

How the History of American Intervention in Latin America has Impacted the Agriculture Sector of Guatemala

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On my honor as a University Student, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment as defined by the Honor Guidelines for Thesis-Related Assignments

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STS Research Paper

Guatemala and the United States

Imagining oneself as a local farmer going against multi-million-dollar corporations is like a story that can only happen in a movie or one's nightmares, a modern retelling of David versus Goliath in the agricultural sector. Time and time again, history has repeated itself without society seemingly being capable of recognizing these patterns. Citizens of the United States throughout the decades, especially during the world wars and cold war, have seen the impact that American intervention has had on foreign nations and its people; however, this has not always meant a change in future proceedings or discourse. One of today's biggest political issues concerns immigration, more specifically migration from Latin American countries to the United States. The following analysis highlights the current standing of Guatemalan agriculture, exploring the roles of small farmers and their interactions with influential American corporations.

The effect that American intervention has had on Guatemala is most evident through the recent migration out of Guatemala. A primary actor in this network is the United Fruit Company, which was one of the major actors behind the Guatemalan coup (Chapman, 2007)). Exploring this topic as laid out below has the primary goal of achieving more insight into what history is behind that which has caused a disruption in Guatemalan society, as seen today. When considering the impact it had today, the topic is most akin to the parameters ascribed to a wicked problem. Wicked problem framing is used to analyze how solutions like globalization and immigration policies have come up to address the issue surrounding the American desire to expand its reach and the Latin American desire for prosperity. Through various research methodologies and wicked problem framing, the ways in which the United States' intervention has influenced Guatemalan agriculture and the tradition of small farming are analyzed to consider future endeavors as Globalization increases across the world.

Methods:

To accurately discuss the topic at hand, there needs to be enough background and historical information concerning the political and economic standing of Guatemala during the rise of American involvement. Methods used include literature reviews and text analysis, essentially using existing research papers with data collected by researchers in related or relevant topics. Data for the background research includes sources from American government agencies, sociologists, and researchers. The same process of finding current, up-to-date research is used to discuss the way in which Guatemalan Agriculture exists today as well as current influence from the United States. The approach used to discuss the proper STS framework is by analyzing and comparing how the framework maps to the topic of American intervention and Guatemalan agriculture. There is an initial exploration of the background and history of the agriculture sector in Guatemala incorporating the relationship to wicked problem framing. Then the present state of Guatemalan agriculture is explored followed by how the future has been affected and possible paths that can be taken by the various actors involved.

History of the United Fruit Company

How Guatemalan agriculture has gotten to its current state requires an exploration of the intertwined past of both the United States and Guatemala. Ironically, a major actor in Guatemala's downfall is linked to one of Guatemala's greatest exports, bananas. The United Fruit company (UFCO), involved primarily in fruit exports from Latin America, was among the "Three U.S. corporations...accounted for nearly all foreign investment in Guatemala, about \$100 million (Dosal, 1993)." The UFCO's great reign over many of the rich fertile lands of Central America began in the early 1900s but came to a head in Guatemala in the 1950s (Chapman, 2007). Ultimately, the UFCO did not act alone.

There were many behind the scenes negotiations between Guatemalan politicians, American politicians, and the UFCO for American capitalistic wants to succeed as well as a select few Guatemalan leaders, who were willing to fulfill American wishes. However, everything would soon become unstable, especially when socialistic Guatemalan leaders started to fight back against the rise of the so-called “Banana Republic.” One of them being Jacobo Arbenz who “was elected President of Guatemala in 1950... the CIA disdainfully refers to in its memoranda as "an intensely nationalistic program of progress ...anti-foreign inferiority complex of the 'Banana Republic.'"(Haines, 1995).” President Arbenz was attempting to loosen the grips UFCO had on Guatemala, but to no avail.

The U.S. in conjunction with the CIA hatched a plan to overthrow the elected president, justifying these measures with the help of UFCO and anti-communist/socialist sentiments. The mission was called “PBSuccess, authorized by President Eisenhower in August 1953, carried a \$2.7 million budget for "psychological warfare and political action" and "subversion,"(Haines, 1995).” With a destabilized country at hand, the UFCO was able to garner more power and increase their chokehold. An increase of countries like the U.S. getting involved in countries like Guatemala has led to a lot of instability for the actual citizens of the invaded countries. Those people who are succeeding have “largely been the capitalist farmers and particularly transnational agro-industrial capitalists ... (Gwynne, 2004).” Everything discussed so far provides the setting for the following plot analysis to explore why Guatemala is in its current position.

Wicked Problem Framework and Foreign Intervention

The main lens through which the Guatemalan agricultural system will be analyzed is by way of wicked problem framing. Analyzing the historical background surrounding the current

situation has shown that there is not one simple solution to the problems in Guatemalan society that exist today. Wicked problems are defined as problems in which “information needed to understand the problem depends upon one's idea for solving it (Weber and Rittel, 1973).” The given definition makes it clear why certain problems are deemed “wicked.” They are difficult and some might believe even impossible to solve. The original leading theorists who wrote about wicked problems and worked in design theory were Rittel and Weber, also professors. The definition for wicked problems can also therefore not seem useful because solutions are needed to begin understanding the issue at hand. Some critics of wicked problem framing have stated that “the concept of wicked problems has had little direct impact on policy theories,” and therefore is an idea that should be rejected due to its lack of usefulness (Dewulf, Termeer, and Biesbroek, 2019).

Even though society and technology are necessarily what is in discussion, a piece of technology does not always have to be a solution to a wicked problem. Especially when looking at sustainability, “for almost all sustainability problems, there are non-technical, social and behavioral solutions that are (sometimes) cheaper, better, and more sustainable than any technological solutions (Seager, Selinger, and Wick, 2012).” Those involved in the process of determining solutions must not forget the influence societal changes can have. When considering design, those discussing wicked problems can accurately consider multiple solutions related to a design problem. The goal here is the same, to consider many possible solutions and leave enough information for a discussion to form and bring about ideas to fix the issue that exists in Guatemalan culture, which can be extended to issues across Latin America. One of the biggest criticisms of using wicked problem framing for any practical means is first and foremost as either provoking “paralysis or an overestimation of what policy can do about wicked problems,”

when considering policy implementation (Catrien, Dewulf, and Biesbroek, 2019). Using this framework when considering the ins and outs of every actor involved exemplifies this criticism with wicked problem framing. There exist many possible solutions; however, the answer is not clear.

Results and Discussion:

American intervention within Guatemala reversed forward progress that Guatemalan leaders were taking to reform the country's plethora of economic issues and disparities among its peoples. The coup performed on a democratically elected leader and the “virtual monopoly of the banana export trade,” at the hands of the United Fruit company (UFCO) (Britnell, 1953) had negative impacts on the country, which were never addressed by the perpetrators via the form of reparations or a mutual accord. There are many unresolved issues; however, focus will be put on the many identities of the agricultural sector. The general instability of the country has left many small farmers to fend for themselves and many other families or individuals to flee the country in search for better quality of life. The United States might have experienced many gains from their intervention, but actions taken did not come without a cost. Relevant issues within the United States like immigration are inextricably linked to the history of intervention, lending the topic to wicked problem framing in order to analyze the main question at hand. The past events and actions, present choices, and the impact everything has had or will have on Guatemala will be explored in depth and solutions to problems will be analyzed within the wicked problem framework.

Like every country, Guatemala has a complicated past, with Guatemala navigating uncharted circumstances in their involvement with the United Fruit Company. One of the “three most important foreign corporations,” was the United Fruit Company (Britnell, 1953). The

UFCO had a monopoly on one of the biggest exports from Guatemala. An American company had significant amounts of control on a foreign economy and therefore would also be able to yield power over decisions which could affect the company's grasp on the fruit exports sector. It is not uncommon for politicians to gain monetary support from powerful businesses in exchange for some kind of impunity from laws which could have a widespread negative effect on these mega-million-dollar corporations. There was more of a focus from the political leader's point of view "on the exports of cash crops, rather than on food production for its own people (Moye, 1998)." The Guatemalan people were not considered in order to support corporations and make those already in power even richer. Income inequality would become further stratified from the already "70 quetzales," for indigenous populations to the "246 quetzales," for the Ladino population (mixed Spanish and indigenous) (Britnell, 1953). Oftentimes, the indigenous populations cultivate land and profit off of this land, but mostly in the way of subsistence. There are very minimal profits, with the act of cultivating land for corporations in exchange for food to survive off of being a common practice. Guatemala has many volcanoes, making the land very fertile. Therefore, many companies within the agriculture industry seek ownership over Guatemalan territories in order to reap the benefits. Small farmers who are either trying to maintain their own business or just sustain themselves and their families are being forced to compete with very wealthy corporations. At the end of the day, there still needed to be people willing to work on land owned by foreign companies. The pool of available applicants inevitably came from Guatemalans. However, due to the existing monopoly, it was not difficult to take advantage of those who signed up for the job.

The infiltration of UFCO highlights many changes that were happening within Guatemala. One of these changes was the move away from traditional agriculture "to the process

of commercialization within many regions of the tropical highlands of Latin America,(Horst, 1987).” Agriculture within the country was undoubtedly changing due to an uptick in globalization. To succeed in a capitalistic world where a country wants to extend its global influence, they must learn to commercialize every and any aspect of their economy. Guatemala is a very small country and therefore would have had more difficulty and required more time to become a powerhouse. In the end, American companies helped speed up the process at the behest of Guatemalan leaders; but, at the cost of the traditional way of living for many Guatemalans. With an influx of large and powerful corporations, many farmers would inevitably be compelled to join their forces or be left without an ability to sustain themselves financially. A similar situation occurs when big businesses start to encroach on the same market of small businesses in small towns. Leading to a loss in revenue for small businesses due to an inability to match the cheaper prices of market giants. Beyond controlling land, the UFCO also had the “International Railways of Central America...under control (Britnell, 1953).” The government had to grant permission for such an extensive project to take place. Again, companies are being put above any needs or issues faced by Guatemalans. The primary benefactor of the railways was the UFCO, inevitably displacing anyone within the path of the designated railway path. A foreign company having so much control over public transportation further strips away the country's autonomy. The aforementioned examples all highlight the increase in globalization which had already been occurring across Latin America and would only ramp up going forward.

The leadership under Juan Jose Arevalo and Jacobo Arbenz ushered in new reforms and laws to support the people of Guatemala. The reforms implemented were meant to give back to the people, which under their reforms meant taking back from the UFCO. In the name of getting the highest profit margins, a solution was used with the aid of the United States government.

Ultimately, the UFCO and U.S. government “ousted Arbenz because his land reform had expropriated more than half of the UFCO banana estate (Streeter, 2000).” Carrying out a coup d'etat on a sovereign nation was the recourse and solution chosen in order to battle a wicked problem facing the US during the events described above. One of the primary reasons behind ousting Arbenz was because “he tolerated communism and expropriated a large part of United Fruit’s vast estate (Streeter, 2000).” The 1950s was a time of deep anti-communist propaganda, especially with the Cold War as the backdrop. A threat of communism in Guatemala was not unfounded but was exaggerated in order to have some backing evidence that would compel the political leaders to allow agencies like the CIA to perform a coup. Communism was not a substantial threat to the United States within its own borders nor from external influence from places like Guatemala. Therefore, the true wicked problem lies in deciding whether or not to allow foreign actors to exert so much power and influence in different aspects of a country's culture and economy. The UFCO did manage to provide job opportunities for many people, but erred in pushing for the downfall of a democratically elected official. Any sort of unjustified coup would undoubtedly lead to instability. Guatemala was at the mercy of the United States until a new leader was installed in the free position of power. What would come was “the repressive operatives of successive military regimes,” which “murdered more than 100,000 civilians (Haines, 1995).” Such an extreme set of actions could not be surprising when the State department said of the indigenous population that “they throw away what little they can on liquor and fireworks (Streeter, 2000).” Every decision made by the various actors in this wide and complicated network had an irreversible impact on the agriculture sector and the working-class individuals involved. Every person or group had their own reasonings and point of view for any decisions they made.

From every involved actor, there existed a different point of view which led to different solutions to the issues at hand. The UFCO was facing a threat to their profit, which in a capitalistic model meant an increased likelihood of failure. Therefore, the solution they chose was to enlist aid from various sources to stop this encroachment. They were stuck between backing down and risking their business or moving forward, leading to the situation that followed. On the opposite side, Guatemalan leadership was faced with rejecting a new flow of money or gaining the trust of American industries. The group with virtually no say and whose lives were affected the most, were the citizens themselves. After everything was said and done, the choices many Guatemalans had to choose between was staying and weathering the storm or leaving and facing a whole new world of issues. Those who chose to leave happened upon a relatively new wicked problem at the time, immigration.

Over the decades countries have only become more interconnected in every aspect of their existence. Globalization is rising and has had many positive effects in today's societies, considering that "In some Latin American countries the export sector has been able to give a new dynamism to the national economy, (Gwynne & Cristbal, 2004)." Foreign involvement has not been all bad for Guatemala. The agricultural sector has been revitalized due to the increased demand from external buyers. With agriculture responsible for "two-fifths of exports," and "half of the labor force (Mendoza et al., n.d.)." The economies of the US and Guatemala have become more intertwined over the course of many years. The US is one of the main global leaders therefore Guatemala will necessarily be at will of the United States. A precedence has been set for the United States being able to assert its dominance over other nations with minimal or futile pushback. Ignoring the bloodshed and much of the horrible past, in the present, both countries have been able to benefit greatly from exports and imports from each other. Small farmers have

been helped by the “dependence on a guaranteed overseas market for a single cash-crop (Gwynne & Cristbal, 2004).” Not only are individuals guaranteed a job but also a source of income to support their family and grow the country's GDP.

Globalization would not be a wicked problem if there was not also a negative side to an increase in foreign influence. A survey by Comité de Desarrollo Campesino (CODECA, Farmers Development Committee) found that “the persons who are working in the farms are mainly indigenous people and they are victims of discrimination, social exclusion and systematic violations of their fundamental rights (“The situation of farm workers in Guatemala”, 2013).” There is a hierarchy in which the corporations are at the very top and the indigenous farmers are at the very bottom. The positive aspect of American corporations and a possible solution to the gross mistreatment of workers would be for companies to start demanding healthy work environments such as those that comply with American standards. A future in which no foreign corporations exist within Guatemalan borders is virtually impossible to conceive. Therefore, the next best thing would be for conditions to drastically improve. Past reformist leaders attempted to set strong foundations for a more prosperous Guatemala but failed due to various factors. Today the burden lies on the government to support farm workers, especially small farm owners and indigenous employees, by way of stricter health requirements and more support in general. The Guatemalan government should demand this support from any foreign company that wishes to establish itself in Guatemala by creating accords with the government of those countries. Laws to prevent human rights violations must be implemented or enforced. According to the CODECA survey, “The provisions of national legislation... are systematically breached in the farms (“The situation of farm workers in Guatemala”, 2013).” Without strong foundations and strong enforcement, the future of the agriculture sector and all those involved is bleak.

The future direction in which the agriculture sector can be very powerful. Currently “Guatemala has the largest economic market in Central America (Mendoza et al., n.d.),” demonstrating that there exists a strong base upon which to build and move forward with. Wicked problems intrinsically are issues that are time sensitive. The longer the issue is ignored, the more it is left to fester and worsen an already precarious situation. If the future hope is to stop migration out of the country and for the US to prevent as much migration coming into the country, then the wicked problem must be attacked from each angle. Each solution taken has culminated to many people fleeing countries like Guatemala with “fear of political violence... probably the dominant motivation of these migrants (Morrison & May, 1994).” A possible ideal outcome would be for Guatemala to cultivate its peoples growth through education and honing technical skills to push the country forward, beyond just existing as another country's outsourced workers pool from which to pull from for primarily their own gain. Even within this solution to the wicked problem, there still exist many obstacles. Every obstacle of the past, present, and future highlight the precarious nature of wicked problems.

The content of this project was limited to any online resources on the topic of agriculture in Guatemala and the role of the United States within Guatemala. In an ideal situation, the discussion and analysis of the present situation facing the agricultural sector would have included some sort of first source investigation with small farmers, corporations in the farming business, and political leaders with ties to the agriculture sector. Having discussion with primary sources would have been much more difficult because the topic occurs in another country, making the endeavor expensive as well. A more formal and investigative approach could have yielded a wider array of viewpoints. Future research on this topic would be aided by setting aside enough time and resources to get first-hand accounts of the different groups involved in such a

complicated issue.

By overthrowing a democratically elected official, monopolizing an important export, and generally exerting power with the backing of various national groups or corporations; the United States has managed to create immeasurable change and exert influence over Guatemala by way of the agriculture sector. Looking beyond a company or country's goal to make a profit, the lives of peoples within two distinct societies have been altered at a high cost not often discussed. The aforementioned research identifies another wicked problem that exists within the present world. Through thorough discussion and education on the issues plaguing countries like Guatemala, there can be aspirations for an ever-improving future. Although the problem might not indefinitely be solved, improvements and applications of solutions can serve to make vast leaps forward in many aspects of Guatemalan society.

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