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The Historical and Contemporary Causes of «Survival Migration». From Central America's Northern Triangle*

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Abstract: The past half decade of massive refugee outflows from the Northern Triangle of Central America –that is, from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras– emerge from a number of perverse and mutually reinforcing historical processes: the deeply flawed implementation of equally flawed peace accords that ended the region's civil wars in the 1990s; the pursuit of neoliberal privatization and «market-friendly» economic policies that undercut advance toward sustainable social peace, including trade agreements that inflicted great damage to peasant agricultura; the pursuit of foreign investment in extractive sectors that displaced rural and indigenous peoples, and the policies of the major international institutions, and of the United States government in particular, which deepened all of these perverse trends that left people without livelihoods. The gang and criminal violence linked to the narcotics trade are manifestations of these underlying processes that expel people from the region in waves of forced «survival migration».

Keywords: Migration, Neoliberalism, Agribusiness, Agrarian Reform, Trade Agreements, Extractive Industries.

Las Causas Históricas y Contemporáneas de la «Migración de Supervivencia». Desde el Triángulo Norte de Centroamérica

Resumen: Durante la última media década se han producido salidas masivas de refugiados procedentes del Triángulo Norte de América Central, es decir, de El Salvador, Guatemala y Honduras. Dichas salidas surgen de una serie de procesos históricos perversos, que se refuerzan mutuamente: la implementación profundamente defectuosa de acuerdos de paz igualmente defectuosos que puso fin a las guerras civiles de la región en

* «Survival migration» is the term used by my colleague Catherine Nolin, Professor and Chair of Geography, University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC), to describe the exodus of people from the Northern Triangle of Central America. I also owe a debt to my colleagues Simon Granovsky-Larsen and Ricardo Grinspun, who commented an earlier draft of this article. The original version of this article was presented to a Virtual Conference: «From Complicity to Solidarity: Canada's Role in the Central American Refugee Crisis», organized by Prof. Jaymie Heilman, Department of History and Classics, University of Alberta, December 7-18, 2020.

la década de 1990; la búsqueda de la privatización neoliberal y las políticas económicas «amigables al mercado» que socavan el avance hacia una paz social sostenible; los acuerdos comerciales que infligieron un gran daño a la agricultura campesina; la búsqueda de inversión extranjera en sectores extractivos que desplazaron a pueblos rurales e indígenas y las políticas de las principales instituciones internacionales y del gobierno de Estados Unidos en particular, que profundizaron todas estas tendencias perversas que dejaron a la gente sin medios de vida. Las bandas criminales y la violencia vinculadas al narcotráfico son manifestaciones de estos procesos subyacentes que expulsan a las personas de la región en oleadas de «migración de supervivencia» forzada.

Palabras clave: Migración, Neoliberalismo, Agroindustria, Reforma Agraria, Acuerdos Comerciales, Industrias Extractivas.

Introduction

An entire complex of perversely destructive and interrelated processes created the multiple crises that the Northern Triangle countries of Central America are experiencing today. Fundamentally, however, those processes resulted from the neoliberal «market friendly» policies forced on the region by Washington, the Central American elites, and the principal international organizations – the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) most prominently among them. Neoliberalism, briefly stated, centered on the reduction of the role of the state in economy and society in order to «free» the market to grow, to allocate resources, and to distribute incomes. In Central America, among other measures, it involved the reversal of all progressive agrarian policies, the privatization of public enterprises, the reduction of corporate and income taxes, and the encouragement of foreign private investment.

However, the necessary point of departure for understanding what is happening in the Northern Triangle today comes from first understanding the historical causes of the region's civil wars. Those wars emerged from many kinds of interrelated and mutually reinforcing inequalities and types of oppression – inequalities in the distribution of land and incomes; the oppression of workers and peasants, many of them indigenous, by elites descendant from European conquerors and immigrants; lack of access to education and health care for the great majority of the population; systematic repression of the legitimate demands of the majorities, including wide-spread torture and the assassination of union and peasant organization leaders in periodic waves of death-squad terrorism deployed by ruling military and police forces; and American military assistance to, and training of those forces in addition to support for the region's civilian elites (see Booth *et al.*, 2020; Sánchez-Ancochea and Martí i Puig, 2014 and Paige, 1997 on the region; North, 1989; Stanley, 1996 on El Salvador; Handy, 1994 on Guatemala; Shipley, 2017 on Honduras). These were the social, economic, and political conditions that had to be reversed to build a sustainable peace after the region's civil wars were brought to an end in

the 1990s. Although Honduras had not descended into full-scale internal war, it was a country that was, *de facto*, occupied in the 1980s by the United States, and it faced similar social and economic inequalities and forms of political oppression as its Northern Triangle neighbors.

To provide illustrative detail regarding these forms of domination and repression that demanded urgent transformation, in his meticulously researched study of Central America's coffee elites, Paige writes that the power of Guatemala's coffee plantation owners:

rested on the captive allegiance of its [indigenous] serfs and the armed forces at its command... [It] was a backward, semi-feudal class that faced little opposition from a captive labor force [...] Guatemala had so many soldiers that it resembled a penal colony because it was a *penal* colony based on forced labor (1997:75, 87; emphasis in the original).

Meanwhile, in his in-depth study of the evolving relationships between civilian elites and military forces in El Salvador, Stanley describes the pre-civil war country as a «protection racket state» in which the armed forces and police functioned as «mercenaries of the agrarian elite» (1996:257). The political system in Honduras was less repressive and more open to reform; however, its history of dictatorship and the impacts of the U.S. military aid and occupation of the country in the 1980s held back positive transformations.

The United Nations-brokered peace accords that were signed in El Salvador in 1992 (after 13 years of internal war) and in Guatemala in 1996 (after 36 years of war)¹ were minimalist in the ways in which they dealt with the historic inequalities and multiple forms of oppression summarized above. Worse yet, post conflict policy choices exacerbated the social and economic conditions from which the civil wars had erupted. This was the case because post-conflict peace building policies relied on neoliberal economic theories whose prescriptions contradicted the kinds of policies that were needed for building a sustainable peace (North and Grinspun, 1996; Lefebvre, 2003; Stiglitz, 2003; Weisbrot *et al.*, 2000, 2002). So, to restate the central argument briefly, the fundamental causes of today's crises of violence and «survival migration» from the Northern Triangle rise from the weaknesses of the 1990s peace accords and the wrong-

¹ In fact, the origins of Guatemala's civil war may be traced back to 1954, when the United States sponsored a military intervention that brought down the reformist government of Jacobo Arbenz. It had sponsored an important agrarian reform that affected United Fruit Company banana plantations as well as the estates of local coffee-export oligarchy that had ruled the country since the late 19th century (Handy, 1994).

headed post-conflict policy prescriptions derived from the neoliberal paradigm.

The arguments presented in this work will deal, first, with the limited peace accords of the 1990s and their faulty implementation, focusing on their neoliberal inspiration and on the particularly nefarious consequences of market-reliant agrarian policies and lack of genuine agrarian reform. Second, it will examine the international trade agreements into which the region was forced and their nefarious consequences for rural employment in particular. The third section deals with patterns of foreign investment, with a focus on the ways in which mining, tourism, and export agriculture displace rural peoples, along with the displacing impacts of climate change. A brief fourth section will review the amount of the remittances that are sent home by migrants to ensure the survival of their families in their countries of origin. The role of the United States will be examined in the fifth section where Canadian foreign policy will also be mentioned for its importance in supporting the operation of Canadian mining corporations in Honduras and Guatemala and with regard to its geographic location for the potential admission of refugees. Any one of these issue sets, of course, deserves a work of its own. However, the objective of this article is to identify the basic trends and to provide some examples of those trends that left people without reasonably remunerated employment or assets such as land to employ themselves, thereby converting them into «survival migrants».

In addition to standard academic sources, evidence for the arguments will be drawn from my own earlier research (North, 1989; North and CAPA, 1989; North and Grinspun, 1996; North, 1997; North and Grinspun, 2016), the publications of graduate students whose doctoral dissertations I co-supervised (Velásquez Carrillo, 2012, 2018 and 2019 on El Salvador; Shipley, 2013, 2016 and 2017 on Honduras; Granovsky-Larsen, 2013, 2014, 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2021 on Guatemala); and the publications of journalists and civic organizations that monitor U.S. policies, human rights violations, and environmental conflicts in the three countries (e.g., Amnesty International, Peace Brigades, Rights Action, Witness for Peace, Washington Office on Latin America/WOLA, and the Center for Economic Policy Research/CEPR).

Flawed peace agreements

The peace agreements in El Salvador and Guatemala were deeply flawed because the terms on which peace was negotiated came out of military stalemates that were secured by Washington's intervention and counterinsurgency support for the economic elites and the military and police forces that had ruled the region's countries. The revolutionary and reformist forces were not able to negotiate or bargain from positions of

sufficient strength to secure agreements that would fully address the historic causes of the civil wars; nor were progressive forces able to ensure the full implementation of even the minimal reform agendas that were agreed upon in the 1990s. Of course, those agreements did bring an end to the region's civil wars, an achievement not to be dismissed lightly.

Nevertheless, reformists and the revolutionaries of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front/*Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional* (FMLN) in El Salvador and of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity/*Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional de Guatemala* (URNG) had to concede too much to local elites, to the families of large landowners and merchant-bankers that, together with their allies in the United States, had created the conditions that led to the civil wars in the first place. Honduras had avoided civil war, but it had not avoided spillover effects from its neighbors' wars and occupation by American forces. In this context of revolutionary and reformist weakness, the putative peace building policies that were pursued after the end of the wars, inspired by neoliberal thought, eventually wound up generating more social conflict and violence.

The neoliberal policy framework, which became a rigid ideology, relied on market forces and on private initiative to resolve deep-seated social and political conflicts; it relied on markets rather than strengthening of state and public institutions to enable those institutions to pursue and implement equalizing social and economic policies and reforms. National and international policy makers –such as the officials of the US-Agency for International Development (US-AID), Canada's then existing International Development Agency (CIDA), the IMF, the World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)– all insisted on the creation of so called «free markets». Between them, US-AID, the World Bank, and the IMF held most of the purse strings and the power to set the terms for financing post-conflict reconstruction and reform in the Northern Triangle's war-torn nations. They «called the shots», so to speak, for encouraging market development, privatizing public institutions, negotiating «free trade» agreements, and financing «think tanks» to disseminate neoliberal theories. Perhaps the most influential of the disseminators has been the Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development/*Fundación Salvadoreña para el Desarrollo Económico y Social* (FUSADES), set up by US-AID and members of Salvador's elite in the depths of the civil war in 1983 (Velásquez Carrillo, 2018:157).

To be sure, democratic political openings were created by the peace processes, with the implementation of important political-legal and judicial reforms while the military and militarized police were retired from direct rule, albeit to different degrees in the three countries. Also, United Nations-monitored truth commissions were mandated, and those com-

missions eventually delivered important reports that were based on in-depth research, published as *From Madness to Hope* in March 1993 in El Salvador and as *Guatemala: Memory of Silence* in February 1999. These reports confirmed that government forces were responsible for 85 percent of the egregious violence against civilians committed during the civil war in El Salvador and for 93 percent of the violent and «genocidal» acts committed in Guatemala, where 83 percent of victims were indigenous people². Perhaps most important with regard to potential transformation, revolutionary organizations were recognized, and they were asked to form political parties in order to participate in electoral competition to advance their reform agendas. Thus, the possibilities of progressive change rested on the capacity of the new political parties to promote at least the minimal reforms of the peace accords in a step-by-step fashion through electoral politics. Unfortunately, they lacked sufficient power to do so (even when they won elections, as they did in El Salvador in 2009), faced as they were by the overwhelming national and international forces of neoliberal globalization.

The question is: What were the most important policies that were necessary for peace building? What were the policies that should have been pursued, but were not pursued? Arguably, most important of all were comprehensive agrarian reforms. Such reforms, which were barely mentioned in the peace accords, would not simply involve the devolution of land and water resources to the peasantry and to indigenous communities; other necessary components, extrapolated from successful agrarian reform experiences in East Asia and elsewhere, would have had to include: a) The organization of cooperative marketing and processing enterprises to ensure peasant or farmer control of the chain of production and distribution, from the farmer's field to the consumer's table or to the export market; b) an emphasis on rural education and technical assistance, with both policies organized and delivered in collaboration with peasant and agricultural union organizations; c) and the establishment of basic public health facilities in the countryside, as the COVID-19 pandemic has now made more than clear.

As noted, Honduras had not descended into civil war; nevertheless, progressive rural development promotion policies were as urgent there as they were in El Salvador and Guatemala.

Comprehensive, inter-related, and mutually reinforcing policies of agrarian reform, of the kind summarized above, had been pursued in East

² The United Nations used the term «genocide» for describing the military onslaught against the indigenous peasantry of Guatemala. For a searing in-depth analysis of the «modern» culture of cruelty in Latin America and U.S. complicity within it, see Franco (2013).

Asia with U.S. support. Fearing the spread of Mao's victorious peasant revolution (1949) from mainland China after the Second World War (You, 2014), Washington provided support for radical agrarian reforms that involved the redistribution of land and irrigation water and the provision of education (especially rural primary education), technical extension services, and public health programs in Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea. These agrarian and related social policies also involved the establishment of family farms that were organized into cooperative marketing enterprises that were granted access to U.S. markets (Donnelly, 1984 on Korea; Evans, 1987, Griffin, 1989; Cameron & North 1996 on East Asia; North 1997 on Taiwan). No threat equivalent to China's Communist revolution of 1949 existed at the end of the wars in Central America; to the contrary, the Soviet Union, the principal geo-political and ideological rival of the United States started to disintegrate politically with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 while the Sandinista National Liberation Front/*Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (FSLN) lost power in Nicaragua in 1990, on the heels of a counter-revolutionary war waged by the United States from military bases in Honduras.

The foundations for the economic and social success and transformation in the three Asian countries derived, in fundamental ways, from their agrarian reforms. This was so because these reforms ensured steadily increased employment, improved incomes, and diversified market growth in rural areas, the poorest areas in these countries, and they also slowed down migration to urban centers as living conditions, employment opportunities, and access to education and health services improved steadily in the countryside (Donnelly, 1984; Griffin, 1989). In fact, small-scale farming, all over the world, is associated with the generation of employment, self-employment, and increased incomes in rural areas, and therefore it is associated with a broad range of social benefits in rural communities (Berry and North, 2011; Berry, 2014; Thorp, 1998:30-35). Moreover, it can also be associated with improved wages for urban workers since urban labor markets are not saturated with migrants from rural areas (Evans, 1987).

Instead of pursuing necessary and comprehensive agrarian reform policies to generate wellbeing in rural areas, El Salvador's elite-controlled post-conflict governments systematically dismantled the agrarian reform legislation of early 1980s that had redistributed roughly twenty percent of agricultural land to peasant cooperatives (Velásquez Carillo, 2019:3-5). Although its peace accord established a *Fondo de Tierras* or Land Fund in Guatemala, with World Bank financing for its execution, the result was «an overall unchanged pattern of inequality of landownership at the national level... [and] a worsening of conditions within specific regions» (Granovsky-Larsen, 2018:191). In Honduras too, an important land

redistribution program in the Bajo Aguan valley, executed with US-AID support in the mid-1970s, was threatened by agribusiness expansion after a new Agricultural Modernization Law, underwritten by the World Bank, was enacted in 1992 (Holland, 2014:3).

In effect, the Northern Triangle countries followed the neoliberal policy prescriptions on which the United States, international aid organizations, and international banks insisted: the three countries relied on various kinds of market mechanisms to encourage land sales that the advocates of these policies promised would generate broader ownership and more equitable distribution of land and incomes. However, the market-reliant policies did nothing of the kind. As noted above, they favored the dismantling of existing redistributive laws and programs and the further concentration or re-concentration of land and other assets by local elites and U.S.-based corporate interests. Moreover, they favored monoculture export production of «flex crops» on large plantations that cut employment in the countryside, especially so in Guatemala and Honduras.

The production of «flex crops» (that is, crops with high and stable export prices due to their multiple uses for human consumption, animal feed, and bio-energy or «green energy») increased notably in Central America. Between 1970 and 2009, the area dedicated to soy went up from 9.943 hectares to 83.444; sugar cane cultivation increased from 500.207 to 1.231.025 hectares; and African Palm, from 22.910 to 239.2004 hectares (Kay, 2014:25). In Guatemala, sugar cane, African palm, and cattle ranching generated fewer jobs per acre than any other agricultural activities (Pietilainen and Otero, 2019:1159). At one oil palm nursery, studied by Pietilainen and Otero, even the few who were hired were not assured «a stable income... [since] work was precarious, only offered a few months or weeks at a time (often 15 days on, 15 days off), it did not include health care or insurance, and only provided minimum wages» or less (Pietilainen and Otero, 2019:1159; see also Granovsky-Larsen, 2019)³. In sum, Granovsky-Larsen concluded:

sugar cane, African palm, rubber, and banana plantations are expanding at the expense of [labor intensive] subsistence crop production, and they are sucking the surrounding river systems dry for commercial irrigation. In a country where many rural communities rely on rivers for their daily drinking and cleaning water [in addition to cultivating subsistence crops], industrial tactics of unauthorized

³ Earlier, the mechanization of banana plantations had reduced the size of their labor forces in Honduras and Guatemala – for example, in Honduras, United Fruit Company (UFCO) eliminated 15.000 jobs on its plantations following a strike in 1954 (Holland, 2014:2).

diversion, damming, and mechanized water removal threaten the survival of local residents (Granovsky-Larsen, 2017).

Meanwhile, in Honduras, the World Bank-supported the expansion of African palm cultivation into the cooperative lands of peasants who had benefited from agrarian reform in the Aguan valley in the 1970s and early 1980s. The expansion was carried out with military, police, and private security-force violence: between 2010 and 2014, 92 persons, most of them members of peasant organizations, were killed in the valley⁴, and murderous violence has not ended; between 2009 and 2014, 74 lawyers and 25 journalists were killed in Honduras, including lawyers and journalists who defended peasant cooperatives (Holland, 2014:2).

Environmentalists, «water defenders», and peasant producers have protested the water-intensive practices of African palm and other export crops cultivated by monoculture plantations. To increase water supply, plantation interests have engaged in various damaging and murderous practices, ranging from diverting water from peasant producers to sponsoring the construction of dams and hydroelectric works to contracting «hit squads» to eliminate opponents. It was her activism against the construction of the Agua Zarca hydro-electric dam, partly financed by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), that led to the murder in 2016 of Lenca indigenous land and water defender Berta Cáceres, co-founder of the Council of Popular and Indigenous Organization of Honduras/*Consejo de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas de Honduras* (COPINH) (Lakhani, 2020; Shipley, 2016:464-467). Agua Zarca was just one of dozens of such «clean energy» dams whose construction displaces indigenous and peasant farmers and continues across the country, without consulting local communities. While the intellectual authors of Cáceres' assassination continue to enjoy impunity (Méndez, 2020:440), among those arrested as members of the «hit squad» that carried out the assassination were former members of the Honduran military who had received training in the United States (Main, 2017:2).

It is possible to find successful peasant communities that obtained some land, generated employment for their members, and established viable marketing enterprises, but they did so through their own persistence, their own organizational efforts, a dose of good luck, and perhaps the support of a non-governmental development organization (NGO), not

⁴ A few of those who lost their lives in violent confrontations were security guards who had been hired by the large plantation owners of the Bajo Aguan valley (Holland, 2014:2); see also Lakhani (2020) for a detailed history of the political context and aftermath of the March 2016 assassination of water defender and environmentalist Berta Cáceres.

good-faith public policies (Granovsky-Larsen, 2014). Such successful communities, unfortunately, do not represent the norm. Moreover and most often, even successful rural communities relied, at least in part, on remittances from the migration of family members to the United States (discussed below). That is, they relied on money sent back home by «survival migrants» in order to supplement the insufficient incomes of their household members in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

With regard to the abandonment of other economic activities and policies that might have improved equity and social conditions, in the case of El Salvador, the privatization of coffee export marketing and of the banking system were pivotal events, as was the eventual privatization of the social security/pension system, alongside the deregulation of the housing market and a shift to regressive sales taxes, all to favor elite interests (Velásquez Carrillo, 2018:164-167). In sum, in tune with neoliberal policy recommendations, publicly owned and operated economic, social, and regulatory institutions that might have been used to improve the incomes of large numbers of people and to improve social conditions in general were turned instead into profit makers for the privileged elite groups that came to own them. Among the privileged were the families of the traditional coffee export oligarchy and «those who had emerged as new oligarchic actors in the 1980s and during the post-war financial bonanza» (Velásquez Carrillo, 2018:164), that is, when billions in financial assistance were channeled to the country by US-AID, the World Bank, and various international aid agencies. However, in contrast to Guatemala's and Honduras' elites, El Salvador's ruling elite largely abandoned export agriculture in order to profit from the financial, services, and import sectors that were facilitated, along with money laundering from illicit activities, by the 2001 adoption of the U.S. dollar as the official currency of the country (Towers and Borzutzky, 2004). All those sectors, moreover, were sustained by the remittances sent from the United States by Salvadoran «survival migrants», altogether perhaps a third of its population (discussed in section 3, below), in amounts that matched or nearly matched all the dollars earned from the country's merchandise exports.

Trade agreements and their impacts

Rural and urban lives were made even more difficult by another neoliberal market policy. This was the Central American Free Trade Agreement that included the Dominican Republic (CAFTA-DR). Negotiated between the region's countries and the United States, CAFTA came into effect in 2006, despite widespread protest all over the region:

Farmers, workers, small businesses, civil society and center-left political parties vocally opposed the trade agreement over issues of sovereignty, constitutionality, the inability of local agricultural producers to compete against subsidized US products, labor exploitation, and environmental degradation (Booth *et al.*, 2020:331).

As feared, CAFTA became an immediate threat to both urban and rural livelihoods. Most importantly, this free trade agreement added to the numbers of already displaced peasant farmers since local production of corn, beans, and other staples was «freed» from all protection. Subsidized agricultural imports from the United States to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras almost doubled during the first decade of CAFTA, «while the [three] countries' agricultural trade balance with the United States [...] dropped, spelling farmer displacement» (Public Citizen, *Eyes on Trade* 2015:4)⁵. «Meanwhile, CAFTA's labor provisions [...] failed to halt the assassination of dozens of Central American union workers who were trying to end unmitigated labor abuses like wage theft» (Public Citizen, *Eyes on Trade*, 2015:1).

Since land and employment losses in the countryside were predictable, CAFTA-DR negotiators had promised that rural job losses would be more than compensated by the creation of new jobs in the *maquiladora* (or sweatshop) apparel assembly production sector. However, given competition from other very low-cost producers in Asia, apparel exports to the United States from the three Northern Triangle countries actually fell by \$ 1,6 billion, or 21 percent, between 2004 and 2015. In its conclusions, Public Citizen's *Eyes on Trade* review of the end of the first decade of CAFTA-DR reported that «Not only has the promise of new factories disappeared – so have existing factories» (2015:4). Worse yet, while the jobs and incomes of both rural and urban workers were lost, health care costs soared because the Agreement provided protection for corporate pharmaceutical giants by restricting «access to more affordable generic versions of life-saving drugs» (Public Citizen, *Eyes on Trade*, 2015:1). The impacts of commercial outlets set up by large U.S. retail corporations and the extent to which they knocked out employment intensive 'mom and pop' stores remain to be analyzed.

The unemployment and poverty created by CAFTA-DR was added to the unemployment and poverty that had already resulted from the civil

⁵ Concerning CAFTA-DR, see, for example, the various reports of the independent think tank, Public Citizen, founded by Ralph Nader, and its Global Trade Watch. See also the numerous reports of the human rights advocacy organization Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA). Spalding (2014) provides detailed analysis of free trade impacts in Central America, with specific reference to Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Nicaragua.

wars, from the lack of agrarian reform after the civil wars, from the expansion of mechanized plantations dedicated to export agriculture, from the displacement of rural peoples by «development projects» such as dams, and by yet another earlier «free market» initiative. It was the abandonment of the International Coffee Agreement (ICA) in July 1989 – that is, just as the Salvadoran and Guatemalan peace agreements were being negotiated and the Berlin Wall came down, effectively signaling the near elimination of international threats to the United States and the end of the Cold War. The ICA had been signed in 1962 by a large majority of the coffee exporting and consuming nations of the world. It had ensured relatively stable export prices for coffee producers in South and Central America for almost 30 years. With its abandonment, coffee export prices and employment plummeted in the 1990s under the new «free market» international regime, and prices seesawed during the following decades. The impacts were severe in all three Northern Triangle countries, and especially so among small producers⁶.

Extractive foreign investment

There are even more sources of displacement and conflict than the ones reviewed above, the nefarious displacing impacts of large-scale mining, logging, and tourism enterprises prominent among them. After a bitter and deadly conflict over mining, El Salvador became the first country in the world to officially ban all metal-mining activity within its borders. Remarkably, in March 2017, in an all-party vote of 69 to zero, the country's legislature agreed unanimously on a ban. While El Salvador escaped the impacts of mineral extraction, Guatemala and Honduras have suffered them for decades.

In Honduras, it is not only African palm plantations that have displaced peasant producers and generated violence in the Bajo Aguan (see above). The most acute of current conflicts involves the El Guapinol open-pit iron-oxide mine, projected to be the largest in Central America. Even before it had begun operations, preparatory infrastructure, including a polluting hydroelectric project on the Guapinol river, raised widespread protest and violence: these included an 88-day long protest encampment, from August 1 to October 27, 2018, by «Water Defenders»; arrest warrants for the organizers of the protest and preventive detention for seven of them;

⁶ It is worth noting that plummeting coffee prices and IMF-imposed market-friendly reforms were among the fundamental causes of the 1994 genocide of as many as 800.000 Tutsis (the ethnic affiliation of coffee merchants) by Hutus (coffee farmers) in Rwanda, a country where the majority of peasants cultivated coffee as their cash crop and the economy was deeply dependent on coffee exports (see Anglin, 1995).

and, with the criminalization of protest, the presence of hundreds of members of the national police and military, along with the heavily armed private security forces of the mine. Since 2013, «eight people, including community leaders, mine workers, and military policemen, have been killed in relation to the proposed Guapinol mine» (Olson, 2020; see also Springer, 2021:400-401). One local «Water Defender» told a journalist:

[the police treat the protesters] horribly, knowing that they defend our river and environment... And what they say is: «We fight so that we don't have to emigrate from our country». If we cease to fight against the mining company, there are 3.500 people who would have to leave the community (Olson, 2020).

Today's mining opponents in the Aguan Valley know the extreme contamination that has already taken place in the Valle de Siria region of their country. There, the San Martín gold mine, owned by Canadian mining giant Goldcorp, operated from 2000 to 2009 and left behind a toxic legacy of cyanide, arsenic, and mercury in the soil and water (Shipley, 2016:476-481)⁷. Meanwhile, a conflict continued between local residents and Aura Minerals (also a Canadian listed company) and its Honduran subsidiary, Minerales de Occidente (Minosa), accused of harmful health and environmental impacts. This gold mining company sowed divisions in a coffee farming community by offering payments to its poorest members for the permission to dig up their relatives' bodies from the local cemetery where the company wanted to expand its operations; the third of three payments to those who agreed was contingent on the total clearance of the cemetery (Jen Moore, Mining Watch Canada, e-mail communication, 10 June 2018)⁸.

In Guatemala too, mining has been a great source of contamination and violence. The country's four operational mines are sites of «severe conflict, with militarization and repressive violence swirling around mining-affected communities» (Granovsky-Larsen, 2017 and 2021; see also Power 2008, North and Young, 2013 regarding the Canadian role). The Marlin Mine, owned by a subsidiary of Canadian mining giant Goldcorp, for

⁷ See the periodic reports and bulletins of Rights Action, a Toronto-based human rights organization that monitors the operations of Canadian mining, forestry, and tourism corporations in Honduras and Guatemala, and provides support for communities that are affected by land dispossession, criminalization, and violence. Rights Action has also supported communities in legal struggles in their home countries and in Canada to launch suits against the repressive violence of these corporations and the state.

⁸ Various Jesuit institutions in Canada, Honduras, and the United States have sponsored the analysis of mining impacts in Honduras; see Serrano (2020).

example, was reported to use «45.000 litres of water per hour, and high levels of arsenic, cyanide, and mercury have been detected in nearby water sources» (Granovsky-Larsen, 2017)⁹. The most conflictive of Canadian mining sites, with three suits ongoing in the provincial courts of Ontario in Toronto, dates back to the 1960s when it was owned by International Nickel Company (INCO), changing hands first to Skye Resources and then to HudBay Minerals in 2008 (Imai *et al.*, 2007; Maheandiran *et al.*, 2010). The violent eviction of Mayan Q'eqchi' farmers from lands claimed by Skye Resources was filmed in 2007 by Canadian then doctoral student Steven Schnoor who was accused by the Canadian Ambassador to Guatemala of fabricating the events and hiring actors for his video. When Schnoor did not get an apology for these false accusations from Canada's foreign ministry, he successfully sued the Ambassador for slander (Schnoor v. Canada). The three still ongoing court cases, however, date from events that took place in September 2009 under HudBay ownership, and they involve the maiming of an activist, the assassination of a local community leader of the opposition against the mine and the gang rape of eleven Mayan Q'eqchi' women (Russell and Nolin, forthcoming in 2021)¹⁰.

With regard to the dislocations and violence generated by tourism development, perhaps the most egregious case is provided by the attacks on the Afro-Indigenous Garifuna communities of Honduras. Their origins date back more than 200 years, when they were removed from the island of St. Vincent by British colonial authorities and settled on the Caribbean coast of Central America, mostly in Honduras and Belize. In 2015, the Garifunas' communal ownership of ancestral territories was recognized by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (ICHR), and the Court ordered the Honduran government to recognize and respect those land rights. However, the government (a descendant of the 2009 coup discussed below) took no action to comply with the ruling, and the Garifunas continued to battle the privatization of their lands by the tourist industry in which Canadian capital was heavily involved, suffering flagrant criminalization and violence (Shipley, 2016:471-476). In 2019, at least 16 Garifuna were murdered, and in July 2020, four leaders of The

⁹ Extensive documentation on the operations of Goldcorp (later merged with Newmont Gold) in Guatemala, from 2004 to 2017, can be found in the archives of Rights Action: <https://rightsaction.org/gc-guatemala-archives>

¹⁰ As a consequence of deep-seated and widespread community opposition, a Guatemalan court suspended the opening of the Canadian listed Escobal mine, a silver mine originally owned by Vancouver-based Tahoe Resources but subsequently sold to Pan American Silver. Canadian civil society organizations also filed complaints against Tahoe with the British Columbia Securities Commission. For an in-depth analysis of mining in Canada (its physical footprint, financing and organization, political insertion, social and environmental impacts, and aftermaths), and including a discussion of its international presence, see Kuyek (2019), a veteran activist who was born in a mining town.

Black Fraternal Organization of Honduras/Organización Fraternal Negra de Honduras (OFRANEH), the group that brought the land conflict to the ICHR, were kidnapped from their homes and disappeared (Global Witness Press Release, 11 August 2020). Most recently, on 4 March 2021, two more Garifuna community leaders were assassinated, and two environmental defenders were arrested (Rights Action electronic newsletter, 8 March 2021).

The NGO Global Witness monitors and reports on the assassinations of land defenders and environmental activists around the globe. In its July 2020 publication, *Defending tomorrow: The climate crisis and threats against land and environmental defenders*, Global Witness reported that 12 «defenders» were killed in Guatemala in 2019 and 14 were killed in Honduras; the number in Honduras made it the most dangerous country in the world for land defenders on a per capita basis.

Although it cannot be attributed to specific development projects in the region itself, the «silent violence» of global climate change also is having devastating impacts in the coastal areas of Central America and on Garifuna communities in particular (Méndez, 2020:436-441). The general coordinator of OFRANEH, Miriam Miranda, recently stated:

We have entire villages suffering environmental displacements relating to the encroaching sea». She pointed to the village of Tornabé [...] where she said an «unprecedented number of families» had joined the tens of thousands leaving the region in migrant caravans beginning in 2018 (quoted by Méndez, 2020:439).

Moreover, the frequency of devastating hurricanes is yet another consequence of climate change. Hurricane Mitch in 1998 and hurricanes Eta and Iota in November 2020 forced people to escape not only from coastal but also other areas destabilized by erosion and torrential rains. Honduras was the country worst hit in Central America by the two hurricanes, with up to two million persons affected as houses, infrastructure, and crops were destroyed, but Guatemala also suffered great destruction. «These catastrophic climate events», added to the prolonged drought of 2014-2016, «had a devastating effect, including on farmers' livelihoods in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras», the three countries that form part of the Central American Dry Corridor, a region of climate insecurity even in the best of times (Pons, 2021)¹¹. Meanwhile, in

¹¹ A searing account of one Guatemalan farming family's experiences with the impacts of climate change and its attempts to migrate to the United States is presented by Aguirre (2020).

the United States, powerful political lobbies hold back policies to mitigate global warming and even deny the fact that it is caused by human activity (Collomb, 2014).

«Survival migrant» remittances

Instead of policies to create employment and self-employment opportunities, a host of land, water, trade, investment, and other policies based on neoliberal economic theory converged to deepen poverty and to expel hundreds of thousands of peasants and their children from the land. Lacking alternatives at home, some migrated to cities and then, from the region's cities where few jobs were available, they moved onwards to destinations in the United States. More and more, however, began to migrate from the countryside directly to the United States¹².

As a consequence of all this, the Northern Triangle countries became dependent on migrant remittances (often called *migradólares*) as a principal source of foreign exchange and support for the basic consumption needs of large proportions of their populations: in 2018, remittances made up 22 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) of El Salvador where, in the second decade of the twenty first century, half of all households depended on receiving money from abroad and where remittances added up to two to three times the government's budget for public social spending (Menjívar and Gómez Cervantes, 2019). With regard to El Salvador's neighbors, migrants' remittances made up 20 percent of the GDP in Honduras in 2018; and they totaled 12 percent of GDP in Guatemala in that same year (Orozco, 2019). The expulsion of the poor thus turned into a principal source of foreign exchange for the Northern Triangle economies and a substitute for public social programs. Indeed, remittances became the principal source of economic growth for the Central American region as a whole, increasing from \$3,3 billion in 2000 to \$20,3 billion in 2018 (Booth *et al.*, 2020:334).

It is revealing and instructive that outmigration from Costa Rica, by contrast, was very much lower than from the Northern Triangle countries. This is so because Costa Rica enjoys more equitable land tenure and agrarian structures than its northern neighbors. Its society and economy also benefit from a long history of cooperative organization for agricultural marketing, from relatively high levels of investment in public education (for both girls and boys since the late 19th century), and therefore from a much greater capacity for rural and small-town job

¹² Direct migration from the countryside is what Simon Granovsky-Larsen has observed during field-work in Guatemala over the past decade (personal communication, 23 March 2021).

creation and income generation than its northern triangle neighbors. Moreover, Costa Rica abolished its army in 1949, and spent much more than its Central American neighbors on public social services, thereby also building the capacities of the state to effectively administer programs for the benefit of its citizens. Booth, Wade, and Walker point out that «Costa Rica's ratio of spending for social services versus defense was four to five times greater than that of its nearest competitor in Central America» (2020:81, 75-94). The percentage of the national budget spent on defense in 1978, when war was brewing in the region, stood at 2,7 in Costa Rica, 24,6 in El Salvador, 11,0 in Guatemala, and 10,5 in Honduras (Booth *et al.*, 2020:Table A.5, 377).

Although neoliberal policies chipped away at its public enterprises and social programs, Costa Rica's civic organization and civic resistance prevented the wholesale demolition of the state and its institutional capacities, and thereby resistance impacts in that country actually sustained social peace, in contrast to the violence into which its northern neighbors descended. This history is reflected in the very much lower level of Costa Rican migration to the United States, or anywhere else. It is therefore also reflected in the insignificance of remittances in Costa Rica's GDP: remittances made up only 1 percent of Costa Rica's GDP in 2018 (Orozco, 2019); this is a dramatic contrast to the 22 percent of El Salvador, the 20 percent of Honduras, and the 12 percent of Guatemala.

The Policies of the United States

In February 2021, Senator Jeff Merkley, with the support of seven additional Democratic Senators, proposed legislation «to suspend United States support for the Government of Honduras until endemic corruption, impunity, and human rights violations cease, and their perpetrators are brought to justice» (cited by Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective, Electronic Bulletin, 23 February 2021). Specifically, Merkley's bill calls for: sanctions for President Juan Orlando Hernández and top officials implicated in human rights violations and corruption; the establishment of an anti-corruption commission, to be negotiated with the United Nations; prohibition of U.S. arms sales to the Honduran police and military; suspension of U.S. bilateral and multilateral funds for Honduran security forces; the prosecution of the material and intellectual authors of the assassination of Berta Cáceres; and \$2 million dollars for the Honduras office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNCHR). The proposed legislation is remarkable. However, it does not fully recognize the fact that the United States is, largely, responsible for the violence and corruption in that country and the Northern Triangle more broadly.

Into the cauldron of socially polarizing and violence provoking policies that the United States pursued at the end of the civil wars, the mass deportation of Salvadoran and other Central American refugee youth stands out as particularly wrong-headed. Young people who had become involved in delinquent gangs in the United States were forced to return to their home countries, with no provisions made for their integration into a society that many of them did not even know, having escaped as children, with their refugee families, during the war years.

Gang members were deported [...] straight from prison to their countries of origin. Between 1998 and 2005, the U.S. deported 46.000 Central Americans with criminal convictions. Between 1996 and 2016, the US deported nearly 100.000 people with criminal convictions to El Salvador alone (Nolan, 2021).

There they were confronted with situations that did not provide employment or educational opportunities. To quote two scholars who have researched the terrible outcomes of this policy in El Salvador, Menjívar and Gómez write: «Young Salvadorans increasingly became involved with gangs, as these groups provided them with the financial opportunities and social resources that the government continued to systematically deny them» (Menjívar & Gómez Cervantes, 2019)¹³. Méndez (2018:6) quotes a young Honduran from a marginalized neighborhood: «they do not see us the way they see other people. There are no jobs for us. They consider us trash. But you must work to survive. We survive from contract killings, extortions, drug sales, and kidnappings».

Meanwhile, American arms merchants fueled the crisis by exporting a large percentage of the weapons that the gangs, often linked to the narcotics trade that led through Mexico, purchased while these gangs maintained their connections with criminal organizations in the United States: «70 percent of the guns seized from criminals in Mexico traced by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) come from the U.S. Almost 41 percent of guns seized in the Northern Triangle originate in the U.S., including almost half the guns in El Salvador» (Heinz, 2020). New export rules introduced in March 2020 by the Trump

¹³ While Salvadoran youth were being deported from the United States, young people also made up most of the «survival migrants» who tried to escape from the country and enter the United States. For example, in 2005, «90 percent of those leaving the country [were] 35 years old or younger and 70 percent [were] 20 years or younger, 56 percent [were] men and 44 percent [were] women» (Velásquez, 2019:16). Of course, today, it is entire families that are leaving their homes and trying to reach the United States.

administration deregulated and thereby further facilitated this export industry. Moreover, weapons «legitimately» exported to the police and armed forces of the region may wind up in the hands of gangs and cartels since corrupt military and police officials pass them on. For example, in El Salvador, «soldiers have been caught selling rocket launchers to the Milenio Cartel, and in a separate incident trying to sell over 1.800 hand grenades» (Heinz, 2020). Between 2006 and 2017, «more than 20.000 weapons belonging to the Mexican police were stolen or went missing» (Heinz, 2020).

Most of the consumer market for the gangs' and cartels' narcotics sales was also provided by the United States, a country that treated narcotics as a criminal rather than a public health matter. Although gang-growth became particularly notorious in El Salvador, it was also a curse in Guatemala and Honduras, which evolved into the narco-state that Senator Merkely's proposed legislation was designed to address. Year after year, the three Northern Triangle nations topped the lists of the most violent countries in the world that are not in an actual state of war. However, it was the narcotics-related violence that drew public attention in the United States, rather than the deep-seated violence of the multiple forms of dispossession generated by neo-liberal policies, and elite and foreign owned extractive industries of many kinds.

The division of profits from the narcotics industry also favored banks located outside the region, in the United States and Europe. In 2011, for example, it was revealed that Wachovia, now a part of Wells Fargo Bank, had been involved in laundering billions of dollars in narcotics profits for Mexico's cartels from 2004 onwards (Vulliaimy, 2011). In 2020, the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) obtained files of the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) of the U.S. Treasury Department that document «an unprecedented view of global financial corruption, the banks enabling it, and the government agencies that watch as it flourishes». The FinCEN files «flagged more than \$2 trillion in [worldwide] transactions between 1999 and 2017» by, among other banks, JPMorgan Chase and Bank of New York Mellon (Business and Human Rights Resource Centre, 2020; also ICJIJ, 2020)¹⁴.

Over arching all of this was U.S. recognition of flawed elections, of *coups*, and the tolerance of extreme corruption on the part of the region's governments. Perhaps most notoriously, when the Honduran military re-

¹⁴ On the ways in which the narco-economy and narco politics function, see the studies in Paley and Granovsky-Larsen, eds. (2019), Guillermoprieto (2010), and the detailed field work based analysis of the connections between Tamaulipas in the north of Mexico and financial institutions in Texas, presented by Martínez (2020).

moved President José Manuel Zelaya Rosales from office in June 2009, towards the end of his mandate, the United States eventually recognized the *coup* makers. To be sure, conditions during Zelaya's term in office need not be idealized; already during his presidency:

organized crime had infiltrated the government itself. One former security minister estimated that 30 percent of police officers had organized crime ties and over half of the Police Investigative Unit officers belonged to Mexican narcotics cartels (Booth *et al.*, 2020:251).

Nevertheless, Zelaya enjoyed considerable popularity for freezing basic goods prices (despite his approval of CAFTA), raising the minimum wage by 60 percent (Booth *et al.*, 2020:250), supporting the cooperative organizations of the Aguan Valley peasant movement (as discussed above), and decreeing that «unused parcels owned by large landowners be redistributed to landless families», among other initiatives that alienated the business elite (Holland, 2014:4).

Following the coup d'état, social conflict, criminal activity, and repression exploded: Zelaya's successor, Porfirio Lobo, won the presidential election of 2009 under questionable circumstances and both his son, Fabio Lobo, and a nephew, Jorge Lobo, were implicated in narco-trafficking. Organized crime further penetrated government and business sectors, including the promoters of dam construction and African palm exports in the Aguan valley (Spring, 2020:397-403). Lobo's successor, Juan Orlando Hernández violated the Constitution by running for a second term in office, «winning» an election in 2017 that was considered fraudulent by many credible observers both inside and outside the country, and his brother was found guilty of drug trafficking by a New York jury in 2019. Human rights activist and coordinator of the Honduras Solidarity Network (HSN), Karen Spring, states that it is «the overlapping interests of criminal gangs, state authorities, private investors, and the large illicit networks connected to [development] projects» that local communities have to navigate (Spring, 2020:403; see Gutiérrez 2018 on the similar state of affairs in Guatemala). An assistant U.S. Attorney stated that «drug traffickers 'infiltrated the Honduran government and they controlled it'» (Palmer and Malkin, 2019). In the words of WOLA security analyst Adam Isacson, «corruption is the oxygen that organized crime breathes»¹⁵, and corruption has penetrated just about all of the most

¹⁵ Isacson stated this in a presentation entitled «Lethal Flows: the U.S. Role in Arms Transfers and Trafficking in Latin America and the Caribbean», organized by the Clarke Forum for Contemporary Issues, 10 September 2020. It is available on You Tube.

powerful private and public institutions of the Northern Triangle countries¹⁶.

The United States, as well as Canada and other countries, could have refused to recognize the 2009 coup and the 2017 re-election of Hernández to signal opposition to an increasingly predatory and corrupt state. However, that was not done although opposition in 2009 was met by «thousands of arrests, beatings, and even some selective killings» (Weisbrot, 2009), as reported by Amnesty International, The Center for Justice and International Law, Human Rights Watch, and the IACHR, among others. As the coup of 2009 rolled out, to no avail, seventeen senators asked the Obama administration (and its Secretary of State Hillary Clinton) to «publicly denounce the use of violence and repression of peaceful protestors, the murder of peaceful political organizers and all forms of censorship and intimidation directed at media outlets» (quoted by Weisbrot, 2009). In 2017, the election observer mission of the Organization of American States (OAS) found «irregularities, errors, and systematic problems... [that do] not allow the mission to be certain about the results» (quoted in WOLA press release, 2017) and recommended new elections. The Trump administration, of course, did not follow that advice, nor did the Canadian government. Although the state-crime-business-extraction-development-violence axis may not be quite as blatant in El Salvador and Guatemala, it exists in both countries.

Might a significant change in policy toward the Northern Triangle take place under the new Biden administration? The prospects for a policy based on understanding the fundamental causes of «survival migration» are dim, in light of the 2015 \$1 billion dollar plan for the region headed by Vice-President during the Obama administration. In an *op-ed* piece for the *New York Times*, Biden argued that his package of measures «would help make the region ‘overwhelmingly middle class, democratic, and secure’» (cited by Main, 2015:1). In fact, the plan was based on neoliberal ideological thought, on the kinds of policies that had created the crisis in the region; and almost a third of the funding was directed toward military and police programs¹⁷.

¹⁶ You (2014) argues that the relatively low levels of corruption in Korea and Taiwan derive from the profound agrarian reform policies of the two countries since elite/landlord capture of the state was erased following World War II. These two countries stand in dramatic contrast with another Asian nation, the Philippines where no such reform took place and the penetration of the state by landlords/elites was cemented.

¹⁷ For a masterful in-depth work on U.S. foreign policy in Latin America, see Loveman, 2010. For a review and analysis of U.S. military/security assistance programs around the world, see Isacson & Kinoshian, 1917, published by WOLA, a human rights agency that monitors the issue and has prepared numerous reports about it. The specific history and role of the U.S. Southern Command and of other military institutions involved in, for

Conclusions

To summarize, lack of comprehensive agrarian reform and related policies of privatization of public services, the pursuit of trade agreements that displaced peasants and workers, and extractive industry promotion that also expropriated people's livelihoods lie at the bottom of the multiple crises that the Northern Triangle countries of Central America confront. Washington insisted on the implementation of policies based on market ideology while it provided generous funding for elite «think tanks» to make sure that neoliberal ideology was propagated in research centers and academic institutions all over Central America. It engaged in the mass deportation of Central American refugee youth into the context of exclusion created by its preferred neoliberal policies. Additionally, North Americans provided the demand for the kinds of goods that illicit and violent Central American and Mexican traders sold; and North Americans participated in arming the traders and gangs that engaged in the ever-widening circles of violence and extortion that caused people to flee. Meanwhile, U.S. banks often «laundered» the profits that traffickers made from their illicit trade. Finally, U.S. security programs provided training and resources to the police and military forces that were corrupted by criminal organizations. Not least, lack of action on climate change in the United States held back the possible mitigation of that long-term crisis. To reiterate my earlier statement, a multiplicity of perversely destructive, interrelated, and historically embedded feedback loops created the crises that the Northern Triangle is experiencing today. And the United States is implicated in all of them.

International organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) may engage in essential and necessary services to assist «survival migrants», the IACHR can issue rulings that demand respect for the human rights of Garifunas and other indigenous groups that are harmed by extractive industries, and the United Nations may demand action against corruption. They should all be supported generously by the United States, Canada, and other nations. However, these fine institutions can only deal with the manifestations of the deep-seated problems presented here. This is also the case with the many national and international civic organizations that document and denounce corruption and violence, and engage in the heroic defense of social, economic, and political human rights. Only a new economic

example, training Central and South American police and military forces, are not addressed in this article.

paradigm can begin to reverse the mutually reinforcing and perverse processes of exclusion.

A new paradigm needs to be focused on social, economic, and political inclusion: the generation of employment and the redistribution of assets such as land; on the public provision of universal health care, quality education, and social security programs; on the regulation of basic food prices and housing markets; on the institutional strengthening of the capacities of the state to deliver such policies and programs; and on respect for all the dimensions of rights for all citizens.

In the meanwhile, in addition to the kinds of measures proposed in Senator Merkley's bill, an entire range of national and international humanitarian organizations can be generously funded and supported; action can be taken to strengthen corporate monitoring institutions, such as the Canadian Ombudsman for Responsible Enterprise to facilitate community suits against predatory Canadian corporate behavior in Guatemala and Honduras; coups and fraudulent elections need not be recognized; military and police assistance to all three countries should be cut; land and environmental rights advocates must be defended; impunity for crimes, like the assassination of Berta Cáceres and hundreds of others, cannot be tolerated; and «survival refugees» must be heard and generously treated.

The stories that are reported about violence and gangs as drivers of migration from the Northern Triangle are true. However, it is the unreported stories that explain the violence and the gangs. Those are the stories of stolen land, stolen crops, stolen water, stolen work... *en fin*, stolen lives.

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