Ethnic Debate in Guatemala

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1. Introduction

This essay presents the ethnic debate in Guatemala by providing a summarized narrative of its historical background: the Colonial period, Independent and Liberal Eras; and the Revolution from 1944 to 2005. Next, it addresses current issues and their connection with contemporary social movements. This work is part of the chapter on the ethnic debate in Guatemala, from the project "UNIVERSITY TEXTBOOK ON GUATEMALAN HISTORY" (Libro de Texto Universitario sobre Historia de Guatemala) prepared by this author in 2005 for the General Directorate of Research (Dirección General de Investigación) at Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala.

2. Background of the Ethnic Debate

2.1 The Colonial Period

The history of the conquest and colonization of Latin America began with a project of cultural assimilation of the Indigenous people, which involved the negation of their culture and their Christianization in fulfilling the mandate imposed by the Pope on the Spanish Crown and the denial of Indigenous culture and languages in a context of labor and tax exploitation.

In the seventeenth century, the population decrease of fifty percent[1] among the Indigenous people drew the attention of some researchers. Later, during the first two centuries of colonial life, the Spanish population increased, due to the increasing migration of peninsular Spaniards, known as "chapetones or gachupines," and the rise of Spaniards born in the Americas, known as "criollos."

In the first century of colonial life, doctrinal priests used the terms “ordinary people” and “castes” in parish records to refer to the population groups that appeared from unions between Spaniards and Indigenous and Black people, as well as between Blacks and Indigenous people. The former resulted in the birth of mestizos and mulattoes, respectively, while the latter led to the formation of pardos or zambos.

The castes and Ladinos adopted the prejudices and attitudes that the Spaniards held toward the Indigenous people. For their part, the Indigenous people saw the Spaniards as greedy individuals who were never satisfied with their goods, labor, and services[2].

The Christianization of the Indigenous people, the eradication of their ancient religious practices by doctrinal priests, as well as their submission to forced labor through the repartimiento and encomienda systems, led to "Indian uprisings," like those documented in the sixteenth century and occurring in Suchitepéquez and Quetzaltenango, which continued in the centuries that followed.

[1] Siglo XXI. *Movimiento Indígena Maya y Reacción*
In *Historia Popular de Guatemala. Época Contemporánea.* Vol. IV, Fascicle 9, Guatemala, 1998, p. 764.

[2] Siglo XXI. *Movimiento Indígena Maya y Reacción Ladina. 1944-1996.* In *Historia Popular de Guatemala. Época Colonial.* Vol. II, Fascicle 8, Guatemala, 1998, p. 335.

2.2 Independent and Liberal Eras

At the beginning of the independent era, inhabitants who were not Spaniards or criollos, that is, "whites," were classified into two groups: Indigenous and Ladinos; the latter included mestizos of all types as well as Black people, also known as ordinary people, castes, or pardos[3].

The criollo nation model, rooted in the criollo patriotism of the social elite of Nueva Guatemala de la Asunción by the end of the 18th century, was a "process of assimilation," whereby both Indigenous people and Ladinos were to "civilize"[4] by adopting Western sociocultural patterns and practicing the Catholic faith.

In this context, Ladinos were at an advantage over Indigenous people since they already spoke Spanish, even though they shared physical traits with Indigenous people due to mestizaje; moreover, they were present in both rural and urban areas as free laborers. Since the mid-18th century, they were part of militias and developed small internal trade networks that, since colonial times, had been connected to the Spanish world.

This Guatemalan social elite supported an interest in recruiting Indigenous people as cheap labor for coffee plantations. In rural policy, they were linked to the expansion of large estates focused on agro-export production, which marked the 19th and 20th centuries[5].

On the other hand, liberal policies promoted changes in interethnic relations by increasing the immigration of Black, Chinese, and European laborers to coffee plantations and banana companies. As a result, Indigenous people's sense of land ownership and work was disrupted, and their access to education remained limited[6]. This segregation created a "differentiated citizen," preventing Indigenous people from fulfilling the "civilizing process" demanded by the Criollo National Project, which was later adopted by the liberal project led by Ladinos[7]. The same occurred with the Black and mulatto population throughout the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries.

Since the 19th century, Ladinos have benefited from cultural and social capital due to their closer ties with the criollo social sphere, facilitated by mestizaje, greater access to education, the exercise of citizenship rights, and improved labor mobility and wages. The poor still paid the price of forced labor on public roads. With the 1871 revolution, they came to power and displaced the Criollo hegemony[8].

The duality of Indigenous Ladino was accompanied by an ethno-social nomenclature and stereotypes to categorize each social sector, intending to present asymmetric relations as something natural and unchangeable rather than a historical construct, inherited from the colonial caste system[9].

In the 1880 census, the terms Ladino and Indio were used under the concept of race[10]. From 1871, the liberal rulers, once again in power, took drastic measures to incorporate the Indigenous population into economic development, once again as cheap labor for coffee cultivation, reinstating the forced labor system.

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[3] Op. Cit., *Historia Popular de Guatemala,* p. 754.
[4] PNUD, CIRMA, OREA. Project: *"Por qué estamos como estamos." Repensando las relaciones interétnicas en Guatemala.* February 20-21, 2003, Guatemala, 2003, p. 2.
[5] Ibid., p. 2.
[6] Ibid., p. 3.
[7] Ibid., p. 3.
[8] Ibid., p. 1.
[9] Ibid., p. 3.

The 1877 Laborer Regulations during Justo Rufino Barrios' era, up to the Vagrancy Law under Jorge Ubico, forced Indigenous people to work 100 to 150 hours on coffee plantations, which led to Indigenous uprisings, such as those in Momostenango and San Juan Ixcoy[11].

The early 20th-century liberal governments continued the same policy of forced Indigenous labor, enforced by agro-export companies and for road construction. Some Indigenous people were compelled to leave their communities, while others were taken from them to work in coffee harvesting. This contributed to the acculturation of Indigenous people and their ladinization; others were incorporated into military service. Indigenous people were used as assistants and sappers, and battalions of Indigenous recruits were created during the time of Manuel Estrada Cabrera. During the liberal governments of the 20th century, most soldiers were Indigenous, and even after 1944, the military served to "civilize" them.

2.3 The Ethnic Debate in Guatemala (1944-2005)

According to the 1940 population census, Guatemala was divided into four races: White and Mestizo, Indian, Black, and Yellow. It was concluded that in practice it was difficult to distinguish between these groups, as it was not possible to accurately determine where one began and another ended[12].

In 1944, there was an Indigenous uprising in Patzicía, but after the triumph of the revolution, the government initiated substantial changes, such as banning forced labor for Indigenous people and allowing them to participate in political parties, allowing them the opportunity to run for public office.

The 1946 population census distinguished Ladino and Indigenous people based on physical appearance, language, customs, attire, and other factors. In the 1950 census, it was decided to divide the population into two categories: Indigenous and Ladino. The term Ladino included any individual who did not qualify as "Indian," making Ladino essentially "a catch-all category." That year's census showed that 51.3% of the total population was Indigenous.

With the fall of the revolutionary government in 1954, progressive ideas declined[13]. According to Richard Adams, Indigenous people once again sought invisibility. However, religious movements such as Catholic Action and Protestant Evangelicals brought political and economic changes to the communities.

In the 1960s, Quetzaltenango became an important development center for Indigenous people, who were employed in artisan workshops, as office workers, teachers, accountants, lawyers, and more. Catholic Action spread its activities across many areas of the Western Highlands through its catechists, transforming the traditions and customs of numerous Indigenous communities.

Also, during the 1960s, an armed conflict appeared between the government and guerrillas. Initially, guerrilla activity developed in the East, where the Indigenous population was smaller. When the insurgent group was defeated, they moved to the western regions populated by Indigenous people, from whom they gained not only guerrilla fighters to battle the army but also a broad base of support[14].

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[10] Op. Cit., *Siglo XXI,* p. 754.
[11] Ibid., p. 756.
[12] Ibid., p. 754.
[13] *La Hora. Agenda Legislativa de la Paz con Logros Sustanciales.* Guatemala, Saturday, December 28, 2002, Guatemala.
[14] Op. Cit., *Siglo XXI,* Vol. IV, Fascicle 9, p. 759.

In 1967, the first Indigenous university leaders appeared, and violence against Indigenous activists began in the 1970s, with hundreds killed.

Despite the existence of Indigenous organizations in the 1970s, the Guatemalan state never officially recognized them, adhering to an assimilationist model that aimed to integrate Indigenous people into national life.

In the latter half of the 20th century, there was a state policy to gradually assimilate Indigenous people into ladino culture. Beginning in the 1970s, Indigenous migrations increased towards the southern coast and the capital as agricultural and urban workers, to El Petén as agricultural laborers and peasants, and even abroad due to the internal conflict of those years[15].

According to researcher Manuel Camus[16], the internal displacement in the 1970s led to a significant migration of Indigenous people to Guatemala City, resulting in a transformation of values within these groups due to the city's urban influence.

The Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP – Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres) was founded in 1972, with one of its main strategies being the incorporation of Indigenous people into the Guatemalan revolution, emphasizing the ethnic-national question. Both the EGP and the Organization of the People in Arms (ORPA – Organización del Pueblo en Armas) incorporated Indigenous leadership in their political programs.

The 1976 earthquake affected Indigenous populations and highlighted the government's weaknesses and the need for greater mobilization to demand responses to the needs of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

In 1976, peasant leaders from El Quiché formed a clandestine organization that later became the Peasant Unity Committee (CUC – Comité de Unidad Campesina). On May 1, 1975, CUC organizers marched into the city, and on January 31, 1980, they took over the Spanish Embassy. The National Police intervened, leading to a fire in the building where Indigenous peasant leaders, embassy officials, and various Guatemalan political figures died. The cause of the fire remains unexplained to this day.

In 1978, the Christian organization Committee for Justice and Peace (Comité Pro Justicia y Paz) was established, and due to the massacre of Catholic priests and catechists, the Guatemalan Church in Exile was formed.

At the beginning of the 1980s, political spaces were increasingly restricted, and state violence against the population escalated to destroy the insurgent social base. This policy relied on the prejudice that fueled fears of ethnic retaliation. The result was a breakdown of local Indigenous economies, an increase in state presence, a decrease in Ladino political and economic influence, reinforcement of Indigenous identity, and a rise in migration to new locations[17].

Indigenous communities faced severe punishment from military repression during the 1980s, with more than 50,000 deaths and tens of thousands forced to flee to Mexico or move within the country as displaced persons.

[15] Ibid., p. 760.
[16] Camús, Manuel. *Ser Indígena en Ciudad de Guatemala.* FLACSO, Editorial Magna Tierra, Guatemala, 2002.
[17] Op. Cit., PNUD, CIRMA, OEA, 2003, p. 8.

The 1985 Constitution introduced, for the first time, provisions that recognized Indigenous people as a distinct social and cultural group, as stated in Article 43 of the Constitution of the Republic of Guatemala.

In 1988, the National Reconciliation Commission (Comisión Nacional de Reconciliación), established as a result of commitments made in the Esquipulas II Accords (Acuerdos de Esquipulas II), called for a national dialogue on issues later incorporated into the Accord on Identity and Rights of Indigenous People.

Between 1993 and 1996, the Guatemalan government approved and ratified ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal People's Rights in Independent States. This occurred despite opposition from the country's coffee-growing sectors and with a favorable opinion from the Constitutional Court (on the lack of incompatibility between the 1985 Constitution and ILO Convention 169). During this time, Rigoberta Menchú was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. For the Guatemalan state, the armed conflict officially ended on December 29, 1996.

Among the Peace Accords signed between the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG – Unión Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca) and the Government, several agreements specifically addressed ethnic issues: the Agreement on the Resettlement of Populations Uprooted by Armed Conflict; the Accord on Identity and Rights of Indigenous People, which created joint commissions for Official Recognition, Educational Reform, Reform and Participation, Rights Related to Land, Temples, and Ceremonial Sites, Indigenous Defender's Offices, and the Role of Judicial Interpreters; and Socioeconomic Accords[18]. This Accord opened the doors for government and Indigenous representatives to take part in the public debate on ethnic issues. A significant precedent of this Accord was the Penal Code Reform, which established the classification of discrimination as a crime.

In summary, ethnic relations in Guatemala from 1944 to 2000 sought to establish the impact of the State's involvement in these dynamics. The topics addressed included land, labor, population, migration, education, political participation, local government, identity, and ethnic relations. The ethnic categories currently used in Guatemala are the result of a historical process that led to the creation of the bipolar model of Indigenous people versus Ladinos. This perspective on society influences how people identify and interact, originating in the colonial period when "the use of ethnic categories defined social groups, through which Indigenous people became a collection of diverse communities that maintained a shared identity rooted in the recognition of common ancestry." On the other hand, the Ladino category includes "all those individuals, mostly of mixed heritage, who sought to differentiate themselves socially and culturally from Indigenous groups, yet identified in varied ways among themselves and had diverse origins." This category attempted to homogenize these sectors of the population. Often, there is a mismatch between the classification promoted by the State and the identity embraced by the individuals it encompasses[19].

[18] Op. Cit., *Siglo XXI,* Vol. IV, Fascicle 9, 1998, p. 760.
[19] Op. Cit., PNUD, CIRMA, OEA, 2003, p. 6.

By 2022, according to the census conducted by the National Institute of Statistics (Instituto Nacional de Estadística), Guatemala had a population exceeding 11.2 million. Of that population, 39.3% identified as Maya, 60% as Ladino, and 0.2% as Xinca and Garifuna. The census also indicated that the Maya and Xinca populations predominantly inhabit rural areas, while the Garifuna live in urban areas[20].

In 2005, the Framework Law for the Peace Accords was passed after the referendum on the Constitutional Reform of the Republic failed.

3. Current Topics in the Ethnic Debate

In the late 1960s and 1970s, theories on the ethnic debate and the indigenous issue revolved around three main socio-anthropological trends: 1) the culturalist view, which considered indigenous cultures as backward and advocated for their assimilation through acculturation to promote national integration; 2) the proletarianization approach, which sought to transform indigenous people into wage-earning subjects by assimilating them into the agricultural proletariat or semi-proletariat; and 3) the ethnic class perspective (Indigenous and Ladino) and its interaction with Marxist class analysis (social classes), arguing that Guatemalan society exhibits complex racialized contradictions that should be considered[21].

The debate on the ethnic issue remains in its early stages, despite the Guatemalan State's commitments to approving and ratifying Agreement 169 of the International Labor Organization on the rights of indigenous and tribal people, as well as the signing of the Peace Accords.

Issues related to Indigenous rights and Guatemala's multiethnic, multicultural, and multilingual nature **must be scrutinized by Guatemalan society.** The current structure of the State does not reflect this complex reality, making changes necessary to achieve alignment[22].

3.1 Ethnic Identities

The contemporary debate on ethnic identities began to appear when Maya intellectuals declared their ethnic awareness of being Maya in the late 1980s. Although, in daily life, Indigenous people identify with their local community and municipality, Maya intellectuals advocate for a broader identity, understood as a political construct in opposition to the "Ladino." This initiative has historical, linguistic, and cultural logic, rooted in a shared heritage. This also relates to the issue of non-Indigenous people, who have not been compelled to define themselves defensively.

Others argue that both Indigenous and non-indigenous people (Ladinos) have coexisted for more than five hundred years on the same land and have shared the same destiny, making them all Guatemalans.

3.2 Autonomy and Self-Determination

As a result of recognizing Guatemala's multicultural makeup, the issue of political autonomy for the people and various ethnic groups within the country arises.

[20] *Censo de Población de 2002.* Guatemala has a population of 11,237,196. See Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE). *Características de la Población y locales de habitación,* Guatemala.

[21] Murga, Jorge. *Debate sobre el Racismo en Guatemala. 1970-1973.* Revista de la Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, Editorial Universitaria, October-December 2004.

[22] Cuevas Molina, Rafael. *El Movimiento Social Étnico Contemporáneo.* Instituto de Estudios Latinoamericanos (IDELA). Article from the research titled *Movimientos Sociales en Centroamérica: Étnicos, Femeninos y Ambientalistas,* Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica, Costa Rica, 1998.

The concept of "people" has been associated with the right of different Indigenous communities to endow themselves with a unique power to govern and manage their affairs.

Some argue that each ethnic group should have the opportunity to organize politically with some form of autonomy within the State. Others advocate for a multinational State or the creation of a federal State.

Proposals have also been made for establishing regional autonomies of an administrative nature, with the aim of managing their own future with their own leaders, based on cultural and political values. This includes the idea of an agenda for reform, modernization, and democratization of the State.

There are opinions that suggest that Guatemala's ethnic-linguistic diversity and heterogeneity make it difficult to implement the principle of autonomy.

3.3 The Nation in a Multiethnic Society

The Maya intellectual movement conceives the nation as revolving around its ethnic components, emphasizing the distinct cultural aspects of each one. What is advocated is a State identity that enables differentiation and recognizes the multiethnic society.

The current State is criticized for its ethnocentric and monolithic nature, as non-Indigenous people historically defined the nation as a unified entity, with Spanish as the unifying language and Western culture as dominant. The cultural assimilation policy embedded in the Political Constitution of the Republic of Guatemala is seen because of Western culture.

Today in Guatemala, mestizo or Ladino populations coexist alongside ethnically diverse groups. The issue is complex, as the label "Ladino" is far from homogenous as an ethnic grouping. The Garifuna and Xinca people are also beginning to gain social and political visibility.

The Peace Accords, especially the Agreement on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous People, the Agreement on Strengthening Civil Power and the Role of the Army in a Democratic Society, the Agreement on Socioeconomic Aspects and Agrarian Situation, and the Agreement on Constitutional Reforms and Electoral Regime, propose a model of plural justice and the recognition of customary law. They set the framework for the constitutional recognition of the State and Nation's multicultural character.

This transformation should be expressed in a State that is pluralistic, decentralized, and democratic.

3.4 Officialization of Mayan and Garifuna Languages

This topic is widely debated due to its political nature. The Maya, Xinca, and Garifuna communities demand recognition of their right to use their languages, aiming for them to extend beyond private use and serve as official languages. The Commission for the Officialization of Indigenous Languages in Guatemala (Comisión de Oficialización de los Idiomas Indígenas de Guatemala), created as a result of the Agreement on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous People, has made proposals to extend education, justice, and health services to different groups.

3.5 Justice and Customary Law

In Guatemala, as in any state, there is an existing legal system that aspires to be applied equally and exclusively.

The existence of other forms of conflict resolution, rooted in the cultural and historical

practices of a large segment of the population, contrasts with the lack of recognition by the formal justice system. The Justice Strengthening Commission acknowledges the difficulties in addressing this issue, such as the absence of a clear profile defining customary law, a public debate that has yet to reach a consensus on alternative forms of justice, and the need to reconcile the modernization of the state apparatus with the necessary recognition of customary law.

The Commission has proposed that the Republic's Constitution include a mechanism recognizing the principles, criteria, procedures, and decision-making processes developed by Indigenous people to resolve conflicts, as well as the establishment of parallel justice systems that coexist without interference. It also recommends that this constitutional provision be formalized into a law regulating the relationship between the two systems, which should be flexible, consensual, experimental, and enacted promptly.

Among the debates on this matter, some social sectors advocate for the legal unity of the State and oppose recognizing other norms. Others argue that customary law is composed of flexible regulatory rules and principles. It is a form of law aimed at conciliation and complementing the national legal system[23].

3.6 Contemporary Social Movements Related to the National Ethnic Debate

Since the mid-20th century, ethnic, economic, and political demands have been raised that extend beyond the local and municipal community. Beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, partially influenced by the Revolution of 1944, cultural claims began to appear with an emphasis on valuing indigenous languages. This movement developed through indigenous integration into cooperatives, rural leagues, Catholic and Protestant churches, schools, and political associations.

Later, from the late 1970s to the mid-1990s, the revolutionary movement fostered Indigenous participation in social, cultural, and rural struggles, challenging the foundations of the Guatemalan state. Indigenous and rural organizations that emerged and were influenced by this movement promoted human rights defense, political participation, cultural rights recognition, and land access. These include the National Coordinating Committee of Widows - CONAVIGUA (Coordinadora Nacional de Viudas) -, Council of Displaced Persons of Guatemala -CONDEG (Consejo de Desplazados de Guatemala)-, and the Peasant Unity Committee -CUC (Comité de Unidad Campesina)-.

Since the signing of the Peace Accords, popular and rural organizations have adopted an ethnic discourse, referring to Mother Earth, Maya spirituality, customary law, and the quest for municipal political power.

The culturalist discourse since 1995 has partly permeated some popular organizations, which began to view ethnic identity as a key element in the discussion of rights. At the same time, these culturalist organizations have accepted that the struggle for land and human rights is also part of the political struggle[24].

The most significant aspect of the organizational alliances within the Maya ethnic movement has been political coordination, meaning the alliance between organizations and coordinating bodies with similar work agendas.

[23] Ibid., 1998.

[24] Instituto de Estudios Interétnicos. *Reflexiones,* Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, Year 4, No. 4, January, Guatemala, 2003, p. 13.

The signing of the Peace Accords has provided a space and opportunity for ethnic groups to influence the State in fulfilling their rights. In the 1990s, new spaces were opened to strengthen and establish some government institutions, such as the Indigenous Development Fund, the Academy of Mayan Languages, and the Ombudsman's Office for Indigenous Women (El Fondo de Desarrollo Indígena, la Academia de la Lenguas Mayas, la Defensoría de la Mujer Indígena).

However, certain issues cannot be overlooked, such as unequal land distribution. Although the Coordinating Committee of Peasant Organizations -CENOC (Coordinadora de Organizaciones Campesinas)- has developed initiatives to pressure the State to meet the needs of rural communities, the State has yet to provide practical solutions. The National Land Fund -FONATIERRA (Fondo Nacional de Tierra)- has been unable to alleviate the situation due to its limited policy and lack of sufficient resources.

The women's movement in Guatemala, consisting of organizations, groups, and individual women from both civil society and governmental entities, holds the view that the multiethnic and class-based character that unmistakably colors the condition of women, whether they belong to indigenous, ladina, or Garífuna groups, and, depending on their place in the social class system, must be recognized.

In municipal and national administration, neither the Indigenous population nor women have participation beyond the electoral process, in cases where they possess a neighborhood identification card.

Most Indigenous people and women, who represent over 40% and 50% of the population respectively, are denied full access to their civic and political rights. This is largely because many individuals lack identity documents and are not registered in the corresponding Civil Registry.

It is the sentiment of the women's movement in Guatemala that ethnic plurality and gender equity cannot be genuinely discussed when there are almost no women representatives from the various groups—mestizo or Ladino, Maya, Xinca, and Garífuna—occupying popularly elected public decision-making positions, with a voice and a vote in state affairs. For the democratic construction of the country, as a process to be realized in the short, medium, and long terms, it is essential to design and implement state policies with a multicultural, multilingual vision, as well as to ensure the advocacy and negotiation of political participation quotas in a tiered system between men and women to occupy public decision-making positions from municipal, departmental, and regional levels.

The recent reforms to the Electoral and Political Parties Law do not transform the country's electoral system nor provide affirmative measures for tiered political participation quotas between men and women, nor do they prove a quota for the representation of ethnic groups in publicly elected decision-making positions.

Political parties lack representative participation that is both multicultural and gender-fair. Some of them are dominated by pressure groups tied to an elitist economic oligarchy, whose sole interest lies in achieving their classist political and economic goals.

For an effective institutionalization of public policies on decentralization, it is urgent to reform the Decentralization Law, the Municipal Code, and the Development Councils Law, as well as to comply with and monitor the Social Development Law and the Framework Law of the Peace Accords, along with a more just and equitable distribution of goods and services

among the population to fulfill the supreme purposes of the state, which are security, justice, and the common good.

Sustainable development does not simply imply the introduction of stabilization measures and structural adjustment to adapt the national economy to the demands of globalization. What has been achieved through NGOs, environmental groups, and state institutions is a fragmented local development of communities in isolation. For this reason, the Guatemalan state must face the following challenges to achieve sustainable economic growth: a) protection of human rights and democracy, modernization of state institutions, the rule of law, and governance; b) achieving equitable economic growth and employment-generating policies; c) strengthening and increasing tax collection to guide and boost equitable and decentralized social investment; d) promoting product diversification and the country's productive restructuring; fighting against socioeconomic exclusion, social inequalities, and discrimination; e) promoting cultures and human development; f) improving environmental resource management and natural disaster prevention.

In the year 2000, 54% of the Guatemalan population lived in poverty, and 22.8% lived in extreme poverty. Three-quarters of the rural population were poor, as was a quarter of the urban population. In recent years, a type of poverty has appeared in urban areas, with a high indigenous prevalence, due to internal migratory trends[25].

The sectors most affected by marginalization and socioeconomic exclusion are children and women, especially in the Indigenous population, who show the lowest socio-economic indicators, such as maternal and infant mortality, education level, income level, and land ownership. This poverty is also reflected in malnutrition and limited access to food and social services.

4. Conclusions

It is necessary to promote and foster spaces for intercultural socialization with a gender perspective, aiming to create a space for communication and understanding where various social actors can freely express their aspirations and social and political projects so that these can become permanent forums grounded in mutual respect and tolerance.

5. Recommended Additional Reading

Aside from the bibliography cited in this essay, it is recommended to stay up to date with the information provided by social communication media, especially print media, to deepen one's understanding of the Guatemalan ethnic debate.

The following books are recommended as complementary reading:

[25] European Community. *Guatemala. Documento de Estrategia: 2002-2006,* p. 14.

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