, since 1992 when INTA was originally assigned to handle the land sales, it had had a sorry record of resettling returnees. Often placed on poor tracts of land in highly militarized zones, these circumstances obviously translated into a high level of frustration among resettled communities.

Nonetheless, these were the tools presented by the 1994 “Agreement on the Resettlement of the Population Groups Uprooted by the Armed Conflict” and, given the other problems plaguing the accord, it is clear why these governing bodies were left untouched. The dilemma was how to make the land productive. Clearly, it would require capital to facilitate this switch, capital that had to be drawn from not only foreign sources, but also the refugees in the form of
land payments due to the poor state of the Guatemalan economy. In sum, it equaled a circular thought pattern in which the government sold the land to the returnees at a “fair market price”. The returnees, drawing income from the land, would pay the government the mortgage on it. Finally, the payments would be channeled back into the communities in the form of productive projects increasing profits for the returnees. This train of thought was packaged with the ubiquitous term “revolving credit,” and was the carrot enticing the refugees to return to Guatemala.

Although on paper the scheme seemed sensible, questions abounded about how to provide land for resettlement, how many communities would be included in the revolving credit plan, and how to handle communities that were not capable of paying off the land. In the case of Guatemala, where the vast majority of the refugees had no legal documentation proving ownership of land, expecting the refugees to be able to return to their previous home was often out of the question. More often than not, refugees returned to find their land “possessed” by somebody else with legal documentation. This was the result of Guatemala wanting to facilitate the leap to a more formalized economy and a legalized society, one that demanded private property and documentation of it. Furthermore, the amount of refugees out numbered the amount of publicly owned land, making it necessary for the government to turn to the private sector to purchase enough land for resettlement. In doing this, the Guatemalan government essentially entered into a financial investment that would ultimately require the returnees to purchase the land from the government.

Not only did this arrangement legalize the process, but it also provided funds, in the form of land payments, for the government to implement productive projects through the revolving credit fund mentioned above. Within the 1994 "Agreement on the Resettlement of the Population Groups Uprooted by the Armed Conflict," a system of financing the land sale was outlined, giving INTA the discretion to set the price of the land, as well as establishing a payment plan, over a set number of years, with a one year grace period. It was hoped that by giving the
returnees, oftentimes self-organized as a cooperative where every member would pay an equal share of the overall land debt, a year to establish themselves and reap the benefits of one year’s harvest, they would have accumulated enough cash to begin paying off the debt to the government. Implied in this payment plan is that the productive projects, dependent on the revolving credit fund, could not begin until the community of returnees began depositing money in this fund through their payments. Again, the circular thought pattern of the accord is clear and an understanding of the peasant’s perspective is lacking as it would prove difficult for subsistence farmers to create a profit without productive projects ready to assist them in the jump to commercial farming. In addition, the possibility of the community not being able to or not being willing to pay the land debt is not considered. Quite simply, this translates into a lack of cognitive respect and participation.

First of all, and very important in the case of Nuevo México, nowhere in the 1994 Agreement is it mentioned that the inclusion of revolving credit in the sale of the land is dependent upon the location of the farm being sold. This is a glaring omission in the text that would later cause serious repercussions. However, upon being presented with groups of refugees who did not want to return to their native region (normally the northern departments of Guatemala) but to the fertile areas of the southwest, the government, unable to stop them, acted to deter them. CEAR and INTA divided the country into two sections: the “Conflict Zone” and the “Non-conflict Zone.” The Conflict Zone represented the areas hardest hit by the civil war (the northern, mountainous areas), and resettlement in these areas normally carried with it a slew of financial benefits (reduced price on the land and revolving credit among other things). The “Non-conflict Zone,” by logical deduction, consisted of those departments in the southern, coastal region that were largely untouched by the fighting and are home to the most fertile soil in the country. However, resettlement on these lands carried with it no economic incentives from the government. The reason behind this arbitrary separation is the deep-seated social boundaries that are still prevalent in Guatemala. The southern coast is where many commercial farms are found.
Although it would not have been hard to find idle land to appropriate, it would have difficult to create enough political pull to obtain land in this part of the country. Furthermore, the government was not about to give out the richest farmland in the country, both in nutritive and commercial value, to people whose successful insertion into the economic society of Guatemala was still up in the air.

In a larger scope, what this omission points to is a neglect to define the needs of each group. The government, on their part, hinted at the economic needs they hoped to fulfill: a productive lower class whose products could find their way to a larger domestic market or an international market as well as a strong commercial farming class. Among this was the need for a favorable standing among the international sector to also facilitate the economic changes, which would be done by settling the longstanding and embarrassing civil war. As for the refugees, land ownership and the titling of land were only minor issues in comparison to the basic needs of nutrition, education, and health services. However, it would be naïve to believe that the returnees (especially those who comprise Nuevo México) did not expect to reap economic benefits from being resettled. In cases like Nuevo México, the community felt justified in seeking out an upper-hand over the government in retribution for not only being forced off their land, but for being condemned to a life of poverty. One can hardly argue with either of these stances, but it begs the question, what happened if these issues were so blatantly obvious?

Much of the fault lies in inflated expectations of the resettlement process conveyed by the CEAR representatives to the refugees when organizing returns. The government expected complete cooperation from the refugees in the resettlement process, not examining the underlying issues that the financial burden of land payments could and would cause. The returnees were given the impression that they would be building, as Maida Kover of MINUGUA stated, an "ideal community," but consequently were never consulted on how to create it. In the end, both sides were dealing with an exaggerated ideal of what the resettlement could accomplish. This is often the case in failed public policy where the state is intent on creating a “model village,” one
which is “uncritical, unskeptical, and thus unscientifically optimistic about the possibilities for the comprehensive planning of human settlement and production.” In statements given by individuals in Nuevo México, this analysis is corroborated as it is obvious that the government never fully took into account the negative outcomes of the resettlement process outlined above.

In conclusion, in looking at the text of the 1994 “Agreement on Resettlement” and the background supporting this accord, it is clear that there was a conflict between the Modernist model and the peasant’s perspective. Several factors contributed to this fact’s existence. Among them is the deterioration of the channels created for conveying the refugee needs (the CCPP) and the disregard of any “uprooted” input in the framing, a fault shared by both the members of the CCPP and the framers of the accord. Adding to this were the contradictory views of what was needed for a productive returnee class – differences that were never fully resolved but left dangling. The most evident of these involves the productive projects, where an initial investment is needed to get them started, but funds could not be obtained without a profit was first made by the community. All of these considerations lead into the conclusion that the government did not incorporate cognitive respect and participation and, as a result, the accord was a crack in the dam that erupted once the actual resettlement process got fully underway.
THE CURRENT SITUATION OF NUEVO MÉXICO

In the following pages, Nuevo México will be held up as an example of the frustration that has defined the resettlement process, due initially to the lack of cognitive respect and participation in connection to the refugee’s reality and specific situation. By no means universal to all returnees, the individuals who comprise this village share a very common story of disappointment, confusion and frustration that highlights the shortcomings of the public policy in question. These dilemmas could have been, and should have been, averted by a concerted effort on the part of the government and on the part of the community to establish a clear understanding of each group’s needs through reliable, direct channels of communication. Both parties, as will be shown, played a role in determining the current circumstances of no finalization of land ownership, no initiation of productive projects, and (most importantly) no cooperation among the two groups to intentionally examine each other’s specific reality – a key component in the competent implementation of any policy. This is of the utmost importance, for although one can easily place the blame on the government of Guatemala, the community of Nuevo México also shares a portion of the responsibility for the complication of their resettlement.

The story of Nuevo México starts in early 1995 when an exploratory team comprised of future residents visited the still privately owned farms of La Providencia and Islandia. (The sale of the land from the private owner to the government would not be finalized until after the resettlement on May 31, 1995.) In the shadow of San Vicente Pacaya Volcano, milpa reached majestically skyward and, much to the pleasure of the visitors, cattle grazed on the lush rolling hills characteristic of the Coast Sur. According to the individuals on the exploratory team, they were told that the cattle would be included in the final sale – a claim disputed by government representatives. Along with the “promise” of cattle, the farms had groves of coffee trees as well as a wet mill facility to complete the first of two steps in processing coffee. Although there was a lack of electricity and potable water for the scheduled amount of families, the CEAR officials accompanying the exploratory group assured them those conditions would be remedied. These
shortcomings were overlooked from the very beginning due to the CEAR officials’ eagerness to resettle and the refugees’ baited anticipation to return to their homeland after fourteen years in exile.

Shortly after the group’s return to Mexico, 77 families flew from Campeche and Quintana Roo to Guatemala City where they were then bussed to the farms, now known officially as Nuevo México on April 9, 1995 - a full month and a half before the sale of the farm to the government. Although no contract had been signed before this date, it was no mystery to the community members, the government officials, or the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNCHR) what the financial conditions for the sale were. A survey by INTA had fixed the value of the land at Q8 million – roughly $1.3 million – to be paid back over ten years by the returnees with a one year grace period, 12% interest, and no revolving credit (instead capital loans would be available at the inflation adjusted interest rate of 18%). Also, the declining quality of the land was known to all thanks to an INTA report done shortly before the resettlement. Although still better than the land in the northern departments, years of production and overuse of chemicals had left the soil deteriorating. Erosion was becoming a pressing problem complicating the already low levels of nutrients found in the soil. As one community member stated, the land simply “no alcanza” (does not provide enough) anymore without heavy use of fertilizers. Despite these detractors, the community established themselves and in turn insisted on renegotiations while withholding all payments for the land, setting the ball moving along the present ill-fated path.

However, the community members came up against obstacles in their quest for land renegotiations, as INTA was not about to back down from their stance. Within a few weeks of the returnee’s resettling and calling for new talks on the land sale, the cattle that had supposedly come with the sale of the farm were taken away by the previous owner. Furthermore, INTA stood firm on their refusal to fund any productive projects in the way of electricity or potable water supply until “good will” to pay for the land was established. In specific, INTA was
withholding all economic and social aid until the community members, through the cooperative they had formed, signed the payment agreement and established a payment plan. On a larger scale, INTA had threatened to remove the individuals from the land if the payment was not forthcoming. Outraged by what they saw as a blatant abuse of power on the part of the government, Nuevo México sought out international aid and legal support through the CCPP and, to be more specific, Lic. Alfonso Bauer Paiz. Lic. Bauer Paiz, a long time proponent of indigenous rights in Guatemala, argued that Nuevo México’s claim on the land in Esquintla was protected by the right of possession, a legal precedence drawing from “Article 39” of the Guatemalan constitution and loosely tied to the “inherent right to property” clause in the “Agreement on Resettlement.”

Unfortunately for Nuevo México, INTA refused this claim on the grounds that to prove right of possession, one would have had to live on the plot of land for ten years and complete the procedure for “Titulación Supletoria” (a title expressing the intent to claim land rights). This process stipulates that during this ten-year period, the group in question had to have shown “good faith and peacefulness;” two things, which in the eyes of the government, the community of Nuevo México had been lacking in. Fighting what was seeming to be a losing battle in going through the legal proceedings, Nuevo México entrenched themselves on the land, sought out foreign aid instead (using the connections established while in exile in Mexico), and distanced themselves slowly from the CCPP. It was becoming clear that the systems established to assist them in their resettlement were in practice causing more harm than good as their voice increasingly was drowned out by the political turmoil within the CCPP and ignored by the government.

Unfortunately, the foreign aid coming in did not incorporate or satisfy the needs of the returnees, but focused on political wants and questions of quantity rather than quality. First on the list of foreign support was the presence of an accommodator provided by NCOORD and funded by a church in Iowa. Used as a political resource, both Melinda Van Slyke and Sarah Stafford, who served consecutively starting in November of 1997 to last writing, were privy to a good
portion of the negotiation process and used as a political tool by the community leaders who felt their voice carried more weight accompanied by the face of a "gringa." In addition to this, a poultry project was instituted by another foreign NGO specifically targeting the women of the community. However, the continuation for the project depended on the women having easy access to a market outside of the village to sell the eggs and meat of the chickens, as there was not sufficient demand to sell them locally. This proved to be virtually impossible because to reach the nearest market, 16 km away in Escuintla, takes a torturous hour and a half bus ride over roads that are often flooded and inaccessible. Nuevo México tried to improve their economic and social condition to little avail due to the inadequate funds coming into the village from organizations such as Plan International, Cooperación Española, and the Canadian NGO Canadian Centre for International Studies and Cooperation (CECI). The inability of the community to gain private or public loans or to define the aid entering the community resulted in growing poverty and led some to question their choice of resettling instead of remaining in Mexico. Still, the community members felt that this existence was better than agreeing to the contract the government had drawn up.

As time passed, tensions grew higher between the community members and the government representatives due to years of frustration and what some community members saw as the government "engañoando" (tricking/fooling) the people. Consequently, less effort was made to seek a compromise. Nuevo México continued asking for a 40% discount off the market value of the land, as well as a longer grace period to accumulate savings to pay back the mortgage. To them it only seemed fair that they receive the same economic assistance as their compatriots who had also been run-off their land nearly 15-years prior, but had been resettled in the northern reaches of Guatemala. Unfortunately, due to the location of Nuevo México in the Non-conflict Zone, INTA had denied these benefits. Despite the continuing efforts of the community leaders and the Permanent Commissions representatives, led by Hermitaneo Mozón
and Carlos Choc, the government squarely denied any change to the original agreement. After over three years of no progress, the community members took matters into their own hands.

On August 26, 1998, representatives from INTA were visiting the community in a vain attempt to settle the land issue. As had happened in past meetings, representatives of the two groups met, community members would plead their case disregarding the original agreement, INTA officials would deny the returnees the right to renegotiate, and the two parties would part on their separate paths, no closer to a settlement than before. However, on this occasion, some individuals from Nuevo México, frustrated by the proceedings, left the meeting and within an hour returned. Declaring that they had blocked the road with trees, the INTA officials would not be allowed to leave the village until a settlement had been reached – a settlement in favor of Nuevo México. The matter was settled peacefully, as MINUGUA officials arrived several hours later and diffused the situation. As a result of this, negotiations were suspended until the community elected a new directive junta – a process that occurs yearly. By January 18, 1999, formal talks between the Nuevo México and the government began once again.

However, much had changed in those few months after the stalemate had reached its pinnacle. Sweeping changes were taking place on the government’s end. In a feat of bureaucratic house cleaning, INTA was in the final stages of being replaced by an organization called FONDO de TIERRA under the umbrella of the Ministry of Agriculture and Cattle (MAGA). Although this was seen as a positive for the returnees because of the overwhelming conservative stance INTA had taken in the past, this move signified a new set of regulations as well as a new set of people to deal with for the Permanent Commissions and Nuevo México. In addition to the termination of INTA, CEAR, the government body in charge of refugee resettlement was closing its doors as well. Due to the ending of the stipulated timeframe in which refugees could resettle under the jurisdiction of the “Oct. 8th Accord” and the 1994 “Agreement on Resettlement,” CEAR was being phased out. Instead, all returnee issues would be funneled through Technical Commission for the Execution of the Agreement on Resettlement of the Population Groups.
Uprooted by the Armed Conflict (CTEAR). Although these actions taken by the government could have indicated a small step in acknowledging the peasant perspective, their effect was minimal in that the legislative bodies that govern these institutions largely remained the same. It was a different face, but the same song. This was especially troublesome in the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch that devastated Guatemala. After the storm had passed, Nuevo México had lost essentially all of its corn crop, most of its coffee crop, and about half of their bean crop. Since the government continued to isolate the community for its lack of “good faith and peacefulness,” the people of Nuevo México had to seek out even more foreign aid just to get through the year.38

In addition to the restructuring of the government, the relationship between the communities and the Permanent Commissions was shifting as well. Instead of the Permanent Commissions traveling out to the various communities and then traveling back to the capitol to represent the political voice of the returnees, the community leaders were now traveling to the Permanent Commissions in Guatemala City. The reason behind this was a mistrust that was developing between the Permanent Commissions and the Nuevo México community leaders dealing with a question of solidarity.39 The CCPP still maintained close political ties to the URNG and seemed to be more intent on working with the government on behalf of the returnees, rather than working with the community to empower them. It was felt that if the community leaders were more often physically present in the more meetings between the CCPP and government representatives, they would be more engaged and a greater peasant input could be gleaned. In addition to this, the desire to have more community participation involved in the negotiating process contributed to the change in relationship.40 Clearly, this points to an attempt to seal the crack in the channels for cognitive respect and participation. This change in procedure had its drawbacks for the community leaders, as it required them to leave the village and their fields to make the arduous journey to Guatemala City.

Upon the start of talks between the Communities of the Costa Sur (among which Nuevo México is one of three) and the representatives from CTEAR, a key concession was made. The
government stated that it would fund certain productive projects, as outlined by a government study of the land, before the finalization of the land sale. Although this did signify a step in a history of no progress, it came with mixed emotions. As was pointed out in the analysis of the 1994 “Agreement on Resettlement,” it was the government that would conduct these studies with little to no input from the communities. Essentially, Nuevo México was presented with a list of approved projects, investments the government saw as capable of making a profit first and foremost— not directly focusing on the needs of the community. In addition to this, all three of the proposed projects (coffee, cattle, and pineapple production) required capital investment that is only possible through government loans at 18% real interest. The most cost effective of these proposed projects, coffee cultivation, was estimated to add almost Q1 million to the cost of the farm. And even with that investment, success was not assured.

The project would result in every member of the Nuevo México cooperative owning 5, 250 coffee trees on 3 manzanas of land (roughly 2.5 hectares), nearly doubling the present amount of coffee trees. Although the majority of the funds for this project is coming from NGO’s, it will still require a considerable investment on the part of Nuevo México - at 18% real interest. In addition, for the project to be successful, three other very important conditions need to be satisfied alongside with the additional coffee trees. First is the completion of the wet mill facilities in Nuevo México. Before any coffee can go to market, the coffee bean must be separated from the cherry and dried. This process requires a depulper, a key component the people of Nuevo México are missing. According to accounts, the motor for the depulper was stolen shortly after resettlement and this costly item has yet to be replaced.41 Second is that there needs to be an efficient and reliable way to get the coffee to a market. As was stated before, the road connecting Nuevo México to a key market is extremely bad and if this condition cannot be remedied, it could prove to be impossible to make the productive project profitable. Although this might provide the impetus to improve the infrastructure, it would be all for naught if the third condition is not addressed. The biggest obstacle is that the community lacks the general know-
how to conduct a successful coffee producing enterprise.\textsuperscript{42} Tying back to the misplaced Modernization goal of "mobilizing people for...productive work,"\textsuperscript{43} the returnees of Nuevo México have little experience in doing anything but subsistence farming – a consideration obviously forgotten by the FONDO de TIERRA representatives who planned the project.

As if these three conditions were not daunting enough, there remains the obstacle of the fluctuating price of coffee in the international market. As of last writing, the going price for coffee on the New York CSCE Coffee market had made its way to $1.12 per pound, a considerable jump from the paltry sub-$1.00 range the coffee market experienced the summer of 1999. Even at this price, small coffee producers (such as those in Nuevo México) find making a profit difficult. This is worsened by the fact that since Nuevo México is at a low elevation (below 750 ft. above sea level), the coffee produced would be of lesser quality and would draw an even lower price. Furthermore, this productive project would not yield a profit for five years, owing to the time it takes for coffee trees to mature.\textsuperscript{44} Nonetheless, the coffee trees would have to be maintained meticulously in those early years to ensure that in five years’ time a crop could be harvested, all the while taking away time and energy from the food crops that feed the village. All in all, a productive project focused on coffee would not spell success for Nuevo México, a sentiment quietly shared by some in the community.\textsuperscript{45}

Likewise, in examining the other proposed productive projects, none appear to be in the community's best interests. In taking into consideration the current situation for fruit exportation, the market for large plantation-style commercial developments is improving, but at the cost of smaller operations.\textsuperscript{46} Clearly Nuevo México could only produce a pittance in comparison to the large multi-national firms, more than likely requiring them to exist on contract farming. The same report goes on to note that the present interest rate is too high to make any real rural development feasible. Noticeably, the state’s insistence in determining the development that Nuevo México and other returnee communities will take, without collaborating with the peasants, is resulting in illogical productive projects whose success is dubious at best.
Despite this one concession on the part of the government, FONDO de TIERRA and CTEAR, like their predecessors, have not budged on the insistence of Nuevo México paying the full market value and doing so in the prescribed period of time with no added grace period. This has left the relationship between government and community tense especially since none of the projects are expected to produce a profit for five years, yet 18% real interest would be accruing. Although there is some hope for the new round of negotiations, it is a cautious hope for many members of the community as they recall similar talk of finalization of the sale in the past. Some individuals from Nuevo México also realize that the strength of the community is dwindling as more members leave the longer the land finalization process is drug out. Since their resettlement in 1995, when the total population of the village numbered 87 families, numbers have continually crept lower to the most recent count being 80 families. Among the seven families who left, two of the three original health promoters moved to villages in the northern part of the country. These individuals still have not been replaced, despite the desperate need for health care in Nuevo México. The drop in community members points to the stress the negotiation process has put on Nuevo México — largely due to the lack of medicine, food and other social services. Nonetheless, community members continue to sow their small plots with staples such as corn and beans. Living “from hand to mouth,” the returnees earn a paltry Q126 on whatever crops are left over after consumption by the individual families.47

The history of Nuevo México tells an important story. Simply by looking at the facts, it is clear that from the very beginning in the refugee camps the resettlement process was bogged down by several factors. Not only was there inadequate communication between the refugees and the government representatives, but among the refugees and the Permanent Commissions — those charged with representing the needs of the communities. In addition to this, nowhere was there fostered a sense of cooperation among the groups, rather antagonism was the norm. On repeated occasions while interviewing individuals of Nuevo México, not surprisingly they cynically voiced their view of the “government,” blaming all their woes on an institution they felt
betrayed by. On the other hand, the government maintains that they have continually made the effort to negotiate and settle the argument whereas the community, citing the "hostage" situation, has been at fault for the delays.\textsuperscript{48} However, this stance is refuted by the four years where the government refused to budge on the sale price of the land. Obviously, the government has been willing to negotiate, provided that the negotiations follow their wishes.

In considering these statements, it is clear that the resettlement process has denied the perspective of those affected by the policy in focusing on the issuing of land and land ownership as the sole end to solving the problems faced by the refugees in Mexico. Therefore, when implementation was started, the government officials and the returnees were not working cooperatively because they were working for different goals and outcomes. It is the view of the peasant communities as well as several international NGO’s that the success of the productive projects (and consequently the resettlement) does not depend on the question of land ownership, but on quality infrastructure, education and health services.\textsuperscript{49} Likewise, community members from Nuevo México echoed this sentiment declaring that the first need of the community was "food" to combat "malnutrition among the people, especially children," and secondly, health issues.\textsuperscript{50} This lack of agreement concerning interests and needs has spiraled into a case where communication between the two groups is non-existent.

As was argued in the previous chapter, although concessions were made to include what was considered by the framers to be refugee input, it was faulty in that neither the URNG nor the Permanent Commissions fully represented the needs of the individual refugee groups. Rather, the report published by the Permanent Commissions in May of 1999 stated that because the URNG was not only trying to "incorporate the interests ... of the refugee population," but also maintain their revolutionary platform what resulted was a garbled message and dubious commitment from the refugee perspective.\textsuperscript{51} Because of internal conflicts within the groups, a shaky support base from the refugee population to start, and a difference in objectives, neither organization adequately represented the needs of the returnees. This fact spelled doom for the resettlement
process for, as Peter Berger points out, no one can know an individual's situation and needs better than the individual himself/herself. It was this perspective that was squarely denied and is the central flaw in the implementation of the resettlement process.

The absence of self-definition of needs by communities, such as Nuevo México, led to policies and procedures that could not lend themselves productively to the situation at hand. As is apparent in the financial issues concerning the resettlement (i.e. the land sale), the resettled community was fighting a losing battle to begin with. By focusing principally on the finalization of the land sale as the starting point for all productive and social projects, INTA established a pattern where the community did not have a vested interest in settling with the government. For any implemented policy to be effective, the group affected must have a desire to see implementation through – they must see the benefit in their own lives. This aspect was completely missing in the resettlement of Nuevo México.

After arriving in Guatemala, many members of the community did not see the rationale behind acquiring an Q8 million debt in order to receive government assistance that did not address their needs. With this in mind, it is clear why Nuevo México did not seek out a cooperative relationship with the government. This stance was furthered by the accessibility to limited NGO aid, a general mistrust of the government perspective, and the benefits of government funded projects being outweighed by the debt accrued. One community member best characterized this sentiment when he stated, "[w]hat will the government do if they [the directive junta] do not sign?"52 Obviously, there does not exist a shared view between the returnees and the government officials in dealing with how best to precede the issues of productive projects and the land sale. As was stated earlier, due to the lack of cognitive respect and participation resulting in compromised channels of communication, the priorities of Nuevo México differ considerably from those of the government.

However, the case of Nuevo México is not a clear-cut case of a victim oppressed by the government, for the community also bears some of the blame for the dissatisfaction in the
resettlement. In insisting that the government cater to their needs while vacillating on how the two groups could work together, they have essentially worked against themselves. A clear case in point is the suspension of negotiations after the “hostage” situation that occurred in August of 1998. In addition to this, Nuevo México and the Costa Sur representatives (who also represent two other communities in the same situation as Nuevo México) have sent contradictory messages since the commencement of the new round of talks. An example appeared in a national newspaper shortly after the resuming of talks and the stated willingness of the CTEAR to fund productive projects as a sign of good will before finalization of the sale. In an ad, paid for by the Permanent Commissions for the Costa Sur, the government was lambasted for its unwillingness to cooperate with the returnees. Obviously, by turning a blind eye to government concessions and refusing the government any room to define and include their own needs in the negotiating process (i.e. finalizing the sale and saving political face), Nuevo México and the CCPP are hindering the implementation process as well and denying cognitive respect and participation for the government.

These examples feed into three core political relationships that need to be addressed when dealing with an analysis of the resettlement. First and foremost is the rapport that exists between the community and the government at the national level. Although throughout the years the relationship has evolved, the antagonistic feel of one group pitted against the other rather than working with each other has remained constant. At the time of the resettlement, the community had won an unprecedented political battle in obtaining land on the Costa Sur. A traditional stronghold of agro-business, the fertile tracts of land found on the south coast of Guatemala had long been inaccessible to peasant farmers. However, international pressure, due to increasing international and domestic media coverage, and the overriding desire of the Guatemalan government to resettle refugees at almost any cost combined to open a window for returnee resettlement there.
Even though no one disputes the political victory on the national arena, it is one that is lessened in the larger scope of Guatemalan politics. As was stated in the previous chapter, INTA, the organization charged with the financing of the land sale, was a bastion of conservative strength, rarely bowing to the needs of the peasant class. Due to its power, INTA, if not able to halt the resettlement process, could slow it down to a glacier crawl as long as the resettled communities gave them “due reason” to do so.\textsuperscript{54} Nuevo México’s insistence for renegotiations and consequent belligerence provided just that. Taking a step back, it becomes clear that what is transpiring between the government of Guatemala and the returnees of Nuevo México is rooted in an age-old hierarchy. Commercial farmers’ strength relies upon peasant subservience, and, for this reason, to acknowledge the returnee perspective would be to relinquish power.

One other national political point affecting the negotiation process has been the general elections taking place this year in Guatemala. As of the last writing, several individuals speculated that it was no coincidence that the government granted a provision on productive projects so quickly after restarting the negotiations. In an effort to pick up low approval ratings, the ruling political party, the Party of National Advancement (PAN), began appealing to the lower and peasant classes. However, what progress has occurred has been in the shape of increased meetings, but no agreements or resolutions. CTEAR representative, in a meeting between CTEAR representatives and the \textit{Costa Sur} communities, stated that past delays related to the negotiation and finalization process were not because of an unwillingness on the part of the government, but a result of the “democratic process.”\textsuperscript{55} Unfortunately, the details of these delays were not elaborated upon, leaving it up to speculation.

Nonetheless, to those involved in the resettlement process there has been a marked change in the attitude of the government toward the negotiation process building up to the elections. However, it is one that still does not fully incorporate the peasant input. By focusing on concessions while maintaining the same perspective of land ownership as the solution to the problems faced by the returnees, the government still refuses to acknowledge the primary needs.
of Nuevo México. The consequence of this is an absence of trust by the community for the government embodied by a reserved optimism on the part of the community members, especially among members of the local women’s group Madre Tierra.55 As was apparent, by not incorporating the peasant/returnee perspective, the government alienates those who the policy is designed to help. What results is a genuine mistrust and uneasiness in Nuevo México. Without trust all action taken by the government in respect to the land negotiations is meaningless, a further complication that is aggravated by the lack of cognitive respect and participation. As was mentioned earlier in the chapter on Guatemala’s history, the 1999 elections brought to power Alfonso Portillo whose political allegiance presents several question marks in connection to the peace process and, consequently, the finalization of the resettlement process. This turn of events holds little promise in helping the people of Nuevo México obtain a comprehensive solution and further deepens the mistrust felt towards the government.

Another contributing factor to the mistrust can be found in the tenuous political relationship between Nuevo México and the Permanent Commissions. Although it ought to be that these two groups should work in close cooperation, the events of the past five years would lead one to think otherwise. Nuevo México community leaders, in interviews, expressed their doubt about the effectiveness of the Permanent Commissions in representing their best interests. An example of this deals with the perception of the CCPP being more interested in long-term political goals than in immediate needs of the community. By not directly focusing their energies toward resolving the needs of food and health services, it is perceived that they are more in line with the government than the community. In this case, the intermediary (the CCPP) has acted as a drawback to the ideals of cognitive respect and participation.

Naturally, there are instances where practically it would be detrimental for the government to only work for consensus with the community. As some see it, the community members of Nuevo México (as well as the two other communities under the umbrella of the Costa Sur: La Lupita and El Carmen) do not fully grasp the political intricacies that are part and
parcel of the negotiations process.\textsuperscript{57} It is what the CCPP representatives view as channeling political naivete that the community leaders see as twisting their voice. However, if a commitment to cognitive participation is to be fostered, there must be a balance between these two views that is not being sought presently.

One final political relationship that hindered cognitive respect and participation and, consequently, the successful implementation of the resettlement process was internal conflict within Nuevo México. Several factors figure into this situation, among them cultural barriers within the community. As a profile study conducted by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (ACNUR) demonstrated, the ethnic make-up of Nuevo México consists of various groups such as Kekché, Quiché and Kanjobal to name a few. In addition to this diversity is the presence of the ten families who had lived on the farms prior to resettlement, all of whom have now been incorporated into the cooperative. The resulting mix has manifested itself in confrontations between community members strictly along ethnic lines making nearly impossible to reach consensus.\textsuperscript{58} Another cultural barrier is little social/political mobility for women. Although there is a women’s group (Madre Tierra) that is active in the community, on the whole women have little power despite efforts by ACNUR and MINUGUA to address this obstacle to cognitive respect and participation. In part, this was the result of efforts focused solely on reaching and organizing women while not including men in the discussions. What resulted was no progress in the area of equality of opportunity for peasant women. On a smaller level, Carlos Boggio, Head of the Resettlement and Incorporation Area at MINUGUA, echoed what has been hampering the resettlement process on the whole when he stated “for a project to work, both sides have to be treated alike.”\textsuperscript{59} This disunity has hampered the people of Nuevo México, for not only do they have difficulty in having their perspective acknowledged, but also they have trouble conveying their perspective at all.

There also exists mistrust in regards to community leadership. Those serving on the directive junta expressed their opinion that all are active participants in the political life of the
community. However, this statement was contradicted later by saying that only “one or two”
community members are involved in the negotiation process, leaving most of the people in Nuevo
México in the dark.\textsuperscript{60} Verified by several that confessed having little to no knowledge of the land
negotiation process, it is obvious that there is a lack of communication among the residents of
Nuevo México itself.

As a result of these two factors in community politics (a directive junta which, in the
opinion of some, usurps power and a general populace that does not feel incorporated in the
negotiations process) there is considerable division for such a small group.\textsuperscript{61} After a failed
attempt at cooperative farming where everyone worked for the benefit of each other, they have
now resorted to every family tending to their “parcela” (plot). Also, there is the division of
leadership between the sexes where a few men dominate the political scene. Following this path
has led many in the community to simply drop out of the political arena, further complicating the
possibility of reaching a compromise where all are represented and heard.

In conclusion, in looking at the resettlement process of Nuevo México, it is clear that
from the community level up through the national level cognitive respect and participation was
not fostered nor present. As was shown, denial of this basic precept in the first stages of the
implementation through the recent developments in the land negotiations has resulted in:

1) practices that are not based on the needs of the groups affected by the policy,

2) practices that do not encourage the groups to take an invested interest in the
implementation process,

3) a fractured political arena with no efforts being made to work in cooperation.

In addition to these three points, it is clear that the absence of cognitive respect and
participation is not solely on the part of the government. While the most obvious and arguably
the most appalling instances have been committed by various government groups such as INTA,
Nuevo México has also hindered the effective implementation of the resettlement process by
refusing to consider any other view beside their own.
CONCLUSION

In examining the case of Nuevo México, it is clear that several factors contributed to the present state of the situation: the civil war, years of discrimination and social marginalization, and internal disputes among different indigenous groups. However, the reason behind the ineffectiveness of the resettlement process comes down to one main point: a lack of cognitive respect and cognitive participation, which has affected the text of the accord and the implementation of the resettlement. Essentially, without integrally incorporating the peasant perspective, the implementation of this policy was doomed to fail short because it was an attempt by a government to manipulate a subject in which they had little practical experience. Adding to the complication, the peasants of Nuevo México have not cooperated in forwarding the resettlement process due to a lack of trust toward the government. This conclusion was also expressed recently in a report released by MINUGUA. The UN mission pointed towards a lack of cooperation between the government of Guatemala and the returnees as the major sticking point in holding the resettlement process back and called for a solution by year’s end.62

The question remains, how can Guatemala overcome these obstacles in the resettlement process, and in doing so, begin healing the wounds of the civil war? The immediate answer is a decentralization of funds and powers so as to allow regional governments and communities to determine their own path. Following along the lines of E.F. Schumacher, the most effective projects and policies are those that start from the grassroots level and develop around a specific community need rather than a large amorphous national policy.63 It is always easier to save a village than the world in one felled swoop. This sentiment was also shared in the MINUGUA report as they called for a more the Guatemalan government to seek more “efficient and effective” policies and procedures which “reflect the pluricultural character of Guatemala.”64

Owing to Guatemala’s extremely diverse and independent rural populace, it only makes sense to vest the developmental power in their hands. Although this goes against the norm in Guatemalan
politics, the government must make a concerted effort to actively include the returnees in the public policymaking process on a level in which all community members are involved.

Although this does not ensure success, it does result in a more efficient manner of rural development. Furthermore, if the communities have a sense of efficacy in determining their own destiny, inevitably they will take measures to create programs and projects that fit their needs and means. Regardless of their relatively “uneducated” views in comparison to state officials, this proves to be inconsequential, for there is an “indispensable role of practical knowledge, informal processes, and improvisation in the face of unpredictability,” in developing successful public policy.\textsuperscript{55} It is this experientially based knowledge that, when paired effectively with technical knowledge from the state or NGO’s that results in the most successful development.

However, more than the acknowledgement of the peasant perspective is needed. Specifically for Nuevo México, either the price of the land must be lowered or the payment plan must be adjusted to reflect the payment capabilities of the returnees. It has to be a better alternative for the returnees to agree to the sale than to continue squatting on the land and relying on foreign aid. This requires focused discussions and negotiations with the community members to understand their perspective and what they are capable of. Furthermore, productive projects must be implemented that reflect the know-how of the people and address all issues (infrastructure, market accessibility, price fluctuations, etc.). Most importantly, though, the interests of the returnees must be addressed first. Owing to the fact that the needs of the people are not land ownership, but health care and nutrition, the government must address this first. In other words, the hierarchy that has existed must be torn down to make way for cognitive respect and participation to the returnees, thus acknowledging their perspective. However, this requires a large commitment on the part of the returnees as well. Instead of always pitting themselves against the government, they must come to the table willing to make themselves the co-worker in their own future. There must be a comprehensive defining of the needs of the village and an effort on their part to include the input of the individual villagers. On the whole, the focus of the
resettlement has to get away from issues of land titling and cash crops to center on people. If the question of individual and the community (both national and village) is not at the core of the policy, it will not be effective in the implementation. This focus inherently rests upon gathering input from all those affected by the policy and depends on the valuing of making all useful in the implementation process.
APPENDIX: RESEARCH METHODS

I conducted interviews in Guatemala on two separate occasions. The first group of interviews took place between the months of October and November of 1998, and were conducted in the village of Nuevo México, Escuintla, with community members, as well as in Guatemala City with individuals working with the Consultative Assembly of Displaced Populations (ACPD), the United Nations Mission for the Verification of Human Rights in Guatemala (MINUGUA), the National Institute of Agrarian Transformation (INTA), the Permanent Commissions (CCPP), the Ministry of Agriculture and Cattle (MAGA), and Commission for the Attention to Repatriates, Refugees and Displaced People (CEAR). Again in July of 1999, I conducted the interviews mentioned above with the addition of individuals from the Secretariat for Peace (SEPAZ), the Technical Commission for the Attention to Repatriates, Refugees and Displaced People (CTEAR), the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (ACNUR), Canadian Centre for International Studies and Cooperation (CECI), and Servicio Maya.

The vast majority of the interviews were elite interviews. It followed then that these sessions were unscheduled and focused on key topics rather than specific questions. Open-ended questions were asked, allowing the subjects to articulate their opinion in the context of a conversation. However, due to different circumstances, the level of formality displayed during the interviews in Nuevo México differed from that in the interviews in Guatemala City. All interviews in Nuevo México were conducted in the village, normally in the subject’s home. All interviews conducted in Guatemala City took place in the respective offices of the individuals.

Naturally, in conducting the research, there were several obstacles that had to be overcome. The largest of these was gaining the trust of the people of Nuevo México. Generally, government officials were less suspicious, but nonetheless, my neutrality in the issue often had to be affirmed. This is especially pertinent due to the fact that the issues discussed in this thesis are still very much alive and, so being, are still a dynamic force in several of the subjects’ daily lives.
To allay the suspicion that was inherent in having an outsider enter Nuevo México, steps were taken to make a connection with the accompanier already present within the community. As was discussed earlier, relying on this relationship only took one so far in that both Melinda Van Slyke and Sarah Stafford were still on the fringe of the community. Nonetheless, for the purpose of the research, this detachment did not prove to be a dilemma and was actually a positive force in helping the objectivity of the research.

The interview session/conversation centered on four basic areas: the perceived status of the relationship between the community and the government, the individual’s perceived role in that relationship, the sense of community in the village and how that effected the negotiation process, and the needs of Nuevo México as viewed by the individual. Pains were taken not to delve into the issue of the actual exodus into Mexico. Owing to the fact that many people still bore the scars of the civil war, both physically and emotionally, it was deemed in the best interests of the research not to touch this sensitive topic. Also contributing to this decision was the relatively short period of time available for interviewing. On the whole, four days were spent in the village conducting interviews. During that time, over-identification with the people of Nuevo México was avoided in the interest of objectivity, but it was difficult to remain unbiased when dealing with the different roles of the sexes, and what, by my cultural standards, was sexism in the community. This became extremely apparent in dealing with the individual’s perceived role in the land negotiation process where every man interviewed saw himself as an active member of the community, but every woman interviewed had no real knowledge of the process.

Conducting interviews in Guatemala City with government officials took on a much more formal note. Nonetheless, the questions were centered on the same principles of how has community participation been included in the land negotiation process. Also discussed were their perceived roadblocks in the negotiation process as well as the subject’s view on how the stalemate could be resolved. Trust was still an obstacle to be cleared during the interviews due to
the assumed bias of the investigation in favor of Nuevo México. In conducting interviews with third parties (UN missions, NGO’s, etc.), the formality of the government interviews was maintained. These were often more informational, but also centered on the subject’s perception of community involvement in land negotiations, not just in the case of Nuevo México always but in other instances as well. The issue of mistrust was lesser during these interviews owing to the nature of the organizations and their smaller role in the land negotiations.

In analyzing the responses gathered during the interviews, careful consideration was paid to the subject’s bias. Not surprisingly those interviewed in Nuevo México viewed the government as the antagonist, whereas the government officials interviewed saw the impasse in the negotiations as a result of Nuevo México’s unwillingness to work cooperatively. The third parties interviewed often gave their perceptions of both sides, but nonetheless a bias toward the returnees was apparent.

These biases were influenced by several factors. Among these is the socio-economic status of the various subjects, which also correlated with the level of education. Those in the lower socio-economic group, namely the community members of Nuevo México, tended to have a very simplistic view of the resettlement process and the land negotiations. On the whole, they did not take into account the various other factors contributing to the difficulties they were having in finalizing the land sale. On the other extreme, many of the individuals interviewed from the government tended to over-complicate the resettlement process, losing sight of the goal at hand. The education level also played a role in the amount of respect paid to an individual’s opinion or perspective on the part of the government officials.

Another factor that played an influential role was the differing experiences during the civil war. The time spent in refugee camps in Mexico by those from Nuevo México influenced the responses, adding bitterness toward the Guatemalan government that permeated all the conversations and interview sessions. It was clear that they placed the blame for their lot in life on the government and nothing could dissuade them from that stance. This was especially
apparent in the older generation of community members, where the conversations would on rare occasions become diatribes against the government with little based in fact, but more so in emotion. On the side of the government there existed a perception that the returnees, to a certain extent, did not deserve any special treatment in that their departure from Guatemala was not necessary and was a free choice. As a result, the returnees deserved the consequences of that choice – that being the loss of land and/or land owning rights. As for the third parties interviewed, each organization had its particular bias in that they each had a specific mission, which influenced their responses.

All in all, these influences had to be balanced out by recognizing the different motivations each group had and weighing them accordingly. Each side strove to justify their stances not only on moral grounds, but also on practical grounds. For Nuevo México, their motivation lied in a self-defined ideal of justice. In their minds, they deserved not only land, but also compensation for the hardships faced during the civil war. For the Guatemalan government, they were driven by a desire to close this chapter in their history as an oppressor and redefine themselves as a progressive and forward-moving country. However, the bastion of an elitist society still was apparent and added another facet to their motivation in the resettlement process. As for the third parties, their motivation lied in accomplishing their individual missions, always in connection to a humanitarian goal.

Although pains were taken to remain impartial and objectively collect and analyze data, this work does reflect my own personal view on how public policy and economic development in developing countries ought to proceed. Furthermore, this study deals with one particular returnee community in Guatemala, with peculiarities and differences unique to their situation. For this reason, I still have questions about whether or not Nuevo México’s situation can be applied to other returnee communities. What has been the experience of the communities in the northwest? What have been the results of the productive projects initiated there, assuming that they have
been started? How do the families interact? Are there prevalent ethnic divisions among the returnees or is it more common for returnees in the northwest to remain with their ethnic group?

According to data collected through interviews, the larger issues that have hampered the resettlement process for Nuevo México, namely the lack of cognitive participation and respect, appear to be also present in the other communities going through a similar situation. However, an opportunity to verify this with my own eyes never materialized. The lack of comparing Nuevo México with another returnee community is, in my mind, the single biggest piece missing from this research. Due to time constraints and a limited initial view of how large the issue of refugee resettlement really was, I was unable to delve into this topic to the extent that I would be satisfied.

With that in mind, future paths of research stemming from this work could be in examining how other countries have dealt with resettling landless refugees. In dealing with this topic, look into how the returnees are integrated both economically and socially. On an even broader scale, but one that hits closer to home, how prominent of a role does grassroots community participation (cognitive respect and participation) play in developing public policy in the United States. This is especially poignant in lieu of the farm crisis that is brewing now in the Midwest, where the small-family farm is loosing ground to agro-business firms. Much like the returnees in Guatemala, the small-farmers are presented with few opportunities to determine their own future whereas the larger firms are seemingly controlling the political power.

All in all, I view the issues of cognitive respect and cognitive participation as key in the coming years as globalization drives our economies and societies in a direction that increasingly centralizes power and wealth. It seems to me that if steps are not taken to empower those who are being left out of this shrinking circle of power, we are defaming the essence of democracy and justice.
5 Jim Handy, Gift of the Devil, (Boston, 1984), p. 82.
6 Jim Handy, Gift of the Devil, (Boston, 1984), p. 128.
8 The Historical Clarification Commission Report, (Guatemala, February 25, 1999), sect. II-80.
10 The Kaibiles was the specially trained anti-insurgency military unit organized during the Guatemalan Civil War and connected to several of the human rights violations committed during that timeframe.
11 The PACs (Patrullas de Auto-defensa Civil) were paramilitary structures created in 1981 to organize peasant villages under military control and to arm the villagers. Often, participation in the PACs was forced upon the men of the village and had a tremendous effect on the traditional value systems of the community.
12 CEAR, El Reasentamiento en la Epoca de Paz, (Guatemala, 1998), p. 4
16 MINUGUA, Situación de los compromisos sobre aspectos Socioeconómicos y Agrarios, Reasentamiento e Incorporación, (Guatemala, November 1999), p. 7.
19 Agreement on Resettlement of the Population Groups Uprooted by the Armed Conflict, Part I, Principles 3; 1994.
21 Agreement on Resettlement of the Population Groups Uprooted by the Armed Conflict, Part II, Guarantee 9; 1994.
22 Interview with Lic. Alfonso Bauer Paiz, member of the Permanent Commissions and co-signer of the “Oct. 8th Accord,” Guatemala City; October 13, 1998.
24 Interview with Don Marcos, Junta Directiva president of Nuevo México, Escuintla; July 21, 1999.
28 CERIGUA, Guatemala: the agrarian situation II (Guatemala, November 1996).
29 Interview with Maida Kover, MINUGUA – Costa Sur Vertiente, Guatemala City; August 4, 1999.
31 Taken from an observed Junta Directiva meeting, Nuevo México; October 9, 1998.
33 INTA, Estudio agrológico a nivel de reconocimiento do los suelos de la finca La Provedencia e Islandia, jurisdicción departmental de Escuintla (Guatemala, March 1995).
34 Interview with Don Manuel, community member of Nuevo México, Nuevo México; July 23, 1999.
35 Interview with Lic. Alfonso Bauer Paiz, member of the Permanent Commissions, Guatemala City; October 13, 1998.
36 Interview with Melinda Van Slyke, accompanier for Nuevo México, Nuevo México; October 10, 1998.
37 Interview with Don Tomás, community member of Nuevo México, Nuevo México; October 11, 1998.
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