

Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit: Guatemala under General Efrain Rios Montt 1982-1983 (Religion and Global Politics)

Virginia Garrard-Burnett



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"Waging a counterinsurgency war and justified by claims of 'an agreement between Guatemala and God,' Guatemala's Evangelical Protestant military dictator General Ríos Montt incited a Mayan holocaust: over just 17 months, some 86,000 mostly Mayan civilians were murdered. Virginia Garrard-Burnett dives into the horrifying, bewildering murk of this episode, the Western hemisphere's worst twentieth-century human rights atrocity. She has delivered the most lucid historical account and analysis we yet possess of what happened and how, of the cultural complexities, personalities, and local and international politics that made this tragedy. Garrard-Burnett asks the hard questions and never flinches from the least comforting answers. Beautifully, movingly, and clearly written and argued, this is a necessary and indispensable book."

"Virginia Garrard-Burnett's *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit* is impressively researched and argued, providing the first full examination of the religious dimensions of *la violencia* - a period of extreme political repression that overwhelmed Guatemala in the 1980s. Garrard-Burnett excavates the myriad ways Christian evangelical imagery and ideals saturated political and ethical discourse that scholars usually treat as secular. This book is one of the finest contributions to our understanding of the violence of the late Cold War period, not just in Guatemala but throughout Latin America."

--Greg Grandin, Professor of History, New York University

Drawing on newly-available primary sources including guerrilla documents, evangelical pamphlets, speech transcripts, and declassified US government records, Virginia Garrard-Burnett provides aa fine-grained picture of what happened during the rule of Guatelaman president-by-coup Efraín Ríos Montt. She suggests that three decades of war engendered an ideology of violence that cut not only vertically, but also horizontally, across class, cultures, communities, religions, and even families. The book examines the causality and effects of the ideology of violence, but it also explores the long durée of Guatemalan history between 1954 and the late 1970s that made such an ideology possible. More significantly, she contends that self-interest, willful ignorance, and distraction permitted the human rights tragedies within Guatemala to take place without challenge from the outside world.

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