

Paradise in Ashes

A GUATEMALAN JOURNEY OF COURAGE, TERROR, AND HOPE

"This splendid book is a beautifully written human story...and a must-read for those concerned about the marginalized of the South." ISABEL ALLENDE



Beatriz Manz

WITH A FOREWORD BY ARYEH NEIER

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*A Guatemalan Journey
of Courage, Terror, and Hope*

Beatriz Manz

With a foreword by Aryeh Neier

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS

Berkeley · Los Angeles · London

University of California Press
Berkeley and Los Angeles, California

University of California Press, Ltd.
London, England

First paperback printing 2005
© 2004 by the Regents of the University of California

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Manz, Beatriz

Paradise in ashes : a Guatemalan journey of courage,
terror, and hope / Beatriz Manz ; with a foreword by
Aryeh Neier.

p. cm. (California series in public anthro-
pology ; 8)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-24675-1 (pbk: alk. paper)

1. Quiché Indians—Crimes against—Guatemala—
Santa María Tzejá. 2. Quiché Indians—Relocation—
Mexico. 3. Massacres—Guatemala—Santa María
Tzejá. 4. Political violence—Guatemala—Santa
María Tzejá. 5. Civil-military relations—
Guatemala—Santa María Tzejá. 6. Ejército
Guerrillero de los Pobres (Guatemala) 7. Return
migration—Guatemala—Santa María Tzejá. 8. Santa
María Tzejá (Guatemala)—Social conditions. 9.
Santa María Tzejá (Guatemala)—Politics and govern-
ment. I. Title. II. Series.

F1465.2.Q5 M36 2004

972.8105'2—dc21

2003009015

Manufactured in the United States of America

13 12 11 10 09 08 07 06 05

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum
requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (R 1997)
(*Permanence of Paper*).[∞]

"Manz reads the larger political, national, and international contexts into the gripping and nail-biting horror stories she tells about the life, death, and rebirth of Santa María Tzejá, a tough little village in Guatemala to which she is emotionally and politically bound for life. More than any anthropologist of her generation, Manz is both ethnographer and compañera." NANCY SCHEPER-HUGHES, author of *Death without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil*

"The violent overthrow of democracy in Guatemala in 1954 by the army, with CIA backing, spelled the end of FDR's 'good neighbor' policy. In its stead, cold war ideology transformed Guatemala into one vast death camp. No wonder President Clinton apologized to the victims of that genocide. Beatriz Manz, as both an anthropologist and a human being, gives us the precise account of the high price of a political mistake." CARLOS FUENTES

"Much more than the ethnography of a beleaguered village in Guatemala, *Paradise in Ashes* is about how international politics, in this case, the cold war, played itself out within a culture that is every bit as 'foreign' as that of Iraq or Afghanistan. Combining a lifetime of uncommonly solid scholarship with a lively, accessible style, Manz has produced a genuine landmark, blending the local with the global into a compelling new approach to problems that continue to bedevil our world." LARS SCHULTZ, author of *Beneath the United States: A History of U.S. Policy toward Latin America*

"Studies of genocide, military repression, and the victimization of Latin American peasants tend to be ordeals for all but the most dedicated reader, full of stultifying statistics and harrowing violent incidents. But this account of the settlement, destruction, and rebuilding of a single Guatemalan village . . . is as emotionally enveloping as an Isabel Allende novel." *Publishers Weekly*

"Deeply engaging. . . [M]akes an enormous impact as a first-hand observer's account of one of the largest-scale genocides in Latin American history. . . The details of Manz's personal journey as anthropologist, advocate, and friend to the people of Santa María Tzejá also make a significant contribution to public anthropology." *ReVista: Harvard Review of Latin America*

Paradise in Ashes



CALIFORNIA SERIES IN PUBLIC ANTHROPOLOGY

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*To Santa María Tzejá,
to the memory of those killed,
to the hopes that will not die,
to the future realization of those dreams,
and to Harley and Mariela*

Foreword

The 1970s and the 1980s were a terrible period in Latin America. Country after country—Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Peru, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, among others—was ravaged by repression and internal armed conflict. The toll in lost lives and in suffering was immense. But it was greatest of all in one of the smaller countries in the region where, for a variety of reasons, it was least reported as it was taking place. We now know that about two hundred thousand Guatemalans, most of them Mayan Indians, were murdered during this period. The overwhelming majority were slaughtered by the Guatemalan armed forces in what a United Nations–sponsored “Historical Clarification Commission” that published a twelve-volume report in 1999 appropriately labeled as “genocide.” The number of deaths tabulated by the commission comes close to the known total of all those killed in war and repression during the 1970s and the 1980s throughout the rest of the western hemisphere.

Why was Guatemala so severely victimized? One hesitates to answer such a question for fear of oversimplifying. Yet surely one factor was that, of all countries in the region, it’s the one with the largest indigenous population and the country with the most notoriously brutal military force. As the armed forces considered that insurgent forces were rooted in those indigenous communities, they developed a counterinsurgency strategy aimed at disrupting what they saw as the guerrilla base. This was carried out by the armed forces, whose commanders had been trained in the United States, and aided by the organization of paramilitary forces known as “civil patrols,” who set members of indigenous communities against each other; through forced displacement and resettlement so as to break up established relationships between residents of a particular community; and through massacres that eradicated entire vil-

lages by killing many of their residents and requiring the survivors to flee for their lives.

Many factors combined to shield developments in Guatemala during this period from outside scrutiny. The worst abuses took place in the highlands and distant rainforest regions of the country where the terrain is difficult, where roads and communications facilities were absent, where many different indigenous languages are spoken, and of course, where it was very dangerous to be around while the killing was taking place. During the worst times, there were no Guatemalan human rights organizations to report on developments, and most external human rights monitors only visited for brief periods. Hardly any Guatemalan journalists reported on what was going on in the highlands, and the foreign press corps covering the region focused on the wars in El Salvador and Nicaragua, where the United States was much more visibly and overtly involved. At the peak period of the massacres, during the presidency of Efraín Ríos Montt (1982–83), the United States Embassy in Guatemala was effectively a public relations mouthpiece for the armed forces. It was at this high point of the carnage that President Ronald Reagan labeled human rights reports as “a bum rap” and that his Ambassador to the United Nations, Jeane Kirkpatrick, said of the regime committing genocide that it “offered new powers of self-government and self-defense to the Indians” and that Ríos Montt’s rule “included a strong effort to end human rights abuses by government forces.”

Though the full extent of the slaughter in Guatemala was not known internationally as it happened, enough was reported at the time to make clear that a man-made catastrophe was taking place. One of the very few outsiders who ventured into the heart of the most ravaged regions of the country and stayed long enough to observe and understand what was going on during the worst periods was Beatriz Manz. Her role was two-fold. She pursued a scholarly study of a remote Mayan Indian community, Santa María Tzejá and its people, and the manner in which the tragic events of the period affected and transformed their village. At the same time, enhancing greatly the risk to her own safety, she consistently spoke out publicly about the crimes that she witnessed, providing crucial information for human rights reports, for the media, and for the United States Congress.

Now Beatriz Manz has written a brilliant book that focuses sharply on Santa María Tzejá and that simultaneously puts developments there into the context of what was taking place throughout Guatemala. Her book exemplifies public anthropology at its best. It combines close ob-

servation of a community and its people and a wider-angle examination of the political forces that distorted their lives. The author's scholarly integrity and commitment to the cause of the Guatemalan villagers she writes about are both evident, and neither is compromised in the interest of the other. Beatriz Manz not only explains what happened but also helps us understand what is happening in the postwar period. The result is a book of singular importance. *Paradise in Ashes* is not only the most outstanding work to emerge from the Guatemalan disaster; it also takes its place among the handful of books—such as Elizabeth Becker's account of the Cambodian Holocaust, *When the War Was Over*, Chuck Sudetic's great work on the Bosnian tragedy, *Blood and Vengeance*, and Philip Gourevitch's book on the Rwandan genocide, *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families*—that we need to read and reread to comprehend the terrible era through which we have lived.

Aryeh Neier,
president of the Soros Foundation and
Open Society Institute, former
director of Human Rights Watch

Acknowledgments

I cannot begin to thank all the people who helped me over the past thirty years, inviting me to sleep in their homes in the refugee camps and in Santa María Tzejá, providing meals when little was available, giving extensively of their time, carrying a heavy load on the impassable jungle trails, providing tips and opening networks, meeting in distant locations, even looking after me when their own security was threatened. It would take several pages to thank everyone, and I would still, no doubt, miss many people in Guatemala, Mexico, and the United States. I therefore give one enormous collective thanks to all the wonderful individuals I encountered in this long journey, especially to the people of Santa María Tzejá for their extraordinary support, understanding, and patience. I want to thank specifically the teachers and various committee members; Randall Shea; and Gaspar Quino, who without portfolio, pay, or title became a *de facto* research assistant. I also need to extend a special thanks to Jesús for his remarkable insights.

I am giving only a few individual thanks to those who helped me in the last stages that transformed voices of villagers, field notes, and library research into a final book. Students at Berkeley, undergraduates and graduates, were instrumental in their assistance. I am particularly indebted to Berkeley's Undergraduate Research Apprentice Program (URAP) and would like to thank Monica Pons, Abbie Lowe, and especially Andrea Valverde. Carlos Bazúa, Neferti Kelly, Abbie Friedman, Gabriela Quiros, and Perla Valdes deserve special thanks. Anne Allesshire went over the interviews and helped organize the appropriate comments into specific themes. Her support came at a crucial time and was truly invaluable. I also want to thank students in the fall 2002 graduate reading seminar for their very useful comments. Several students from Santa María Tzejá at

the University of San Carlos in Guatemala City were always available and supportive, especially Edwin Canil and Juvencio Chom.

I am deeply thankful to several friends, colleagues, and former students who read the manuscript and gave me valuable comments, and to those I asked for more precise queries regarding their specific expertise: Charlie Hale, Lydia Chavez, Christopher Lutz, George Lovell, Robert Carmack, Kate Doyle, Nora England, Naomi Roht-Arriaza, Kay Warren, Paula Worby, Luis Losano, Elizabeth Oglesby, Marcie Mersky, Amy Ross, Angelina Godoy-Snodgrass, Elizabeth Lira, and Bettina Prato.

The Center for Latin American Studies at Berkeley has provided a rich intellectual environment for the campus with a highly professional, dedicated, and helpful staff. Many thanks for all their support over the years. Several staff members and colleagues in the departments of geography and comparative ethnic studies at Berkeley were very helpful. I thank Darin Jensen for his first-rate cartographic work in producing early versions of the maps, and Natalia Vonnegut, Donald Bain, and Delores Dillard for the frequent computer help and in general for their infinite patience.

For their friendship and encouragement I want to thank the late Paul and Sheila Wellstone, Aryeh Neier, Jane Olson, Adolfo Aguilar Zinser, Martha Ketchum, Miriam Morales, the late Cecilia Salinas, Margarita and Tom Melville, Stan and Iris Ovshinsky, David and Judy Bonior, Diane Nelson, and for their special enthusiasm, Herb and Marion Sandler.

The “pizzeros”—the Wednesday Berkeley pizza group—is a wonderful and supportive group of colleagues who have kept the weekly pizza tradition alive for many years. Perhaps because we come from different departments and backgrounds but with a common vision made the weekly experience so much fun and never to be missed. The fact that I may have emerged as the best organized—yet the only Latin American in the group—says a lot about the rest of them! The huge Berkeley campus became a small community as we met in each others’ homes once a week, with the occasional international visitor.

I want to acknowledge and thank the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation for their generous research and writing grant that allowed me to take a year off to prepare the manuscript.

I have great admiration for Rob Borofsky, the visionary editor of the new series in public anthropology at the University of California Press, and I appreciate the fine work of the professional staff at the Press, in particular Jacqueline Volin and Sierra Filucci. Matt Stevens did a superb job copyediting. I have great respect for Naomi Schneider, who saw this

book from the first draft through its completion. I am deeply grateful to her for her enthusiastic support.

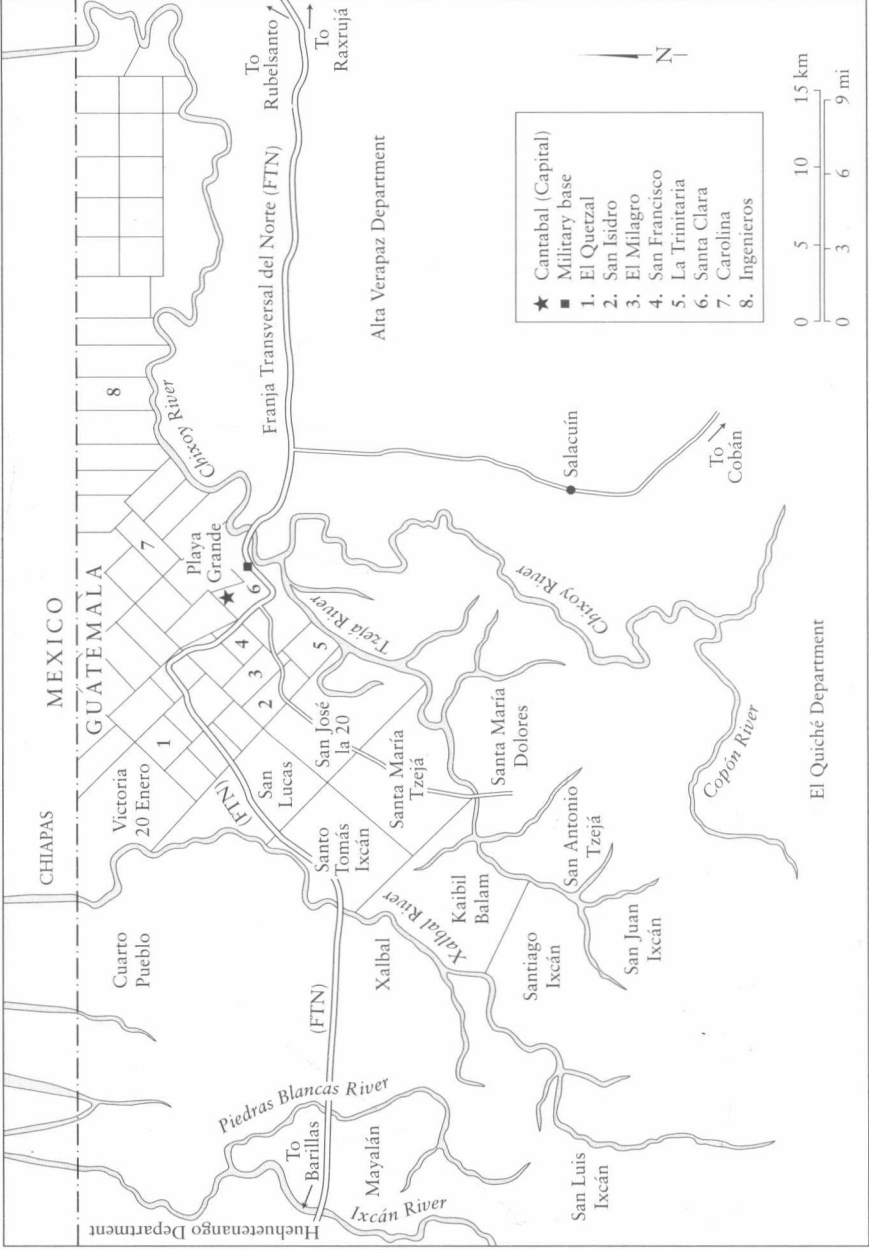
In Guatemala two people deserve a very special mention of gratitude. First and foremost is Father Luis Gurriarán. I am infinitely grateful for his thirty years of friendship, support, and encouragement. He was always available, always ready to provide an invaluable perspective and deep insights about Santa María Tzejá. Vivian Rivera de Jerez was an exceptional research assistant. Vivian is a hard working, extraordinarily efficient and savvy woman who went way beyond the call of duty. Her skillful and dedicated assistance was crucial in completing this book. I also need to acknowledge her husband, Salvador Jerez, for his help, especially in finding out last-minute details in the village.

I treasured Myrna Mack's close personal friendship and special hospitality. She made her home my home in Guatemala. Myrna helped me understand Guatemala like no one else. The military's cowardly murder of her will pain me forever. Her memory is everlasting. How I wish Myrna could read and comment on this book.

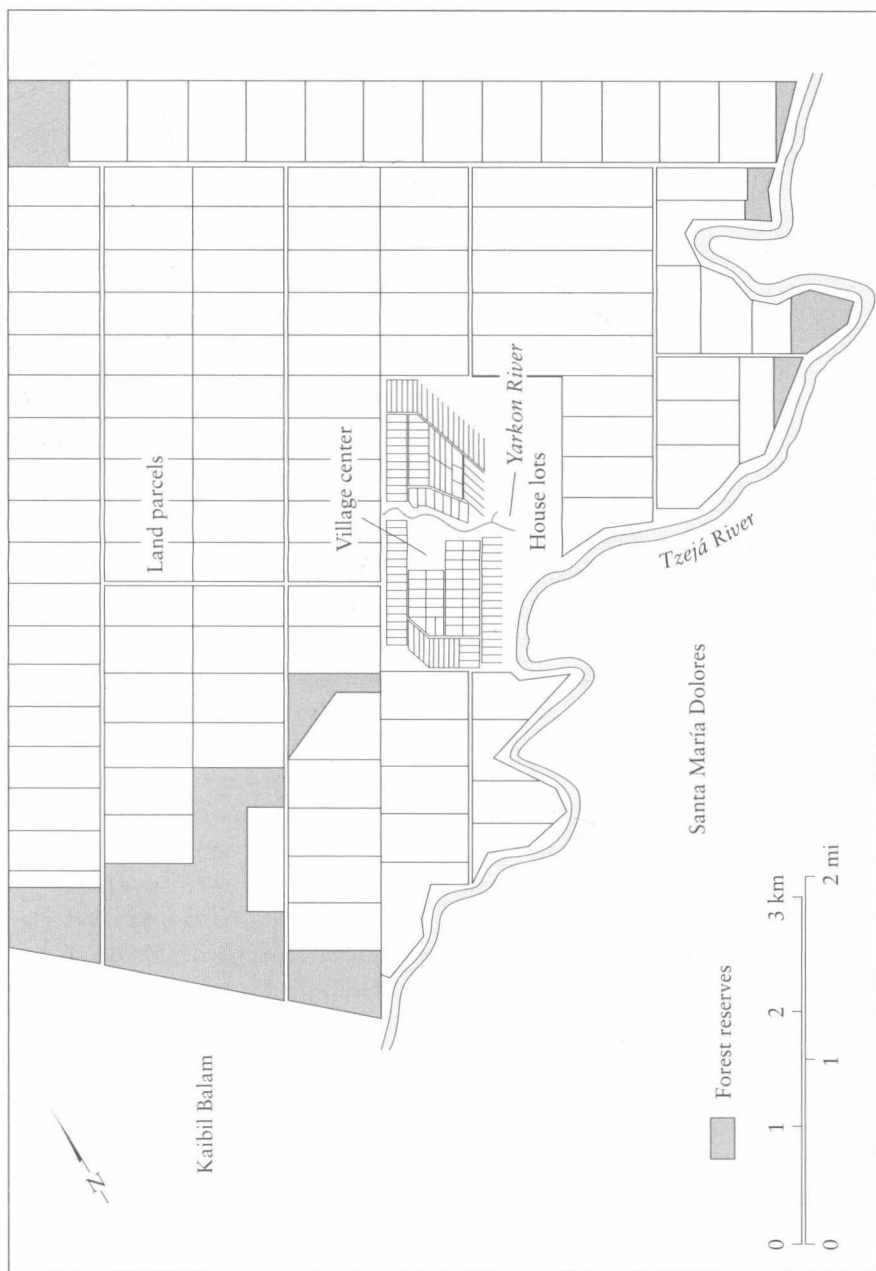
Finally, I want to thank my husband, Harley Shaiken, and my daughter, Mariela Shaiken-Manz. Mariela, while often concerned about my safety when I was away in Guatemala, was always cheerfully supportive and continues to be my champion. Harley has stood by me for thirty years since we first met in the highlands of Guatemala. His support and trust in my judgment never wavered even during traumatic incidents, and he backed my trips even when Marielita was still in diapers. This is what a *compañero* is all about—he doesn't just provide support, he is totally encouraging. He has followed my involvement with this village since 1973, all the way through the completion of the book. This book truly would not exist without him.



Map 1. Guatemala



Map 2. Municipality of Ixcán



Map 3. Village (or *parcelamiento*) of Santa Maria Tzejá

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