

THE ARMED CONFLICT IN SALAMÁ BAJA VERAPAZ, 1970-1985

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Introduction

During the years of the internal armed conflict, which culminated with the signing of the Peace Agreement in 1996, in Salamá there were acts of violence against the population, of which no further information is known, due to the silence, which was used by the neighbors as a defense and survival mechanism, for whom it was almost forbidden to talk about what was happening, for fear of State repression groups.

The research carried out, tries to make known those aspects that have been invisible in relation to the violence generated towards the settlers during those years mentioned above, a period that, as part of the contemporary history of the place, it is necessary to recover. It is also intended that, through historical knowledge and

understanding, the events mentioned above will not be repeated in the present and future.

During development of the work, some data is provided in relation to the dynamics of the main problems generated by the phenomenon studied, a process that is linked to the organizational movements that were generated in the municipality of Rabinal at the same time, and also shows the existing relationship with the municipalities of Cubulco and San Miguel Chicaj, as part of the same region and as a means of communication of the guerrillas to Quiché.

Historical and anthropological methods, documentary research and field research were used to obtain a better understanding of the problem through the collection of data from different sources. In the development

of the text, allusion is made to the guerrillas since there were several groups that operated in the area and although some accounts refer to a specific group, it is not certain whether they belonged to one organization or another.

The study conducted in Salamá is based more extensively on interviews with people who lived closely the armed conflict, whose conversations were conducted in the months of July 2014 to June 2015. For reasons of confidentiality for the informants, their names are not mentioned, only the interview number is given in the quotations.

General Aspects

The report of the Historical Clarification Commission (CEH, 1999: 18-20 Ref. 763 to 770), which mentions that the State created a series of counterinsurgency strategies during the internal armed conflict to maintain control of the population and combat guerrilla organizations, in which the security forces participated and civilians were involved: military commissioners and civilian self-defense patrols, which fits perfectly with what happened in Salamá, was used as a fundamental basis for the elaboration of the work.

On the other hand, under the National Security doctrine, the Center for Military Studies was created in 1970, where Army officers were trained for armed confrontation, whose objective was: the eradication of subversion and communism, through the use of military power supported by other governmental actions, using irregular mechanisms, which violated human rights (CEH, 1999:18-20 Ref. 763 to 770).

It is important to point out that the Army exaggerated the concept of National Security, since the persecution was indiscriminate towards the population, which is consistent with what happened in Salamá regarding the population, the Church and any person who, by denouncing, expressing disagreement with something or belonging to any type of organization, was consigned in the lists and was subject to harassment, disappearance and death (CEH, 1999: 21 Ref. 772).

[...] the Army acted with extreme harshness: the citizen was either for or against them, there was no room for neutrality. In fact, the Army permanently considered as an internal enemy, in addition to the members of the guerrilla organizations, all those who identified themselves with the

communist ideology or who belonged to an organization -union, social, religious, student- or those who for any reason were not in favor of the established regime. This notion was so broad that it was applied against any citizen depending on the whim or arbitrariness of the agents of the State.

The Historical Clarification Commission (1999) mentions that the internal armed conflict was multi-causal and among others, the agrarian structure and economic exclusion, the inequitable distribution of land and the racism, subordination, and exclusion of the indigenous people. In the case of Salamá, according to the information collected, there were no land problems, and the guerrillas could not offer land to the inhabitants to join their movement, because during the time of the conflict there were no large farms in the area to offer them in plots, so this argument was not a way to motivate the peasants to fight for something.

Regarding racism and exclusion of the indigenous, it must be considered that Salamá is a place with a majority of ladino population, although there are indigenous groups that live in the villages and are a minority, reasons for which it can be said that Salamá is out

of the causes mentioned by the Historical Clarification Commission. What existed was an indiscriminate persecution and control of the population, due to the concept of National Security previously mentioned, which was handled by the Army, an institution that saw the neighbors as enemies.

Another important aspect is that the interviews with the inhabitants allowed the reconstruction of the phenomenon from their perspective, in a locality where there was no guerrilla as such, nor combat between guerrillas and the Army, but it was an area of passage for both sides, where the number of sympathizers with the left was minimal and the few who joined the movement operated in other places and the population was in the middle, among other special characteristics. All this gave it a different and enriching character in terms of historical reconstruction.

Background

In Guatemala, the beginnings of the guerrillas took place since 1960 and it was a group of young officers who took up arms to overthrow the government of General Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes, but they were defeated by the Army. Those who remained had to take refuge in the mountains of the Sierra de Las Minas

and others took refuge in Honduras but returned to continue their struggle against Ydigoras. Among the officers were Marco Antonio Yon Sosa, Luis Turcios Lima and Luis Trejo (Guillermo Rubén Arriola, unpublished).

In March 1962, a group of people, including professionals, students and workers, set out on a march from Guatemala, taking the old highway that connects San Juan Sacatepéquez, Granados, El Chol, Rabinal, Salamá and Cobán, under the command of Colonel Carlos Paz Tejada. The objective of this group was to meet with the group of young officers who survived the defeat in the east. While Yon Sosa and Turcios Lima with another group were taking refuge in the mountains of Las Minas, Zacapa (Guillermo Rubén Arriola, unpublished).

The government authorities had knowledge of the group that was going from Guatemala towards Concuá in Granados, for which they ordered that from the Command of Military Reserves of Salamá, they sent soldiers and military commissioners to surprise the insurgents, in such a way, that on March 12th, 1962 at night they attacked them and product of this attack thirteen men died, who were taken to the morgue of Salamá, to be later buried in a common grave. It must be considered

that in the aforementioned group there were civilians without any military training, for which reason several were taken over and eliminated (Guillermo Rubén Arriola, unpublished).

So that they would not be buried in a common grave, Mr. Domingo Rizzo donated the mortuary boxes so that they could be buried individually in the local cemetery. The names of those who lost their lives in the fateful encounter are: Guillerno Grajeda Zetina, Quilo Toledo, Moisés Nuila, Jaime Facundo Reyes, Alfonso Jocol, Julio Roberto Cáceres, Mauro De León, Amado Izquierdo, Rodolfo Heller Plaja, Octavio Reyes, Francisco Barrios, Marcial Asturias and Brasil Hernández (Guillermo Rubén Arriola, unpublished).

Those who survived were taken to the departmental penitentiary located in Salamá, where they remained for some time, the captured were Rodrigo Asturias Amado, Leonardo García Benavente, Julio Rodríguez Aldana, Rigoberto Molina, Hugo Rodríguez, and Raquel Archila. Colonel Paz Tejada managed to escape and later left for El Salvador (Guillermo Rubén Arriola, unpublished).

Although the guerrilla bases were in Rabinal with the leadership of César Montes, there were some contacts in Salamá, as mentioned by Rubén

Arriola (unpublished) “[...] *the following day he moved to Salamá, [César Montes] where a clandestine organizer of the PGT, Pachito put him in contact with Juan Ichich who was known as Juan Ardilla, then he continued to the western part of the mountain range of Las Minas*” (Guillermo Rubén Arriola, unpublished). (Guillermo Rubén Arriola, unpublished).

In the mountains of Las Minas the third guerrilla front was founded, commanded by Luis Turcios Lima, Rolando Morán, César Montes, and Rigoberto Molina, this organized group was given the name of *Edgar Ibarra Guerrilla Front* (FEIG), student founder of the Guatemalan Student Front, Fuego. In this front were some members of Rabinal: Emilio Román López (Pascual), Fidel Raxcacó Xitumul (Socorro), Chepe, Braulio, Sotero and El Abuelo, who were part of the first ten members of the *FEIG* guerrillas (Guillermo Rubén Arriola, unpublished).

The Edgar Ibarra Front was later transformed into the *Frente Regional de Oriente y Regional de Nororiente* (Eastern Regional Front and the Northeastern Regional Front), at that time a group of guerrillas from Rabinal was deployed to Salamá. The organizers decided to form the *Regional de las Verapaces*, to reduce

the jurisdiction in which they would carry out their operations and Rabinal and Cubulco were the generating centers for the area, the leader was Emilio Román López (Pascual) (Guillermo Rubén Arriola, unpublished).

Among the executions of the guerrillas that operated in the area of Rabinal, Cubulco and Salamá, is the closing of the road that leads from Salamá to Guatemala, carried out by a group of Rabinaleros under the command of Emilio Román López, an incommunicado detention that lasted twenty-four hours. The mentioned guerrilla leader participated in different combats during 1964, later he returned to Rabinal to organize the indigenous peasants of that town, Cubulco and San Gabriel (Guillermo Rubén Arriola, unpublished).

The armed conflict from 1970 onwards

From 1970 onwards, the government initiated a combat and persecution of guerrilla groups in Baja Verapaz and used three forms: the creation of military commanders of the Army, paramilitary groups and civilian self-defense. It can be said that in Salamá the persecution was selective, towards people that the Army considered dangerous or had some nexus with the guerrillas

(Guillermo Rubén Arriola, unpublished).

As a way to counteract the guerrillas in Salamá and Rabinal, the government of the time sent a person to train abroad and thus later form paramilitary groups (Interview No. 2).

There was a good working boy, who was hired to go to Israel to receive a guerrilla and anti-guerrilla course, kaibil and other things, and from there he came to form a paramilitary group in Salamá and another one in Rabinal. They wore a red scarf.

Another informant refers that the head of the military commissioners was Hugo Arnoldo Conde Prera, who was governor of the municipality of Salamá for ten years (Interview No. 4). Another interviewee also refers that the governor indicated was a friend of Donaldo Álvarez and was the eye and ear of the government (Interview No. 7).

Guillermo Rubén Arriola (unpublished) states that the first dead in the town of Salamá were teachers who disappeared and a day later their lifeless bodies were found, one on the road to San Miguel Chicaj and another on the road to El Cacao, San Jerónimo. From that moment on, corpses appeared everywhere.

One of the informants reported that the most difficult time in Salamá was after 1979 and the first corpse he saw was on the side of the El Cacao Road, in a place known as Los Mangales, the victim's name was Federico Prera (Interview No. 3).

I remember of those difficult moments, the first corpse that I saw, was on the road El Cacao, Los Mangales is called at the foot of the Cuesta, the name of this young man was Federico Prera, one night before we saw him playing electrified, those were the games of yesteryear, at that time I was working in the Tasqueguite village of San Jerónimo, Baja Verapaz, that was in the 80s, it was a little foggy, when I saw the corpse a few meters away, I was very impressed, I went to see it and it scared me, I felt a horrible fear [...]

This testimony coincides with that of another interviewee, who indicated that in 1979 one of the first young people to die in Salamá was a young man who belonged to a student organization, who fought for a better school (Interview No. 7).

The son of Lico Prera is one of the first ones killed here in Salamá as a student, coming from the students' organization, wanting to

have a new Escuela Normal, the ones that fight for it, he is one of the first dullards who began to have a certain question of being half-revolutionary, half-revolutionary.

In this sense, two conditioning factors must be considered, which in some way influenced the events, according to the interviewee, the first is that in the school's Normal Rural No. 4 of high school, there were students from Rabinal who had a better political preparation, that is, they had a thought of organization in that case student, to advocate for their rights in terms of education. The second is that during the 1976 earthquake, the school building collapsed, so students received their classes in makeshift classrooms, not suitable as educational facilities, which generated discontent and protests from parents, students, and teachers, as stated by Mauricio Milián (2014: 4)

[...] where the INEBE Institute is currently located. The earthquake of 1976 damaged the building considerably, so the decision was made to demolish it, spending a period of 2 months in which students, parents and teachers built with the help of institutions, the wooden galleys, mesh, and tin roof that housed the school for a period of 4 years. In September 1978,

students, teachers, and parents, made a walk from Salamá to the capital city, covering 150 Kms, to protest in front of the Palacio Nacional, asking for the construction of the new school building.

During the years of the internal armed conflict, the strongest guerrilla organization was in Rabinal, since the peasant leaders had communication with those of Quiché and the capital of Guatemala, with whom they held meetings in villages of El Chol and neighboring places. Although there was a peasant organization in the area of Baja Verapaz, the territory was used by the guerrillas as a transit point, since the militants moved from Concuá, the mountains of Chuacús, having as their final destination the Sierra of Las Minas, or they moved from San Miguel Chicaj, Rabinal, Cubulco, to Quiché (Guillermo Rubén Arriola, unpublished).

In this regard, one of the interviewees states that: (Interview No. 1)

"In the villages it was not that they had any incidence in the guerrillas, they passed through like everything else, in many villages they passed through, but they did not pass through influencing and neither did they convince."

According to the references of the Historical Clarification Commission (3364 and 3365 pp. 360 and 361) the population of Rabinal after 1944 was organized in Ligas Campesinas, which were the base for the political work of the guerrillas in the area, but their incursions were mostly propaganda. The region was used as a corridor for supply, recruitment of cadres, rearguard and others. In addition, the geographic area was an access point to Guatemala City, Alta Verapaz and Ixcán, Quiché, reasons why the Army considered indispensable to maintain a complete control of the territory. It is worth mentioning that Salamá, being close to Rabinal, did not escape this control.

The military and paramilitary groups that operated in Baja Verapaz, sowed terror throughout the area, because according to Guillermo Arriola (unpublished) there were a large number of peasants and indigenous people killed, who were taken to the morgue of the national hospital and buried by those in charge as xx, the relatives did not identify their relatives for fear of being killed in the same way, so very few were claimed. In this regard, Bermúdez (2000) indicates that the inhabitants of Pichec (Rabinal), after the massacres carried out by the army, did not know where their relatives were buried.

Guillermo Rubén Arriola (unpublished) describes that at night the military commissioners entered and forcibly removed people from their homes, disappeared and were never heard from again. Some of the disappeared were buried in the same places where their bodies were found, because they were in an advanced state of decomposition. This did not allow relatives to bury their dead decently. Very few people requested the exhumation of remains, even if they knew that a relative was buried nearby. In some cases, in the same places where the disappeared were buried, they placed them in rustic coffins, in order to have their relatives properly buried and to have a place to visit them or pay homage to them.

Some informants confirmed that it was at night when the military came to look for people in their homes to execute or disappear them “*at night the military came to the towns to look for people*” (Interview No. 1). “*There were many who were taken from their homes and left dead on the side of the road, those who were lucky, and others were taken far away and left abandoned*” (Interview No. 3).

A university student originally from Salamá who was taking mining courses in Cobán was disappeared, according to one of the informants (Interview No. 6). “*There was a*

classmate who was studying mining in Cobán and they disappeared him, this boy did do some of his rallies over there, but you know who the murderers of the town have been.”

It must be considered that, many of the soldiers of the Army as well as the military commissioners, who were in charge of the repression of the insurgents, were originally from the villages of Baja Verapaz. The person in charge of organizing and directing the military commissioners of Baja Verapaz was Giovanni Gularte, who had the friendship of the Minister of the Interior, Donaldo Álvarez and the President of the Republic at the time, Romeo Lucas, from 1979 to 1982 (Guillermo Rubén Arriola, unpublished).

Another form of persecution of those the government considered enemies was the preparation of lists with names of people to be arrested and executed, for which there was a group of paramilitaries who kept continuous surveillance in the villages, roads and in the departmental capital of Salamá, who traveled through the streets armed on board a white pickup vehicle (Guillermo Rubén Arriola, unpublished).

On May 1st, 1981, Fulvio Alirio Mejía Milián, a professor, journalist, and writer, was kidnapped from one of

the corners of Parque Barrios. He was writing for a rustic publication about current events and denunciations (at that time) in the department of Baja Verapaz, which was not well seen by the authorities. Many days later his corpse appeared far from Salamá (Guillermo Rubén Arriola, unpublished).

The newspaper he wrote for was called *Minerva*, of which he was also founder and director, and he was a journalist of *Radioperiódico El Independiente*, *Diario La Hora*, *La Nación*, *El Gráfico* and *Noticiero Tele Prensa*. In regard of what happened to the journalist the Professor Mauricio Milián said: “[...] unfortunately, he was kidnapped, tortured and later murdered in May 1981, as a result of the armed confrontation that our country experienced” (Mi Terruño, 2010: 5).

In those same years, another of those killed was Carlos Humberto Ramos, who sold newspapers in Salamá and was in constant communication with Fulvio Mejía. As a result of having told many people that he had seen how the journalist was kidnapped, the paramilitaries of Salamá entered his house at dawn and killed him in front of his grandmother, in his bed. Without giving him the slightest opportunity to defend himself, four individuals stabbed him, while the

grandmother begged for mercy for her grandson (Guillermo Rubén Arriola, unpublished).

Other events related to the previous ones, is the murder of a law student, Santos Barrios, in charge of the popular law firm of Salamá, who commented with other people that he knew the people who kidnapped Fulvio Mejía, for which he was warned that he had to leave to avoid being punished. Attending the warning Santos left the municipality for two months, he returned later for a typewriter and when he was on his way back in a public transport bus, in the road that leads from Salamá to El Rancho he was killed by the commissioners, the passengers were threatened to suffer the same fate if they said anything (Guillermo Rubén Arriola, unpublished).

On another occasion, the doctors of the national hospital of Salamá were preparing to attend in the emergency room to Cayetano Velásquez, fifty-five years old, delegate of the word, arrived from Las Limas with a wound caused by a firearm projectile, when a group of armed men commanded by César Valdizón, entered violently, and shot Velásquez to death. The aforementioned individuals were with their faces uncovered and with a red handkerchief knotted around their necks, and after the act they calmly left

and boarded a white pick-up vehicle in which they were traveling (Rubén Arriola, unpublished).

Regarding this fact, one informant argued the following (Interview No. 2):

They were wearing a red scarf, the leader of the Rabinal paramilitaries was among them, there were about eight of them, they entered the hospital when it was heard that they said, move aside, the nurse said: look, be careful, the man is wounded, they said: you shut up, if you don't want what happened to this guy, don't get involved and they passed in front of him shooting, then they said: goodbye, see you [...] that was at about one o'clock in the afternoon.

Another event in Salamá was the death of a married couple, who left an orphaned child, who as an adult has sought the remains of his parents to give them a dignified burial but has not found them to date (Interview No. 1).

One of the events that can be attributed to the guerrillas operating in the area is the detonation of a bomb in front of the Banco de Guatemala on September 14th, 1981, which damaged the windows of the building. The noise caused panic in the neighbors, who

were sleeping in their homes. Because of this mishap, some local youths were investigated, and when they were threatened, they left the municipality (Guillermo Rubén Arriola, unpublished). This event, also mentioned by Ingrid Bermúdez (2000), was attributed to the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) operating in the region.

There was an event concerning massacres executed by the Army, that although it took place in Cobán on September 15th, 1981, it has a great relation with Salamá due to the destiny of the corpses. The day indicated the military chief of the zone of Cobán summoned all the inhabitants for a meeting that took place in the central square, where men, women and children attended, inhabitants that were attacked with firearms by military and paramilitary; on this occasion a large number of people died, some bodies were taken in a truck of Caminos to the morgue of the national hospital of Salamá, others in vehicles and were left on the side of the road that leads to El Rancho, this to prevent people from other places from finding out about the large number of dead people in one place. The people who arrived at the hospital in Salamá identified the dead, but did not say anything for fear of reprisals, the bodies were buried in a common grave in the Salamá cemetery as xx. This fact

caused great impact in the Salamá population (Guillermo Rubén Arriola, unpublished).

In relation to these events, one of the interviewees considers that there were more than two hundred and seventy dead. Some were taken to the morgue in Salamá, and others were abandoned on the side of the road leading from Salamá to El Rancho (Interview No. 2).

The terror, the fear, the panic, the threats, the imminent danger due to the climate that was being experienced in Salamá, undoubtedly affected the inhabitants and left aftereffects on them, since everyone was in danger. Although the massacres were not in equal form and number that in other places, it was to the hospital of Salamá where they took the corpses or they left them in the borders of the bordering highways, which caused an atmosphere of fear, not only when seeing so many dead, but when thinking that the same thing could happen to them.

The acts of violence against the population of Salamá did not seem to cease, so much that on December 8th, 1981, two young men were kidnapped and later executed by the military commissioners after attending a wedding in a corner of the central park; their bodies were found on the road

that leads from Cacao to El Durazno. The names of the young men were Cristóbal Pineda and Byron Conde (Guillermo Rubén Arriola, unpublished).

On the road leading from San Miguel to Salamá, before reaching Portezuelo, the former mayor of San Miguel was gunned down in mid-1982, a fact that is attributed to the military commissioners whom he knew, they accused him of helping the guerrillas (Guillermo Rubén Arriola, unpublished).

The events in the surrounding areas, that is, the villages and hamlets of Rabinal, Cubulco and San Miguel Chicaj, affected the population of Salamá in some way, since the Army and the paramilitaries acted with reprisals towards the populations that they considered to be helping the guerrillas and others that were nearby.

The guerrillas also committed acts of violence and death against the population in different parts of Baja Verapaz and others, such was the case of September 23rd, 1981 in Rabinal, when members of the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (*Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres* -EGP-) assaulted the municipal building, set it on fire and killed three policemen and two employees, which also caused the loss of the paperwork with the data of the villagers, who

were left without legal identity. It can be said that the losses were not only in human lives, but also in aspects that later affected many people in terms of personal identification documents (Guillermo Rubén Arriola, unpublished). What the information described above indicates is that in some way the neighbors of Salamá were afraid of the guerrillas, because they were also responsible for acts of violence.

In Salamá, several deaths of residents of the urban area are also attributed to the guerrillas, who came to the place and when someone made an apology for the Army, they eliminated them (Interview No. 2).

There is no doubt that many people in the Baja Verapaz area knew that Javier Giovanni Gulate Suevern was the head of the military commissioners who carried out the extrajudicial executions. In such a way that in March 1982 he was deceitfully taken from his house, located in the Santo Domingo de San Jeronimo estate together with his brother Pedro Francisco Gulate Suevern; the body of the first one appeared on March 8th, gagged, the following day the second body appeared. It was not clarified who was the executor of the fact (Guillermo Rubén Arriola, unpublished).

In the texts of Guillermo Rubén Arriola (unpublished) it is mentioned that for a long time the corpses of half-naked peasants appeared on the edges of the neighboring roads, most of them wore only a red bathing suit, the causes of death were gunshot wounds. The roads where the bodies were left abandoned were the Rabinal road, the Cacao slope towards the Santa Elena Summit in Salamá and the road that leads from El Rancho to Cobán. The forensic doctor and the Judge of the Peace of Salamá arrived to pick up the bodies, which had no identification (Guillermo Rubén Arriola, unpublished).

Violence, a cause of fear among residents

According to the accounts of the different interviews, they coincide in that the acts of violence against neighbors caused them fear because they heard about events but did not know what was happening and could not explain why, in addition to the silence, since they could not speak because they feared the same fate.

The people were there, without knowing what was happening, they only knew that there were many dead, a lot of repression, a lot of fear. Nobody spoke, nobody could say anything about anything, it was

a time of silence [...] It was a time of silence, of terror, of fear, of anxiety [...] You could hear how so many communities were massacred, riddled with bullets, how they sacrificed children [...] (Interview No. 1). There was fear of talking (Interview No. 2).

The most difficult years for the population

The interviewees agreed that the most violent years in the lower town of Verapaz were from 1978 to 1983, but after this period there was always persecution, control, and threats against neighbors.

Army and paramilitary control

The Army maintained control at the entrances and exits of Salamá, they maintained an almost permanent registration post in the place known as La Cumbre, where they asked for identification documents from people leaving or entering the municipality. In this place they searched the vehicles and belongings of those who moved from one place to another, with arrogance they asked for documents and sometimes if the person was carrying food, they would throw it on the ground, which instilled fear in the people (Interview No. 3).

"I was witness to some gentlemen who stopped them, they didn't have their papers, they grabbed them, put them in a vehicle and I don't know what happened to them."

The population knew the paramilitary, who drove around the municipality in a white pick-up truck and exercised a certain degree of control through the tours they made, people were afraid when they saw the vehicle, since the crew members were in charge of eliminating anyone suspected of having links with the guerrillas (Interview No. 3).

The control was directed mostly at people who were involved in social organizations, such as a Church leader who had contacts with professionals from the Rafael Landívar University, who came to teach different courses, for which he was persecuted and controlled (Interview No. 8).

I had to facilitate many courses with any kind of neighbors, Catholics, catechists, who came to give us from the Rafael Landívar University, on how to raise the people to have better living conditions, more or less in the 80s to the 90s and I did not know that I was being checked.

Here they killed a huge number of people, but because it is a small town, and it was so controlled

nobody counted and it did not transcend.

The control, according to the same informant, radiated to the whole town, which is why the villagers generated a certain distrust among themselves (Interview No. 8).

"At that time, I worked at the Normal School and the janitors at the Normal School were ears. And on one occasion the governor told us: I have more than a hundred ears controlling this town."

A group of young people from Salamá and students from the University of San Carlos de Guatemala, while drinking liquor, talked about the organizations they belonged to and were therefore fatal victims (Interview No. 9).

Boys who studied at San Carlos when they had a drink, they started to say, "So-and-so is involved in this," but they also heard, that's why they were killed.

Civilian self-defense

The situation in Salamá was one of terror, there was a kind of *curfew*, because after six o'clock in the afternoon nobody could leave their houses, fear reigned, the only ones on

the streets were the civil self-defense forces (Interview No. 2).

[...] and here [he refers to Salamá] at six o'clock in the evening nobody went out on the street, only the little group of the civil self-defense could be heard, they were the poor teachers, they were forced teachers and it was from six in the evening to six in the morning, at six in the morning they went home and at eight in the morning to teach, to work.

We were also forced to do self-defense at night, sometimes we had to do it because they called us and we had to go. One night when we were doing self-defense, a comrade had a fever and did not report that he was not going to make it, the order was to take him out [of his house], they took him out like that, he looked pretty bad, there was a basin with water, they sent for ice, I am talking about the months of December, they put ice in the basin and put him in there (Interview No. 3).

Intimidation of the population by the Army

There was intimidation by the Army towards groups of women belonging to the Catholic Church, who

were doing social work in Salamá, and when they went out, they were persecuted and sometimes shot at by the soldiers and although they did not kill any of them, the threat was imminent (Interview No. 1).

“You know what you are up to, and you know what to expect...”

Reports of guerrilla warfare among neighbors

It was very common for one neighbor to denounce another as a guerrilla, whether it was because of enmity, for keeping land or other reasons. What the interviewee is trying to say is that everyone at a given moment felt insecure, since they did not know when someone could denounce them (Interview No. 6).

“As people denounced each other, people who had land conflicts or for other issues, they would simply go and denounce a person as a guerrilla.”

In the same way, another interviewee commented:

“Here in the town, there were personal friendships, they took that way, if you disliked them, it was bad for you.” (Interview No. 9).

Another important aspect is that the Army soldiers executed suspicious people or because they had some

malicious information, whether it was due to personal enmity, envy, revenge or to appropriate land, one person denounced another as a guerrilla (Guillermo Rubén Arriola, unpublished).

In the case of Salamá, when someone was denounced as a collaborator of the guerrillas or the paramilitaries somehow found out about it, they were executed immediately, without further investigation or judicial process.

And they did it in the following way (Interview No. 2):

The paramilitaries would arrive and question the suspicious person:

You are helping the guerrillas, right? You are protecting them? are you feeding them?

The questioned person responded with fear: *they came and forced me.*

The paramilitaries asked energetically: *yes or no?*

Then the paramilitaries concluded: *well, [...], get out then.*

And they killed him.

In this regard, one informant mentions that denouncing an enemy as a presumed guerrilla was a reason for the Army to have him on the list of persons to be eliminated (Interview No. 1).

“For debt payments someone was at odds with someone, then they would put them on the lists.”

In addition to the enmities, there was a climate of insecurity and silence in the municipality, because anyone who spoke ill of the government was considered a guerrilla. In order to detect those who did not agree with the government, there were people whose job was to listen to what the others said (ears), to denounce them so that they could be eliminated (Interview No. 3).

Although in Salamá there were no massacres of indigenous people as there were in Rabinal and other nearby places, there was persecution and death of workers, teachers and others, and any hint of suspicion of the paramilitaries was a motive for death (Interview No. 2).

“Indigenous people did not die here because there are not many, but they killed teachers, workers, and others. The paramilitaries among themselves said: So-and-so said such-and-such, blow him up.”

The same thing happened in the village of Pichec, according to Bermúdez (2000), where the difference between the indigenous and ladinos, the latter accused the former of being guerrillas and did so in order to keep the land that belonged to them.

As a result, the indigenous people were viewed with repudiation and contempt by the Army.

Persecution of the general population

Some people who were involved in sports or cultural activities in the municipality were also persecuted and watched by the paramilitary groups that operated in the urban area, because they thought they were involved in illegal activities (Interview No. 5).

The population in general felt threatened by the acts of violence they experienced on a daily basis, the uneasiness, as stated by one of the interviewees (Interview No. 6):

It was a serious thing, at that time one went out and did not know if he was going to return, and only with the fact of being a university student any of us were a target of persecution by the Army. The governor here was a slaughterer, on one occasion Don Hugo pressed me in the back with a rifle, which I saw as a threat, and I had to go to the capital.

There were also frequent cases of people who tried to flee from the soldiers, looked for a place to hide and when they saw that they were apparently out of danger, they left, but

they were not saved, since they were found dead sometime later (Interview No. 1).

In addition, any type of organization was viewed with distrust by the government, whether it was cultural, sports or religious, among others, because people somehow had to get together to carry out their activities (Interview No. 7).

Here in Salamá, I begin to organize the experimental workshop of bajaverapacense painting. I was on the left, but the other guys were not, and anything that smelled of organization was frowned upon. A group of students who were painting was looked down upon, Fulvio Alirio Mejía lent us part of his house for that activity [...] later he was kidnapped and later he was found dead.

Persecution against the Catholic Church

According to an informant, the municipality of Salamá was one of the most affected, there was a lot of repression against the Catholic Church, because the military thought that people who attended catechesis were part of groups close to the guerrillas. In addition, for these reasons some catechists disappeared (Interview No. 1).

Salamá was one of the most affected places, the military imposed their teachers, two young people disappeared [at first moment] there was a lot of repression of the Church because it was thought that it was forming groups [...] The line of the Church was not trying to form parallel groups, but to keep the faith alive through a religion that responds to reality [...] Of the group of catechists who went to form San Benito they were disappeared, some were killed and others we do not know what happened, they are still missing.

The hardest years in terms of the internal armed conflict lived in Salamá were from 1978 to 1985, at that time, in a community called *El Nance* they came to look for a catechist and when they did not find him, they took his daughter in law, who had recently given birth and they killed her (Interview No. 1).

There was a constant persecution against the catechists, there were some who were threatened and hid in the mountains, we know of one person who was in hiding for five years, no one but one or two people knew where he was. If any person was involved in Church activities, he was in imminent danger, because he appeared on the

lists and the best thing to do was to disappear from the place or hide, because if he was apprehended, he would be executed (Interview No. 1).

Another well-known case is the one that occurred in *Vainillas*, when a group of catechists who were gathered in a *mill or trapiche*, was surprised by the soldiers, who took some of them away, one of them who was going to be executed on the side of a *road* was saved by the work of God, because when he was going to be riddled with bullets a truck passed by and to avoid his death he threw himself into an abyss, grabbed hold of some roots and stayed there for a long time, the soldiers saw that he was not there and left. This event left this person with a trauma that he has not been able to overcome (Interview No. 1).

Another case concerning catechists refers to a person who held meetings with young people in his house, knowing that meetings were prohibited, his work was limited to imparting religious knowledge so that the children could make their first communion. “*They took him out of his house and went to leave him in Pacalá.*” (Interview No. 4).

Guillermo Rubén Arriola (unpublished) confirms that in Salamá there was a group of the Army that persecuted the supposed guerrillas, in

the same way another group operated in Rabinal. In the case of Salamá there was persecution of catechists, agricultural and health promoters, other municipalities affected in this way were: El Chol, Granados, Purulhá and San Jerónimo.

In this sense, the Catholic Church was affected, since the people who in some way had some relationship with it were included in the lists, which undoubtedly was a motive for persecution and death (Interview No. 1).

“If there was a person implicated within the Church, he was in danger, it was known that he was on the famous lists and if it was known that he was on the lists, to take care or hide.”

Another victim disappeared and executed, whose body was later found devoured by coyotes (Interview No. 1).

“Another case of catechists in Pacalá, he was disappeared and found totally eaten by coyotes.”

In Santa Inés Chivac during the time of the armed conflict, there were some catechists who disappeared (Interview No. 1). *“In Santa Inés Chivac, there they disappeared several, around that area in the south, there are some catechists who disappeared.”*

The idea of the groups that exercised control and repression in Salamá, according to the testimonies, was to disarm all organizations of any kind, including the pastoral organizations of the Catholic Church, which were labeled as guerrillas when they attended to carry out social work (Interview No. 8).

I never had a relationship with a guerrilla, there were people who for the simple fact of coming to church branded us as communists, sometimes we went out to distribute food or clothes and only because God is so great, I am alive. They thought we were proselytizing.

Persecution of other organizations

One of the organizations that was not well regarded by the paramilitaries in Salamá was *Cáritas de Guatemala*, which tried to work with the neediest people in the municipality, helping them build simple houses (Interview No. 6).

Many innocent people died, at one time Cáritas came and began to build adobe houses, but they killed them, because they worked in community, they looked for people and first they built a house, then they built another one together,

they accused them of being communists.

The guerrillas in Salamá

Although in Salamá there was no guerrilla organization that operated in the area, but what is known is that they traveled through the mountains, some men did join the guerrillas, but it was never known to which group they belonged, because they never mentioned it and people did not ask out of fear (Interview, No. 3).

On the other hand, according to the same informant, the guerrillas originally from Salamá said that they did not operate in the municipality, but instead, in neighboring places, such as El Embalse, Sierra de Las Minas, and the Zacapa area (Interview no. 3).

Sympathy for the Guatemalan left

In Salamá, as has already been mentioned, there was no guerrilla group formed by the local inhabitants, nor from elsewhere that resided in the town. What did exist was interest and affinity with the left, which when detected by the paramilitary groups, was sufficient motive for persecution and death (Interview No. 7).

Guerrillas in Salamá I don't think there were any, mostly for ideological reasons, there was

sympathy towards the left, I could have been accused of being a guerrilla, but it is more for ideological or intellectual reasons, that you have a formation that allows you to talk about certain issues.

It should be clarified that according to the informants, sympathy for the left-wing existed in a minimal part and those who coincided with that tendency were generally a small number of students at the Universidad de San Carlos, who were somehow familiar with that thinking.

Guerrilla control and abuse

The guerrillas that operated in the areas surrounding Salamá also exercised some control over the population, who asked for information from those who passed by in the places where they had a surveillance post, questioning people as to whether there was an Army registration post and where it was (Interview No. 3).

If people brought food with them, they had to leave it for the militants and sometimes they forced people to accompany them in order to eat it, which compromised the population in some way and put them at greater risk. On the other hand, they forced the neighbors to accompany them to carry out actions or missions, which

although they were not strictly speaking combat, they also put the inhabitants at risk, because at that time the fact that someone observed them in activities that were not part of their work and even worse if they were observed with a *guerrilla*, they were already accused of being subversives and could be executed by the Army or paramilitary (Interview No. 3).

The inhabitants of the municipality of Salamá were aware of what the guerrillas were doing in the surrounding area, among the most common acts were: the detention of people to take food in some cases and although no acts of violence are known in these detentions, interrupting the passage of passers-by at certain points and holding them against their will, caused fear among the inhabitants, who feared that they would be killed (Interview No. 5).

Most affected locations

Among the most affected places in Salamá are: El Monjón, La Canoa and Trapiche de Agua. (Interview No. 3) As well as other nearby places such as Rabinal, San Miguel Chicaj, Granados, and El Chol.

Forms of death

Although, as already indicated, most of the known deaths in Salamá

and its surroundings were with firearms, there were also others, as one of the informants relates (Interview No. 2):

“There were several, some were with firearms, others were put with a nylon and a stick, they were called the turtledove, tied with nylon straps, strangled.”

Displaced communities

The Historical Clarification Commission mentions (Referencia 4314, pp. 160) that the experience of the displaced was not homogeneous given that different groups were displaced at different times and faced different conditions. But the displaced populations were labeled as having links with the guerrillas, groups of people who lost their homes, their land and even their identification documents. This is the case of a group of people who settled in a place called Trapiche de Agua, Salamá.

A group of people who had taken refuge in the mountains to escape the violence caused by the armed conflict, settled in the place known as Trapiche de Agua, these people came from other nearby villages and were engaged in the production of clay articles. The Catholic Church through its representative (priest) together with the group of settlers, made the

respective procedures to be awarded the land of the mentioned place, by means of purchase. The Catholic Church also provided them with assistance for housing and the opening of a cooperative-type store (Interview No. 1).

The project and especially the store were not to the liking of the military, who considered that the store was only a disguise or a justification to indoctrinate the inhabitants with ideas dangerous to the State. The idea of the Church was that the community would benefit from the proceeds of the sales. It is worth mentioning that according to the informant, Trapiche de Agua was not a community until before the arrival of the group of displaced persons, but rather a vacant lot (Interview No. 1).

The population in the middle of two fires

In this sense, it is necessary to point out that although the internal armed conflict in Guatemala had great similarities in terms of: the way the Army operated, the State policies called counterinsurgency and others, it is essential to take into account that there were also differences within the villages, which makes the events somewhat unique, due to the particularities with which the phenomenon developed, as it

happened in the specific case of Salamá.

Salamá is one of the municipalities where there was no organized guerrilla group with local militants, but there were groups that operated in the adjacent regions and used the surroundings of the municipality as a staging area. And although the people were not sympathetic to the ideas of the guerrillas, neither were they sympathetic to the Army, since, as the informants indicated, they felt threatened by both sides, which made them be in the center of two fires (Interview No. 1).

someone would pass by who was the one who supplied the food and what I recall, the rules they had in the house were: if a soldier passed by, if a guerrilla passed by and asked for food, they gave him food and service and if he entered the house the people were as afraid of one as the other, because in the end they knew that neither was going to defend it, that both were there to exterminate [...]. From time to time they passed by, they were not Guatemalans, they looked like Cubans, they passed by, it was a road, they were given food, they were given water, like most communities that are very supportive.

In the specific case of Salamá, the population was at the mercy of the two groups in dispute: the Army and the Guerrillas, both of which caused irreparable damage and caused fear among the people throughout the bloodiest period, from 1978 to 1985. (Interview No. 3).

We were lucky that the guerrilla did not come to Salamá, because where they went, they burned the municipality, there were never meetings in the park. The civilian population was exposed with the two groups, especially with the Army, they were arrogant, if you did not have identification documents they would arrest you, they would bring you to the police or to the area.

Violence as part of everyday life

When corpses began to appear, the inhabitants did not know what was happening, there was fear, anxiety, and other psychological effects due to the violence against the population, but as time went by, people became accustomed to seeing lifeless bodies everywhere, which became normal, but this did not mean that they agreed or that it did not affect their lives. (Interviews Nos. 2 and 3).

“People get used to living in that environment, the streets are silent, you get used to where you live.” (Interview No. 2). *“But after seeing so many corpses in the street, you get used to these situations”* (Interview No. 3).

Psychological damages

The inhabitants of Salamá were exposed to psychological effects of fear, fear, distrust, persecution, anxiety, and others. As confirmed by some informants in the interviews.

The first corpses I found on the side of the road gave me a lot of fear, because I said, suddenly I'm the one left over there and I always asked God to accompany me to get home without any problems (Interview No. 3).

At night it was a problem, sometimes they would threaten you for watching television, [from outside they would say] turn it off [...] because if not we are going to come in and we are going to destroy that device, so you would turn off the television, turn off the light [...] (Interview No. 3).

On one occasion when one of the interviewees was returning from work, at one of the checkpoints made by men wearing a red bandana around their

necks, they stopped him and warned him to leave without looking at the sides of the road, because if he did not do so they would eliminate him (Interview No. 3).

Go without looking to the sides, go straight ahead, if you look to the sides consider yourself a dead man [...] they were throwing corpses and I saw when they threw two [...] and I passed without looking to the sides [...] when I got to the plan, to the Cacao, I saw in the rearview mirror that a white pickup was coming, with those men and I felt fear, and I said here they are going to stop me. When I got to the plan, to Cacao, I saw in the rearview mirror that a white pickup was coming, with those men and I felt fear, then they were at the airfield, and I said here they are going to stop me and I said here I am going to stay, because I was already psychologically ill.

In front of their families, people preferred not to talk about issues related to what was happening and pretended that everything was fine (Interview No. 3).

The same informant, in relation to the same event, said: That same day when I arrived home they asked me, "How did it go?" I

answered: "Fine, because I preferred not to talk about it in front of my children, I would rather tell them that everything was fine."

There is no doubt that the impressions left in the memory of the people left indelible traces that will accompany them throughout their lives, because they lived through a time when they were in danger of death and survived, but although many years have passed, even in 2015 the memories still remain.

At the viewpoint of the shipyard there were two dogs fighting over the intestine of a corpse, one pulled to one side and the other pulled to the other, further down was the corpse. That impressed me a lot" (Interview No. 3).

What the inhabitants of Salamá lived through has left sequels that have permanently marked their lives, given the force of the events. Such is the case of one of the neighbors who had to recognize the corpse of a friend and then bathe him, to later bury him in the municipality's cemetery. This was journalist Fulvio Mejía (Interview No. 8).

When his body appeared, they called me to go and recognize him, they dug one up, we went to bathe him with other people, with a

garden hose we bathed him like that, I counted eighty bullet holes in that body, when I washed him and grabbed his head [...] oh that hurts [...] it hurts so much [...] it hurts deeply, it hurt me so much to bathe a friend like that [...].oh that hurts [...] my brains were left in my hands and to bathe a friend like that [...] well, it hurts deeply, it hurt me so much that when we went to bury him at the cemetery I could not enter the cemetery [...]

The effects of the deaths in Salamá were irreparable in psychological terms, people felt insecure and could not trust anyone, not being able to go out in the street after a certain hour, not having social gatherings, where the only thing that prevailed was fear. From every point of view, it was not a normal life (Interview No. 9).

1981 was the most difficult year, it was one of the hardest, the psychosis was terrible, I worked in a village and had to walk 8 kilometers, sometimes I was called to meetings, I would pass by at 4 or 5PM and at the summit it was totally silent, there was nobody, everybody was afraid, at night nobody went out, at 8PM at night I could not find anybody in the street.

Damage to the environment

In 1982, an army truck carrying a group of soldiers was attacked by some members of the guerrillas, who were hiding among the trees, and this attack caused several casualties and injuries to the soldiers. In retaliation for this event, a presidential order was issued establishing that all roads should have an extension of fifty meters on each side without trees, which undoubtedly affected the natural environment (Guillermo Rubén Arriola, unpublished).

Consequences

According to the different criteria expressed by the interviewees, the internal armed conflict left negative consequences in Salamá, among which they expressed:

- As of 2015, there are still missing persons, of whom nothing is known.
- There is still pain in the population that lived through the conflict.
- The lack of trust remained as a residue of the confrontation, dialogue and expression were lost due to the extreme repression.
- Displacement of communities to other places and loss of land from their places of origin.
- Nineteen years after the signing of the peace agreement, the

inhabitants still cannot talk openly about what happened; the armed conflict remains a taboo subject.

- Some leaders, in order to avoid persecution, opted to change their religion and moved to the Evangelical Church.
- They took away people's illusions.
- The municipality stagnated intellectually and economically.
- Salamá's society is fragmented.
- Social relations were broken.

Conclusions

Although in Salamá the repression and violence generated by the State was selective, it is undeniable that what happened in the surrounding areas, provoked in the population: terror, fear, uneasiness, to live so closely what was happening in other populations, which undoubtedly affected the people psychologically. Since they were in contact with a high number of victims, therefore, as a consequence the inhabitants took an attitude of passivity and silence, for fear of reprisals from the military and paramilitary groups supported by the State.

It was determined that in Salamá there was no armed confrontation between the guerrilla groups and the Army, what there was selective persecution and death, which was

directed towards people who were involved in social organizations, who the paramilitary groups considered to be guerrillas or had links with leftist organizations. There was also persecution of the population, in order to eliminate any evidence of thinking that would threaten the State.

It was established that in the municipality there was no guerrilla group formed with local inhabitants, although there were guerrillas operating in the surrounding area, they only moved from one area to another.

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