

**Master Narratives and Their Divergent
Interpretations | Challenges and
Vulnerabilities for Public Diplomacy in
Guatemala**

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SMPA 6270: Strategic Narratives in Public Diplomacy

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Spring 2020

Guatemala, the Central American country home to roughly 17 million people is a key ally for the United States. Maintaining a peaceful and beneficial relationship between the United States and other continental partners has long been considered a priority for US foreign policy. A healthy relationship with Guatemala is advantageous for the United States as it lends itself to cooperation on pressing issues such as immigration, regional security, trade, and business. Many of these pressing issues are linked. The US State Department states that one of the key US policy objectives in Guatemala is “reducing illegal migration and illicit trafficking of goods and people to the United States by boosting broad-based economic growth, addressing the economic drivers of migration, and engaging the government and the private sector to reduce poverty.”¹ In 2019, “the percentage of asylum-seeking adults with children in tow or children arriving without parents has soared, especially from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, three countries in Central America with high rates of poverty and violence.”² These family unit migrants have increased by 406% compared to the 2018 fiscal year and 92% of the migrant families are from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.³ In 2013, the US Ambassador to Guatemala claimed that “from the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the Organization of American States (OAS) to regional law enforcement and counternarcotics cooperation, Guatemala is emerging as a key actor.”⁴ US-Guatemala relations focus on building solutions to problems that affect both

¹ “U.S. Relations With Guatemala - United States Department of State,” U.S. Department of State (U.S. Department of State), accessed May 1, 2020, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-guatemala/>.

² Daniel Gonzalez, “The 2019 Migrant Surge Is Unlike Any We’ve Seen before. This Is Why,” USA Today (Gannett Satellite Information Network, December 17, 2019), <https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/nation/2019/09/23/immigration-issues-migrants-mexico-central-america-caravans-smuggling/2026215001/>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Arnold A. Chacon, “US-Guatemalan Relations: Continuing the Partnership,” Council of American Ambassadors, 2013, <https://www.americanambassadors.org/publications/ambassadors-review/spring-2013/us-guatemalan-relations-continuing-the-partnership>).

countries such as human rights, economic opportunity and social inclusion, particularly for women and indigenous peoples.⁵ Further, Ambassador Chacon claimed that “it is in the US national interest that Guatemala continue to evolve into a constructive regional and world partner.”⁶

With the ultimate goal of improving the US - Guatemala relationship, effective US public diplomacy missions in Guatemala are essential. The Guatemalan public are an important audience for the United States to focus on given the lack of representation for indigenous groups in the government and the long history of mistrust of the government by the Guatemalan people due to a history of suppression and violent authoritarian regimes. One lens through which to analyze and form US strategic communication plans and public diplomacy missions is that of national narratives. Narrative informed public diplomacy will help diplomats understand the most effective messages and messengers for missions in Guatemala.

Narratives are important socio-political forces in the world and are defined as a “coherent system of interrelated and sequentially organized stories sharing common rhetorical desire.”⁷ Therefore, narratives are key components of creating and describing a specific culture. “Narratives create expectations for what is likely to happen and what the audience is expected to do about it.”⁸ The importance of narrative and cultural understanding in diplomacy is widely acknowledged. For example, the theorist, Glen Fisher, focuses on the importance of culture and culturally informed perceptions in diplomatic communications and missions in the conduct of government and foreign affairs. In his book, “The Role of Culture and Perception in International

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Jeffry R. Halverson, Steven S. Corman, and H. L. Goodall, “What Is a Master Narrative?,” in *Master Narratives of Islamist Extremism* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p.13).

⁸ Ibid., pg. 25

Relations,” Fisher details a “checklist” of questions to be used as a guide for diagnosing mindsets cross-culturally in order to “lead to accurate diagnoses, or at least informed guesses, no matter what specific cultures or mindsets are involved.”⁹ His checklist consists of sixteen questions divided into five categories: Situation and Context, Knowledge and Information Base, The Image Factor, Cultural and Social Determinants: The Cultural Lens, and Individual Personality and Group Dynamics. Fisher argues that culturally informed perceptions are integral to the role that diplomats and governments play in the enactment of diplomacy and foreign affairs. He argues that his checklist for diagnosing the mindset of an audience allows people to understand how to “systematically ask the right questions.”¹⁰ Some of the questions that Fisher puts forth in his checklist relating to the cultural lens of an audience’s mindset are:

- (#10) Are there mismatches in deep cultural beliefs, values, or assumptions?
- (#11) Does anything about the issue or event elicit strong emotional reaction because of the cultural lens through which it is viewed?
- (#12) Does experience with differing social structure and the related role behavior that go with them affect perception of the issue?
- (#13) What effect does experience with differing institutional forms, function and operations have?

One way in which to answer these questions about a Guatemalan audience and diagnose their mindset is to look at the master narratives which would reveal deep cultural beliefs, values, or assumptions. Then, it is important to look at socio cultural factors that affect the perception of those narratives. The need for culturally informed diplomatic communications is relevant for US-

⁹ Glen Fisher, “The Fine Art of Diagnosing Mindsets - A Checklist,” in *Mindsets: The Role of Culture and Perception in International Relations* (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press Inc, 1988), pp. 71-90, p.71).

¹⁰ Ibid.

Guatemala relations. An analysis of Guatemala's master narratives and contrasting experiences and narratives of different ethnic groups, will reveal challenges for culturally informed communications and diplomacy in Guatemala.

Master Narratives:

Master narratives are a “trans historical narrative deeply embedded in a particular culture.”¹¹ Master narratives contain distinct story forms with archetypes that can be used to convey a larger meaning easily understood by populations who know the master narrative. When diplomacy fails to understand or acknowledge a master narrative and its archetypes, drastic failure is often the result. For example, in their book, “Weapons of Mass Persuasion,” Goodall, Corman, and Trethewey detail failures in communication dialogue and diplomacy through a case study of President George W. Bush's response to 9/11 and the resulting War on Terror. They claim that two of the most important factors leading to past failures in US foreign communication and diplomacy are, “sender-oriented approaches to communication and public diplomacy,” and “a failure to fully engage local narratives and networks to gain ideological support.”¹² They argue that, to combat the past failures of communication directed from a sender-oriented approach, now more than ever, communications must be audience based, culturally dependent and meaning centered.¹³ An understanding of master narratives in Guatemala is therefore an important informant for future diplomatic objectives.

¹¹ Jeffrey R. Halverson, Steven S. Corman, and H. L. Goodall, “What Is a Master Narrative?,” in *Master Narratives of Islamist Extremism* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p.13).

¹² H.L. Goodall, Angela Trethewey, and Steven R. Corman, “‘Strategy’ Missed Opportunities and the Consequences of Obsolete Strategic Communication Theory,” in *Weapons of Mass Persuasion* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008), pp. 3-27, p.8).

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.5.

Two Competing Narratives: How Different Populations Interpret Master Narratives

To constructively analyze master narratives in Guatemala, diplomats must understand that different audiences within Guatemala will focus on contrasting aspects of a larger master narrative. Depending on life experience, identities and other cultural factors, a narrative can be received and interpreted differently. In Guatemala, this results in competing interpretations of narratives by the indigenous population and the non-indigenous, or Ladino, population.

Guatemala has unique vulnerabilities and challenges for public diplomacy presented by the competing narratives, identities, and experiences of its population. Successful public diplomacy missions should understand these divergent realities in order to choose effective messengers and messages. The inequality, repression and lack of political representation for the indigenous population presents a particularly unique environment that fans unrest and lends itself to disinformation.

Whenever there are competing narratives or realities, there exists a vulnerability that can lead to intense polarization, susceptibility to misinformation and challenges for public diplomacy. Narratives are important socio-political forces in the world that make sense of transhistorical patterns and are deeply rooted and embedded in a particular culture.¹⁴ Competing narratives represent a formidable cleavage in a society. The cultural narratives in Guatemala reveal extreme inequality and divergent realities for different portions of the population. The World Bank describes the inequalities and divergent experiences of life in Guatemala saying, “in essence, there are “two Guatemalas,” one with well-off, and one poor, one urban and one rural,

¹⁴ Jeffrey Halverson, Steven R. Corman, and Lloyd Goodall, “What Is a Master Narrative?,” in *Master Narratives of Islamist Extremism* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p.13).

one Ladino and one Indigenous with large gaps in both social and economic outcomes.”¹⁵ This history of inequality, racism, and discrimination against indigenous peoples in Guatemala constitutes a master narrative for Mayans that presents a stark vulnerability for public diplomacy in Guatemala. This master narrative for Mayans influences how other narratives are interpreted. Through an examination of some of these sub-narratives and socio-cultural realities, these vulnerabilities and challenges will be examined through the lens of larger Guatemalan master narratives.

While there are many other master narratives in Guatemala, three key master narratives to understand for diplomacy measures are the Conquest of the Maya, the Guatemalan Civil War (1954- 1996), and the October Revolution (1944). These master narratives each carry their own story form and archetypes.¹⁶ These three master narratives are kept alive in Guatemala and fuel current debates on politics, culture and identity. They mark powerful events and values that Guatemalans relate to.

1). The Conquest of the Maya:

The violent conquest of the Maya by the Spanish still lives on in Guatemalan memory and is a poignant part of history Guatemalans remember as it marked the beginning of Spanish colonization. At the time of the Spanish invasion, what is present-day Guatemala contained many small Mayan kingdoms, two of the strongest being the K’iche and Kaqchikel in Central Guatemala. The 1524 conquest of the Maya happened after the conquest of Mexico and was led

¹⁵ “The World Bank in Guatemala: Overview,” World Bank, October 10, 2019, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/guatemala/overview>.

¹⁶ See Appendix B for more detail.

by Spanish conquistador Pedro de Alvarado, who was a chief lieutenant and right-hand man to Hernán Cortés. Alvarado ruled the Guatemalan region as governor after its conquest and was known to be particularly cruel and violent. Mayans were expected to give up their culture and embrace Spanish rule and Christianity. This master narrative takes the story form of an invasion by the white colonizer and the resistance of the indigenous Mayans. This master narrative evokes sentiments of Mayan pride, of anger at the cultural devaluation of the Maya and sadness at the loss of the great Mayan empire.

This master narrative is kept alive through the divisive nature of Guatemalan culture and experiences between the Mayan population and the Ladino population. Fisher acknowledges that different experiences within social structures can affect the perception of an issue. The socio-cultural realities of the two main racial groups in Guatemala will change their perception of this master narrative of conquest. The indigenous population in Guatemala, most of whom are Maya, is estimated to comprise roughly 60% of the country's total population. Despite making up the majority of the population, the Mayan population faces extreme discrimination, repression, lack of political representation, and access to resources such as housing and education. Even statistics about the Mayan population are contested as inaccurate due to the inability of many indigenous peoples to participate in data collection. Experts continually criticize the official census as underreporting indigenous inhabitants. The fact that many of the Maya are disadvantaged and are not officially counted, and therefore remain unrecognized by the government, demonstrates a rift between identity narratives in Guatemala. The conquest of the Maya remains a prevalent topic and master narrative that is tapped into during political debates about equality, cultural understandings, and memories of national identity.

One way that master narratives are kept alive is through education and stories. How the narrative of Guatemala's colonial history is remembered through education and stories varies greatly due to the lasting inequality and racism against the Mayan population. Depending on political party, race and economic status the way that this master narrative is evoked and talked about is very different. An education study by Rutgers University about how different teachers in Guatemala talk about the colonial era and the Spanish conquest reveals the stark difference. Depending on the race of the teacher, and if the school was public or private, the way that each teacher talked about, and therefore taught students about the Spanish conquest was dramatically different. A ladino¹⁷ teacher at a Guatemalan private school said, "remember that Spain didn't send an army to America. That it was simply people who were deciding to come to win a fortune, some sort of life."¹⁸ On the other hand, an indigenous Mayan teacher at a Guatemalan public school spoke about the same topic saying, "they came and killed. They murdered the pueblo. They took it and claimed it for Spain."¹⁹ The framing and the words used in these two descriptions of the Spanish conquest of Guatemala reflect how differently Mayan populations and Ladino populations remember and talk about it. The study goes on to "illustrate how students' and teachers' positions within societies marked by structural racism and inequality shape their conceptions of ... the ways in which students draw upon the historical past as they make meaning of their lives and of contemporary events."²⁰

¹⁷ Someone with a mixed European race, often the offspring of Mayan and European couplings.

¹⁸ Deirdre M. Dougherty and Beth C. Rubin, "Learning the Colonial Past in a Colonial Present: Students and Teachers Confront the Spanish Conquest in Post-Conflict Guatemala," *Educational Studies* 52, no. 3 (March 2016): pp. 216-236, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131946.2016.1169184>) pg., 216.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 217.

Strategic communication plans by the United States in Guatemala must work to know their particular audience and can use these differing reflections to their advantage, making sure that their messaging is sensitive to these cultural memories. Diplomatic communications should understand the divergent interpretations of the master narrative of the conquest of the Maya in order to understand how their messaging might be perceived by different audiences. Messaging strategies by the United States should be wary of the archetypes of the white colonizer and the conquered indigenous Mayan. For example, if the US is perceived as a white colonizer, this narrative can be tapped into to unite Guatemalans against the US. If the US is labeled as a white colonizer, Guatemalans can claim they want to suppress Guatemalan culture, kill their people and that the US has no regard for Guatemalan lives or political autonomy.

2). Guatemalan Civil War: War and Repression

The lasting trauma left by domestic wars, indigenous suppression, and the history of colonization in Guatemala, and much of Central and South America, has implications for successful public diplomacy. Wars create cultural memories and privilege the victors for future governance decisions. Most recently in Guatemala, the Civil War (1954-1996) has left legacies of pain, exclusion, and division in Guatemala between the Ladino and the indigenous populations. This pain still mars the country's identity and memory, especially that of the Mayan population. The ruling military junta of the time committed acts of terror against the Maya communities in part "to destroy the cultural values that ensured cohesion and collective action in

Mayan communities.”²¹ The government was convicted of committing genocide against its Mayan population. Roughly 200,000 people were killed, most of them being Mayan. The civil war was sparked by the US-backed coup that overthrew the democratically elected government and imposed a series of violent dictators.

Fisher argues that “it is essential to examine how ingrained preconceptions regarding social status, privilege, pecking orders, wealth and poverty, and leadership affect outlooks on such things as politics, industrial relations, professional images, consumer aspirations, military command, and throughout all, person-to-person communication.”²² The master narrative of the Guatemalan Civil War is a key to understanding these preconceptions about social status, privilege and the role of foreign governments.

The Civil War narrative brings to light preconceptions of social status and privilege. These notions of inequality and of repression also are interpreted differently based on the race and socioeconomic status of the audience. Its story form and narrative of Mayan oppression and slaughter goes back to colonization and remains strong to this day. The repeated atrocities committed against the Mayan population keep this narrative alive. Politicians and prevalent cultural figures such as Rigoberta Menchu rose to fame on a platform that directly addresses the horrors of this period and advocates for indigenous rights. Menchu, who is an indigenous Guatemalan herself, has repeatedly run for office and is known worldwide for bringing awareness to the horrors of the civil war. Her platform has been international, and she has been

²¹ Patrick J. McDonnell, “Guatemala's Civil War Devastated the Country's Indigenous Maya Communities,” Los Angeles Times (Los Angeles Times, September 3, 2018), <https://www.latimes.com/world/mexico-americas/la-fg-guatemala-war-aftermath-20180903-story.html>.

²² Glen Fisher, “The Fine Art of Diagnosing Mindsets - A Checklist,” in *Mindsets: The Role of Culture and Perception in International Relations* (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press Inc, 1988), pp. 71-90, p. 86).

given many awards including the Nobel Peace Prize. This has brought an increase in national and international attention to this master narrative as well as the continued human rights atrocities against Mayans. In 2018, 26 members of mostly indigenous campesino organizations were killed with almost no acknowledgement or atonement from the government. Guatemala is considered by human rights activists to be on the verge of a human-rights catastrophe and as desperation for justice mounts, disinformation campaigns are more likely to be successful.²³ Further, relating to notions of privilege and social status, in Guatemala, the memories and narratives of war and inequality disproportionately influence the Mayan population. Guatemala suffers from persistently high poverty and inequality with the indigenous peoples continuously being more disadvantaged.²⁴ In 2016, Guatemala ranked as the number 1 most unequal country in Central America and was included in the world's top ten most unequal countries.²⁵ Between 2006 and 2014, Guatemalans living in poverty increased by roughly 2 million, from 43.4 % to 48.8% of the population.²⁶ The indigenous Mayan population is disproportionately poor in comparison with non-indigenous populations with over 75% of the indigenous population living in poverty.²⁷ Geographically, poverty is predominant in rural areas, primarily inhabited by indigenous peoples with 81% of those living in poverty and 91% of those living in extreme poverty living in the

²³ Maria Martin, "Killings Of Guatemala's Indigenous Activists Raise Specter Of Human Rights Crisis," NPR (NPR, January 22, 2019), <https://www.npr.org/2019/01/22/685505116/killings-of-guatemalas-indigenous-activists-raise-specter-of-human-rights-crisis>).

²⁴ "The World Bank in Guatemala: Overview," World Bank, October 10, 2019, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/guatemala/overview>.

²⁵ "Guatemala: the Paradox of Inequality, the Cruelty of Poverty," ThePrisma.co.uk (The Prisma, July 25, 2016), <http://theprisma.co.uk/2016/07/25/guatemala-the-paradox-of-inequality-the-cruelty-of-poverty/>.

²⁶ "The World Bank in Guatemala: Overview," World Bank, October 10, 2019, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/guatemala/overview>.

²⁷ "Avivara," Poverty in Guatemala-Avivara Report (Avivara), <http://www.avivara.org/aboutguatemala/povertyinguatemala.html>.

countryside.²⁸ This physical divide between populations presents a further vulnerability to public diplomacy as narratives about different socio-economic realities will be more distant and less verifiable.

This master narrative with its story form of genocide and corrupt governments both domestically and that of the United States are important factors to consider when designing communications plans. This master narrative does not paint the United States in a favorable light. The master narrative of the Civil War evokes memories and continues realities of inequality, repression and of powerful monied intervention on behalf of the United States. Politicians still emphasize their independence in their electoral campaigns ensuring voters that they are truly for Guatemala and not an agent of the US. Further, the civil war is talked about in connection to migration issues. The intense destruction that the United States caused has left a lasting legacy of economic hardship, distrust in government and corruption that is often quoted as a cause of migrants fleeing Guatemala to find a better life in the United States. While communications plans cannot fully address or fix the inequality of human rights abuses of Guatemala, a concerted effort must be made to be sensitive to them and to not make them worse. For example, communications about inequality, immigration and financial opportunities must be directed to all Guatemalans, and not just the Ladino population. Specific messaging for the indigenous peoples should acknowledge their challenges and hardships and use a lens of empowerment rather than a punitive lens or tone. Messaging by the United States around immigration issues must also be sensitive to how this master narrative puts much of the blame for the economic hardship of Guatemalans on the United States itself.

²⁸ Ibid.

3). October Revolution: Democracy and Representation

The bloodless 1944 October Revolution in Guatemala overthrew a dictator and started a period of democratic government that lasted until the US-orchestrated a coup against the democratic government in 1954. The revolution marks a powerful, peaceful, and successful democratic win for Guatemalans. The master narrative of the October Revolution is evoked as a reminder that despite years of corruption, and dictatorships, there is still hope for democratic rule in Guatemala. The democratic period brought on by the October Revolution is referred to as the “Ten Years of Spring” and are the only democratic years between 1930 and 1996. Today October 20th is marked as a national holiday to celebrate “revolution day.” This national holiday is proof that this master narrative is alive. On this national holiday, Guatemalans are encouraged to celebrate the rights that the October Revolution fought for known largely as the four freedoms (freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from fear, and freedom from want). People protest, debate and voice their opinions on politics and national issues.

Again, the master narrative of the October Revolution and its celebration of democracy and freedom is experienced and interpreted differently by the Guatemalan population based on race with Mayan Guatemalans having less representation in government and in public affairs. This master narrative of the celebration of the October Revolution and of democracy, for some constitute a still ongoing struggle. Fisher argues understanding cultural conceptions of power and government structure are important because “culture determines beliefs about what amount of

authority is to be displayed or to what degree an egalitarian stance is to be taken.”²⁹ This narrative also helps to illuminate a grievance held by the indigenous population about their lack of participation and representation in their democracy today.

Social and political exclusion of the indigenous population is a challenge to public diplomacy efforts. Much of traditional diplomacy happens at the top level of governments between elected officials and representatives. Political representation for indigenous Guatemalans remains extremely low which makes diplomacy efforts to include indigenous voices difficult. The indigenous population has never gained more than 13% of the total seats in Congress.³⁰ Further, “according to the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the percentage of abstention among indigenous peoples is much higher than among non-indigenous populations.”³¹ Political participation of indigenous peoples is lower than among non-indigenous populations due to challenges “including language barriers in the election process, lack of information on where the votes should be cast, political clientelism, and even violence.”³² The increasingly popular theory of identitarian epistemology claims that a specific identity group cannot acquire the knowledge of another, and argues that each identity group has unique rights that pertain to their exclusive body of knowledge. Furthermore, this theory argues that legitimate representation is an act on behalf of a group that the representative is themselves a part of.³³ Therefore, without political participation and representation of indigenous Guatemalans, the government may be deemed illegitimate by some. Also, in line with Fisher’s checklist question number thirteen, this

²⁹ Glen Fisher, “The Fine Art of Diagnosing Mindsets - A Checklist,” in *Mindsets: The Role of Culture and Perception in International Relations* (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press Inc, 1988), pp. 71-90, p. 87.

³⁰ “Indigenous Political Representation in Guatemala,” *Global Americans* (The Global Americans , October 16, 2017), <https://theglobalamericans.org/2017/10/indigenous-political-representation-in-guatemala/>.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Max Diamond, “Identitarianism and the Splintering of Democracy,” *Quillette*, October 25, 2017.

narrative brings forth differing experiences with institutional forms and operations which shape perceptions and interpretations of the Guatemalan audience. Therefore, in order to combat disinformation, diplomatic and communications efforts must work to engage with and include the indigenous population.

Effective US - Guatemala Messaging:

Effective messaging in Guatemala should demonstrate an understanding of Guatemala's master narratives and the differing interpretations of those narratives based on the different life experiences of the Ladino and the indigenous Mayan populations. As Fisher claims, socio cultural factors do influence the perceptions of narratives and understanding of how they relate narratives to their lives and their view of the international system. One of the simplest ways to address these different audiences with their divergent experiences is to issue all messaging in both Spanish and Mayan languages. For online messaging this is particularly important. While there are 22 indigenous Mayan languages in Guatemala,³⁴ it is important to have subtitles or translations of messages for main messaging campaigns such as addresses from the US Ambassador to Guatemala. Currently, messages on the Ambassador's website are not translated into any indigenous languages. While many messages and pages on the Ambassador's website are available in both Spanish and English, some speeches are only available in English. If translations for all 22 Mayan languages are not available, Kaqchikel and K'iche' are the two most important to include as they have the most native speakers in Guatemala.³⁵ For

³⁴ See Appendix C for a list of languages.

³⁵ "Mayan Languages Spoken in Guatemala," Barbier International Inc., August 19, 2019, <https://barbierintl.com/mayan-languages-spoken-in-guatemala/>

Guatemalans who don't speak Spanish, this is essential. By including translations for Mayan languages, messages are able to be conveyed in the most direct manner with the United States being able to control and monitor the translations. If a message posted for example on the official Ambassador's page is only provided in Spanish and English, then this risks that the Mayan community will never be able to understand or access the message. Or, if a translation is made later, there might be inconsistencies or changes to the message that corrupt or misconvey the original intention. This will also help to combat the perception that the United States does not care about all Guatemalans and that they are complicit in the repression and human rights atrocities committed against the indigenous population. Direct communication in a native language has long been considered a great way for an audience to feel heard, and an important way for the messenger to be more effective and listened to. The lack of indigenous involvement and engagement in the Guatemalan government makes this even more important as public diplomacy measures might be the only time and way that the United States can message to this section of the population as they are not represented in traditional foreign policy or diplomatic meetings and agreements.

In recent years, most of the remarks made by the United States government to Guatemala have been by the Ambassador. These remarks have been made in official capacities and often to other Guatemalan government officials. Then, a transcript of the remarks is published on the official US embassy website. The United States needs to increase its engagement with the public of Guatemala and make messages by the United States more accessible to all citizens of Guatemala.

Public diplomacy messages completed by the United States in Guatemala lack a narrative informed approach. Every public diplomacy message should be centered around the audience. Understanding the master narratives explored above would improve US messaging and their reception by the Guatemalan audience. For example, the current US ambassador to Guatemala, Luis E. Arreaga, made remarks at the National Teacher Conference in Guatemala on November 5th, 2019. One of the main themes from his speech was that education is a way to improve quality of life for individuals and their communities. Arreaga tied it into one of the United States' key goals in Guatemala: to reduce illegal immigration from Guatemala.

“I ask you to take every opportunity to challenge the narrative that migration is the only way to help one’s family succeed or to secure a better future for oneself. Convince your students that they CAN help solve the challenges Guatemala faces, with education. Teach them that government accountability and transparency are possible when educated citizens demand it of their leaders. Teach them that it IS possible to stay in their communities and build a prosperous life for themselves and their families, IF they get that education.”³⁶

However, Arreaga’s message didn’t take advantage of the master narratives of Guatemala nor the different realities by the Ladino population and the indigenous population and was less effective due to it. His speech did not recognize the resentment of the United States for creating much of the economic inequality for the Mayan population that might motivate migration. Further, he claims that education is a way to deter migration but does not address the lack of access to

³⁶ 2019 | Topics: Ambassador U.S. Embassy Guatemala | 2 December, “Remarks Ambassador Luis E. Arreaga - National Teachers Conference,” U.S. Embassy in Guatemala, December 2, 2019, <https://gt.usembassy.gov/remarks-ambassador-luis-e-arreaga-national-teachers-conference/>

education for many Mayan communities. This message would have been more effective, especially for a Mayan audience if he had mentioned that the United States recognized the lack of education and was working to increase educational opportunities for Guatemalans, especially the Mayan population. Further, he delivered the speech in English with Spanish translations available afterwards. He should have found a messenger to help deliver this message in both Spanish and the Mayan language. As the Ambassador, he embodies the United States government and as shown through the previous analysis of master narratives, there is resentment and wariness about the corruption of the United States government and the idea that the US government is self-serving and does not hold the interests of Guatemalans at the forefront of their policy. By including messengers who are known to their communities as Guatemalan and therefore sharing their experiences and identity, this message would have been better received.

Due to the fact that Guatemalan master narratives, such as that of the Civil War, paint the United States in a self-serving and negative light, it is important for messaging to take this into account and pick messengers who have garnered trust from the Guatemalan community and public. For example, Riboberta Mechu is a well-known Guatemalan Mayan woman who has respect both within the Guatemalan indigenous community and internationally around the world. She would be an effective messenger who has built trust in the indigenous community for her work advocating for indigenous human rights. It would be important for the United States to work with partners such as her to develop and deliver policy messages to address the root causes of Guatemalan immigration to the United States. As a messenger, she understands the painful history of war and repression and therefore can tap into those national narratives to promote education, for example, as a way to empower the population.

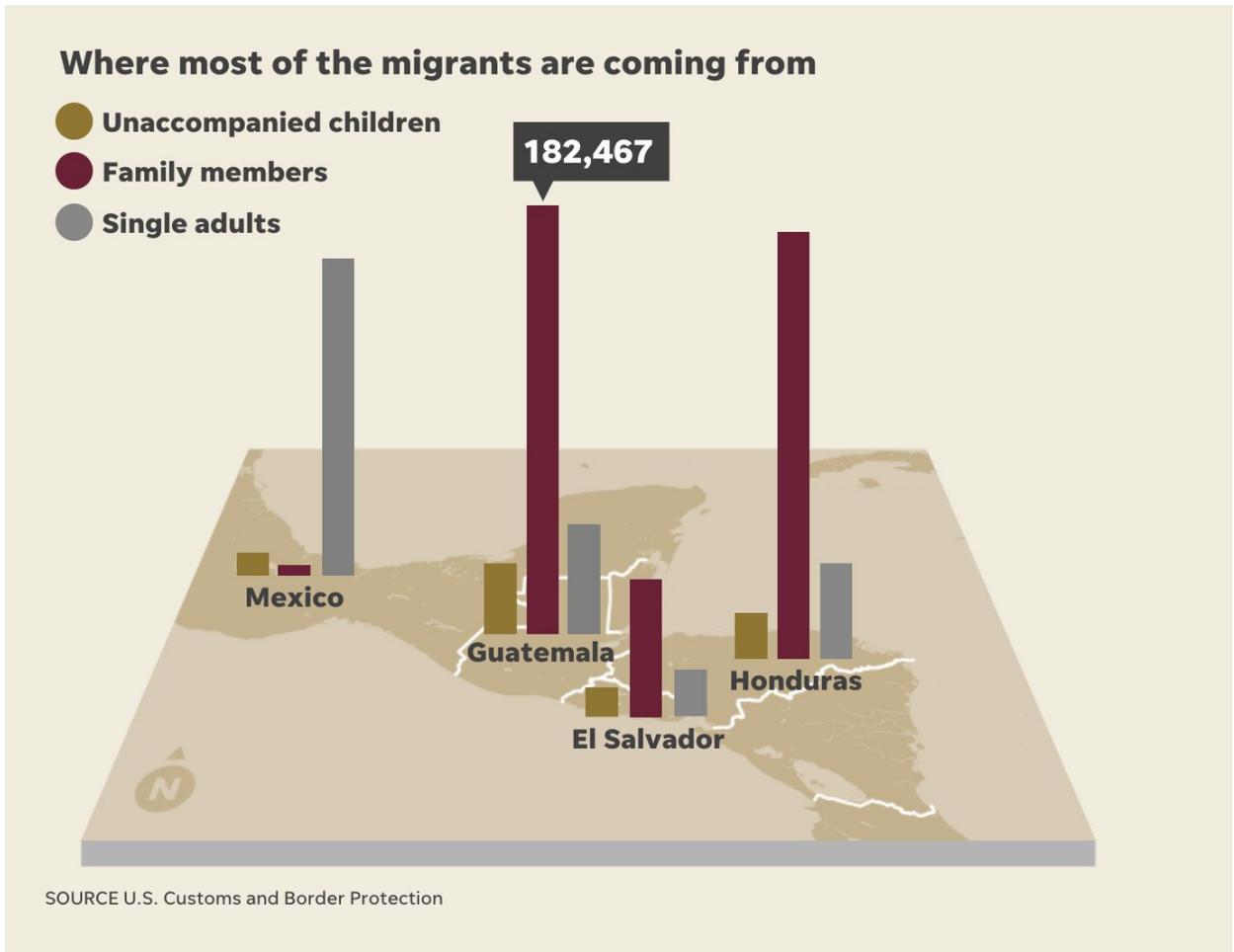
Further, messaging by the United States should take different forms than just official speeches made by the Ambassador. There should be an increase in social media messaging over different platforms. It might be beneficial to have a social media account for each language spoken in Guatemala or at least a segmented messaging platform for the Indigenous population and the Ladino, Spanish speaking population. This way, the same message can be delivered in the native language of the audience reading it. Due to the economic realities of, and therefore access to technology, for the indigenous population compared to the Ladino population in Guatemala, there should be a concerted effort to engage the indigenous population in more direct ways. This might take the form of holding events in more rural areas, marketed towards the indigenous communities, or simply having phone or in person outreach and messaging for indigenous communities. A narrative informed public diplomacy approach must take into account the differing cultural experiences of the population and work to mold messaging in a manner that respects and responds to those different experiences and interpretations of the country's master narratives and identity.

Conclusion and Other Implications:

These vulnerabilities and challenges to diplomacy are not unique to Guatemala and in fact have implications for larger narratives of shared histories of colonization, racism against and inequality that disadvantage indigenous populations. Therefore, similar vulnerabilities are applicable by extension to much of South and Central America. These sociological vulnerabilities can be exploited and used for disinformation campaigns. In countries such as

Guatemala, with a history of colonization, competing identity narratives and extreme sociological differences, disinformation campaigns will be able to tap into existing narratives about oppressors, victims, inequality and representation. These identities and life experiences change the way that master narratives are internalized and interpreted. While the master narratives are shared, the way that they are evoked is informed by the audience's personal experiences. To communicate with the government and the people of Guatemala, it is essential that one uses language that acknowledges the reality of these master narratives and is sensitive to the differing interpretations of these narratives based on life experiences and socio-cultural realities. When negotiating with and forming policy about Guatemala, remember the master narratives and incorporate the audience's interpretations of those master narratives including the lenses of identity and life experience.

Appendix A: Migrants To the United States in 2019



Appendix B: Story Form and Archetypes of Guatemalan Master Narratives

Master Narratives	Story Form	Archetypes
Conquest of the Maya	Invasion, Mayan pride, and resistance, cultural devaluation, a loss of a great empire	White colonizer, indigenous (usually feminized) character

Guatemalan Civil War (1954- 1996)	Corrupt government, genocide, resistance, US intervention, inequality, a lasting legacy of colonization	Money as power, civilian victims, poor Mayan villagers and farmers, rural Mayan, wealthy urbanized mestizos (with European decent)
October Revolution (1944)	Pro-democracy movement, corrupt junta government, the power to the people	A civilian army, revolutionary unionists and students fighting to equality, empowered indigenous groups

Appendix C: Alphabetized List of the 22 indigenous Mayan languages Spoken in Guatemala

1. **Ach**: this language is related to k'iche'. It is mainly spoken in the municipalities of Cubulco, Rabinal, San Miguel, Salamá, San Jerónimo, a part of Granados, and Chol, which are all located at Alta Verapaz. This language has two main dialects: Achi from Cubulco, and Achi from Rabinal.
2. **Akateco**: this language is spoken in the municipalities of San Rafael la Independencia, San Miguel Acatán and San Sebastián Coatán, in Huehuetenango. Akatán community

members respect animals and plants, and they are strongly connected with the environment. This language has around 39,370 speakers in the Guatemalan territory.

3. **Chorti'**: Is mainly spoken by people from Jocotán and Camotán in Chiquimula. Chorti is considered a dialect from k'iche', and it is also spoken by many people in Honduras and El Salvador.
4. **Chuj**: the members of the community who spoke this language were believed to have come from 4 different groups: the Tzabaluta, from Mexico, Ixtatán, which currently inhabit Coatán, and the current members of Santa Eulalia. In 2002, 64,400 people spoke Chuj, according to the Guatemala National Statistic Institute).
5. **Itza**: this language is mainly spoken in Petén. The name of this community is derived from a lake in Petén where the community was formed. The former members of the Tikul Chichen Itzaj community moved there at the beginning of the 15th century because they were afraid of the invasion that they knew was coming.
6. **Ixil**: This language is mainly spoken at Quiché, in the municipalities of San Juan Cotzal, Nebaj and Chajul. People who speak this language respect nature, their community priests, the dances and traditions of their ancestors. In 2002, it was reported that more than 95,000 people spoke this language in Guatemala.
7. **Jakalteko**: this language is also known as abxubal, and it is spoken by both people from Guatemala and Mexico. Most of them live in Jacaltenango, Guatemala. This language has two main dialects (occidental and oriental), and even though they are similar enough to be understood orally, they are completely different in writing.

8. **Qánjob'al**: people who spoke this language used to live in three municipalities of Huehuetenango. This language branch includes chuj, akateco, jalakteco and tojolabal.
9. **Kaqchikel**: with half a million speakers around the country, this language is considered one of the most important in Guatemala. Most of its speakers are bilingual—they can speak both Spanish and their mother tongue. This language has a vast number of dialects, which will vary according to the region where it is spoken.
10. **K'iche'**: is one of the most popular languages in Guatemala with nearly one million speakers, which positions it as the second most spoken language in the country. This language has many dialects, and some of them are even considered a separate language. Some of its varieties are the central k'iche (the one spoken in the media and taught in schools), central-occidental, San Andrés k'iche', Joyabaj k'iche', oriental, Nahualá k'iche' and Cunén k'iche. One of the most famous works of Mayan literature, the *Popol Vuh*, was written in classical k'iche'.
11. **Mam**: Mam is spoken in 61 municipalities of Huehuetenango, Quetzaltenango and San Marcos. The Mam community is mainly located in the north-east area of the country and in the south-west area of México. It is the third most popular language among the Mayan languages in Guatemala.
12. **Mopan**: this language is spoken in Petén, in the municipalities of San Luis, Poptún and Dolores. People from this community are highly religious, they believe in death as the transition to more spiritual life and they have a special respect for the moon, which is believed to represent the stages of life.

13. **Poqomam:** The word “*Poqomam*” comes from “*poj*”, which means “moon”, and “*mam*”, which means “grandkids.” 42,000 people speak this language, they live in different municipalities from Escuintla and Jalapa.
14. **Poqomchi:** this language is related to Poqomam. It is divided into two dialects: oriental and occidental. Both are spoken in Alta Verapaz.
15. **Q’eqchi’:** this language is spoken in the northern region of the country, on the west and north of Izabal, the east of Quiché and a large part of Petén. There are very few places to get information about this language, despite being spoken by a large group of Guatemalans.
16. **Sakapulteco:** this language is closely related to k’iche, because their communities were together for many years before they went separate ways. It is only spoken in the municipality of Sacapulas in Quiché.
17. **Sipakapense:** this language is spoken in the municipality of Sipacapa, in San Marcos. Around 4,500 people speak this language.
18. **Tektiteko:** the speakers of this language live in the region of Tectitán, in Huehuetenango. It belongs to the Mam branch of the Mayan languages.
19. **Tz’utujil:** Is spoken by around 100,000 people, scattered around many municipalities in the south of Sololá and the north of Suchitepéquez. There are at least four different dialects spoken around seven municipalities of Sololá.

20. **Uspanteko**: Is the language of people from the municipality of San Miguel Uspantán, Quiché. People from this community consider food to be something sacred that should never go to waste and they perform traditional rain dance during the dry seasons.
21. **Xinca**: this language, on the edge of extinction, is the only one that does not come from any other Mayan nor Azteca language. Its origins are still a mystery to this day. Its speakers used to inhabit the area from the Pacific Coast to the mountains in Jalapa.
22. **Garífuna**: this language is mainly spoken in the coast of Honduras, Guatemala, Belize, and Nicaragua, by the Garífuna people. One of the main characteristics of this language is that they have separate vocabularies for men and women—which, of course, do not affect all the words.

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