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Summary and Reflection to *Refugees of a Hidden War*

In *Refugees of a Hidden War*, anthropologist Beatrice Manz examines the lives of Guatemalan refugees and Indian civilians in the early 1980's following a period of mass terror. This eighteen month period of terror was characterized by the nation's military raging war against its civilian population as means of extinguishing politically threatening grass roots organizations. Military tactics included but were not limited to burning of crops, abductions, rape, families burned alive, and massacres of entire villages. These attacks left some 400 destroyed communities, one million civilians displaced, and 200,000 refugees who fled to neighboring nations.

Manz's examination focused on three pre-dominantly Indian regions: Huehuetenganago, Ixil, and Ixcán. Manz explained how communities in all three areas were affected by military control. A prominent similarity was the implementation of a civil patrol system; this form of civil duty was often obligatory and met with harsh consequences if avoided. The military utilized the system to maintain control of the men who served, to monitor others in the community, and combat any potential threat from rebel groups. The military's control extended to any travel throughout communities and land usage. Traveling civilians were required to petition for traveling passes, which were seldom obtained, and subjected to checking points throughout the country. The military's control of the land also limited communities in their ability to cultivate sufficient crops and economically devastated many. Most communities were afflicted with volatile and fear ridden environments that often suppressed their human rights. Civilians who failed to adhere to military policies, demonstrated "suspicious" behavior, or had the misfortune of falling victim to unjustified attacks were detained by the military and more often than not they were murdered.

Reaching beyond Guatemala, Manz reported on refugees who had traveled to southern Mexico after the initial terror. At first, these refugees faced better conditions than their counterparts who had chosen to remain behind. Specifically, in Chiapas, refugees were warmly welcomed and aided by the Mexican community. However, with such a great influx of refugees the Mexican government enforced relocation camps that later proved to limit resources among refugees and decreased their self-sufficiency. Refugees that returned to Guatemala were often suspected of having fled due to association with rebel organizations. For those who cleared extensive military examination they were reintegrated back into a community. Often, refugees lost all their land to military control due to their absence. In 1986, Manz concluded her report with the message that as long as the democratic Guatemalan government failed to retain control over the military, human rights and safety would not be guaranteed.

My reaction to this book is a potpourri of emotions and thoughts. I feel compassion and sympathy for the innocent Guatemalans who suffered. I am outraged by the cruelty and complete disregard for humanity by the military. And I am left in awe that these horrific crimes were committed between its own people. While the events described took place in the 1980's, its effects are still present in Guatemala and its people —the most disturbing thought to me.