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**“Dysfunctional democracies in Central America: how and why societies have failed to implement democratic systems.”**

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## Introduction:

Today is essential for the wellbeing of modern societies to protect democratic principles in order to preserve peace. In Robert Dahl's<sup>1</sup> view the democratic process can be seen 'as the most reliable means for protecting and advancing the good interests of all the persons subject to collective decisions'<sup>2</sup>. However, many nations in Latin America, in particularly in Central America in this case, are having a difficult path through the consolidation of a modern democracy. According to the Democracy Index of 2017<sup>3</sup>, four out of seven countries in Central America are considered hybrid democracies<sup>4</sup> (Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras and Belize ) while the other three are considered flawed democracies<sup>5</sup> (Costa Rica, Panama and El Salvador). The results are not that bad if we compare it with the world average: 31.1% of the nations in the world are authoritarian regimes, 23.4% are hybrid democracies, 34.1% are flawed democracies, and only 11.4% are full democracies. Still, in the Latin-American and the Caribbean region, only five countries are hybrid democracies which four are in Central America as we saw before, while the majority, 16 out of 24 countries are flawed democracies.<sup>1</sup> In other words, while in the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the countries are flawed democracies and only  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the remaining quarter is a hybrid regime, in Central America more than  $\frac{1}{2}$  are hybrid regimes while flawed democracies remain slightly higher but very similar to the world average. It seems like societies in Central America have been cursed with political instability, even more than the rest of the continent. The example of Honduras is a prominent illustration of how unstable the democratic system can be in

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Dahl, the Sterling Professor of Political Science Emeritus at Yale University, is author of numerous books, including *A Preface To Democratic Theory* (1956); *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* (1961); *Polyarchy: Participation and Observation* (1971); *Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy: Autonomy vs. Control* (1982); and *Democracy, Liberty, and Equality* (1986). He has also authored many articles, including *Decision-Making in a Democracy: The Supreme Court as a National Policy Maker* (1957).

<sup>2</sup> "Democracy and Its Critics", Robert A. Dahl, New Haven: Yale University Press. 1989

<sup>3</sup> "Democracy Index", The Economist Intelligence Unit,

[http://www.eiu.com/Handlers/WhitepaperHandler.ashx?fi=Democracy\\_Index\\_2017.pdf&mode=wp&campaignid=DemocracyIndex2017](http://www.eiu.com/Handlers/WhitepaperHandler.ashx?fi=Democracy_Index_2017.pdf&mode=wp&campaignid=DemocracyIndex2017)

The democratic index is based on electoral process and pluralism; functioning of government; political participation; and political culture and civil liberties.

<sup>4</sup> Hybrid regimes are found in most developing countries, especially since the end of the Cold War. They are called hybrid because they combine democratic traits (e.g., frequent and direct elections) with autocratic ones (e.g., political repression). See "Hybrid Regimes" Oxford Bibliographies.

<sup>5</sup> A flawed democracy is a country with free elections but weighed down by weak governance, an underdeveloped political culture and low levels of political participation. See Economic Intelligence Unit, Democracy Index.

these countries . In 2009 the democratically elected president Manuel Zelaya Rosales was ousted in a coup d'état after trying to lift presidential constrictions on reelection <sup>6</sup>. More recently in December 2017, after the elections took place the Organization of American States asked for a new call for general elections because “the electoral process was characterized by irregularities and deficiencies, with very low technical quality and lacking integrity.”<sup>7</sup> We can also add the example of Nicaragua where Daniel Ortega has eliminated one of the principles of modern democracy i.e. separation of power, by establishing his control over all branches of government for over 11 years.<sup>8</sup> Also in Guatemala citizens have been asking for the resignations of President Jimmy Morales. Morales has been accused by the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala, of illicit electoral enrichment after hiding 1 millions of dollars from his electoral campaign in 2015<sup>9</sup>. Today, Guatemalans keep asking for president Morales resignation with even more anger, afterward his decision to not renew the UN-backed International Commission Against Impunity mandate.<sup>10</sup>

As a result of the dysfunctionality of the democratic system, inequalities increase perpetuating poverty and ultimately leading to violent situations. Latin America remains the most unequal region in the world. Indeed, 8 of the 20 most unequal countries in the world are in the region. According to the Gini index, Honduras occupied the number one spot as the most unequal country in the area, followed by Colombia, Brazil, Guatemala, Panama and even Costa Rica<sup>11</sup>. The region's average is 4 percentage points higher than that of Africa, 11 higher than China and 16 more than the indices of Europe and Central Asia.<sup>12</sup> In 2014 the richest 10% of people in Latin America had accumulated 71% of the

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<sup>6</sup> “Honduran President Is Ousted in Coup”, Article of the New York Times by Elisabeth Malkin, June 28 2009 <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/29/world/americas/29honduras.html>

<sup>7</sup> Statement by the OAS General Secretariat on the Elections in Honduras, December 17, 2017. [http://www.oas.org/en/media\\_center/press\\_release.asp?sCodigo=E-092/17](http://www.oas.org/en/media_center/press_release.asp?sCodigo=E-092/17)

<sup>8</sup> “A Dictatorship Is Rising in My Country, Again”, the New York Times Opinion by Cynara M. Medina. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/02/opinion/a-dictatorship-is-rising-in-my-country-again.html>

<sup>9</sup> “Piden renuncia del presidente de Guatemala por corrupción electoral”, Tele Sur, 24 April 2018, <https://www.telesurtv.net/news/guatemala-piden-renuncia-presidente-jimmy-morales-20180424-0041.html>

<sup>10</sup> “Guatemala: Thousands demand President Jimmy Morales resign”, Aljazeera by Sandra Cuffe and Jeff Abbott, 21 September 2018. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/09/guatemala-thousands-demand-president-jimmy-morales-resign-180920214112050.html>

<sup>11</sup> “Weekly Chart: Income Inequality in Latin America”, Americas Society/ Council of the Americas by Elizabeth Gonzalez, December 8, 2017 <https://www.as-coa.org/articles/weekly-chart-income-inequality-latin-america>

<sup>12</sup> “Latin America: The Most Unequal Region in the World”. Focus Economics, June 6 2017, <https://www.focus-economics.com/blog/inequality-in-latin-america>

region's wealth. According to the Oxfam's calculations, in just six years' time the richest 1% in the region will have collected more wealth than the remaining 99%.<sup>13</sup> Central American is also the poorest part of the region. The average GDP per capita in Latin America is 9,244.4. Countries in Central America – as Honduras (2,480.1), Nicaragua (2,221.8), El Salvador (3,889.3), and Guatemala (4,471.0) continue to perform below the regional average with the exception of Costa Rica and Panama<sup>14</sup>. Frequently, inequality leads to violence which explains why Central America has been considered for a long time the most dangerous region in the globe. Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, have each one been the most dangerous country in the world, and today they still being part of the top 20 most dangerous nations<sup>15</sup>.

Technological progress has given the opportunity to different generations to connect and compare with each other in a global perspective. The aim of this thesis will be to explain why the democratic system does not work in the major part of Central America arguing that is a matter of time. In the first chapter I will try to expose and explain the institutional foundations in which democracy has been established in Central America. In the first part of the chapter we will analyze the differences of the ancient societies, both in the Central American region, and in Europe. This comparison would argue that at the same period of time where strictly extractive political institutions were being founded in Central America, as well as poor urbanization, in other parts of the world Republics, and democracies were invented. Moreover, we will see how colonization strengthen the extractive and corrupted character of the Central American institutional settlement by comparing the Spanish colonizers with the English colonizers. The purpose of this first chapter will be to acknowledge the preservation of extractive political and economic institutions which lead to the creation of inequalities. We will try to see the contrast between the social and political foundations of the Central American societies with the grounds required to establish a democratic regime. In the second chapter we will see how Central American nations were actually influenced to choose democracy as

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<sup>13</sup> "Latin America remains the most unequal region in the world", Oxfam Communication Team in Latin America, 19 December 2017, <https://blogs.oxfam.org/en/blogs/17-12-18-latin-america-remains-most-unequal-region-world>

<sup>14</sup> Latin America and The Caribbean GDP per capita, World Bank Group Data, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=ZJ-CL>

<sup>15</sup> "The 20 most dangerous countries in the world", The Independent by Sarah Schmalbruch, September 7 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/worlds-most-dangerous-countries-colombia-yemen-el-salvador-pakistan-nigeria-a7934416.html>

foreign interest were at stake. We will try to see how turbulent and violent was the path through democratization by studying the wars in Central America during the Cold War. The goal of this chapter will be to recognize the fact that democracy in Central America was not established with the purpose to give power to the people but instead, to avoid confronting a bigger power. The insufficient understanding of democracy led to poor institutional and economic foundations. In the last chapter we will observe the violent consequences of the dysfunctional democracies in Central America by doing a case study on the Northern Triangle, which illustrated the leading troubles on the region: drug trafficking, corruption and gang wars. This case study exemplifies the fact that political instability is a fertilizer for violence. The union of all these facts will try to give proof that the majority of democracies in Central America does not work because they have not had the time to be properly established. The region has had a long history of exploitation and violence which has disabled societies to develop. As organized terrorist groups increase, the challenge of concrete democratization becomes even more difficult since the monopoly of power held by the state is lost and the social contract is broken.

## **Chapter 1: Institutional background: the Mayans and the Spanish.**

### **1.1 Introduction chapter 1**

In everyday life, we tend to equally compare countries using political, economic and social criteria such as GDP, life expectancy, population, literacy and so on. Very frequently when we examine these evaluations, we forget to understand that societies grow in different ways, following different paths and challenging different institutional foundations. Nation-states in Central America, as many countries in the world, defined themselves as democratic republics with the exception of Belize, which is a constitutional monarchy. Democratic republics, are a combination of the principles of both a republic and a democracy. In its simpler, a democracy, from the Latin *demokratia* *demos* meaning “people, masses” and *kratia* “rule, government”, is a political system that allows the citizens to participate in political decision-making, or to elect representatives to government bodies.<sup>16</sup> A republic, from Latin *respublica*, *res* meaning “entity, concern” and *publicus* “public, of the people”, is a state in which supreme power is held by the people and their elected representatives<sup>17</sup>. Thus, a democratic republic is a state in which all citizens have equal rights to participate on the elections for the representatives that will be in charge of the supreme power. However, neither democracy or the republic was invented by the ancestors of the Central American ancient societies. In fact, this type of political system was available in Central America starting from the twentieth century, and it would have happened later if it was not because of the influence of the United States. Today we know, that in order to have sustainable development, is highly recommendable to have inclusive political and economic institutions, and that growth under extractive institutions is possible but not durable. The degree of understanding of the latter assumption is what today, still determine the paths of the states. We can see through history that small alterations within political institutions, can be a changing factor for a nation. It is not a coincidence that the first modern democracy was founded by the English. Whereas in one hand, the ancestors of the Northern American societies, had experience not only the Glorious Revolution, the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution but also the influence of the Roman Republic through the Roman Empire and the Athenian Democracy. On the other hand, in Latin America, the Aztecs, Mayas, Incas and other

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<sup>16</sup> “Democracy”, Oxford References

<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095709688>

<sup>17</sup> “Republic”, Oxford Dictionary, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/republic>

pre Columbian civilizations had sculptured the political, economic, and social thinking in a very different way. In other words, while the United States and Canada were founded by people who learned from their history, to prefer inclusive political and economic institutions, the founders of the Central American countries were people with a successful experience with extractive institutions. Today, the poorest parts of Latin America are the ones that had, geographically speaking, the highest demographical density during the pre-Columbian Era. If we take into consideration not only modern history but also ancient history, we will easily understand the social, economic and political differences between these nations. In fact, if we want to be able to undertake a substantial analysis, it is fundamental to understand and acknowledge the failures and the accomplishments of each society, taking into account different historical features. In this chapter, we will try to explain the political evolution of the Central American society during the pre-Columbian and the Colombian Era. We will try to argue that a possible explanation for the dysfunctionality of democracies in Central America lays on the fact that societies had a long history of extractive political institutions. Even if the Mayan political centralization was dissolved by the time the Spanish conquistadors came, its influence made domination easier. In the first part of this chapter, we will see how different the Romans, the Greeks and the Mayans were, in the period of time where Rome was a Republic, Athens was a democracy and the Mayans were a composition of theocratic states. In the second part of this chapter, we will study the Conquest to see how different combination of circumstances could be determinant for a whole region. We will see the institutional differences between the conquistadors that lead to inequalities in the Americas, and how important previous centralization of power was, for the functioning of the conquest. The aim of this chapter would be to try to explain how new is the concept of democracy and republic, and how old is the extractive institutional settlement in Central America.

## **1.2 The Mayans: comparison with the Romans and the Greeks.**

500 BC. in the poorest part of the region known today as Central America, which includes Guatemala, Belize, Honduras and El Salvador, a civilization by the name of Mayas, first began to develop. Mayans were a civilization where social classes were strongly manifested. On the top of the social pyramid the clergy and the nobility or

*almehenoob*<sup>18</sup>; below them, artisans, peasants and merchants; and beneath, on the bases of the social pyramid: the slaves or *pentacoob*.<sup>19</sup> Political duties were reserved to the highest social class, whereas the other two would be exploited. Through the same time in 509 BC. , on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, roman citizens founded the Roman Republic after overthrowing Lucius Tarquinius Superbus. Social division within the roman civilization was similar to the Mayan. What changes is the way in which these social strata interacted. The republic cleverly proposed political institutions with many inclusive elements. First, it was governed by magistrates elected for a year, in order to avoid the consolidation and exploitation of power. Second, the institutions contained a system of checks and balances that distributed power fairly. Third and most importantly, the plebeians had their own assembly, which could elect the plebeian tribunes, who had the power to veto actions by the magistrates, call the Plebeian Assembly, and propose legislation.<sup>20</sup> None of these inclusive features were presented in the Mayan theocratical view. The political institutions of the latter, were more similar to the regal period of the roman civilization. In other words, while the roman people was concretize inclusive political though with the creation of the republic, the Mayans were consolidating an extractive form of government. Whereas the power of the roman citizens had been forged by secession<sup>21</sup>, gaining the right to elect their tribunes and enact laws that would govern their community, the power of the Mayan people was being caught with magic.

The Mayan civilization was divided in city-states, similar to the Greeks. However, both the cities and the state were conceived in different ways. The Greek city states called *poleis* were republics. The differences in wealth among their citizens were relatively small. There were no kings with the capital to hire mercenary soldiers therefore, the citizens had to do their own fighting and to decide when to fight. Such states, did not need a bureaucracy for there were not state holdings that needed management and not much

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<sup>18</sup> Meaning the ones with a father and a mother in Mayan language.

<sup>19</sup> People became slaves under five different circumstances: they were born slaves, they were war prisoners, they were thieves, be an orphan or to have been sold by your chief or your parents for one hundred seeds of cacao. See "Mundo maya", George Reston, <https://es.scribd.com/read/266497080/Mundo-maya>

<sup>20</sup> "Why Nations Fail: the origins of power, prosperity and poverty.", 2012, D. Acemoglu and J.A. Robinson.

<sup>21</sup> A form of strike by plebeians, particularly soldiers, who would withdraw and refuse to cooperate with the magistrates until their complains were dealt with. See 'Why Nations Fail: the origins of power, prosperity and poverty.', 2012, D. Acemoglu and J.A. Robinson. P. 160

economic surplus to support a bureaucratic class.<sup>22</sup> Under these circumstances, by 508 BC. the citizens of Athens lived under a radically democratic government. Ancient Greek politicians and philosophers when exposing the first thoughts on the Athenian Democracy, did not conceive it as totally inclusive. Political participation was a right for the earnest i.e. male citizens over eighteen years old. The latter only represented 10-20% of the polis population<sup>23</sup> while the other 80-90% i.e. women, slaves, children and foreigners were not able to participate. Around three thousand citizens over thirty to sixty thousand people could participate in Athenian politics.<sup>24</sup> Even if active participation was encouraged, mostly by covering the travel expenses of the citizens willing to attend the assembly, only one hundred citizens over three thousand dominated the political arena. However, considering the time, it was revolutionary. Contrary to the Mayans, the Greek leaders wanted their citizens to engage in political life and commonly participate in the decision making process. Athenians knew the importance of expertise and knowledge, considering it fundamental for the well-functioning of the polis. Pericles, a respected politician and military leader in ancient Athens during the fifth century BC described nonpolitically active citizens as ‘*not only one who minds his own business but useless.*’ Athenian Democracy was based in the principles of *isonomia* i.e. equality before the law, and *eleutheria* or individual liberty. Per Pericles,

*“ It is true that we are called a democracy, for the administration is in the hands of the many and not of the few. But while there exists equal justice to all and alike in their private disputes, the claim of excellence is also recognized; and when a citizen is in any way distinguished, he is preferred to the public service, not as a matter of privilege, but as the reward of merit. Neither is poverty an obstacle, but a man may benefit his country whatever the obscurity of his condition.”*<sup>25</sup>

As illustrated by this passage, another important value of Athenian democracy is the triviality of social classes and the importance of meritocracy which was clearly absent in the Mayan political institutions.

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<sup>22</sup>“Ancient Greece”, Transcription of a Yale introductory course by Professor Donald Kagan, 2007

<sup>23</sup> “Athenian Democracy”, Ancient History Encyclopaedia  
[https://www.ancient.eu/Athenian\\_Democracy/](https://www.ancient.eu/Athenian_Democracy/)

<sup>24</sup> “Athenian Democracy”, Ancient History Encyclopaedia  
[https://www.ancient.eu/Athenian\\_Democracy/](https://www.ancient.eu/Athenian_Democracy/)

<sup>25</sup> Thucydides, Pericles' Funeral Oration, University of Minnesota – Human Rights Library,  
<http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/education/thucydides.html>

Political and religious institutions have been strongly intertwined as a jointly supportive unified structure. The Mayan civilization was organized in city-states as well as the ancient Greek as we saw before. However, the gigantic difference between these two civilizations, lays indeed, in the degree of synergy of these two components. In one hand, The Mayans were theocratic city-states, where the centralization of power laid in the hands of a ruler legitimized by religious beliefs, whereas on the other hand, the Greeks were the first representation of democratic republics, where religious beliefs had an inferior weight in the political realm and power was on the hands of the people. There was no separate caste of priest in Athens as in contrary to the Mayans, life after death was a minimal concern<sup>26</sup>. Although, the way in which religion was thought by the Mayans, was not that different from the Greeks or the Romans. Maya's religion can be characterized by three main features. First, the Mayans were polytheistic, they praised *Hunab*, creator of the world and humanity, *Itzamna* the god of the skies, *Kukulcan* the god of the wind, *Chaac* god of the rain, and many others. Second, as we could acknowledge by the former examples, the Mayan religion was naturalistic, as every god was a representation of the natural elements (water, air, fire, and earth). Third, Mayans believed in the dualistic principle of good and evil, what is more, in the divinity and holiness of both sides. Everything that happened was controlled by the gods thus, when a catastrophe accrued e.g. hurricanes, droughts, and war, it was because the malevolent gods had won the battle over the benevolent gods on the unceasing battle of time. Mayans considered the world as a cosmic entity composed of different strata. The upper layers were thirteen, where thirteen different gods or *oxlahuntiku* reigned. Under the earth, being positioned at the lower level, another nine sections were supposed to exist. The last and deepest strata was considered hell, and also the home of *Ah Puch* the lord of death<sup>27</sup>. These first Mayan cities eventually failed during the Pre-classic Era, sometime in the first century AD. as well as the Roman Republic and eventually the city of Athens.

What is relevant to compare, is on one hand the rigidity in the Mayan political evolution, particularly in the way that the government interacted with the people. While in the other hand, the flexibility of the Greeks or the ancient Roman civilization that mutated from a regal period, to a republic, to an empire and still preserve a degree of

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<sup>26</sup> "Ancient Greece", Transcription of a Yale introductory course by Professor Donald Kagan,

<sup>27</sup> "Mundo maya", George Reston, <https://es.scribd.com/read/266497080/Mundo-maya>

inclusiveness. For the Mayan, a new political model then emerge between AD. 250 and 900.<sup>28</sup> This period market the acme of the Mayan political organization. The civilization was ruled by two equally important castes: the nobles and the priests, whereas in the south, cities were rule by one man occupying both political and religious duties. Every city-state was rule by an *aluch uinic* i.e. real man. The supreme chief had absolute power over the people and the city, and passed his duties to his eldest son. The *aluch uinic* took political decision with the advice of his Council e.g. the election of the governors, composed by priests, regional chiefs or governors, and counsellors. The governors had different obligations; first, he had to assured that everyone respected and honoured the clergy; second, they had to safeguard the economy within the timing of the agricultural calendar; third, they had also judicial responsibilities as judges; forth, in times of war, they had recruit soldiers to put under the command of a *nacom* or *cahal* , the great chief of war; and last but not least and actually most important of all, they had to guarantee that every citizen pay the mandatory tribute to the *aluch uinic*. To make sure that all these charges were accomplished the governors delegated the work to the secretaries, *ah leloob*. The counsellors, *ah cuch calvo*, were hierarchically placed below the governors and were under the governor's command. They were divided in groups of two or three, the *ah popol* were in charge of the *popolna*, the seats were public business took place, by consequence the *ah popol* were in charge of the relationship between the nobles and the common people. Also the clergy had a hierarchical composition, on the top, the high priest, *Ahaucan*, and below him the *ahkim*, the lower priests, divided in the *chilam*, specialized in fortune telling, and the *chaces* which were charge with the sacrifices. The *Ahaucan* was an essential figure in the social and political realm. He was the first counsellor of the *aluch uinic*, he was in charge of spreading knowledge and wisdom, tell the future, understanding the sciences of the stars and mathematics, moreover, he witnessed the construction of the sacred seats which he was in charge of, he also wrote codes and teachings. The position of high priest as the one of *aluch uinic* was passed from father to son.<sup>29</sup> As we can see, political organization was strongly based on social classes. There was not separation of power nor any type of control. The Mayan cities were ruled by a small part of the population. The centralization of power was a way to better exploit the

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<sup>28</sup> "Why Nations Fail: the origins of power, prosperity and poverty.", 2012, D. Acemoglu and J.A. Robinson.

<sup>29</sup> "Mundo maya", George Reston, <https://es.scribd.com/read/266497080/Mundo-maya>

population. Participation of the people in political matters was not required. Education was primarily hereditary as wisdom and information was seen as a precious asset.

The architectural organization of Mayan cities were a clear representation of how the society worked and how political power was established. There was a clear division in the allocation of both resources and the people. The city, where the famous pyramids as well as the rest of the Mayan architecture were, was a place for politics away from the economic utility. The goal of these constructions was to have a place to connect with the gods, and rule at their command with their blessing. In fact, the major difference between the Mayan pyramids and the Egyptians, is that the former were design as stairs to enable the priests to have a nearest connection with the gods. These seats, were a representation of the power of the kings, when a king was succeeded by another one, they tend to abandon parts of the city already build, to create new structures and established their power. The Mayan edifices served to welcome small, dominant fractions of the population, reason why they never evolved into more complex constructions. Very few people, which of course were the nobility, actually lived inside the Mayan city and its buildings. At the end, the city was the way in which Mayan kings legitimized their power as they were the ones chosen by the gods to speak with. It was also the way in which they legitimize the flux of resources that came from the people, that they convinced of the necessity to sustain the city and the will of the nobles and the clergy. On the other hand, the field, was the place for production. Were the rest of the population was allocated to serve their duties. In fact, the rest of the population was not concentrated at all, peasants lived deep into the forest.<sup>30</sup> For the people, nature was their everyday habitat and the city was a sacred place that had to be visit only occasionally when requested. In opposition with the Greeks and the Romans, the city was a sacred place, squares were not the place where citizens could interact with each other but instead a magic place where mystic took place. Squares were the space where citizens which composed the 90%, could witness thus be enchanted by rituals that strengthened their beliefs. The cities were constructed not as a demonstration of the supremacy of the man over nature, instead, it supposed the social triumph of god's men over the rest of the community.

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<sup>30</sup> López, Fanny y Héctor Escobar

1998 *Arquitectura y urbanismo en Palenque: Análisis de un modelo de organización territorial*. En XI Simposio de Investigaciones Arqueológicas en Guatemala, 1997 (editado por J.P. Laporte y H. Escobedo), pp.399-410. Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología, Guatemala (versión digital).

Contrary to the Romans, the Mayan cities never unified into an empire. However, the dissolution of both the Roman Empire and the Mayan civilization came from the same roots. Institutions were extractive, which led to political instability and ultimately to the bridge between society and state. The origins of the Roman decline go back at least to Augustus's seizure of power, which set in motion changes that made political institutions much more extractive. These included changes in the structure of the army, which made succession impossible, thus removing a crucial element that ensure political representation for common<sup>31</sup>. As well as in the Mayan political system, increasingly extractive political and economic institutions generated death because they caused infighting and civil war. Though Roman citizens had political and economic rights, slavery was prevalent and very extractive, and the elite controlled both the economy and politics, similar to the Mayan city-states. It was this transition from republic to empire, that laid the bases for the decline of Rome. The partially inclusive political institutions, which had formed the basis for the economic success, were gradually diluted.<sup>32</sup> In other words, whereas in the case of the Romans the reason of the failure was to undermined their inclusive political institutions, the failure of the Mayan was to strengthened.

### **1.3 The Spanish Colonization: comparison with the English and the French.**

As we all know, America was discovered in 1492 by Cristoforo Colombo who was apparently looking for a faster route to India. At beginning of the XVI century when the Spanish first arrive to Central American, the Mayan cities had fall and the civilization migrated to the north in Mexico or stood hiding in the woods. The Spanish that first conquest Central America came from two different points. From Mexico, under the command of Hernan Cortés and from Panama under Pedrarias Dávila. The conquest of the north took place from Mexico down to Guatemala, Honduras and eventually El Salvador. While the south, appropriated Nicaragua and then Costa Rica. In 1543 the *Capitanía General de Guatemala* was stablished as a branch of the viceroyalty of New Spain in order to control the central territories. Contrary to what is commonly think, the principal causes for the disintegration of the pre-Columbian civilization were diseases. The Spanish did not bring only fire weapons but something even more lethal, epidemic

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<sup>31</sup> "Why Nations Fail: the origins of power, prosperity and poverty.", 2012, D. Acemoglu and J.A. Robinson.

<sup>32</sup> "Why Nations Fail: the origins of power, prosperity and poverty.", 2012, D. Acemoglu and J.A. Robinson.

illnesses. In fact, malady was both beneficiary and damaging. In one hand the indigenous people were the Spanish 'primary resource for production. While in the other hand, illness weakened the indigenous army e.g. Pizarro plunder the city of Cusco under the Incas rule without any major military confrontation, disease had wiped up the population.

The Spanish strategy of colonization was highly effective. However, is clear that without the centralization of power of the indigenous , it would be impossible to applicate. Perfected by Cortés in Mexico, it was based on the observation that the best way for the Spanish to subjugate the opposition was to capture the local leader. This strategy enable the Spanish to save time and energy by directly asking to the chief to give up his accumulated wealth. They were also able to coerce the indigenous peoples to give tribute and food. At the end, they placed themselves as the new elite of the indigenous society. They took control of the existing methods of taxation, tribute, and particularly forced labour already stablished by the Aztecas, Incas and Mayas. Cortes, as governor of the province of New Spain, began dividing up the indigenous population, through the institution of the encomienda. Is relevant to remember how strong religious beliefs were for the pre-Columbian civilizations. Indeed, they truly though that the gods were in favour of the Spanish. The encomienda was at least, if not less, as extractive as previous indigenous institutions. Whereas in the Mayan civilization slaves and non-slaves worked without anything in exchange for tributes and labour because dogmatism. The encomienda was an endowment of indigenous people to a Spaniard or encomendero, that consisted in giving the encomendero tribute and labour services, in exchange for which the encomendero was charge to converting them to Christianity.<sup>33</sup>

The character of the conquistador is a very important feature for the analysis of the conquest. Because they did very damaging things is important to understand them. Men were between 30 and 45 years old. Which was considered as mature person considering that life expectancy was around sixty decades. They came from a society where the possibilities to ascend to a better position in society were very scarce. In fact, the majority of the people that embarked to the New World were soldiers, farmers, peasants, artisans, bureaucrats and clergy. Only a minor 5 – 6% of the members were part

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<sup>33</sup> "Why Nations Fail: the origins of power, prosperity and poverty.", 2012, D. Acemoglu and J.A. Robinson.

of the nobility. Part of those nobles, were also the minority that travelled, and found the Americas appealing because it would bring honour to their names. In the latter group we can find Vasco Núñez de Balboa, Diego de Nicuesa, Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and Hernán Cortés himself<sup>34</sup>. The expedition was an opportunities for people seeking power, to actually have it, but in a new world with a new beginning. The hidalgos, from Spanish “hijos de algo” meaning sons of something, were the ones without and old Christian surname, which basically increased the difficulty to become part of the highest social class, even if they had the means to. For this reason, they enthusiastically pursue the possibility of becoming one day part of the nobility in the Americas. The hidalgos played a significant role during the conquest as they served as officials and generals that lead the expeditions. Is important to consider that the task of the Spaniards was to conquer in many levels. They had the duty to be a combatants to gather wealth for the Crown. Nonetheless, they also had the responsibility to convert the souls of the savages.

At this point, is clear that the Spanish stablished extractive political institutions (*encomienda, mita, repartimiento, and trajin*) that were designed to force indigenous peoples to remain in a subsistence level. And therefore, to extract all additional income. This was achieved by creating extractive economic institutions that expropriating their land, forcing them to work, offering low wages for labour services. They imposed high taxes, and charged high prices for consumption that were not even volunteering bought. Again, the implementation of these institutions was facilitated by the previous indigenous ones. Also, a lot of territory was gained with the help of indigenous armies seeking revenge from another indigenous city. Both Indigenous societies and calorizators turned Latin America into the most unequal continent in the world. In fact, not the whole continent fall into the hands of the ruthless Spaniards.

The first attempt of the English to found a colony in the Americas was between 1586 and 1587 in Roanoke, North Carolina. At that time, the English were not in a position of economic strength thus, the navy relied on privateers and independent merchant ships. Even if the English feet was much less powerful than the Spanish, the profits of the Atlantic attracted these privateers, challenging the Spanish monopoly of the oceans. Furthermore, the English trying to ally with the Spanish Netherlands, at the time

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<sup>34</sup> “Historia oculta de la conquista de America”, Gabriel Sanchez Sorondo.

fighting against Spain for independence was an additional threat. In 1588 the Spanish decided to put an end to these dangers. Surprisingly, bad weather and strategic mistakes by Sidonia, who had been put in charge last minute after a more experienced general died, made the Spanish Armada lose their advantage. Against all possible circumstances, the English destroyed much of the fleet of their greatest enemy. The monopoly in the Atlantic seas was somehow broken which left space to the English in to explore the Americas in more equal terms.

By 1588 differences between France, England and Spain were reduce to almost nothing. They were all absolute monarchies. All three were clashing with assemblies of citizens such as the Parliament in England, the Cortes in Spain and Estates-General in France. Though, these assemblies had different degrees of influence over monarchies thus different powers and agendas. For instance, the English Parliament and the Cortes in Spain had power over taxation, while the Estates-General did not. For the Spanish Crown this did not matter because after 1492 the monarchy had a vast American Empire and benefited tremendously from the gold and the silver found there. In England however, the situation was different. Elizabeth was less economically independent as the power of Parliament was growing stronger. She had to ask the Parliament for more taxes and if they accepted, they asked for concessions in exchange, in particular restrictions on the right of the Queen to create monopolies. Parliament gradually won. In Spain the Cortes lost a similar conflict as they were in a weaker position compare to the Parliament. Trade was monopolized by the Spanish monarchy. In other words, the opponents to absolutism in Spain and France were poorer compare to their monarchies whereas the opposition in England would be more likely prevail because they were relatively wealthy and more numerous<sup>35</sup>.

After the win against the Spanish, in 1607 England tried again. Three vessels, Susan Constant, Godspeed, and Discovery sponsored by the Virginia Company sailed into a river they called James after the king James I, and then founded the settlement of Jamestown. When they first landed, they did not know that the territory belonged to the Powhatan Confederacy<sup>36</sup>. At first, they wanted to implement the classical model of

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<sup>35</sup> "Why Nations Fail: the origins of power, prosperity and poverty.", 2012, D. Acemoglu and J.A. Robinson.

<sup>36</sup> Coalition of polities owing allegiance to a King called Wahunsunacock.

colonization created by the Spaniards. They decided to learn more about the environment of the civilization. They found out that contrary to the Aztecs, the Mayans and the Incas, these northern civilizations had no gold. At some point, after making friendly approaches, the English understood that it was impossible to find big treasures in a small period of time as the Spanish did. A famous letter by captain John Smith sent in December 1608 illustrates these conditions, he expresses his concern to the Virginia Company and explicitly affirms that it was impossible to force the indigenous to work for them or to provide supplies. Consequently, the English colonies established a market with the other tribes in order to survive. In contrast with the Spanish, the conditions in which the English established their colonies was not favourable for exploitation which forced them to work by themselves. In other words, the lack of strong centralization of power made impossible the implementation of the Spanish methods. However, this had a positive effect later on.

#### **1.4 Conclusion chapter 1**

The extractive political and economic institutions of the Spanish conquistadors in Latin America have endured, condemning much of the region to misery. European colonization set the stage for different combinations of institutions. Whereas in Latin America, the local population suffered the influence of the pre-Columbian institutions combined with the Spanish political institutions, drowning the population deeper into poverty. In North America indigenous people did not fall into the conquistador trap and were influenced by inclusive political thinking. Today in the Americas, where in contrast to the inclusive institutions developed by the United States and Canada, extractive ones emerged in Latin America, which explains the pattern of inequality seen in the Americas<sup>37</sup>. This assumption can be again proved with examples within Latin American countries. Thanks to the fact that Argentina and Chile were neglected as they had few indigenous people or mineral riches, the Spanish focused on the lands occupied by the Aztec, Maya, and Inca civilizations. Today these are better in terms of both politics and economics than the rest of the region.

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<sup>37</sup> 'Why Nations Fail: the origins of power, prosperity and poverty.', 2012, D. Acemoglu and J.A. Robinson.



## **Chapter 2: The price to pay for democratization**

### **2.1 Introduction chapter 2:**

Central America is a forgotten part of the globe, nonetheless, its history does not lack of interesting anecdotes. Until now we have seen that this region was the home of the Mayan civilization, and then was discovered by older civilizations in the 4<sup>th</sup> and last trip of Colon in 1502<sup>38</sup>, becoming part of the Spanish Crown. The 15<sup>th</sup> of September 1821, the area today known as Central America became part of the Mexican Empire after Mexico declared independence from the Spanish. Two years later, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Costa Rica, El Salvador and Honduras at that time part of the Capitanía General de Guatemala, became and The United Province of Central America, and later on The Central American Federation, totally independent from both Mexico and Spain. By 1839 the Federation was dissolved and each country became independent. It is important to confess that the process of independence was driven by the elite that saw possibility for economic benefit as they would enter the global market independently. The reasons were far from a social or political revolution. The Central American population was divided mostly in Creoles, Mestizos and Indigenous. This demographic division and social pyramid, was born with the so called “Discovery of the Americas” and has stayed untouched since then. Even if by the time the Central American Federation was created, different democratic features were established<sup>39</sup>, Central America remained in a long track of authoritarian regimes, economic monopolies, oligarchies, discrimination, exploitation, inequalities, inexistent rule of law, all of these, for the commodities of a few. The Central American civil wars that took place during and after the Cold War, are not much than another example of how easy can be to a greater power, to take profit of weaker nations when needed. The democratic principles that were first prescribed by the founding fathers of democracy, were manipulated in order to secure a greater power. This particular moment in history can be understood as the result of a majority of underdeveloped populations that were manipulated by two main powers, fighting for political influence

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<sup>38</sup> “Cristóbal Colón descubrió Centro América en su cuarto y último viaje”, Diario la Tribuna, 9 Agust 2015, <http://www.latribuna.hn/2015/08/09/cristobal-colon-descubrio-centro-america-en-su-cuarto-y-ultimo-viaje/>

<sup>39</sup> The Central American Federation, had a constitution were separation of power was established, as well as the possibility of each state to choose their own executive, legislative and judicial by 4 degrees indirect popular suffrage.

and hegemonic power; similar path if compared to the Conquest. In this chapter we will try to understand how the democratic integrity of these countries was violated by more powerful actors. By taking a ride through modern history, and more specifically, through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we will see how societies in Central America had failed to establish democracy not only because of their passed history of extractive political institutions but because the intervention of The United States and Russia. We will witness the different paths of each country that was condemned by war being El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua, as well as Honduras and Costa Rica, allies of the greater powers. In the first part of this chapter, we will try to understand the global situation and the foreign policies that were implemented at the time of the civil wars, followed by an analysis of the stakes of both the U.S and the USSR. Later on we will examine the root causes of the conflicts and the conflicts it selves, and finally we will try to see the conditions in which the peace agreements were sign and why they failed again when they were supposed to establish a functioning modern democracy.

## **2.2 The Cold War: Foreign Policies**

The Cold War gave space to several reforms when referring to foreign policy, in particular within the winners of the Second World War. By the end of the armed conflict, the world was divided into two blocks again and the provisions avowed by Stalin in 1927, that: "there will emerge two centers of world significance: a socialist center, drawing to itself the countries which tend toward socialism, and a capitalist center, drawing to itself the countries that incline toward capitalism." and that, "Battle between these two centers for command of world economy will decide fate of capitalism and of communism in entire world." seem realer than ever. After receiving in February 22, 1946, the famous "Long Telegram" by George Kennan, at that time Chargé d'Affaires in Moscow<sup>40</sup>, Washington was provided with a framework for understanding the Soviet expansionist policies. Within this piece of work, in addition to explaining the basic features of post-war Soviet outlook and its projections in practical policy on official level, and on unofficial level; Kennan also looked forward to provide possible solutions to what he thought was the "[...] greatest task our diplomacy has ever faced and probably greatest it

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<sup>40</sup> "George Kennan and Containment", Office of the Historian, Bureau of Public Affairs United States Department of State. <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/short-history/kennan>

will ever have to face.”<sup>41</sup>. Firstly, he strongly believed that the public must be informed of the Russian situation and that “Press cannot do this alone. It must be done mainly by Government, which is necessarily more experienced and better informed”<sup>42</sup>; two weeks later, former British prime minister Winston Churchill, speaking to the population of the U.S., opened on the Soviet expansionist issue saying that they were bringing an "iron curtain" down across Europe, and that the United States and Britain needed to strongly oppose this policy<sup>43</sup>. On Kennan’s view, communist was “like malignant parasite which feeds only on diseased tissue.”<sup>44</sup> and it was imperatively necessary to help the other nations that were “tired and frightened by experiences of past, and are less interested in abstract freedom than in security.”<sup>45</sup> because if the U.S. was not able to do it, the USSR would. That same year Britain received a \$3.75 billion loan from the U.S. government to help it rebuild, while in Germany, Secretary of State Byrnes committed the United States to the reconstruction of that country both economically and politically<sup>46</sup>. In supplement to the “Long Telegram”, in 1946, Kennan wrote the famous “X Article” formulating the policy of containment: “The main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies.”<sup>47</sup> The latter was the basic strategy of the United States to block Soviet expansionism throughout the cold war. Truman’s view of the conflict was strongly influenced by Kennan’s view as we previously acknowledge. The latter considered the Soviet threat to be primarily political, and advocated above all else economic assistance. In January 1947, President Truman appointed George Marshall, to be Secretary of State. In just a few months the State Department, with expertise provided by George Kennan, William Clayton and others, constructed the Marshall Plan concept, which laid on the idea that political stability in Western Europe was the key to reducing

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<sup>41</sup> “The Long Telegram” ,George Kennan, 861.00/2 - 2246: Telegram, February 22, 1946, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/coldwar/documents/episode-1/kennan.htm>

<sup>42</sup> “The Long Telegram” ,George Kennan, 861.00/2 - 2246: Telegram, February 22, 1946, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/coldwar/documents/episode-1/kennan.htm>

<sup>43</sup>Alonzo L. Hamby,“Harry’s Truman: Foreign Affairs”  
<https://millercenter.org/president/truman/foreign-affairs>

<sup>44</sup> “The Long Telegram” ,George Kennan, 861.00/2 - 2246: Telegram, February 22, 1946, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/coldwar/documents/episode-1/kennan.htm>

<sup>45</sup> “The Long Telegram” ,George Kennan, 861.00/2 - 2246: Telegram, February 22, 1946, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/coldwar/documents/episode-1/kennan.htm>

<sup>46</sup> Alonzo L. Hamby,“Harry’s Truman: Foreign Affairs”  
<https://millercenter.org/president/truman/foreign-affairs>

<sup>47</sup> “The Sources of Soviet Conduct” , “X” George Kennan 1 July 1946, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/2016-10-31/sources-soviet-conduct-excerpt>

the advances of communism in that region.<sup>48</sup> However, as history has shown us, the Truman Doctrine had not only political and economic solutions but also strong military strategies. In July 1947 Congress passed National Security Act which gave birth to a new national security structure with the creation of the National Security Council and the CIA.<sup>49</sup> The same year, In September, Truman saw the first opportunity to secure the continent using the theory of collective security and implemented the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, also known as the Treaty of Rio. It was originally signed by 19 countries, including Costa Rica, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.<sup>50</sup> Truman strongly believe in this theory as this type of compromise would assure the military behaviour of member states. They will not attack each other, and that they will rise in defence of a member state as collective measures would be taken to deter the aggression<sup>51</sup>. By 1949 the situation in Europe was harsh, after a fail compromise between Stalin and the western powers for the situation in Berlin, the later saw the opportunity of a new multilateral alliance. 12 countries signed the North Atlantic Treaty, which lead to the creation of NATO.<sup>52</sup> The end of the Truman administration became always more aggressive as the Soviets were catching up. The monopoly on nuclear weapons came to an end, while mutually assured destruction brought fear and made of the Korean War a conventional, unpopular war, which coasted Truman his presidency<sup>53</sup>.

### **2.3 Stakes in Central America**

Meanwhile, the situation in Central America seem to be under control as the attention of the two blocks was turned towards Europe and later on in Asia. One possible explanation for this geographical preference is the fact that Stalin only supported orthodox communist parties, which left Central America under the control of the United States. After Stalin's death, a new Khrushchev era started, and in 1955 the latter policy

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<sup>48</sup> "History of the Marshall Plan" <https://www.marshallfoundation.org/marshall/the-marshall-plan/history-marshall-plan/>

<sup>49</sup> "A New National Security Structure" Office of the Historian, Bureau of Public Affairs United States Department of State. <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/short-history/kennan>

<sup>50</sup> "The Rio Pact at Glance", The New York Times 1982, <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/04/21/world/the-rio-pact-at-a-glance.html>

<sup>51</sup> "Collective Security: Revisiting a theory" <https://foreignpolicyblogs.com/2007/08/06/collective-security-revisiting-a-theory/>

<sup>52</sup> "Formation of NATO", History Channel <https://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/formation-of-nato-and-warsaw-pact>

<sup>53</sup> Lawrence D. Freedman, "Nuclear strategy", <https://www.britannica.com/topic/nuclear-strategy#ref1224925>

was overturned. At the beginning it seemed like the Soviets were ready to be more flexible and to open up to non-communist Third World countries who were objectively anti-imperialist.<sup>54</sup> Soviet willingness to support developing countries was a dependent variable of both the availability of resources and the Soviet calculation of a possible U.S. response. Since at that time, also the U.S. started a new, more aggressive era with President Eisenhower and the theory of massive retaliation. The way in which the Soviets operated was very different from the U.S. policies. First, the Soviets believe that it was fundamental to emphasise the importance of political organization by the local revolutionary groups as the channel to gain power, rather than military intervention. The latter was the most popular kind of intervention made by the USSR. For that end, it was imperative to give support to the Marxist-Lenin groups and encourage them to create vanguard parties: "Democratic-progressive" elements abroad are to be utilized to maximum to bring pressure to bear on capitalist governments along lines agreeable to Soviet interests."<sup>55</sup>Second, the Soviets were not interested in giving external aid for the economic development of the countries as the U.S. did but rather to give military support as they did with Cuba during the Cuban missile crisis. This preference toward violent conflict has been a major feature of communism since the revolution in Russia, and was accentuated with the victories of Castro and the Sandinistas. Third, intervention depended strongly in the calculations made by the Soviets considering the risk for a U.S. response. Through the 1960s negotiations were conceded on nuclear proliferation, resulting in the non-proliferation treaty of 1968 and later on the SALT and ABM agreements.<sup>56</sup> In the Soviet's view, détente was seen as a great opportunity for communist activism in Central America. Indeed, the emergence of a strong opposition against the military governments, appeared together with the U.S-Soviet détente that emerged in the early 70's and finished 10 years' latter after the intervention of the USSR in Afghanistan. In fact, during that time, attention of the USSR in Central America was very little and saw a major increase only after the unexpected victory of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua.<sup>57</sup> The interests of the

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<sup>54</sup> Francis Fukuyama, Scott Bruckner, Sally Stoecker, "Soviet Political Perspective on Power Projection", A Rand Note, March 1987.

<sup>55</sup> "The Long Telegram", George Kennan, 861.00/2 - 2246: Telegram, February 22, 1946, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/coldwar/documents/episode-1/kennan.htm>

<sup>56</sup> Peter Wallensteen, "American-Soviet Detente: What Went Wrong?", Journal of Peace Research, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Mar., 1985), pp. 1-8 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/423582.pdf?refreqid=excelsior:90cb7cb0040be76f2bc8d825a92ea456>

<sup>57</sup> Francis Fukuyama, Scott Bruckner, Sally Stoecker, "Soviet Political Perspective on Power Projection", A Rand Note, March 1987.

U.S. in Central America was greater than the one of the USSR. The geographical position of this region put at stake not only the security of the U.S. but also its economy. A falling into communism by the Central American countries would difficult the insure and continued access to strategic raw material, primarily oil and natural gas from Venezuela and Mexico and Panama Canal sea lines. The cooperation of the governments of the Central America's countries has permitted to the U.S. to easily execute its role as a world power, enabling the United States to focus attention on Asia, Europe and the Middle East. After the domino theory became popular with the Eisenhower administration, the risk to have a communist power in the region was not worthy to take. The American's feared a triple alliance between Cuba, Nicaragua and the USSR, and most importantly, the militarization of these nations. In addition to the security and economic issues, the United States has though to have a moral responsibility towards the world and has promote a set of institutional values. Even though the U.S. has continuously supported authoritarian regimes, it seems like the ultimate aim was to assure democracy within these countries.<sup>58</sup>

#### **2.4 The Civil Wars: Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador**

The political and socio-economic situation in the Central American region was very similar among the countries as these had had similar historical paths. They were all Spanish colonies, part of the Mexican Empire, and then part of the Central American Federation. In 1839 with the dissolution of the latter, all these countries had the opportunity to experience national sovereignty<sup>59</sup>. However, all these nations choose to continue with the long tradition of authoritarian regimes; exclusive political institutions; and extractive economic institutions that produced poverty to the majority of the population while uncontrolled wealth to oligarchic monopolies.<sup>60</sup> In a Marxist view, this type of outcome is not surprising as it is simply the consequence of the historical materialism caused by the hunger of mature capitalist states.<sup>61</sup> However, if we compare the English colonies with the Spanish colonies, and in particular the Central American

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<sup>58</sup> Edward Gonzales, Brian Michael Jenkins, David Ronfeldt, Cesar Sereseres; "U.S. Policy for Central America", March 1984.

<sup>59</sup> "Republica Federal de Centro America"  
[https://www.ecured.cu/Rep%C3%BAblica\\_Federal\\_de\\_Centroam%C3%A9rica](https://www.ecured.cu/Rep%C3%BAblica_Federal_de_Centroam%C3%A9rica)

<sup>60</sup> Daron Acemoglu, 2012 "Why Nations Fail"

<sup>61</sup> Cambridge University Press, "Marxism, Modernity and Postcolonial Studies"  
<https://books.google.at/books?hl=es&lr=&id=LZjb88O-pmwC&oi=fnd&pg=PA125&dq=marx+exploitation+and+colonialism&ots=mYJNm6xE3A&sig=HbKdn19HcjkXDZ1UNqMtYHBP19Y#v=onepage&q=marx%20exploitation%20and%20colonialism&f=false>

countries, we can see that the English were much better in accomplishing their holistic task, in Marx words ‘ ‘ one destructive, the other regenerating - the annihilation of the (Asiatic) society, and the laying of the material foundations of Western society (in Asia.)’ ’<sup>62</sup>. The U.S., a British colony, is now a superpower in the world; India, is one of the most influential nations in nowadays, nonetheless, no Spanish colony has ever reach this kind of position in the world. The Central American countries had always have a patriarchal, dependent relation with other countries. This condition derives from the begging of their history, with the Mayan civilizations, as a prevalent relation between master and slave seems to have become part of our identity. The white creoles seen as superiors and powerful, while the darker skinned indigenous are seen as assets, a working force happy to be exploited. It is clear that if the population can be easily manipulated by a profitable local oligarchy, it would be easier for more developed nations to do the same thing. To maintain rebellion in Central America under control was a simple and also a necessary task for the U.S. toward maintaining economic stability. Nonetheless, the extension of the Soviet influence during the Cold War made this task a little more difficult madding possible the outrageous civil wars in Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador.

The conflict started when the Truman administration came to see reformist governments in Latin America as hypothetical allies of the Soviet Union and thus a threat to the United States. In May 1950, President Truman signed National Security Council (NSC) 56/2, authorizing military aid to Latin American governments for the apparent purpose of combating "communism." That same year the Guatemalan people elected Árbenz. The latter proposed further reforms including most importantly, land reform. He was far from a communist and always declared his liberal intentions when he had the opportunity:

*"to convert our country from a dependent nation with a semi-colonial economy to an economically independent country; to convert Guatemala from a backward country with a predominantly feudal economy into a modern capitalist state; and to make this transformation in a way that will raise the standard of living of the great mass of our people to the highest level."*

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<sup>62</sup> Karl Marx, New-York Daily Tribune, June 25, 1853; "The British Rule in India"  
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1853/06/25.htm>

The 1952 Agrarian Reform Law sought to achieve these goals by redistributing uncultivated hacienda lands to increase the number of small private landholders<sup>63</sup>. The United Fruit Company, owned over 3,000,000 acres along with major utilities as the energy company, all kinds of transportation: ports, railroads and much-uncultivated land. Árbenz nationalized 234,000 acres of uncultivated land owned by UFCO, offering \$1 million in compensation. In his administration, Eisenhower had for the first time in the history of the United States a couple of brothers leading two major branches of the executive, John Foster Dulles was Secretary of State and Allen Dulles the director of the CIA. The siblings had a law firm, Sullivan, and Cromwell, that represented the United Fruit Company and owned shares in the company. Árbenz's actions led UFCO to start a personal war against his administration. The strategy was clear from the begging, UFCO planned a campaign to discredit him first in the U.S. to back up the intervention and then in Guatemala, an operation led by the CIA. They hired publicists to publish articles and advertisements in U.S. newspapers critical of Árbenz, labelling him a communist.<sup>64</sup>The Árbenz government was tag a security risk because it had allowed Communist party members in the cabinet and initiated a land reform program that infringed on holdings of the United Fruit Company. President Eisenhower went further and in March 1953 and signed NSC 144/1, quietly shelving the non-interventionist Good Neighbour Policy introduced by Roosevelt in 1933. This was the beginning of what will be the culmination of a coup against the democratically elected government of Jacobo Árbenz in Guatemala. The violence was at first psychological, The CIA created a secret base in Miami were they crafted radio registrations defaming Árbenz that were transmitted 24 hours per day.<sup>65</sup> People were told that Árbenz was a communist that may still their lands soon. They disapprove of the people started to rise as the Church was backing up these allegations. Árbenz holds tie until June 1954, when the CIA-backed "National Liberation Army" invaded Guatemala from Honduras while unmarked U.S. World War II fighter planes flew over Guatemala City, firing into the air. When the conflict took a violent path,

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<sup>63</sup> "Jacobo Arbenz chapter 2", Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gNGPj1tyrzQ>

<sup>64</sup> "Blood for Bananas: United Fruit's Central American Empire", ashington State University, 2014 <https://history.libraries.wsu.edu/fall2014/2014/08/30/the-united-fruit-companys-effect-on-central-america-in-the-early-1900s/>

<sup>65</sup> Jacobo Arbenz chapter 3, Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nYJL9eHFuYw>

Árbenz dismissed to maintain peace. In his resignation speech, he clearly exposes his position in the situation:

*"Workers, peasants, patriots! Guatemala is going through a hard trial. A cruel war against Guatemala has been unleashed. The United Fruit Company and U.S. monopolies, together with US ruling circles are responsible.... Mercenaries have unleashed fire and death, respecting nothing. We all know how cities have been bombed and strafed, women and children have suffered. We know how representatives of workers and peasants have been murdered in occupied cities... That was an act of vengeance by the United Fruit Company. We are indignant over the cowardly attack by mercenary US fliers. They know Guatemala has no adequate air force so they try to sow panic. [...] They have blamed their actions on the pretext of Communism. The truth is elsewhere -- in financial interests of the United Fruit Company and other US firms that have invested much in Guatemala.[...]"*<sup>66</sup>

The CIA installed a repressive military regime led by Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas, one of major figures in the 10 years before Ubico's dictatorship. This marked the end of the democratic revolution and installed the ground for more than 30 years of civil war. After assuming the presidency Castillo Armas, through a fraudulent plebiscite, rolled back the social and political reforms of Árbenz and Arévalo. The CIA helped Armas compile a register of those deemed threats to the state; by November 1954, the list included over 72,000 names. Aided by U.S. intelligence and military personnel, Guatemala became a police state. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Guatemala's military rulers with the blessing of the U.S. continued to persecute and liquidate their political "communist" opponents. Discontent increasingly grew, the left became militarized and launched a full-scale civil war against the government. On the 13th of November 1960, a group of left-wing junior military officers of the Escuela Politecnica national military academy, were former president Árbenz served as professor, led a failed revolt against the autocratic government of General Ydigoras Fuentes. The "Movimiento Revolucionario 13 Noviembre" was the beginning of what would be the Rebel Armed Force, the major branch of the guerrilla's front also integrated by the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP), the Revolutionary Organization of People in Arms (ORPA), and the National Directing

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<sup>66</sup> " President Arbenz's Resignation Speech", Baltimore County History Labs Program, a partnership between Baltimore County Public Schools and the UMBC Center for History Education.

[https://www.umbc.edu/che/tahlessons/pdf/historylabs/Guatemalan\\_Coup\\_student:RS06.pdf](https://www.umbc.edu/che/tahlessons/pdf/historylabs/Guatemalan_Coup_student:RS06.pdf)

Nucleus of PGT (PGT-NDN). The guerrillas were heterogeneous when referring to ideology and the use of violence. On one hand the rational like EGP that drew inspiration from the success of the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese army in resisting U.S. forces in the Vietnam War and saw the conditions of the indigenous people as a priority, or the ORPA led by Nobel Laureate Miguel Ángel Asturias. On the other hand, FAR responsible for the death of the U.S. ambassador to Guatemala, John Gordon Mein. During the civil war in Guatemala, identity was a powerful instrument as it was the ethnic majority that was screaming for help. The grievance of the indigenous was used to increase mobilization by the guerrillas. The opposition knew that going back to inclusive liberal democracy worth the violence. The Maya were already becoming a target for the government, who promulgated an ideology that perceived all Maya as natural allies of the insurrection, and thus as enemies of the state. The conflict worsened by the years and saw a major escalation with the election of General Fernando Romeo Lucas García in 1978. Social mobilization was at its peak from 1978 to 1982 and so too was the rate of killings and human rights abuses. According to the Historical Clarification Commission, recorded cases of extrajudicial killings rose from 100 in 1978 to over 10,000 in 1981. In 1982, Guatemala experienced the bloodiest period with General Efraín Ríos Montt which enjoyed close ties with the Reagan administration and with Christian conservatives in the United States, an estimated 70,000 indigenous people were killed or disappeared.<sup>67</sup> The Commission found that the total number of people killed was over 200,000; 83% of the victims were Mayan and 17% were Ladino. The State forces and related paramilitary groups were responsible for 93% of the violations documented. This conflict is considered a genocide.<sup>68</sup>

In 1979 what started in Nicaragua as a civil rebellion led by Sandino, reached its transformation on what today is known as a revolution. The Sandinistas started the opposition against nondemocratic rulers and in particular against Somoza's dynasty during the 60's. The tension increased after the assassination of Pedro Joaquín Chamorro. Social mobilization reached its peak as the death of a conservative, brought the middle class and its bourgeoisie into the conflict. Between 1978 and 1979 the Sandinista started

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<sup>67</sup> GUATEMALA "SILENT HOLOCAUST": THE MAYAN GENOCIDE, The center of Justice and Accountability <https://cja.org/where-we-work/guatemala/>

<sup>68</sup> "El caso de genocidio en Guatemala", The center of Justice and Accountability <https://cja.org/espanol-9/casos-3/el-caso-de-genocidio-en-guatemala/el-caso-de-genocidio-en-guatemala-2/>

an anti-dictatorial campaign. However, 45 years of dictatorship didn't simply end by the rebellion of the people but as a matter of a phone call between Carter and Samozá, in which the former specified that the government did not count with the support of the U.S anymore. When the Sandinistas finally seized power, they were determined to do *tabula rasa* and built a new revolutionary program. The Sandinistas found the economy as they knew it will be: in the bankrupt. For this reason, the inexperienced revolutionaries put together a policy plan that would try to establish sustainable development through 3 pillars: inclusive economy, democracy, and recruitment.<sup>69</sup> When referring to the economic criteria, they started to redistribute land owned by the ancient regime, as the Samozá Group, in the hope that smaller owners would buzz the weak market. The Sandinistas never defined themselves as communists, indeed, they favoured a mixed economy and political pluralism. Unlike Carter, President Reagan was convinced that the Sandinistas were a threat for the U.S and pushed Nicaragua to strength further relations with Cuba and the URSS that helped with the development of human and physical capital. The URSS gave a total of 486 millions of dollars for these matters. In November 1981, Reagan and his executives authorize a budget of 19.5 million to the CIA for the creation of paramilitary counterrevolutionary force.<sup>70</sup> The CIA was helped by Videla's dictatorship in Argentina, who sent agents to participate in the operation. In addition to that, the Honduran and Costa Rican governments granted the land to create military bases, where the counterrevolutionary force would live and be trained. Initially, the CIA convinced the ex-National Guard to create the Fuerza Democrática Nicaraguense (FDN) and recruited small Indian farmers discontented by the Sandinistas program of agrarian reform as the government was trying to privatize Indian land, the *Misurasata*. The third branch of the opposition was composed by revolutionaries that didn't agree with the Sandinistas methods and felt betrayed. Eden Pastora, member of the latter group, set up an opposition base in Honduras creating the Alianza Revolucionaria Democrática (ARDE). The CIA supplied the funds and the equipment, coordinated training programs, and provided intelligence and target lists but didn't physically compromise as the operations aim was to prove that the government didn't have "the monopoly of violence" as Weber would say. The strategy was to distribute free violence through mob violence, neutralization of civilian leaders and government officials and attack soft targets as

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<sup>69</sup> "CENTROAMÉRICA Revoluciones sin cambio revolucionario" Edelberto Torres-Rivas, 1997.

[http://nuso.org/media/articles/downloads/2612\\_1.pdf](http://nuso.org/media/articles/downloads/2612_1.pdf)

<sup>70</sup> "Central America Wars, 1980s" <http://peacehistory-usfp.org/central-america-wars/>

schools, health clinics and cooperatives. On 9 April 1984 the Ambassador of the Republic of Nicaragua to the Netherlands filed in the Registry of the Court an Application instituting proceedings against the United States of America in respect of a dispute concerning responsibility for military and paramilitary activities in and against Nicaragua. The International Court of Justice the 27th of June 1986 ' Decides that the United States of America, by certain attacks on Nicaraguan territory in 1983-1984, namely attacks on Puerto Sandino on 13 September and 14 October 1983 ; an attack on Corinto on 10 October 1983 ; an attack on Potosi Naval Base on 4/5 January 1984 ; an attack on San Juan del Sur on 7 March 1984 ; attacks on patrol boats at Puerto Sandino on 28 and 30 March 1984 ; and an attack on San Juan del Norte on 9 April 1984 ; hereof which involve the use of force, has acted, against the Republic of Nicaragua, in breach of its obligation under customary international law not to use force against another State". However, ICJ ' Finds that the United States of America, by producing in 1983 a manual entitled "Operaciones psicologicas en guerra de guerrillas", and disseminating it to contra forces, has encouraged the commission by them of acts contrary to general principles of humanitarian law ; but does not find a basis for concluding that any such acts which may have been committed are imputable to the United States of America as acts of the United States of America"<sup>71</sup>. Nicaragua was the only country that tried to legally punish the U.S for its negligent acts and partly accomplished its goal. The U.S. was asked to cease its intervention and to give compensation for reparations to the Republic of Nicaragua. The Congress' pass the Boland Amendment which prohibit the use of resources for Nicaraguan intervention. The Reagan government wasn't over with Nicaragua and planned the Iran-Contra Affair, a secret U.S. government arms deal whit Iran that would free some American hostages held in Lebanon but also gave logistic to the Contras<sup>72</sup>. The internal conflict known as the Contras war continued until the begging of the 90's when the Sandinistas were defeated in the 1990's elections. Nicaragua lost between 15 000 and 20 000 citizens yet it is clear that the violence during the conflict was distributed freely by both sides.<sup>73</sup> This fact lead a big part of the society to doubt on the accomplishment of the Sandinista's revolution and think of it as another unnecessary armed conflict.

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<sup>71</sup> ICJ: INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE 27 June 1986: CASE CONCERNING MILITARY AND PARAMILITARY ACTIVITIES IN AND AGAINST NICARAGUA.

<sup>72</sup> "Iran-Contra Affair"<https://www.history.com/topics/iran-contra-affair>

<sup>73</sup> "Contras reconocen 13 mil muertos en sus filas", La Prensa, 2009  
<https://www.laprensa.com.ni/2009/11/05/nacionales/6932-contras-reconocen-13-mil-muertos-en-sus-filas>

Even if the Revolution in Nicaragua did not accomplish its tasks, it surely was contagious for the others countries in Central America. In El Salvador the victory of 1979 by the Sandinistas was the spark that lit the resurrection of the Salvadorian warrior. As Edmund Burke said: "Those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it." In fact, El Salvador was the lattes country entering the civil war party in 1980 after being contaminated by the revolutionary fever. Same path of its fellows Central Americans, economy in the 30's was harsh and the Great Depression ended the coffee boom highlighting problems in El Salvador. Coffee growers cut the wages of their already impoverish workers to reduce the cost of production. In 1932 a revolutionary attempt was made by peasants led by Augustín Farabundo Martí. The revolt didn't last much and reach its end in a massacre of over 30 000 known as La Matanza. After a Nicaraguan dose of adrenaline in the 80's, the Farabundo Martí Liberación Nacional front (FMLN) was created. Dictatorships in Central America were barbaric, they didn't know how to deal with an internal conflict and statistical regression was far from understood. This ignorance will be one of the major factors of the dependence of Latin America's dictatorship in U.S. The Salvadorian were a repressed Christian population; mobilization experience a major increase after the assassination by the government of Archbishop Oscar Romero. In his homilies he denounced the numerous violations of human rights committed by the government and founded a culture of awareness<sup>74</sup>. People started to became involved in the guerrillas with the benediction of their priest. Romero sympathies with the guerrillas as they had a humanistic structure. In the guerrilla camps education was mandatory, people learn basic skills as reading and writing but they also attended a political course. The guerrillas became a refuge from violence indeed, they called themselves liberators.<sup>75</sup> The civil war saw other two major attacks within the religious majority with the rape and murder of four American churchwomen and the 1989 Jesuits Massacre. The massacre in El Salvador during the 80's was the largest lost in Central America of the 20th century. President Reagan thought that they were not sons of gods that could be communists and on February 23, 1981, the State Department released a White Paper titled "Communist Interference in El Salvador,". We already know how history goes when Reagan target a country as

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<sup>74</sup> "LAST HOMILY OF ARCHBISHOP ROMERO" March 24, 1980, [http://www.romerotrue.org.uk/sites/default/files/homilies/final\\_homily\\_of\\_archbishop\\_romero.pdf](http://www.romerotrue.org.uk/sites/default/files/homilies/final_homily_of_archbishop_romero.pdf)

<sup>75</sup> "In the name of the people" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHO-WiiZba0>

communist. In 1982 and 1983, the administration gained Congressional approval of \$117.4 million in military. In addition, in 1984, another \$196.5 million plus the U.S. arranged for international loans to the Salvadoran government amounting to \$280 million between July 1981 and September 1984<sup>76</sup>. A scenario in which the FMLN would overthrow the government was far from a realistic perspective, by 1985 government forces had quadrupled to about 55,000 troops. Over 75 000 civilians died during the Civil War that lasted 12 years from 1980 to 1992.<sup>77</sup>

## **2.5 Institutions: Peace Agreements Esquipulas I and II**

The first attempt to sign peace was made in 1986 by the Contadora Group. The foreign ministers of Colombia, Mexico, Panama, and Venezuela wanted to deal with the Central American situation before the whole region ended in total misery. The authoritarian regime in El Salvador was untouchable and stood behind the U.S. during negotiations.<sup>78</sup> Some of their objectives during the Contadora process included the preservation of its military aid and assistance relationship with the United States; the resolution of the civil conflict on terms consistent with the 1983 Constitution that, incorporated the rebels into the established system rather than allow the opposition and share power within the government; and of course a verifiable termination of Nicaraguan military and logistical aid to the FMLN insurgents. Costa Rica and Honduras demanded the establishment of a democratic government and the size reduction of the Sandinistas armed force before they would end support for the contras. By mid-1986 negotiations were deadlocked over the issues of arms limitation, democratization, and US support for the Contras.<sup>79</sup>

The 24th and 25th of May 1986, the five presidents held a reunion in the city of Esquipulas in Guatemala. The participation of the Sandinistas was at first denied specifically by the Costa Rican president Arias, but still later convene with the others. It was impossible to think of a peace in Central America without the participation of Nicaragua which was the principal subject of conflict but, it was equally difficult for the

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<sup>76</sup> "Central America Wars, 1980s" <http://peacehistory-usfp.org/central-america-wars/>

<sup>77</sup> "El Salvador", The Center for Justice and Accountability <https://cja.org/where-we-work/el-salvador/>

<sup>78</sup> "The Arias Plan" <http://countrystudies.us/el-salvador/86.htm>

<sup>79</sup> Bagley, Bruce Michael. "Contadora: The Failure of Diplomacy." *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, vol. 28, no. 3, 1986, pp. 1–32. JSTOR, JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/165705](http://www.jstor.org/stable/165705).

Central American countries to ever reach peace if they were always being controlled by major powers. Indeed, the strategic location of Esquipulas was reserved from third parties' intervention or espionage by the U.S. or the USSR. This part of the territory free from influences allowed the components to speak freely and search for a solution. It was evident that no country was prepared for a war against the U.S. as ex-President of Guatemala Marco Vinicio Cerezo said: "the war would become bad business for us". The treaty was conceived at first as a unified compromise to be supportive of each other and share political information about local and foreign interventions. When they finally wrote Esquipulas I they also integrated points referring to sustainable economic and social development and pluralistic democracy.<sup>80</sup> Esquipulas I is historically relevant as even if it can be defined as just a methodology to find peace, by deciding to hold meetings of Presidents on a regular basis; sign the "Contadora Act for Peace and Co-operation in Central America" after changing some things; and as discuss, undertake efforts to strength dialogue; it commemorates the first time that these five Central American countries cooperate together to construct a peace agreement shutting down the will of both blocks of the Cold War.

The declaration of Esquipulas II can be compared to what today we call the "Agenda 2030"; it was a set of goals that looked forward to reconstructing the impoverished nations weaken by the war. The declaration included: National Reconciliation by means of the Amnesty; Appeal for an end to hostilities; Democratization, describe as: " pluralistic and participatory, which entails the promotion of social justice and respect for human rights, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States and the right of every nation to choose, freely and without outside interference of any kind, its own economic, political and social system."; Free Elections that: "shall be held simultaneously in all the countries of Central America in the first six months of 1988, at a date to be agreed in due course by the Presidents of the Central American states."; Termination of aid for irregular forces and insurrectionist movements, this point was very discuss during the Contadora process as some countries wanted to preserve the aid from the U.S. and USSR, but for the first time: " The Governments of the five Central American States shall request Governments of the region and Governments from outside the region which are providing either overt or

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<sup>80</sup> "Esquipulas I

"[https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/CR%20HN%20GT%20NI%20SV\\_860525\\_Esq UIPULAS I.pdf](https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/CR%20HN%20GT%20NI%20SV_860525_Esq UIPULAS I.pdf)

covert military, logistical, financial or propaganda support, in the form of men, weapons, munitions, and equipment, to irregular forces or insurrectionist movements to terminate such aid; this is vital if a stable and lasting peace is to be attained in the region"; Non-use of territory to attack other states; Negotiations on security, verification and the control and limitation of weapons; Refugees and displaced persons; Co-operation, democracy, and freedom for peace and development.<sup>81</sup> The peace agreements seem to be a failure as none of this goals was properly accomplished. The region is experiencing an ever worst war against organized criminal organizations as a result of the incapability to fortified the political and economic institutions. Democracy in Central America is clearly dysfunctional, in 2009 Honduras suffered a coup d'état and now they are living an electoral crisis<sup>82</sup>. Governments are strongly corrupted and the rule of law is far from respected as there is a deficit in actual numbers in the security forces of all these countries. Economic development in the region is very low and the majority of these countries have a poverty percentage higher than 50%. The homicide rates had reach in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala the highest number in the world. In the words of former Secretary General of the UN Ban Ki-moon: *"The perception that democracy has still not responded to the aspirations of the region's poor brings home to us the need to make the fight against poverty and extreme social inequality a regional priority. Some of these problems would benefit from regional and international cooperation; others can be resolved through more effective performance by institutional structures already in place."*<sup>83</sup>

## 2.6 Conclusion chapter 2

At this point it is clear that the civil wars in Central America were no more than useless armed conflict that brought oceans of blood and nothing else. The reason why this conflict did not represent a change or did not ended in a at least an ideological revolution was

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<sup>81</sup> "Esquipulas

II" [https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/CR%20HN%20GT%20NI%20SV\\_870807\\_EsquipulasII.pdf](https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/CR%20HN%20GT%20NI%20SV_870807_EsquipulasII.pdf)

<sup>82</sup> "Crisis of Honduras democracy has roots in US tacit support for 2009 coup", The Guardian

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/07/crisis-of-honduras-democracy-has-roots-in-us-tacit-support-for-2009-coup>

<sup>83</sup> Secretary-General's remarks to the conference on "A firm and lasting peace in Central America: The pending agenda 20 years later", June 2007, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2007-06-13/secretary-generals-remarks-conference-firm-and-lasting-peace-central>

because major foreign interests were also in the table. Even in the cases of Nicaragua, where it seems that it was enough to gain political power, history shows that no country and most importantly, no government in Central America can live without the consent of the U.S. In addition to that, the scarce development of the region consequence of the lack of education, make it even more difficult for the people to understand the roots of the problem and try to solve it. It is clear that the weight of the United States and the USSR during the Cold War and further in history, is not the only reason of the actual situations of these countries. There is a lack of incentives to change the way in which institutions were established from the beginning as these countries still oligarchies disguised as democracies.

## **Chapter 3: Case study: The Northern Triangle**

### **3.1 Introduction chapter 3**

By the mid-twenties the American economist Walt Whitman Rostow published his Rostow's Stage of Economic Growth. The latter stated that it is possible to identify all societies, in their economic dimensions, as lying within one of the five categories: the traditional society, the pre-conditions for take-off into self-sustaining growth, the take-off, the drive to maturity, and the age of high mass consumption. As we saw before, countries in Central America tend to have difficulties evolving. In order to mature and be able to produce massively, is strictly necessary to have a positive degree of inclusive economic institutions. Thanks to the findings of Pereira and Teles<sup>84</sup> we can state that there is a strong link between stable political institutions and economic growth, especially within democratic systems. Furthermore, the results suggested that the impact of political institutions on economic growth in consolidate democracies is very low compare to the same impact in unstable democracies. Linking these two theories, we can conclude that it would be very difficult for a nation to pass from one stage to the next without strengthen political and economic institutions. This could explain the difficulty that countries in Central America are having to consolidate a proper democracy.

History has shown that when leaders and citizens recognize the importance of the creation of inclusive political and economic institutions, empires are created and technologies are developed maximizing the quantities of human and physical capital necessities for optimal production e.g. Great Britain and The Glorious Revolution that lead to the Industrial Revolution. However, empirical prove has also shown that economic growth is also possible within a nation with extractive political institutions in two different but corresponding circumstances. First, growth is possible under high-productive elites that are able to manage and developed their own resources. In the sixteen

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<sup>84</sup> To assess the importance of political institutions on economic growth Pereira and Teles (2010) developed an econometric model (a system GMM estimator with an autoregressive distributed lags) using yearly data in a large sample of 109 countries covering a maximum time span from 1975 to 2004. See "Political Institutions, Economic Growth and Democracy: The Substitute Effect" <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/political-institutions-economic-growth-and-democracy-the-substitute-effect/>

and eighteenth century, the Caribbean region was one of the wealthiest thanks to the mass production of sugar that was sold worldwide. This fortune was produced by slaves, which were the majority of the population, but enjoyed and organized by elites that allocated correctly all the necessary resources for the process. Second, growth is possible when political institutions allowed some degree of inclusiveness in the economic area. The latter is closely related to how much is the political power secured i.e. until the monopoly is not threatened. Growth in Central America can be explained by one of these two assumptions depending on the period of time. The former can be easily illustrated by the Mayan city-states located in Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. The shift between these two options can be explained by the strong support of the United States in the region. Industrialization was a process led by the United States thus by an economy where economic institutions were inclusive. Authoritarian regimes during the nineteenth century felt politically secured by their allies which made them prone to inclusiveness. Central American nations were not ready for a forced democracy. They did not have the time to understand it. The United States try to give guidance and support in many ways, The Alliance of Progress, Brady Plan and The Washington Consensus for example.

However, the ‘one size fits all’ view brought even more poverty and violence. Extractive institutions and the strong influence of the U.S in Central America had catastrophic consequences. The more frequent seems to be violence. At the end of the nineties when Central American nations were recovering from the conflict, the U.S. started to deport gang members back home. In a very short time gang members started to strongly organize and increasing their influence. States suffering from this phenomena had lost the monopoly of violence which puts the whole society in constant danger. Organized criminal groups also operate with drug, arms and human smugglers which makes the problem even bigger. This particular decision taken by the United States brought serious problems in particular in the region known as El Triangulo Norte or the Northern Triangle referring to Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras. These nations suffer high levels of violence perpetrated by organized criminal groups. In the latest years the homicides index has dramatically increased.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, in this area there is intensification of crimes such as sexual violence, disappearance, forced recruitment in

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<sup>85</sup> “Drug and violence in the Northern Triangle”, The Broker by Pien Metaal and Liza ten Velde, July 3 2014 <http://www.thebrokeronline.eu/Articles/Drugs-and-violence-in-the-Northern-Triangle>

armed gangs and extortion. This kind of violence affects various kinds of people, normally the weakest ones such as children and women. With this case study, we will try to expose three of the main problems faced by democracies in Central America. I will illustrate each problem with a specific case e.i. drug trade in Guatemala, gang wars in El Salvador and corruption in Honduras.

### **3.2 Drug Trade in Guatemala:**

Considering the geographical position of Guatemala, the latter could metaphorically be seen as the biggest gate to enter the richer countries of North America. Guatemala seems particularly appropriated for drug trade as in addition to a 590 miles' border with Mexico, which most of it is remote, they also possess ports on the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific Ocean, along with borders with Belize, Honduras and El Salvador. According to official estimates, there are at least 1,200 "blind" or unobserved border crossing points along Guatemala's borders, 125 of which allow for the crossing of vehicles without any kind of immigration controls. Even at formal transit points on major highways, the infrastructure and manning of guard posts are often insufficient to provide effective control<sup>86</sup>. Nearly 400 metric tons of cocaine passes through Guatemala each year, 75% of the total amount arriving in the US.<sup>87</sup>

Guatemala has lived a turbulent path when referring to drug trade organizations. By the early 1980s, the local traders saw a major opportunity as Colombian traffickers faced growing efforts by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency and Defence Department to interdict illegal drug shipments from Colombia, across the Caribbean, to the US. These cartels sought new routes and found in Guatemala a network of existing trafficking zones and routes, controlled jointly by local community leaders and by military officials who could guarantee easy transit even at formal border crossings.

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<sup>86</sup> "Criminal Organizations and Illicit Trafficking in Guatemala's Border Communities", The Wilson Center by Ralph Espach, Javier Meléndez Quiñonez, Daniel Haering, and Miguel Castillo Girón, December 2011 <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/CNA%20Organized%20Crime%20in%20Guatemalan%20Border%20Communities%2012.2011.pdf>

<sup>87</sup> "Guatemala Human Rights Commission Fact Sheet: Drug Trafficking in Guatemala", Guatemala Human Rights Commission

Before 2008, the local trafficking of drugs, humans, arms, and other contraband was mostly controlled by local capos, individuals and families with a long tradition of ownership and influence within their communities. These include the Mendoza, Lorenzana, Ortíz López and León families, each of which controlled strategic areas near the borders. However, the stable, controlled, relatively peaceful system of trafficking in Guatemala, in which foreign groups paid Guatemalan traffickers for safe and secure passage and otherwise for the most part left them alone, ended in 2008.

Part of the rupture of this system can be attributed to the arrests of top level Guatemalan transportistas. However, the principal reason of this change is called the *tumbe*: the stealing of drugs in transit and their resale. The rise of the *tumbe* among Guatemalan transportistas, precipitated the need for a firm response on the part of the Mexican cartels. The Zetas penetrated the region and seized control by establishing intelligence, presenting offers and threats to whomever currently traffics in the region, and committing violence against those who do not subordinate their operations to Zeta control.

The infiltration of foreign criminal organizations in Guatemala has led to internal violence among different players particularly in the borders. The Guatemalan government has focused its border security efforts on the border with Mexico as is almost 600 miles long and runs through 22 municipalities and 4 departments. Still, on the Guatemalan side, one official estimated that there were no more than 100 police and 1,000 military personnel in the entire state of Petén, an area equal in size to that of El Salvador. Despite these poor efforts, the communities bordering El Salvador and Honduras remain the most violent in the country.

Violence brought by the DTO's came along with arms trafficking. A new report has provided additional information on arms trafficking routes in Guatemala, showing that they appear to mirror the drug trafficking hot spots utilized by the country's criminal groups. Guatemala has the highest rate of firearms per capita in the Northern Triangle with an estimate of 13.1 in 2016.

Another big problem brought by the DTO is the land grabbing and deforestation. Guatemala had the highest rate of deforestation of Central America, losing almost 1% of its forest cover each year. Huge swathes of land, of more than 1,000 hectares, were cleared

in many regions. The region of Petén was one of the hardest hit, with 75% of the forest loss in 2000-13 in this area.<sup>88</sup> This “narco-deforestation,” occurred through three interrelated mechanisms. First, smugglers cut roads and landing strips from the forest. Second, money and guns spilled over from the drug traffic, destabilizing the frontier. Third, drug traffickers had to launder their cash; using drug money to clear land for commodity production.<sup>89</sup>

### **3.3 Gang Wars in El Salvador:**

Social violence is driven primarily by a particular element of organized crime: the street gangs of the Northern Triangle. Gangs can be considered as non-state armed groups categorized as a type of actor that carries out criminal and violent activities and can operate in urban and non-urban societies. Gangs can be loosely organized and moderately or highly cohesive; their longevity can range from a few months to decades and, most importantly, a key characteristic that distinguishes gangs from other non-state armed groups is that they do not seek to overthrow the state.<sup>90</sup>

El Salvador registered an unprecedented high intentional homicide rate of around 103 per 100 000 population in 2015. Official statistics suggest that around two-thirds of these many homicides were committed by gang members.<sup>91</sup> The majority of the present day gangs appeared by the end of the civil war in 1992 when Salvadorian gang members were being deported from the US to El Salvador<sup>92</sup>. At the time the military was forced to demilitarize and disarm; without a security force the government wasn't prepared for the arrival of a new enemy. Indeed, data shows that in 2015 the average rate of approximately 18 violent deaths per day in El Salvador, exceeded the average rate of 16 violent deaths per day during the civil war of the 80's.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> “Cocaine production and deforestation in Central America”, Latin American Post, May 18 2017  
<https://www.latinamericanpost.com/15234-cocaine-production-and-deforestation-in-central-america>

<sup>89</sup> “From Cocain Cowboys to Narco-Ranchers”, Foreign Policy by Saul Elbein, July 8, 2016  
<https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/07/08/guatemala-cocaine-central-america-drug-forest-maya-biosphere-reserve-cattle-ranching/>

<sup>90</sup> “The war report 2017”, Geneva Academy, 2017.

<sup>91</sup> “As Deadly as Armed Conflict?”, Cantor

<sup>92</sup> “As Deadly as Armed Conflict?”, Cantor

<sup>93</sup> “No Boundaries: Transnational Latino Gangs and America Law Enforcement”, University of Michigan Press by T.Diaz,, 2009.

Street gangs can be considered as a variant of the classic territorially organized crime groups. They differ from the others as they are comprised almost entirely of young males being extended in the 12-30 age range; their focus is not on financial gain but on the dominance of territory; and they do not have predetermined political ideologies or any goals related with overthrowing the government.<sup>94</sup> Their main activity is to demand a payment, sometimes call ‘war tax’ to workers in the public transportation business; merchants; private schools and so on; to guarantee their so called protection.

Currently in the Northern Triangle, two major Maras are operating and one of them was conceived by Salvadorian pioneers following the Los Angeles-style gang culture. According to UNODC, The Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Mara Barrio 18 (M-18), who are historical rivals, appear to be involved not only in war taxes but also in theft and robberies, extortion, street-level drug trafficking, migrants smuggling, human trafficking, murder-for-hire and firearms trafficking<sup>95</sup>. All of this is possible as the Maras are well organized and more importantly, increasingly well-armed with M-16; AK-47 and; Galil rifles, considered a war weapon in Salvadorian legislation.<sup>96</sup> The MS-13 and the M-18 are currently present in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, the US and Canada.<sup>97</sup> Presumably, this gang have ties with drug cartels and in particular with major Mexican and Colombian cartels like Los Zetas, and the Sinaloa cartel.<sup>98</sup>

Organization often takes place inside the prisons, as some of these are specifically for gang members who at the same time are split out in different prisons for each gang. Salvadoran prisons are the most crowded in the entire American continent, and their overpopulation usually lingers around 300 percent.<sup>99</sup> The environment is contaminated with diseases including fungal skin diseases, tuberculosis, HIV which remain untreated as part of extraordinary measures. Rehabilitation in this conditions is hard to imagine as

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<sup>94</sup> “As Deadly as Armed Conflict?”, Cantor

<sup>95</sup> UNODC, Transnational Organized Crime in Central America and the Caribbean: A Threat Assessment, September 2012, p 27, [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/TOC\\_Central\\_America\\_and\\_the\\_Caribbean\\_english.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/TOC_Central_America_and_the_Caribbean_english.pdf).

<sup>96</sup> “The war report 2017”, Geneva Academy, 2017.

<sup>97</sup> ‘MS13’, InSight Crime by S. Velázquez, 9 March 2017, <https://www.insightcrime.org/el-salvador-organized-crime-news/mara-salvatrucha-ms-13-profile/>

<sup>98</sup> ‘Mara Salvatrucha (MS13)’, InSight Crime, 11 January 2017, <http://es.insightcrime.org/noticias-sobre-crimen-organizado-en-el-salvador/mara-salvatrucha-ms-13-perfil>

<sup>99</sup> “The unbelievable hell in El Salvador’s Prisons”, InSight Crime by C. Martinez,, 28 December 2016, <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/unbelievable-hell-inside-el-salvador-prisons/>

human rights protection are constantly denied. In fact, poor conditions fortified the relationship between free gang members and those in prison as the former are expected to provide for the latter because sooner or later they will switch up roles.

The Salvadorian Minister of Defence has stated that there are approximately 60 000 gang members in El Salvador and only 50 000 officials combining police force and the army<sup>100</sup>. Studies conducted by the Salvadorian Ministry of Defence show that an estimated 10% of the population work for these two Maras.<sup>101</sup> In addition, one should take into account that if a family member is a gang member, it is complicated to dissociate the rest of the family from the gang.<sup>102</sup> Conflict between security forces and gangs have become very common and a major problem for the civilian population. According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, in 2015, 432 gun fights were reported, an annual increase of 171%. As a consequence of the attacks, in 2016, 220 000 civilians escaped the conflict.<sup>103</sup>

The first concrete response to combat this conflict was made in 2003 by President Francisco Flores. He implemented the Mano Dura policy which was replaced one year later by the Super Mano Dura policy. The latter was way more repressive as allowed apprehension based on appearance. These policies were highly inefficient as they created more violence in the country, where gangs responded by killing more civilians and officials. The Plan Safe El Salvador was the policy that followed up in 2014. A holistic approach, both preventive and repressive as in one hand provided youth employment and education; and in the other hand the militarization of the most violent areas by expanding security in public transport, increasing state presence in the most dangerous municipalities etc.<sup>104</sup> At the end of 2016, the Northern Triangle states decided to launch a Tri-national Task Force that aimed to maintain government control and public order. The

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<sup>100</sup> "Pandilleros de El Salvador superan en numero a efectivos de seguridad", PanAm Post by T. Molina, 23 October 2015, <https://es.panampost.com/thabatamolina/2015/10/23/pandilleros-de-el-salvador-superan-en-numero-a-efectivos-de-seguridad/>.

<sup>101</sup>, 'Salvador: un Etat sous contrôle', ARTE by H. Van Offel, G. Roudier and S. Avalos, 30 January 2016, <http://info.arte.tv/fr/salvador-un-etat-sous-contrôle>.

<sup>102</sup> "The war report 2017", Geneva Academy, 2017.

<sup>103</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring System, Global Report on Internal Displacement 2017, <http://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2017/> p 22–23.

<sup>104</sup> "Consejo Nacional de Seguridad Ciudadana y Convivencia, Plan El Salvador Seguro", Executive Summary, 15 January 2015, <https://app.box.com/s/qk24npw6f2fqhti9p7hfderrmto3kfvu7>

triple security is composed by members of the judicial system of the 3 countries, with the help of military personnel and national police, seeking to neutralize crime and traffic.<sup>105</sup>

### **3.4 Corruption in Honduras:**

Honduras is the only country of the Triangulo Norte that was spared from the epidemic civil wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, it is considered one of the major players when referring to illegal drug traffic. Estimates vary, but between 140 and 300 tons of cocaine are believed to pass through the country each year.<sup>106</sup> The persistency of this phenomena found its nutrients in the weak institutions founded hundreds of years ago by the Spaniards. Corruption in Honduras has led to political instability that has been positively exploited by different interest groups, including drug cartels.

The country's first premier international drug trafficker was Juan Ramón Matta Ballesteros. Matta was able to escape custody in the United States in the 70's joining what would become the Guadalajara Cartel. Then, he established what can be described as the Honduran bridge, linking the Medellín Cartel and the Guadalajara Cartel. The connections between Matta and the Honduran government were always tight as he always had powerful political influence. In 1978 he financed a military coup and in 1986, after bribing his way out of jail in Colombia, he bought off the Honduran government to be safe from prosecution until 1988. Even if at the end Matta was capture by the U.S., which caused rage inside the Honduran population and culminated in the burning down of the US Consulate in Honduras, it is important to know that the US government, contracted Matta's air fleet to get aid and weapons to Nicaragua's Contras, who were fighting the Sandinista government at the time.

The political instability in Honduras has seen a long path. The experiment of civilian governments, starting in the 80's, saw a major failure in 2009 after a coup against former President Manuel Zelaya Rosales. This episode illustrates both unprepared security forces and the weak and disrespected rule of law. Indeed, part of the Honduran

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<sup>105</sup> "Northern Triangle Countries Create Trinational Force', Diálogo by J. Pelcastre,, 9 December 2016, <https://dialogo-americas.com/en/articles/northern-triangle-countries-create-trinational-force>.

<sup>106</sup> Honduras Profile, InSight Crime, URL: <https://www.insightcrime.org/honduras-organized-crime-news/honduras/>

population still consider the military coup as constitutional succession. In the wake of the coup, criminal groups profited from the crisis increasing the number of trade as state security forces 'attention were away from crime.

Honduras' police force is one of the most corrupt in the region. In addition to demanding bribes, passing information to criminal groups, and allowing drug shipments to pass unchecked, some Honduran police have reportedly participated in, and even directed, violent criminal operations. In fact, Alfredo Landaverde, former counter-narcotics chief was shot dead just days after accusing the police in San Pedro Sula of linkages to narco-trafficking. Since 2011, the country has been engaged in a police reform process aimed at weeding out corrupt elements. For years this process saw few concrete results, but in early 2016, the government created a police purge commission following revelations that top-ranking members of the police had participated in the 2009 murder of Honduras' anti-drug czar, General Julián Arístides González<sup>107</sup>.

According to Transparency International, Honduras is the most corrupted country in the region. As claimed by a source linked to organized crime cases in the country, 90% of campaign funds come from narco-traffickers. Though it is of course impossible and extremely dangerous to verify these numbers, the follow examples of the strong corrupted bipartidism in Honduras, could strongly support this thesis:

- Liberal Party: Yani Rosenthal former presidential candidate of the Liberal party was charged in October 2015 along with his father, Jaime Rosenthal, a former vice president of Honduras, and his cousin, Yankel Rosenthal, a former minister of investment under current Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez, for money laundry.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> "Honduras Suspends Ex- Police Directors Implicated in Drug Czar Murder", InSight Crime, <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/brief/honduras-suspends-ex-police-directors-implicated-in-drug-czar-murder/>

<sup>108</sup> " Honduran politician sentenced to three years in U.S. for money laundry", Reuters by Brendan Pierson, December 16 2017. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-honduras-moneylaundering/honduran-politician-sentenced-to-three-years-in-u-s-for-money-laundering-idUSKBN1E92Z4>

- National Party: In 2017, Fabio Lobo son of former president Porfirio Lobo was sentenced with 24 years of prison for attempting drug trade in the U.S<sup>109</sup>. That same year, member of the Cachiros Cartel, Devis Maradiaga, gave declarations implicating Ramon Lobo, and Jorge Lobo brother and cousin of former president Lobo, who helped him maintain connection with his narco-partners<sup>110</sup>.

It is evident that this type of internal corruption within the executive has contaminated the remaining judicial and legislative power as cooperation is necessary for its vitality. Corruption remains a big challenge for Honduras as impunity still is a vicious circle.

### 3.5 Conclusion case study

Today, the causes of this perpetuate violence:

- 164,000 human beings are asking and applying for asylum coming from Triangulo Norte. Ten times more than in the latest five years.
- 174,000 internally displaced people (IDP) in Honduras (this research is based on a process of profile identification of 2014, realized by 21 municipalities (21 out of 298 in the country))
- 214,000 effected deportations. Citizens from the Northern Triangle have been deported from United States and Mexico in 2016. Estimates show that 450,000 migrants entered Mexico in an irregular form.

All these bottlenecks limit the well-functioning of democracy. First, because violence and insecurity the society lacks the right conditions were to enjoy freely political rights. Even if they do, corruption is so deeply injected that governments can no longer be legitimize by tricked universal suffrage. Moreover, in places were democracy is better conserve as El Salvador, the state has no resources to fight organize crime and gang wars. The corruption and the lack of control of the government creates a negative environment for development through economic growth. Society remains mostly poor which is why people seek other destinies even if they are illegal. In the majority of the cases people do

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<sup>109</sup> "Fabio Lobo es sentenciado a 24 años de cárcel en Nueva York", Diario La Prensa, Grupo OPSA, September 5 2017. [https://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1105401-410/fabio\\_lobo-sentencia-narco-corte-nuevayork-eua-trafico\\_droga-honduras-](https://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1105401-410/fabio_lobo-sentencia-narco-corte-nuevayork-eua-trafico_droga-honduras-)

<sup>110</sup> "Cachiro también implica a hermano de Pepe Lobo, a dos diputados y un alcalde", Diario La Prensa, Grupo OPSA, March 9 2017. <https://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1051087-410/cachiro-tambi%C3%A9n-implica-a-hermano-de-pepe-lobo-a-dos-diputados-y>

not have the possibility to escape the country. And have to live with the fear of the “war tax”. Also, the youth lacks of incentives as public education is also threatened by gangs. All these examples gives us an insight of the situation live by the Central American people, and how hard could it be for these citizens to take the time to capture every institutional problem that undermined democracy.

## Conclusion:

As we saw before thanks to the Democracy Index<sup>111</sup>, in Central America nations have different degrees of democracy. But how do we measure democracy? Simply put, democracy means rule by the people. This simple maxim has been elaborated by many scholars in order to illustrate the different levels of how much the people is actually ruling the nation. Democracy can be seen as a decision-making process. For Robert Dahl<sup>112</sup>, the democratic process must make effective participation and voting equality available to all adults who are subject to the binding collective decision of society. Democratic system secure effective participation where citizens have an adequate and equal opportunity, for expressing their preferences as to the final outcome. A democracy must also provide citizens with opportunities for understanding civic issues, as well as allow them to have control over matters that reach the decision-making agenda, and finally there has to be voting equality at the decisive stage<sup>113</sup>. In fact also the Democracy Index is based on similar criteria: electoral process and pluralism, functioning of government, political participation, and political culture and civil liberties. Democracy is positioned in a spectrum that ranges countries from authoritarian regimes where none of these principles are met, hybrid democracies where some of these principles are met, and finally the ideal, perfect democracies. Most of the countries in Central America have continuously vacillated between authoritarian regimes and hybrid democracies as if there were no other options. Democracy in Central America does not work for the reasons presented by Dahl: there is no proper education, there is no proper information, and there is a lack of effective participation. In this study I have tried to give a valid explanation of the origin of the social and political barrage in which these nations are today. Nations in Central America are a perfect illustration for the *Iron Law of Oligarchy* as progressive social movements

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<sup>111</sup> "Democracy Index", The Economist Intelligence Unit, [http://www.eiu.com/Handlers/WhitepaperHandler.ashx?fi=Democracy\\_Index\\_2017.pdf&mode=wp&campaignid=DemocracyIndex2017](http://www.eiu.com/Handlers/WhitepaperHandler.ashx?fi=Democracy_Index_2017.pdf&mode=wp&campaignid=DemocracyIndex2017)

<sup>112</sup> Robert Dahl, the Sterling Professor of Political Science Emeritus at Yale University, is author of numerous books, including *A Preface To Democratic Theory* (1956); *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* (1961); *Polyarchy: Participation and Observation* (1971); *Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy: Autonomy vs. Control* (1982); and *Democracy, Liberty, and Equality* (1986). He has also authored many articles, including *Decision-Making in a Democracy: The Supreme Court as a National Policy Maker* (1957).

<sup>113</sup> "Democracy and Its Critics by Robert A. Dahl", Review by Cary Coglianese, The Michigan Law Review Association, 1990, [https://www.jstor.org/stable/1289333?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/1289333?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents)

inevitably become undemocratic and dominated by a conservative élite<sup>114</sup>. Developed by sociologist Robert Michels in his 1911 this political theory explains that all complex organizations eventually develop into oligarchies as is necessary for the organizational process.

We see that determining the democratic state is the first step since what really matters is getting to understand why democracies in Central America still dysfunctional. It is impossible to solve a problem without acknowledging the root causes. We could ask why these societies fail to produce a change like the one that occurred in France for example, during the French Revolution, the French fought for 10 winning the Declaration of the Rights of the Citizens and the abolition of monarchy. Or why did they not fight to get social and economic reforms like the workers after the Black Death in England? Now we know that in the countries of Central America as for the rest of Latin America, societies have lived under the law of the strongest for much longer. As we saw, the Mayans were small monarchies with a very defined social pyramid, which produced a lot of inequality. Education was a privilege as was urbanization. Even during the period of pacification under the Spanish influence societies where reduce to be a labor force and where not treated as equals. Societies in Central America have failed to established a democracy because they have not had the means to understand it. How can a society ask and fight for something that they do not fully comprehend? In this paper we have seen how the extractive institutional framework that have been passed from generation to generation has become a habit. Compare to other countries as South Korea for example, little has been accomplish. It seems true that one of the greatest challenges of the newborn democracies, is to make sure that every single citizen understands at least the importance of being aware of which combination of political and economic policy should the government have i.e. when economical liberties might be appeased with the creation of social and political rights and vice versa, at that specific point in history, hopefully taking into consideration past and present generations.

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<sup>114</sup> Iron Law of Oligarchy: A theory of trade unions and socialist political parties formulated by the sociologist, Robert Michels, in the early years of the twentieth century. It expresses a deeply pessimistic viewpoint that progressive social movements inevitably become undemocratic and dominated by a conservative élite. The theory has had most influence on the analysis of trade unions and is associated with the view that unions are controlled by an unaccountable bureaucracy. Critics of the theory believe that it exaggerates the extent of leader control of unions and argue that the trend towards oligarchy is reversible. Oxford Reference :

<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100011347>

In conclusion, what I am trying to argue on this paper is that democracies in Central America, in particular in Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala are dysfunctional because they have not had the time to be properly established. First, democracy was brought into being by oligarchs seeking economic profit. An uneducated society could not understand, preserve or protect democracy. Second, when democracy was starting to be promoted by greater powers in Central America, the goal was to win an ideological race. The geographical position of Central America obliges these nations to be under the spell of the United States. Not only the Central American nations have a history of more than three thousand years under extractive institutions, but they also lack sovereignty. These nations are dependent both politically and economically from the United States and its decisions on economic and foreign policy as they are their principal partner. Democracy is certainly the best option for societies, as the development of their country strongly depends on the performance of the candidate as the institutional system is weak. Which is why the major challenge for the societies in Central America is to ask for the proper grounds to establish a democracy. Education is essential to create opportunity for a brighter future. In Central America as in many other countries, people tend to use violence as a response to injustice. We have seen that every time society has turned to violence to produce a change, they have failed. To find a peaceful way to change the tragic situation in Central America seems very difficult. As we have seen, the forces of order are often corrupted, the rule of law is nearly nonexistent, societies are condemned to large percentages of poverty and lack of economic opportunity. The challenges that the societies of these countries have, are bigger and harder from what we can imagine. They are disarmed against corruption and live under the rule of governments that have been appeasing their rage with little improvements over the years.

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## Summary:

Lo scopo di questa tesi non è di dare solamente una spiegazione alla disfunzionalità della democrazia nella maggior parte dei paesi in Centro America bensì cercar di capire perché queste democrazie rimangono disfunzionali. La mia ipotesi è che le democrazie in Centro America non funzionano perché non sono state stabilite e nemmeno implementate nella maniera adeguata. Abbiamo visto che la utilità che viene data alla democrazia quando è stata incorporata nelle istituzioni politiche di questi paesi, non era quella di dare il potere al popolo, ma piuttosto, di trovare benefici economici nel mercato globale, sotto l'influenza dei grandi poteri. La risposta alla domanda perché le democrazie in Centro America non migliorano, che è il nucleo di questa tesi, ha una risposta basata nella sociologia politica di ogni nazione. Studiando la storia delle società moderne e antiche, vedendo lo sviluppo delle loro istituzioni, della loro urbanistica, capendo come i popoli e i governi reagiscono al conflitto possiamo capire il motivo della disfunzionalità delle democrazie in Centro America, e l'incapacità vero un miglioramento adatto ai nostri tempi.

Il ragionamento comincia cercando di capire perché la democrazia è nata nel continente Europeo e non nel continente Americano. Facendo un paragone tra le civiltà classiche e le loro filosofie politiche possiamo rispondere a questo primo punto. Sin dagli inizi delle fondazioni delle prime civiltà, l'uomo si è dimostrato un animale politico come lo descrisse Aristotele. Ogni uomo è diverso e perciò ogni politica è diversa. Nello stesso momento in cui i Romani stavano lasciando indietro una repubblica per convertirsi nell'impero più grande della storia, i Greci vivevano in una democrazia e i Maya stavano fortificando le loro monarchie. La civiltà precolombiana che era situata nella regione che oggi conosciamo come Centro America, specificatamente come Guatemala, Belize, Honduras e Il Salvador, è la civiltà Maya. Ci sono tante differenze tra queste tre grandi civiltà ma ci sono anche delle somiglianze. I Maya erano divisi in città-stato come quelle dell'Antica Grecia, ad esempio. Tuttavia, nell'Antica Grecia, luogo di nascita della democrazia, i cittadini avevano diritto di partecipazione negli affari politici, e l'educazione era un pilare dello stato. Il pensiero politico inclusivo era dimostrato anche nelle costruzioni architettoniche, dove le città ospitavano la popolazione, e le piazze venivano utilizzate come un ritrovo comune. Contrariamente ai greci, il sistema politico maya viene definito teocratico, in quanto il re aveva tutto il potere concesso dagli dei. Le città-stato

Maya, comprendevano una somma di piramidi ed edifici nei quali alloggiava solamente una piccola percentuale composta dai nobili e dal clero, mentre il resto della popolazione viveva nella foresta. Altri paragoni presentati nella prima parte del primo capitolo, come le somiglianze fra la caduta della Repubblica romana e quella delle città-stato Maya, per illustrare quanto sono fondamentali le istituzioni politiche nella formazione delle società, e soprattutto per sottolineare quanto è vecchia questa tipologia di istituzioni politiche estrattive. Nella seconda parte del primo capitolo cerco di illustrare la rigidità di queste istituzioni politiche. Dopo la caduta della civiltà Maya, la parte più grande della popolazione ha migrato al Nord verso gli Aztechi, o al Sud verso gli Incas. Nel 1502 quando sono arrivati gli Spagnoli, sono state trovate solo piccole comunità che vivevano nascoste nella foresta. Ciò non toglie il fatto che il metodo di conquista che usavano gli Spagnoli, perfezionato da Cortes e poi da Pizarro, si basava nel uso della organizzazione politica previa. I conquistatori catturavano i re per poi sottomettere il popolo. Per fortificare questo argomento, faccio un paragone con i conquistatori Inglesi e la loro esperienza totalmente diversa che li ha portati anni dopo alla fondazione degli Stati Uniti. Questo capitolo cerca di sottolineare il fatto che i paesi in Centro America hanno una lunga storia di istituzioni politiche estrattive e ineguaglianza.

Nel secondo capitolo di questa tesi, ho esposto il fatto che le democrazie in Centro America sono vulnerabili, non solo perché la loro implementazione non è stata fatta correttamente, essendo stata eseguita solo per uno scopo economico, ma anche perché viviamo in un mondo dove i paesi piccoli vengono influenzati dai paesi più grandi, come abbiamo visto precedentemente durante la conquista. Difatti, le guerre in Centro America durante il ventesimo secolo, illustrano perfettamente queste due supposizioni. Durante il periodo della guerra fredda questa regione era di uno straordinario valore, dovuto alla sua posizione geografica strategica, per gli Stati Uniti, che stavano combattendo contro la Russia in uno scontro ideologico. Gli Stati Uniti non potevano permettersi di perdere i loro alleati centroamericani, visto che avevano bisogno della loro produzione per mantenere i costi della guerra. Conseguentemente all'ondata democratica, i popoli in Centro America sono diventati sempre più propensi a questo sistema di governo, cercando di togliere i regimi autoritari, formati dalle vecchie oligarchie, provocando le guerre in Centro America. Questi conflitti sono stati finanziati sia dagli Stati Uniti che dalla Russia, condannando i popoli ad anni di guerre e di miseria, e si sono conclusi in accordi di pace che delineavano istituzioni politiche inclusive che non sono mai state implementate.

Nella parte finale del mio discorso, illustro la situazione attuale della regione con un caso di studio sul “trianuglo norte” che comprende i paesi del Guatemala, del Salvador e dell’Honduras, esponendo i problemi principali sofferti da questa regione, ossia le organizzazioni transnazionali di droghe, la corruzione politica e le guerre fra gang. Queste difficoltà sono viste come i nemici maggiori della democrazia e della società, perciò ho ritenuto importante presentarli come la conseguenza di un lungo periodo di istituzioni politiche estrattive.

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