

CONTEMPORARY HISTORY OF SALAMÁ TOWNSHIP OF DEPARTMENT OF BAJA VERAPAZ, 20TH CENTURY

Abraham Israel Solórzano Vega

Introduction

The purpose of the work presented here is to share the contemporary history of Salamá, emphasizing the 20th century, also it has the purpose of strengthening the local identity. In one of the exploration trips to Salamá, we discovered that there was no document that gave to know the history of the township, in a coherent and synchronic way, there was only scattered and brief information, which contribute to motivate us to continue with the research.

The importance of doing the research in this city is based on the need of the inhabitants to know their past, because, although there has been interest on the part of the neighbors to reconstruct the events that took place and to gather them in a single writing, the task had

not been possible until 2014. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that a community that does not know its past cannot understand its present and its future.

The methodological techniques of Microhistory and Ethnohistory were used for the elaboration of this writing. The text began by providing some data from the 19th century as background, and then continued with the development of the 20th century, where information was collected from different processes, namely: land distribution, construction of roads, urbanization, installation of basic services in the urban area, the conditions in which people lived in some past governments, an armed movement against government of the President Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán,

land problems, economic conditions, the earthquake of 1976, among others.

Some data prior to the 20th Century

According to information provided by the Universidad del Valle de Guatemala (2010), the inhabitants of Chilascó were awarded a piece of land that had thirty caballerías of extension in the same place, which is consigned in the governmental agreement of May 20, 1874. The lands that were divided internally were the following: Cerro Verde, Repollal, San Vicente, Guadalupe Panimá, Sinajá, and El Espinero.

The township of Salamá in 1880 was the departmental capital of Baja Verapaz and the places mentioned as part of its jurisdiction were: Rabinal, San Gabriel, Rodeo, Cubulco, Toco, Saltán, Purulha, Canoa, San Jerónimo, San Miguel Chicaj, and El Chol (AGCA B. E. 201 L. 28674).

As it is known, formal education called after 1871 “Public Instruction”, was one of the fundamental pillars of the liberal foundations, which is made known in a writing of the General Archive of Central America (B. E. 201 L. 28674 F. 2) in which it is mentioned that: “Complementary Schools” were not in the department of Baja Verapaz (probably in reference to the junior and high school level), instead, there were

only 27 schools of elementary level in that jurisdiction, attended by 1320 students. “[...] *that popular education constitutes the foundation and guarantee of the republican system in order to cooperate resolutely to the diffusion of the lights with energy of our liberal convictions.*”

An important work in 1880, was the construction of the bridge called “La Estancia” that connected Salamá with San Jerónimo and with a total project cost of seven hundred and ninety-five pesos, which were paid by the national treasury and the township of Salamá, the labor for the work was in charge of the neighbors of both municipalities ((B. E. 201 L. 28674).

In the same year, accordingly to the same document, the construction of the public marketplace of Salamá was almost finished, since it only lacked some final paints and varnishes, so its value was one thousand one hundred eighty-nine pesos. This building was located to the east of the central square of the departmental capital (B. E. 201 L. 28674).

Other works that were carried out during the same year aforementioned were: a side construction next to the La Libertad bridge” which had been destroyed by an overflowing river and an avenue in the eastern part of the central plaza, as part of the

ornamentation of the city center (B. E. 201 L. 28674). In the villages surrounding that city, in the same year, buildings were constructed for each of the schools of: Payaqué, Panimá, and Chilascó, as well as buildings for municipal offices. A small bridge was built over the Barranca Honda stream, and the streets were paved, and sidewalks were built near downtown. It is also mentioned in the manuscripts of the General Archive of Central America (B. E. 201 L. 28674) that agricultural work was done with communal work established by the township.

There is no doubt that commercial needs gave rise to the construction of roads to connect with neighboring towns and with Guatemala City, as stated in the document (AGCA B. E. 201 L. 28674 F. 5.v.) *“in response to the increase that gradually acquired the commercial movement I have traced and opened several roads [...]”*.

The road section that led from Salamá to Rabinal was in the process of being completed, because until 1880 it reached San Miguel Chicaj, a road that was ready for use by *wheeled vehicles* in that year (AGCA B. E. 201 L. 28674 F. 5.v.).

It is essential to point out that, in the writings mentioned above, is made on the *voluntary work* of the settlers,

but considering the laws of that time it was not voluntary, instead it was obligatory, which is the reason why the investment in public works was only in materials and transportation, since labor had no cost, as the same document proves (AGCA B. E. 201 L. 28674 F. 5.v.) *“Both on the road as well as in the other roads mentioned, no other expenses were incurred that in the payment of caporales, since the generality of the respective neighbors were engaged in their construction as a public service”*. In that sense, the laws contemplated the imposition of labor in public works, in which the neighbors had to participate without salary.

One of the economic policies of the liberal governments implemented after 1771 was to promote the cultivation of coffee, which is why, according to a governmental agreement of 1880, it was decreed that the residents of Chilascó who were interested in planting this fruit could opt for one *caballería* of land, as part of the state strategies to encourage farmers and export the product (Universidad del Valle de Guatemala, 2010).

Continuing with the incentives for agriculture, benefits were disposed by the government in the same year, in order to favor the development of agriculture in Salamá, with the purpose of increasing the wealth

through the use of natural resources. For such reasons, in 1880 some lands were distributed, all of them located in: Cerro Verde, Repollal, San Vicente, Guadalupe, Panimá, Sinajá y El Espinero (Revista de la Facultad de Ciencias Jurídicas y Sociales, 1960).

The land endowment for each family ranged in size from one block to one caballería. The settlers could opt for a maximum of ten blocks, whose value was fifty cents each. The funds from the aforementioned sales, according to Revista de la Facultad de Ciencias Jurídicas y Sociales (1960), were used for the construction of roads and the purchase of two machines for pulping and threshing coffee. Another government aid was the manufacture of seedlings, to provide farmers with scions, at a low cost. As mentioned before, the intention of the authorities was to promote the cultivation of coffee in that area, to later export it.

The only condition assigned by the authorities regarding the distribution of land was that the land had to be used for planting coffee or raising cattle, which had to be proven two years after delivery of the plot. If they decided to use the land for cattle raising, they had to own at least fifteen cows. If the farmers did not comply with the established terms, the land was withdrawn and the amount paid was refunded to them (Revista de la

Facultad de Ciencias Jurídicas y Sociales, 1960).

Public lighting as part of the basic needs of the township was authorized according to a governmental agreement of June 10, 1885, the year in which the township of Salamá allocated a monthly amount of money to begin work in the town: but it was not until 1923 that the project was carried out (Gall: 1979).

Another of the properties purchased by the government with the purpose of distributing plots of land was the La Vega farm, whose purchase contract was made in 1886, the owner of the property was Romualdo Ambrosy, who sold the property for seven thousand pesos. Subsequently, the land was divided, and a part was distributed to each neighbor (Revista de la Facultad de Ciencias Jurídicas y Sociales, 1960).

The celebrations corresponding to the commemoration of the independence on September 15th of 1892, were full of civic fervor, according to the newspaper La Regeneración (1892: 3), it was a date of great importance that could not go unnoticed by the neighbors of Salamá, “[...] and no free citizen could dedicate himself but to the pleasant commemoration of the great day of 1821”.

The festivities began at four o'clock in the morning with cannon shots, ringing of the bells and martial band *reveille*, until six o'clock in the morning. Then the flag was raised with honors, followed by the gathering of the population in the meeting hall to listen to the reading of the act of independence, and concluded with the singing of the "hymn to freedom" (Periódico La Regeneración, 1892).

Regarding organizations and cultural activities, in 1892 Salamá had a social organization called La Concordia, which was aimed at charitable actions, whose organization was in charge of young ladies of Salamá. Another work carried out by young woman from Salamá was the addition of a newspaper called "La Academia de Maestros", whose objective was to publish news of the department and educational events (Periódico La Regeneración, 1892).

The same year a School of Music was inaugurated, an art in which it is alluded in the indicating newspaper (La Regeneración, 1892). At that time there were already in Salamá some people with that skill. Also, at that time a library was inaugurated in the township.

One of the problems with which the township suffered was the distribution of water, which as stated Regeneración

(1893: 1) it was a basic service that did not reach the entire population due to difficulties in the construction of the network.

Many efforts have been billed to achieve that our public fountain gave us this element of life, so indispensable and useful, not only for most of the neighborhood, but to every passerby, because during the year of which I am concerned and number of repairs were made, undoubtedly, due to the poor construction of its plumbing.

20th Century

Within the administration policies of the government of 1901, continuity was given to the allocation of land with the aim of encouraging the cultivation of coffee, this as part of the Liberal tactics in the mentioned year, the donation was directed to the military of Chilascó, who were granted sixty-two caballerías of land, for the indicated purpose (Universidad del Valle de Guatemala, 2010).

The founding of the "Finca Pacalaj" is considered the date back to 1906, according to a governmental agreement of President Manuel Estrada Cabrera. Who that same year granted them a plot of land as a reward for having participated in a battle known as the "Regalado War" (war

against Guatemala led by the Salvadorian General Tomas Regalado, which took place from July 6th to 11th of 1906), People who are believed that have migrated from the township of Salama and the villages: Las Limas, Las Tunas, and Chocojá (Universidad del Valle de Guatemala, 2010).

The introduction of drinking water in the municipal head of Salama was decreed, according to a governmental agreement of 1909, in which it was established that obtain funds for the works, money corresponding to the contribution of ornament of the whole department had to be taken. All the money collected was to be invested in the piping of the liquid for which they took advantage of the Cachil River. As they had to wait for the proceeds from the collection of the following two years. The work was not started until 1912 (Universidad del Valle de Guatemala, 2010).

According to an agreement authorized on February 9th of 1910, a state hospital in Salamá was founded, therefore, a committee was formed to carry out all the diligence concerning the construction, all the work began on March 15th of the same year and the hospital was inaugurated on March 15th of 1911 (Gall, 1979: 162).

In terms of population territories, the inhabitants of El Aguacate and

Chocolá requested the government in 1920 to unify the two settlements, which was authorized according to the agreement of December 9th of the same year. This new site was given the name of La Paz (Universidad del Valle de Guatemala, 2010).

According to the data studied regarding the water service, it can be inferred that the construction of the pipe network did not last long, because in 1922 they were already broken, so it was necessary to repair them, it is worth to mention that, only ten years before the work had been done. Again, the government authorized that all the money resulting from the collection of the ornamental fee be invested in the necessary refurbishments (Universidad del Valle de Guatemala, 2010).

The project of the installation of publish lighting, which began in 1885, continued until 1922, the year which the township paid the firm “Schlubach Sapper & Company” to carry out the respective studies and the contract was approved on June 25th, 1923 (Gall, 1979).

While remembering his childhood, a neighbor of Salamá refers to the times of General Jorge Ubico when there was calm and security in the place, he says, there was no crime and when the General came to visit, people

received him well. On the other hand, the school was militarized, because the teachers were military, and they taught their classes with a lot of discipline. In addition to the master classes of the elementary school, the students received military instruction. Although, according to the criteria of the interviewee, Ubico administered the government of Guatemala as a farm (Interview: Heriberto Ramírez, November 22nd, 2014).

Among the infrastructure that Salamá had in 1932 was the air station, which by governmental agreement of January 25th of the same year, was elevated to the category of Aerodrome (Gall, 1979).

In a document from the General Archive of Central America (Ministerio de Agricultura año 1934-1935 Legajo 58) diverse information of 1934 was found, which is consigned that in the place known as “Rincón Grande” there was a brick factory, place where material was brought for the repair of the bridge “Las Palmas”, which was located between Salamá and San Miguel Chicaj. In “La Estancia” there was a tile factory and the transport used to move the product was by ox carts. The construction of the road from El Rancho to Salamá is also mentioned.

Other infrastructure works that were executed to link Salamá with other places were: road to Rabinal, Purulhá, El Rancho and Cobán. In 1935, the repair of *San Clemente* bridge that connected Salamá with El Rancho was mentioned. The sections to Cachil and La Cumbre were also under construction (AGCA Ministerio de Agricultura año 1934-1935 Legajo 58).

On the other hand, in 1935 there was already a company that provided electricity service in the township, which was called “Empresa Eléctrica García & Co.” in Salamá, Baja Verapaz; the cost of the service was one quetzal per month (AGCA Ministerio de Agricultura año 1934-1935 Legajo 58). In 1940, the agreement of October 5th stipulated that the management of the Municipal Electric Company be attached to the township and the regulations were approved five years later (Gall, 1979).

Another important aspect of the same year is the construction of the park of Salamá, in the months of March to July which was called “Parque Barrios”, a project in which were invested approximately three hundred sixty-five quetzales with forty cents (AGCA Ministerio de Agricultura año 1934-1935 Legajo 58). In that regard, Francis Gall (1979) notes that the park was built by the

governmental agreement on April 5th, 1921, and was named “La Unión”.

The government of General Jorge Ubico in 1937, gave the authorization to the Township of Salamá so that from the funds collected by concept of ornament, the amount of forty-two quetzales was awarded for the purchase of a sculpture with the effigy of the Licenciado Francisco Lainfiesta (date that coincides with the year of birth of the honoree) and was placed in a street that bore his name. The same year the image was installed in the place that in 2015 is known as Plazuela Lainfiesta, as well as the same year the 5th avenue of El Centro neighborhood was named after the famous Salamateco (Conde, 1996).

In order to be worthy of the aforementioned recognition, a brief description of Francisco Lainfiesta’s life will be described. He was born in Salamá on September 23rd, 1837, when he was 14 years old, he received his bachelor’s degree in philosophy, he dedicated himself to various trades such as: portraitist, metal engraver, and stonemason. Also, he continued his studies in the School of Law at the University of San Carlos de Guatemala, served as a meritorious in the Supreme Court of Justice Secretary and was a clerk in the Foreign Affairs Secretary. He got married in 1860 with Luz Marure, was a bookkeeper,

graduated as an attorney in 1865, on several occasions he was the President of the Congress of the Republic. He also held the position as Director in the following Secretaries: of Development, War and Presidency. he was also owner and editor of the Tipografía El Progreso, where the newspaper of the same name was printed. He is considered a historian, journalist, attorney and notary, among others (Conde, 1996).

According to Heriberto Ramírez (Interview, November 22nd, 2014) General Jorge Ubico, came every year to Salamá, which confirms the Revista Militar (1937) in which one of the trips to that township is related. The conditions of the city in 1937 were not of economic prosperity, but of precariousness and only had a dirt road as a means of communication.

The political chief of Salamá, in the indicated years was Colonel Ochoa, who was the host of the President Ubico, who was attended in the building of public offices; within the tour of that visit the General inspected the hospital, where he was told that they did not have funds to cover the expenses. On the same day, a lady asked for the release of her son (who was in the local jail), but the President denied her request because he was accused of being a *Communist* (Revista Militar, 1937). In the

observation that Ubico made in the jail, he gave freedom to twenty-five prisoners, since the crimes for which they were accused were considered minor. As for the achievements in the communication routes, the road that leads from Salamá to Rabinal was culminated, which was narrow and according to its inferred, it was of dirt road. The importance at that time, according to the document, was due to the fact it would lead from Guatemala City to Cobán, taking the route from San Juan Sacatepéquez, Concuá, El Chol, Granados, Rabinal, and Cobán (Revista Militar, 1937).

Regarding the government of Juan José Aévalo, one of the neighbors recalls how it was perceived in Salamá during that period (1945-1951) and commented that after having lived through the Ubico era, everything changed, since there were free elections and political parties emerged, which was an advance in democratic life. During Arévalo's administration, a federation type school was built in Salamá. On the other hand, according to the interviewee, people liked the president, who constantly traveled to the place because he had friends who invited him to their house (Interview: Heriberto Ramírez, November 22nd, 2014).

The service of piped water in Salamá, as it was indicated previously,

according to the development of the previous events, it is deduced, that it did not fulfill the expectations of the neighbors, since it was inaugurated again the fluid on September 28th, 1952. In the communiqué of the Minister of Communications of that year, the population in general was invited to attend the ceremony of delivery of the finished project (Revista de Correos y Telégrafos, 1952: 492). “[...] has special pleasure in inviting you to the act of delivery and inauguration of the safe drinking water service of the population of Salamá [...]”

The source of water was the Cachil River, a tributary that had been used on previous occasions. This place was known as “Rincón del Judío” and it was there where a stone masonry dam was built, which was thirteen meters long and three meters high. The people involved in the construction of the dam were Colonels Carlos Paiz Tejada and Carlos Aldana, as Ministers of Communications and Public Works, and engineers Enrique Prera, Manuel Muñoz, Roberto De León, and Carlos Von Ahn (Revista de Correos y Telégrafos, 1952).

An armed movement against the government of Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán, took place on March 29th, 1953, who led the military operation was the Major Manuel Juárez, who

commanded sixteen Salamatecos who participated in the rebellion, namely: Abigaíl Mejía, Sergio Escobar, Heriberto Ramírez P., Tomás López, Alcides Ochoa, Manuel Ramírez M., Francisco Colucho, Rosalío Amperez, Isidro Bautista, Ambrosio Flores, and other members of the anti-communist party (P. U. A.) (Ramírez, 1999).

The systematizations to carry out the uprising were initiated that day before, when Otilio Figueroa and another companion took to Salamá a shipment of light weapons: machine guns, rifles and small arms. The idea of the insurgents was to first take that township and later expand the actions to all of Guatemala, taking advantage of the geographical location of the township (Ramírez, 1999).

After forging a strategic plan, in the early morning of March 29th, they took over the warehouses and workshops of Caminos to get hold of explosives, later they subdued the police headquarters and imprisoned the officers. Afterwards, the actions were aimed at cutting communications, they occupied the post and telegraph offices and dynamited three bridges located on the road from Salamá to Cobán: Chiquilá, Las Burras and La Cebadilla, to prevent the entrance of army troops from the military zone of Cobán (Ramírez, 1999).

The uprising did not last long, because at three in the afternoon the Army was advancing through the Santo Tomás farm, at 4 PM air force planes flew all over the place, at 5 PM some insurgent men contacted the Army and withdrew to their barracks, but leaders had left. Another army group that entered from the north met little resistance in the town and some insurgents took refuge in the parish church (Ramírez, 1999).

One of the rebels who died on that occasion was Manuel Ramírez M. and other participants in the armed movement against the government were imprisoned for fifteen months and were released after Jacobo Arbenz resigned the presidency in 1954 (Ramírez, 1999).

Regarding formal education, in 1957 the Instituto de Educación Básica was created, which in 2015 is known as INEBE. (Milian, 2014). In this regard, Gall (1979), notes that the prevocational school was created according to a governmental agreement of September 24th, 1957.

Among the relevant data of Salamá, Otto Alvarado (1963), notes that the city at the beginning of the 1960s had 12687 inhabitants, comprising 2602 families, 30 villages, 34 hamlets, and 115 farms. On the other hand, the main tributaries that supplied water to the

township were the Chilascó, San Isidro, Las Flautas, San Jerónimo and La Estancia rivers, which formed the Salamá river that divides the urban area into two parts. At the time in the neighborhood of La Hacienda de la Virgen, there was a Caminos camp, probably they were working on the surrounding roads.

It is important to note that in those years the inhabitants saw as an alternative for the development of the township, the construction of a hydroelectric plant, which would provide energy to Baja Verapaz and Alta Verapaz, for that purpose it was planned to use the San Isidro, Las Flautas and Chilascó rivers (Otto Alvarado, 1963).

In the 1960s, a monthly magazine or newspaper was also being published, the printed material was called *Salamá en Letras* and its objective was to encourage young students of the pre-vocational level to write in a journalistic way. The texts contained information about the city of Salamá (Revista UCPA, 1963).

In 1963, according to an agreement issued by the Ministry of Education on June 11, 1963, the Eusebia Aucedo Vda. de Padilla Pre-vocational (basic education) Institute was authorized to offer the first pre-vocational grade at

night. The agreement was published two years later (Gall, 1979).

The main activity of seventy-five percent of the population in 1964 was agriculture, and the main products were corn and beans, although it is worth mentioning that these people lived in rural areas. On the other hand, in terms of land ownership, most farmers did not have their own plots of land but paid for the rent of the land. The usual form of leasing was the "retribución por medianía", in which half of the harvest corresponded to the landowner (Arce, 1977).

Another modality of land use was the *colonato*. In this type of agreement between the farmer and the landowner, the owner provided plots of land to the peasants for planting; in exchange, the landowner obtained labor for his farm, without economic remuneration. As a result, the settlers, lacking the material goods, were forced to work on the farms (Arce, 1977).

According to Arce (1977), there were *latifundios* and *minifundios*, which indicates the unevenness of land concentration. There were only 5 large family farms, 1,732 sub-family farms, 71 micro-farms, 293 family farms and 114 multi-family farms.

In the educational field, it can be said that in 1965 the Escuela Normal Rural No. 4 was inaugurated in the

building occupied at that time by the Instituto de Educación Básica, which was located where INEBE is in 2015 (Milian, 2014). In this regard, Gall (1979), notes that according to a Ministerial Agreement of November 11th, 1965, it was decided that the Instituto de Educación Básica should become Rural Normal School No. 4, to teach the basic education cycle and the diversified Rural Teacher Training.

The educational needs of Salamá did not culminate with the operation of a School of Basic and Diversified Education, which already existed in 1969, a complement in the formation was needed, that is why in the aforementioned year, the Ateneo academy was inaugurated, to teach typing courses in the departmental capital, authorized according to Ministerial Agreement number 825 of June 13th of the same year (Gall, 1979).

Another important aspect is that which refers to the health of the population, of which it can be said that the national hospital of Salamá had functioned normally, but it did not have a maternity ward, which is why, due to the need of the service in 1972, the annexed ward dedicated to gynecology was inaugurated (Gall, 1979).

The population of Salamá in 1973 reached 22,000 inhabitants, of which

5,600 lived in the departmental capital and one of the characteristics of the township was subsistence farming, with a dispersion towards the rural area. Of the total population, 24.5% was indigenous. It is important to emphasize that by that year the ladino population was increasing in the urban area and in the rural area the indigenous population was increasing (Arce, 1977).

At the same time, there were migrations of indigenous people to the south, to work temporarily on the coastal farms. There were also frequent migrations of ladinos to the north and northeast of Guatemala (Arce, 1977).

Regarding telecommunications, in 1973 the Guatemalan company GUATEL had a manual telephone switchboard plant in Salamá, with a capacity for fifty lines, and a year later the service was expanded to one hundred lines (Gall, 1979).

The electric power service, like others, had a prolonged development, so much so that until 1975 INDE concluded the electrification work in the departmental capital, but most of the villages lacked it (Arce, 1977).

The earthquake that occurred in Guatemala in 1976 affected the entire national territory, specifically in Salamá, according to one of the

informants who has lived all his life in the place, referred that the 1976 earthquake generated disasters in the town, but the damage was to homes and buildings and in terms of number of deaths there were only two (Interview: Heriberto Ramírez, November 22nd, 2014).

According to Arce (1977), the aforementioned earthquake, which was one of the strongest to have occurred in the country, caused serious damage to housing in the township, since the materials used for construction were adobe, wood, and tile roofs. In the urban area there were 6060 inhabitants, of which approximately six lived in each household.

Most of the buildings in the central part of the city were of the colonial type and 40% were rendered unusable due to severe damage, while 60% were moderately affected, which is why the latter were not uninhabited (Arce, 1977).

One of the buildings that suffered serious damage from the earthquake was the Escuela Normal Rural, which also housed the Instituto de Educación Básica, a building that had to be demolished. Two months passed without the students being able to attend classes. In order for the students to have a place to study, parents,

students, and teachers built wooden galleys and a tin roof, costs that were covered by some institutions as aid. The students attended classes in these conditions for four years (Milian, 2014).

Observations made by Arce (1977) after the earthquake show that in 1976, in the peripheral neighborhoods, it was still customary to build houses in the midst of small plots of land used for growing corn and fruit trees. On the other hand, the author also mentions that after the earthquake, the neighborhood La Hacienda de la Virgen and the settlement El Calvario (the latter formed after the earthquake), were areas where people displaced from the countryside lived and the urban center had a certain exclusivity, since farm owners, merchants, professionals, and public employees resided there. In terms of neighborhoods, the most populated was *El Centro*. Probably, the telluric movement gave rise to the construction of new subdivisions in the La Hacienda de la Virgen neighborhood, to which Arce alludes.

As for safe drinking water, in 1976 it was transferred from the Cachil hacienda to the departmental capital, through the distribution network that directed it to the center of the city, which led to the elimination of the "llena cántaros", which was where

most of the neighbors used to get the liquid, forcing them in some way to request the service. It is worth mentioning that the cost at that time was high and the network did not supply all the neighborhoods (Arce, 1977).

Other important data provided by Arce (1977) is that the township did not have sewage systems before 1976, and construction work did not begin until that year. There were only 600 telephone lines and only one television channel in Guatemala.

In relation to education and protests against the deprivation of this right, it can be said that there was discontent on the part of the population of Salamá, since two years after the 1976 earthquake, the students of the Escuela Normal Rural No. 4 and the Instituto de Educación Básica did not have an adequate building to receive classes, since the building where the two educational centers were located collapsed in the earthquake. It was for these reasons that in September 1978, students, parents, and teachers walked from Salamá to Guatemala City to protest in front of the National Palace and demand the construction of new facilities (Milian, 2014).

Due to the period of repression that took place in Guatemala and especially in Salamá in the 1970s, the organizers

received attacks and false offers so that the walk would not take place, but they did not manage to make them desist and the walk was carried out. The protests had an effect until 1982, when the construction of the project began (Milian, 2014).

The bad distribution of the land in Salamá was a serious problem that was dragged from the colonial period, which generated the hoarding of that means of production in a reduced group of people and small lands divided in a great number of peasants, this was the case of Salamá. For these reasons, it was not strange that in 1980 the indigenous people of the village of Las Anonas lacked land to plant and as a consequence of this situation they experienced misery, since as is known, in the rural area the majority of the population depends on the land (Vela, 1980).

The neighbors of Las Anonas had the lands called Pastor and Durazno as farmland, but they did not have any document that accredited them as owners, on the other hand, in the years prior to 1980 the National Forestry Institute (INAFOR), was dedicated to reforesting a part of the mentioned lands, which reduced the agricultural area and generated problems for the peasants. It is important to mention that the property legally belonged to

the township of Salamá, which had the property as a shipyard (Vela, 1980)

Although the villagers had a committee with legal status, until that year they had not been able to obtain legal ownership and the land was used communally. It should be noted that the cultivation of these plots was only for self-consumption, thus ensuring their subsistence. They did not see leasing as a feasible possibility since they did not have the money to buy seeds. Until 1980 they had not solved this legal situation (Vela, 1980).

During the government period of General Romeo Lucas (1978-1982) the construction of sports complexes in Guatemala began, it was then when the Departmental Sports Association of Salamá, requested and managed the construction of one of these spaces in the township. At that time the board of directors was chaired by Professor Salvador Guzmán, the problem was that they did not have land for the work, so the representatives of the board went to the Attorney General of the Nation, who helped them in the purchase of an appropriate land (Interview: Salvador Guzmán, October 24th, 2014).

The land they bought for the sports project consisted of twenty blocks, ten of which were to be used for recreation and the rest for experimental

agricultural practices, but with the 1982 coup d'état, the plans were truncated, and the land was given to the Army to build the military brigade, which remains in the same place until 2015. Despite the fact that the sports leaders already had the plans for the construction of the sports complex, the work was never carried out (Interview: Salvador Guzmán, October 24th, 2014).

It is important to mention that the military zone in 1982, before being moved to the aforementioned land, was located in the facilities that had previously functioned as a prison or penitentiary in Salamá, which was known as "La Siberia de América" (Interview: Salvador Guzmán, October 24th, 2014).

Subsequently, in 1984, on an occasion when General Mejía Vítores arrived in Salamá on a visit, Professor Salvador Guzmán, representing the sports leadership, asked the General, in view of having used the land previously indicated for the military brigade, to grant the Departmental Sports Association the land that had been abandoned by the Army, that is, where the penitentiary had been, to create a Sports Village (Interview: Salvador Guzmán, October 24th, 2014).

The request was considered, and the land was ceded to the Association, to later begin construction and

remodeling work on the new sports facilities. The Sports Village in 2015 is located in the same place, which completely changed the panorama, first from a penitentiary, then a military zone and finally a recreational space (Interview: Salvador Guzmán, October 24th, 2014). In the place you can still see the high perimeter walls, with spaces for lookouts in the corners and inside the vestiges of what was the prison.

An important event for Salamá was the founding of the Lions Club in 1984, the main objectives projected by this organization were to carry out works of social benefit, especially directed towards the neediest population (Noguera, 2005).

Salamá has been characterized for being an eminently agricultural place, in the villages Llano Grande and Trapiche de Agua, in 1987 the crops according to their order were the following: corn, beans, local sorghum, and sugar cane, in the same way the work instruments were the traditional ones: hoe, pickaxe, shovel and machete. Regarding land tenure, it can be said that the indigenous people did not own land plots, but leased them to landowners, to whom they paid either in money or with labor (Gómez, 1987).

Regarding the economic conditions in the villages mentioned above, it can

be said that there were two groups of peasants: small peasants and impoverished peasants. In terms of land ownership, there were landowners and communal landowners. In the 1980s, the communal landowners carried out their agricultural activities as family farmers, but since their income was not enough to meet their needs, they were forced to work for nearby farms, on average thirty-three days a year (each day is equivalent to one day's work). Another activity to which the indigenous people of these towns were dedicated (on a smaller scale) was the elaboration of clay pots and comales (Gómez, 1987).

In the 1990s, according to Barrios Escobar (1996), the main activities in Salamá were the cultivation of corn, beans, local sorghum, sugar cane, cucumber, onion, asparagus and tomato. Another important activity was timber extraction, whose businesses were managed by ladinos.

As part of the participatory human development process, in 1990 contacts were initiated with the General Secretariat of Economic Planning and the German Society for Technical Cooperation (GTZ), to give way to the "Agreement on the Las Verapaces Project". The objective of the project was to involve the beneficiary groups of the plan (poor families, women,

children, and others) in identifying the origin of their problems and their solution (Flores, 1996: 12).

The project was specifically aimed at generating a conscious participation in terms of what, how, where, and when to do something productive, in order to make decisions as a community and not have others make them for them, considering the use of their resources and potential. According to Flores (1996), the process was gradually implemented, and participatory planning has borne fruit in that it has given the communities the opportunity to reflect on the execution of their projects.

One of the shortcomings of Salamá at the end of the 20th century was the lack of ophthalmologists and a hospital to treat eye diseases, which motivated the Lions Club to build a building for clinics exclusively for the treatment of patients with these diseases. The building was completed at a cost of Q. 576,000.00 and the medical equipment was acquired at a price of Q. 375,000.00. This hospital was inaugurated on November 30th, 1996 (Noguera, 2005).

Within the information gathered, it was possible to confirm that the conflict that has existed in different populations reflects the historical process experienced in Guatemala

during the thirty-six years of internal war. This period gave rise to new dynamics of confrontation, which have their origin in the uprooting, the violation of sacred sites, some spaces used as clandestine cemeteries, the displacement of populations from one place to another, among others (Procurador de los Derechos Humanos, 2004).

In the specific case of Salamá, the protests of the inhabitants in 2002 were aimed at problems due to deficiencies in the electric energy service, which led to conflict. The disagreement was against the company Distribuidora de Electricidad de Oriente, S. A. (DEORSA), which resulted in two peaceful demonstrations in the township. The way they protested was to put black bows on the meters and they not only rejected the service, but also the discrimination especially directed towards indigenous women (Procurador de los Derechos Humanos, 2004).

Another of Salamá's contemporary problems is migration, specifically in the village of La Canoa, in the early 2000s, there was an exodus to the United States of America, due to the conditions of economic poverty experienced by the inhabitants. According to Oliva (2005), one of the causes of the relocation was

agriculture as the main source of work, the infertility of the land, and the large number of families.

The income received by the inhabitants was insufficient to cover their expenses, the lack of work opportunities, the low pay of the agricultural labor force and the lack of schooling are other factors that motivated people to travel to this country. In the aforementioned decade, young people from the age of fifteen decided to leave for North America illegally, even though they knew that separating from their families would affect their lives, their relationships and cause disintegration (Oliva, 2005).

The idea with which they left Guatemala was to help their relatives who remained in the country; in most cases it was the man who left and when he already had a family, he left a great burden to the woman, the role of provider, father, and mother. The minimum length of stay in the United States was four years and although the migrants managed to establish themselves in that country and send money, not all families had enough to fully cover their economic needs (Oliva, 2005).

Samayoa (2006) refers that one of the attractions in Salamá is Chilascó, a place that has a waterfall known as El Salto de Chilascó, which is

approximately 130 meters high and can be accessed through an area of cloud forest, where there is a great variety of birds, ferns, mosses, and bromeliads.

In 2008, the commissions for economic development, tourism, environment, and natural resources (FETARN) of the municipalities of Salamá and San Jerónimo created a strategy for local economic development, to take advantage of the potential and opportunities for investment, with the support of the municipal governments. The project was aimed at generating an integral development of the population (PROMUDEL/ GTZ, n.d.).

The representatives of this initiative were Professor Salvador Guzmán, for the township of Salamá, and Floridalma Juárez, for the township of San Jerónimo, both from the Economic Development Commissions. The objective was the attraction of investment to the places, making known the benefits and possibilities, which in the future would generate economic benefits to investors and employment to the populations. Among the sectors that the project aimed to promote were agriculture, forestry, tourism, commerce, livestock and the environment (PROMUDEL/GTZ, n.d.).

According to information obtained (Universidad del Valle de Guatemala, 2010), in 2010 the Pacalaj farm was home to three villages: Llano Largo, El Carmen and Pacalaj, which were administered independently, its organization has as its main governing body the Community Development Council (COCODE) and an auxiliary mayor appointed by the Municipal Mayor.

This farm was constituted as a community, and its main activity and source of income was agriculture (corn and beans), with a small number of people raising cattle. They also took advantage of the forest, from which they collected mushrooms and plants for food, and medicinal plants, pine and moss for commercialization in the market (Universidad del Valle de Guatemala, 2010).

In the cultural sphere, there is a place dedicated to recreation called "Casa del Quetzal y la Marimba", which is located at 8^a. Avenue. 3-20, zone 2, within the objectives of this recreation center are to make known the natural history of the Quetzal and its environment, through educational talks, slides, films, and others. There is also a space dedicated to the Marimba and also explains to the visitors the history, the value, the differences that exist, as well as the different sounds that can emit the sonorous instruments,

through the execution of diverse melodies.

Salamá within its neighbors has had people who have been concerned about the protection of the environment, so much so that in 1966 when Dr. Guillermo Rubén Arriola was Mayor, who was interested in creating a nature reserve, he thought that the goal could be achieved if the idea was proposed to the authorities of Costa Rica. At the same time, a columnist from the newspaper El Imparcial, surnamed Alvarado Rubio, had a trip scheduled for the aforementioned country (Interview: Guillermo Rubén Arriola, October 21st, 2014).

The Mayor contacted Alvarado Rubio and gave him a letter to be delivered to people related to the environment in Costa Rica, in the letter it was stated that the Township of Salamá, was committed to donate six caballerías of land to make a national park, for this initiative the Municipal Corporation and the emissary were congratulated, because until that moment Guatemala was the only country in Central America interested in the conservation of the natural heritage (Interview: Guillermo Rubén Arriola, October 21st, 2014).

These efforts had no effect, and the project was stalled. Some years later,

Mario Dary Rivera became interested in the creation of a national park and joined forces with Professor Francisco Guzmán, who knew the terrain and had made specific studies of the Quetzal. Subsequently, they began to make the studies and arrangements for the idea to become a reality (Interview: Guillermo Rubén Arriola, October 21st, 2014). In fact, the Township of Salamá complied with the offer and granted the six caballerías of land in usufruct for life to the University of San Carlos of Guatemala, in the agreement signed between the Rector of the University and the Mayor, it was established that the land could not be used to commercialize or destroy the area (Interview: Guillermo Rubén Arriola, October 21st, 2014).

The agreements that gave legal origin to the biotope were: with the township of Salamá 07-77 and with the township of Purulhá 06- 77, and later the decree 4-89. When the biotope was granted to the University of San Carlos de Guatemala, the university agreed to cover the operating costs (Barrios, 1996). The protected area was inaugurated in 1977 and was named "University Biotope for the Conservation of the Quetzal Mario Dary Rivera". The main objective of the biotope was to protect the national bird, symbol of freedom, the Quetzal (*Pharomacrus Moccino Moccino*), and

at the same time to protect the ecosystem (Dary, 1981). This place is located in a bordering point that includes a part of Chilascó (Salamá) and a part of Purulhá.

The protected area has 1153 hectares of land, which is used for recreation, research, and environmental education. It should be mentioned that there are some problems or threats that could cause damage to the environment in the future, such as: cutting firewood in sawmills in neighboring communities (Purulhá and La Unión Barrios), which could cause the isolation of the area; there is also the extraction of "cane baskets," which is used by some adjacent residents to make handicrafts (Barrios, 1996).

The Centro de Estudios Conservacionistas de la Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala (CECON), elaborated a master plan, which provides all the details regarding the biotope and states the following: "*The declaration of this protected area is very important to ensure the integrity of the Quetzal biotope, since it constitutes a fundamental part of the possible ecological corridor between the Sierra de Las Minas Biosphere Reserve and the biotope*" (Centro de Estudios Conservacionistas, 1999: 45).

Another of Salamá's natural attractions is the "Parque Municipal Los Cerritos – El Portezuelo", which was created on October 1st, 2002, according to decree 13-2002, in which the Township of that town declared the site a protected area and on January 23rd, 2003, granted the administration rights in usufruct for life to the Fundación de Defensa del Medio Ambiente de Baja Verapaz (FUNDEMABV) (Fundación de Defensa del Medio Ambiente de Baja Verapaz, 2007).

The Parque Municipal Los Cerritos – El Portezuelo, category IV, is located in northern Guatemala, in the Salamá-San Jerónimo valley, occupies an area of 69.65 hectares (4 km perimeter), with elevations ranging from 940 to 1111 meters above sea level (Fundación de Defensa del Medio Ambiente de Baja Verapaz, 2007).

The National Council of Protected Areas declared the Parque Municipal Los Cerritos–El Portezuelo a protected area on March 30th, 2004, and in 2007 the Master Plan for its management was released. This plan is a legal tool designed to implement guidelines to ensure the management and sustainability of the park's natural and cultural resources (Fundación de Defensa del Medio Ambiente de Baja Verapaz, 2007).

Communities, municipalities, the governor, governmental institutions, and non-governmental organizations of Salamá collaborated in the preparation of the legal and administrative aspects of the project. Among the objectives established by the Fundación del Medio Ambiente de Baja Verapaz are the following: rescue and conserve archeological remains, create environmental education programs, develop native species recovery programs, promote recreational and tourism activities, and support scientific research (Fundación de Defensa del Medio Ambiente de Baja Verapaz, 2007).

Conclusions

Within the reconstruction of the contemporary history of Salamá, it was found that during the first years of the 20th century, great importance was given to the construction of roads, bridges, education, and land distribution, as part of the liberal policies to achieve an apparent development of the rural area. On the other hand, coffee cultivation was encouraged with the allocation of land, technical assistance, and the implementation of machines for the processing of the fruit.

Regarding the information that the investigation projected, it was

corroborated that the township throughout the twentieth century, has had a right-wing and extreme right-wing political inclination, which is why in 1953 a plan was hatched to overthrow the government of Jacobo Arbenz, which was put down by the Army.

It was found that the area studied has been economically poor, with a population that has been mostly dedicated to agricultural work, and that throughout the 20th century lacked land for planting, which has generated other problems, namely: migration to the south coast, to the north, to the northeast of Guatemala and to the United States.

Despite these conditions, some nonprofit organizations have tried to create plans for the economic development of the geographic area, trying to develop tourism, agriculture, commerce, and the environment, among others, which until 2015 has been difficult to achieve.

References

- Alvarado, O. (1963). *Conozcamos nuestras ciudades y sus leyendas*. Guatemala: Revista UCPA, No. 132, (pp. 4 – 5).
- Arce, P. (1977). *Análisis del equipamiento urbano de Salamá y propuesta de solución*. Guatemala (Tesis inédita de Arquitecto) Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala. Guatemala.
- Barrios, R. (1996). *50 áreas de interés especial para la conservación en Guatemala*. Guatemala: Centro de Estudios Conservacionistas, USAC.
- Barrios Escobar, L. (1996). *Pueblos e historia en la Baja Verapaz*. Guatemala: Revista Estudios Sociales IV época, No.56, (pp. 1-144).
- Centro de Estudios Conservacionistas (1999). *Plan Maestro 2000-2004: Biotopo Universitario “Mario Dary Rivera” para la conservación del Quetzal*. Guatemala: Centro de Estudios Conservacionistas, USAC.
- Conde, H. (September, 1996). *Personajes ilustres de Baja Verapaz*. Guatemala: Revista Mi Terruño No. 2, Editorial, Imprenta y Serigrafía Mi Terruño, (pp. 18).
- Dary, M. (1981). *Biotopo Universitario para la Conservación del Quetzal: Apuntes generales para el plan de interpretación del biotopo univertario para la conservación del Quetzal*. Guatemala: Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala.
- Flores, O. (September, 1996). *El proceso de desarrollo humano participativo: Base de trabajo del programa Las Verapaces*. Guatemala: Revista Mi Terruño No. 2, Editorial, Imprenta y Serigrafía Mi Terruño, (pp. 12).
- Fundación de Defensa del Medio Ambiente de Baja Verapaz (2007). *Parque Regional Municipal, Los Cerritos – El Portezuelo, Salamá Baja Verapaz*. Guatemala: Autor.
- Gall, F. (1979). *Diccionario Geográfico Nacional. Tomo III*. Guatemala: Instituto Geográfico Nacional.

- Gómez, A. (1987). *Caracterización del sistema campesino de producción de las aldeas Llano Grande y Trapiche de Agua, municipio de Salamá Baja Verapaz*. Guatemala: (Tesis inédita de Ingeniería) Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala. Guatemala.
- Guzmán, F. (2000). *Mis experiencias junto al Quetzal*. Guatemala: Editorial Piedra Santa.
- Milián, Mauricio (March, 2014). *49 años de historia de la Escuela Normal Rural No. 4*.
- Noguera, J. (September, 2005). *Club de Leones Salamá*. Guatemala: Revista Mi Terruño, (pp. 9).
- Oliva, L. (2005). *La migración como refl ejo de pobreza (caso específico: aldea La Canoa, Salamá Baja Verapaz)*. Guatemala: (Tesis inédita de Licenciatura). Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala. Guatemala.
- Periódico Bajaverapacense Minerva, (pp. 4)
- Periódico La Regeneración No. 1. (September, 15, 1892). *15 de septiembre*. Guatemala: Autor, (pp. 3).
- Periódico La Regeneración No. 14. (31 de enero de 1893). *AGuas*. Guatemala: Autor, (pp. 1).
- Procurador de los Derechos Humanos (2004). *Análisis de la Conflictividad*. Guatemala: Autor.
- PROMUDEL/GTZ (S/F). *El Valle de Salamá - San Jerónimo*. Guatemala: Autor.
- Ramírez, H. (1999). *Movimiento armado en Salamá*. Guatemala: Fin de Siglo, (pp. 32).
- Revista de Correos y Telégrafos (1952). *Introducción de agua potable a la ciudad de Salamá*. Guatemala: Autor, pp. 492 – 493.
- Revista de la Facultad de Ciencias Jurídicas y Sociales (1960). *Compra de una finca en jurisdicción de Salamá, para repartir sus terrenos entre aquellos vecinos*. Guatemala: Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, (pp. 158 – 160).
- Revista de la Facultad de Ciencias Jurídicas y Sociales (1960). *Acuerdo que dispone que los vecinos de Salamá puedan solicitar a la jefatura política lotes de los terrenos de Cerro Verde, Repollal, San Vicente, etc.* Guatemala: Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, (pp. 160 – 161).
- Revista Apuntes para la Historia de la Benemérita Cruz Roja Guatemalteca (1952). *Fiesta Cruzrojística en Salamá*. Guatemala: Autor, (pp. 75).
- Revista Militar (1937). Guatemala: Autor, Volumen IV, (pp. 44).
- Samayoa, M. (2006). *Diseño de la ampliación del sistema de agua potable del barrio Agua Caliente, casco urbano de Salamá; y diseño del tramo carretero de la Aldea San Ignacio – Entronque ruta departamental 12, municipio de Salamá, Baja Verapaz*. Guatemala: (Tesis inédita de Ingeniero) Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala. Guatemala.
- Vela, J. (1980). *Situación jurídica de los campesinos de la aldea “Las Anonas”, de Salamá Baja Verapaz, respecto a los derechos de propiedad de sus viviendas; y respecto al derecho de posesión de los terrenos del “Pastor y Durazno”*. Guatemala: (Tesis inédita de

Licenciatura) Universidad de San
Carlos de Guatemala. Guatemala.

**Documents from the General
Archive of Central America**

B. E.201 L. 28674

B. E.295 L. 28674

Ministerio de Agricultura years 1934 1935

Legajo 58